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Collaborative Meaning-Making in Sand, Colette, & Nothomb and Collaborative Pedagogies in the Higher-Education Classroom

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Collaborative Meaning-Making in Sand, Colette, & Nothomb and Collaborative Pedagogies in the Higher-Education Classroom

by

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Dedication

To my brilliant and caring students, who will never read this, but without whom I would have been lost during graduate school.

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I would like to thank my committee members, all of whom provided me with invaluable guidance. Special thanks to Dr. Wettlaufer, who supported all of my non-conventional decisions throughout graduate school, and to Dr. Coffin, whose excitement for her own material and mine regularly reminded me of my passion for this work. Thanks also to Dr. Jocelyn Wright, my mentor and friend from the beginning to the end of my graduate school years.

Abstract

Collaborative Meaning-Making in Sand, Colette, & Nothomb and Collaborative Pedagogies in the Higher-Education Classroom

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This dissertation argues for the significance of epistolary correspondence in its ability to exemplify, more successfully than any other medium, the spirit of collaboration in the negotiation of meaning both on a personal scale and on a broad social scale. Collaborative meaning-making allows for multiplicities of identities and truths, thus constructing diverse environments that welcome individuals and ideas that are constantly in motion and in progress, rather than accepting static and limiting definitions.

Additionally, this dissertation explores how we might use this understanding of collaborative mediums and genres to improve our own collaborative spaces, namely our classrooms. To this end, I present a number of various critical pedagogies that we might implement into our classroom, emulating these authors in their capacity for inclusion and their refusal to settle for those definitions and limitations imposed upon them by societal standards of the day. The pedagogies explored include gender-neutral language in the second language classroom, trauma-informed approaches to texts containing violent material, and negotiations of relationships within hierarchies in the higher-education context.

I hope that this work—in its attempt to consider pedagogy and research as intrinsically linked and mutually beneficial to each other—helps initiate discussions in classrooms and academic settings on the potential of collaboration between our two primary expectations within our universities, and the many ways in which our passion for our subject area can grow in unexpected directions when brought into the classroom.

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Introduction

A Pedagogical Start

I started a doctoral program in French literature in the Fall of 2015, brimming with excitement at the thought of sitting in a small room with bottle green chalkboards discussing all of those authors that had shifted my worldview. I pictured the classes I would lead myself as a teaching assistant, imagined myself in a hound's-tooth jacket in front of twenty-five wildly excited and quietly insecure students. But in the Spring of 2017, I started to recognize a gap in the training of teaching assistants and instructors at my University. While we were being trained to teach the linguistic, literary, and socio-cultural aspects of the texts we studied with our students, we were never taught how to address the most difficult material in these texts. How do I, as a first-time instructor, teach a film that contains a rape scene, for instance? As a teaching assistant, I was not responsible for the syllabus, and this situation, under various guises, arose several times within my first year of working with undergraduates. I knew the statistics—at American colleges, 1 in 5 women has experienced sexual assault, with upwards of 80% of cases going unreported. How many of my students, I wondered, were part of this statistic, sitting quietly with their heads down as these traumatic moments were discussed strictly in analytical terms, as if these passages were only literary creations rather than frequently lived experiences? How many of my students remained silent but left retraumatized as their classmates referred to a rape scene in a film as a "sex scene," as scholars dismissed a director's assault conviction with claims of art and artist existing separately.

I spoke to numerous professors about this pedagogical dilemma, asking them how they mediated discussions dealing with traumatic material, and eventually made my way to Voices Against Violence, a violence prevention and response program at UT Austin. I spoke to a staff

member and social worker, Lauren White, explaining the situation. Lauren and I researched Trauma-Informed spaces and practices, finding almost exclusively information for social work and mental health institutions. I spent the summer of 2017 digging into Trauma-Informed methods, and wrote a "Trauma-Informed Teaching in the Higher-Education Classroom" literature review.[1] I learned that the use of trauma narratives in Humanities classrooms has been growing steadily for years and, when poorly addressed, classroom exposure to these narratives results in poor student performance, missed classes, and student attrition.[2] These repercussions are academic, but the research also clearly shows how these narratives can and do lead to retraumatization, resulting in severe depression, anxiety, and other serious mental health conditions for our students.

All of this new knowledge, and the work based upon it, led to what would become a major component of my graduate school experience. Based on the literature review, Lauren and I created a Trauma-Informed Pedagogy workshop, one that explained trauma and its pervasiveness, its effect on students, and then offered instructors implementable practices for their classrooms when discussing traumatic topics. We were quickly fielding requests to present the workshop from organizations and departments across campus. Though Lauren left their job soon after we began the workshop, I continued to present any time I was invited. I created a "Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in the Humanities" guide,[3] that has been requested by several departments and organizations across campus. Feeling that there was further yet to go, I partnered with others, and received a grant with Dr. Steve Lundy, of Classics, from a UT organization to spread Trauma-Informed Pedagogy across campus. I was recently invited to Clemson University to present my workshop and lead a round table on Trauma-Informed Teaching. I mention this not to list work I

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[1] See appendix for the complete literature review.
[2] See Trauma-Informed Pedagogy Guidebook for statistics and references.
[3] See appendix for the complete guide.

have done, but to reveal a gap in graduate teaching. Being asked to bring this material to an out-of-state university underlines the lack of access to this training on a broad scale. Trauma-Informed Pedagogy reminds us that students are people. As such, they cannot leave their experiences at the door of our classrooms. It is a pedagogy that would be beneficial for all instructors, regardless of the subject or level they teach, to familiarize themselves with and practice in their classrooms.

All of this pedagogical work took place amidst my own academic work. I attended classes that thrilled me, taught by professors who encouraged me. I wrote articles on the literature I studied and submitted these to literary journals. Eventually, I started to wonder why my research and my pedagogy exploits had never intersected. For instance, while I was reading countless scholars' books on George Sand's fluid gender identity on my own time, I was preventing students from expressing their own gender identity in the classroom by refraining from explaining gender-neutral pronoun usage in the language I taught. This discrepancy struck me as problematic, and I started thinking about, and eventually including, pedagogical research and suggestions in all of my literary research. I assumed that the individuals reading these articles were most likely in academia, which meant that they also were both researchers and instructors, and would benefit from considering both of these topics. Writing on pedagogy opened up a whole other side of the academic world to me, allowing me to meet and come to know those researchers who studied teaching in relation to their own fields and specialties at international and interdisciplinary conferences (MLA, INCS, SDN, etc). The collaboration of these two fields, that of literary research and pedagogical research within higher education, became for me the most interesting and exciting territory to explore, and it was a thrill to discover this fairly unknown area with colleagues whose passion for their field was matched only by their devotion to their students.

Correspondence and Collaboration

I would first like to address the term that I have just used to describe my approach to academic research, and the term I myself use most in discussions of letter-composition and exchanges. That word is *collaboration*. While much of this dissertation argues that definitions, especially those provided by a single source, are limiting and one-sided, it seems important to provide a definition of key terms such as I use them within this dissertation specifically. I come back, throughout this work, to 'collaborative meaning-making,' by which I want to express how individuals come to understand themselves and their surroundings by negotiating meaning with another. For example, the manner in which Sand and Flaubert negotiate their understanding of gendered terminology (man, woman, third sex…) as analyzed in my first chapter exemplifies my understanding of 'collaborative meaning-making'; it is an extended negotiation of meaning, resulting in a shared, original, and ever-evolving vision of the matter discussed. Collaboration, then, is something more than two individuals exchanging ideas; it is the evoluation of meaning in conversation with the other. That other can come in many forms: another person, another version of ourselves, another text, even.

Epistolarity evidently presents opportunities for extensive collaborative meaning-making in its very nature as a genre of duality as emphasized by Janet Altman (I/you, writer/recipient, bridge/barrier, here/there, now/then, etc). [4] As we will see in the third chapter while exploring the epistolary pact, epistolarity is a genre of anticipation—one is often waiting for a response and always writing with the other in mind, anticipating reactions to their letter, whether that leads to divulgences or fabrications. The very presence of the other makes the letter what it is; the genre ultimately exists only insofar as some reality or expectation of collaboration exists in the text.

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[4] See next section of this introduction for a discussion of this duality and its role in epistolary texts.

Epistolarity, then, is not just relational—it's not just that letters can only be understood in relation to each other. It is collaborative—what is produced through the exchange is separate entirely from any singular letter-writer and comes instead to represent a wholly original set of thoughts and ideas, a new world of sorts.

Epistolarity creates what Leonie Hannan, in her 2014 article on collaborative scholarship, explained as "the interconnected and intellectually motivated relationships of the letter-writers" (292), a "network" of letters and letter writers (290). Together, the two sides of a letter correspondence come to represent "something greater than its parts" (291). Hannan discusses the letter's metonymous existence—it is a text that is often taken to represent a separate whole (most often the letter-writer) or that is understood to stand as merely one portion of a greater "something," as Hannan puts it. In her article, Hannan explains that this 'something' can come in many forms for the contemporary reader, including: "a record of the history of subscription publishing, a trace of antiquarian curiosity or the surviving remnant of a largely female epistolary network" (291). In my own research and throughout this dissertation, the elusive 'something' that Hannan points to is collaboration itself. Letters, in my estimation, come to represent the pinnacle of collaboration, in which references to 'the text' come to mean 'the collection of exchanged letters' (even if the collection consists only of one side of that exchange), rather than a single author's specific work. Letters become chapters in a novel that only definitively end with the death of one of the writers—or a form of rupture that is equally dramatic. Otherwise, the correspondence can always be returned to.

More importantly, letters assembled into a collection or read together come to create an entirely different world from that of either writers' singular experience. What is created in the act of exchanging letters are entirely new universes, where words take on new meanings agreed upon

or negotiated or even merely implied by the two individuals who make up the correspondence. And whether that other is literally present in the form of a response or exists merely as a ghost haunting the letter's pages, they are inescapable. This is an argument that I only fully delve into in my third chapter as I explore a rather strange collection of letters through which the writers construct, as Karen Ferreira-Meyers argues, a different space that belongs to neither letter-writer: rather, "ensemble ils construisent une oeuvre" (205). This notion that through an exchange of letters, writers and recipients are able to create a reality that is separate from either of their own, is the idea, and ideal, of collaboration that I will be returning to in this dissertation.

Defining the Terminology—a Historical and Critical Overview

Before delving into my own dissertation topic, I want to give a brief overview of the terminology and theories I will be using throughout my chapters to better contextualize my arguments and to lay the ground work for my teaching's relationship with my scholarly pursuits. To begin with, the literary genre with which I will be working, as has surely been surmised, is that of the letter, both in terms of real authors' correspondence and in the context of their fictional texts. It seems important to make explicit those scholars who have influenced the ways in which I interpret the texts included in this dissertation—in some cases, the influence is direct, while in others, I use the scholar's work as a point of departure to lay the groundwork for separate arguments. The following paragraphs will attempt to present a very brief overview of the letter's historical trajectory in literature, but my primary aim is to locate my arguments within this theoretical literature. In this way, I hope to make explicit the collaborative conversation that is taking place throughout this dissertation with the many brilliant epistolary scholars who have come before me.

My basic understanding of the letter as literary device began to take shape with the work of Jean Rousset, who, in 1962, argued in *Forme et Signification* that the epistolary novel gets closest to sharing true sentiment with the reader, "tel qu'il est vécu" (68), claiming it as the most realistic of the genres: "le plus vrai, le plus rapproché de l'entretien ordinaire" (68). He claimed that the epistolary novel made way for the *journal intime*, but explained the particular paradox of the letter as one that is equally simulated and authentic. This paradoxical aspect of the letter is at the center of many of the theorists' and academics' discussions of the genre, as well as my own grappling with the complex genre in this dissertation. Like my above definition of 'collaborative meaning-making,' Rousset's definition of the letter helped me understand that meaning in the letter is found in its incongruities and complexities—he laid out the many seemingly contradictory aspects of the letter that are part of its fundamental makeup. Rousset was thus the first of many scholars that I came across that made explicit the characteristic of the genre that drew me to it: in the letter, meaning is created out of paradoxes that work together to make sense of a complicated and ever-evolving system wherein multiple truths can exist simultaneously rather than out of a set of steadfast rules.

Soon after Rousset's *Forme et signification*, François Jost argued for the importance of *la vraisemblance* rather than *le croyable* in epistolarity (400), explaining that the success and power of the letter emanate from its resemblance to the everyday. The fascinating—and thorny—matter of *le vraisemblable* versus *le vrai* will be central to the discussion of various texts throughout this dissertation. In fact, I want to delve deeper into this question of *vrai* vs. *vraisemblable* by analysing how the epistolary is used to encourage trust between correspondents and therefore indirectly between author and reader. What does it mean to write something *vrai*? And more importantly, what happens when the *vraisemblable*, that which rings true but is not factual, touches readers

more deeply than the *vrai*? Authors' use of the letter's *vraisemblance* can create a sense of the personal and the true for the reader, but it just as easily can be considered a betrayal in its inaccuracy within the realm of 'actual experiences.'

Jost further differentiated between several different types of epistolary texts: singular recipient, multiple correspondence, and one-sided correspondence. Each of these scenarios leads to different kinds of texts and therefore different kinds of analyses and approaches to the epistolary material. The presence of multiple correspondents within a narrative creates particularly complex plots. Jost calls these multi-narrative texts *type Laclos*.[5] These stories underline the difficulties created by space and time in the world of correspondence where the letter is a material object circulating between distinct writers and readers. As letters are lost, delayed, or otherwise intercepted, the author creates a disjunction not only in space (the places from which both writers are penning their letters) but in time as well (the lag between a letter being written and then received becomes significantly greater than expected). These incidents come to play important parts in the narratives and character development of these texts. This specific type of communicative issue is not one that I will dwell on at any point in my own writing, but it is one that plays a significant role within the history of novels of correspondence and therefore in my own theoretical positioning of the letter within a larger literary and social context. Jost considered these Laclos-type narratives best at mimicking reality in their multiplicity of writers and recipients and their complicated system of exchange of the letters themselves. Again, however, we arrive at the complicated notion of 'reality.' I chose the epistolary texts carefully not in their ability to mimic real-life situations, but rather in their ability to mimic real-life relationships. That the latter might

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[5] By '*type Laclos*,' then, Jost is describing epistolary texts that, like *Liaisons Dangereuses*, contain multiple letter writers and recipients. Different narrative threads are thus woven into the text in order to create a complex setup by which the reader has certain information on the characters to which not all characters are privy, while still omitting those letters or correspondence that Laclos later uses in order to shock the reader later in the text.

best be exemplified by fabricating realistic situations features prominently in contemporary discourse on the letter. In the twenty-first century, the ethics of fabricating experiences and emotions in order to play them off as having actually taken place become fundamental to the discussion of genre, including those of epistolarity and autobiography or autofiction. These are intersecting genres that led me to question, in my final chapter, the purpose and consequences of these literary denominations.

In 1973, Janet Altman expanded upon Jost's insights and defined epistolarity as the use of the letter's formal components to create meaning. She argued for the wonderful and peculiar paradox of the letter genre as exemplified in various different aspects and functions of the letter: bridge/barrier, *confiance*/*non-confiance*, writer/reader, I/you, here/there, now/then, closure/overture, and unit/unity. Thus Altman returned to Rousset's argument regarding the paradox of the letter, but delved much deeper into the specific concepts at play within this paradox.[6] Questions of authenticity, truth, character, and the role of the letter as a paradoxical instrument in the writers'/recipients' lives is one that I touch on in various ways throughout the dissertation. It is a theory that is, I believe, at the heart of our fascination with the letter. Recipients and readers both enjoy the privilege of insider information and personal contact, and yet they remain aware that the letter-writer is constantly creating and recreating themselves and their story.

Within the genre of the letter, I am also fascinated by the concept of confidantes, one that is clearly related to notions of truth and fabrications. To delve into the role of confidantes, I was able to consult Ruth Perry who, in 1980, wrote *Women, Letters, and the Novel*. In this publication, Perry outlined the history of the epistolary genre with its beginnings in Puritan distaste for

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[6] Along those same lines, we might also consider *Special Delivery*, in which Linda Kauffman set out to prove the resiliency of the novel of pathos, specifically in epistolary forms, arguing that the epistolary novel deconstructs ruses of identity while reconstructing history.

'falsehood,' explained the stakes of etiquette manuals for letter writing, and argued for writing about emotional realities as a peculiar process that changes those realities (122). She explained the epistolary genre as one in which thought is action and characters are their words, and finally, looked into the role of confidantes, likening them to the reader at home. This analysis of confidantes particularly interested me in the context of my work on Amélie Nothomb in my final chapter. As Nothomb creates a text that is both autofiction (a term that I delve into in the chapter itself) and epistolary, our role as reader and theoretical recipient of both sides of a correspondence complicates the reader's role, and therefore potentially their responsibility, within the world of the text.

When questioning the role of confidantes in epistolary narratives, I naturally also questioned the larger population of intended recipients. Confidantes, it turns out, are often not the only ones to read a letter writer's concerns. Whether by design or by accident, who read one's letter shifts throughout history and the ethics of who could or should read a letter shifted along with it. Roger Chartier became a valuable resource in this regard. In 1991, Chartier penned *La Correspondance*, in which he, like Perry, outlined the history of the letter, going back still further than Perry and exploring its roots in the 12th century, when the letter first began taking on formal qualities. He explored the history of the *secrétaires*, manuals for letter etiquette and epistolary rules. In working through these manuals, Chartier analyzed who is writing and to whom, to which the answer becomes more diverse with time since, for a long period, the letter is primarily a business matter. Chartier traced the letter up through the 20th century, when the genre's waning popularity suddenly picked back up with the advent of the Second World War. In 2006, Martha Hanna continued the discussion on the role of the letter during the Second World War, and argued for letter-writing as a way in which soldiers maintained civilian identity in the midst of war,

analyzing the coded language that soldiers used to circumvent censorship laws, as their privacy was being violated. How and why the letter is being used is, of course, one that is considered throughout this dissertation, and I posit drastically different answers depending on the narrative's context. Though I do not look into the role of letters and letter-writing during wartime, I certainly do delve into what might be considered coded language, or implications, in the letter, and who is presumed to be reading these letters—something that also shifts significantly as time moves forward, and is thus explored individually within the chapters.

Finally, in reading contemporary epistolary narratives, I became fascinated by the role of author versus that of letter-writer, and the role of reader versus that of recipient. In 2006, Judith Lyon-Caen looked specifically at the rise of the roman-feuilleton that compelled readers to write passionate letters to the author (focusing on Rousseau and his devotees), marking the beginnings of a cult of the author. This also brings up questions of authors corresponding with each other, whether about personal matters or their literature. As Vincent Kaufmann argued in his 2014 text *Postscripts*, writers' correspondence with each other can serve as workshops where non-communication is constructed and carefully maintained; these authorial exchanges are about a desired reader who is fundamentally absent—the point, as argued by Kaufmann, is to make the other disappear. In looking at this question from the perspective of different authors, my own analysis of this phenomenon leads to very different conjectures about the relationship between popular authors and their intent in corresponding with each other. I primarily explore authorial communications in my first chapter, especially the correspondence between Sand and Flaubert, and between Sand and Alfred de Musset, though this latter exchange is complicated by being reproduced in semi-fictional texts by various people including Musset and Sand themselves as well as Musset's lover and his brother—all of which is addressed in the first chapter. These are only

some of the many scholars who helped shape my understanding of and love for the letter, and its endless implications and purposes throughout history.

Pedagogical Theory

Finally, I want to draw attention to the term 'critical pedagogies,' and briefly address the relationship, as I see it, between the letter and the classroom. In a very early article on critical pedagogy from 1995, Anuradha A. Gokhale explains that, in practice,

> The term "collaborative learning" refers to an instruction method in which students at various performance levels work together in small groups toward a common goal. The students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own. Thus, the success of one student helps other students to be successful. ("Collaborative Learning")[7]

Gokhale notes that studies of collaborative learning are heavily focused on the K-12 environment, with few available research projects on its success within higher-education. I will add that it is more difficult still, even in 2020, to find articles on critical pedagogies within a higher-education *Humanities* environment. Gokhale's study uses a population of undergraduates enrolled in industrial technology fields from Western Illinois University: her tests lead her to conclude that collaborative practices are especially helpful (i.e., students score higher) in the context of critical thinking exercises.

In a particularly fascinating article from 2012, Leslie A. Real conducts research on the role of collaboration in the Sciences as opposed to the Humanities, noting that "humanists have often viewed the role of collaboration in research with considerable skepticism and have placed greater value on the traditional model of the solitary scholar pursuing knowledge and truth" (250). In this article, Real wonders why these two "essential approaches [collaborative v. independent] to

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[7] Online article (no page number).

knowledge developed such contrasting images of collaboration's role in the generation of truth and understanding" (250-251). While considering this question, Real recounts an anecdote about his wife, who is a poet trained in English literature. His wife (I do wish we had a name) completed an essay for her Shakespeare course that the instructor found essentially ready for publication, with the caveat that much more research into the surrounding scholarship should be included. This professor, Real explains, helpfully provided Real's wife with a complete and annotated list of sources to which she should refer—but Real's wife was more interested in working on her own poetry and, since the reading and redaction of so much Shakespearean knowledge would evidently take months, she decided to simply not publish. Real reacts with some confusion to this conclusion:

> To a scientist, the solution to this dilemma – after all, it would have been nice to have this paper   produced – is rather obvious. Teacher and student would simply collaborate in the writing of the paper. The professor brings years of specialized experience and context, the student contributes a particular new point of view perhaps expressible as a hypothesis about a piece of writing. Together they generate a work of scholarship that neither alone would have been able to produce. (253)

After all, the concept of developing a theory and gathering evidence with which to support it is an extremely familiar practice for both scientists and humanists. What was confusing to Real as a scientist, he explains, "is the desire to recreate expertise rather than utilize expertise in a collaborative enterprise that improves the quality of the final product and saves time" (256).[8] Surely there is much to be considered in the argument that collaborating on articles and exchanging knowledge in the Humanities is either easy or preferable to independent study. Perhaps all humanity scholars prefer to retreat in order to think and write in peace—yet, that hasn't been my experience in graduate school as I learned and discussed what I learned with my fellow graduate

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[8] Real continues: "Who would expect the forensic scientist to hand a laboratory manual over to the lawyer and suggest 'The methods you seek for doing the blood work can be found here. If you have problems, I can be contacted.' This seems rather a silly way of going about the task. Yet, so often we are asking our young colleagues to rediscover what we already know and to newly acquire what we have already mastered" (256).

students. In fact, many of the graduate students I met in the required four years of coursework repeatedly expressed interest in writing articles together. As far as I know, none of these ambitions for collaborative work were realized. There are a multitude of reasons that this might be, but for whatever reason, it seems difficult for humanity scholars to agree to collaborative writing and publishing.

This is not to say that the Sciences have it figured out with their collaborative methods, nor that collaboration should even be the default for all research. The enacted stereotyping of the Scientific and the Humanist method—the inconceivability of a lone research scientist and the unlikeliness of a collaborative group of humanists—is the issue that so fascinates me, and that seems to fascinate others across disciplines, such as Real. In a section about pedagogy, I acknowledge that I have spent perhaps too much time on the question of research in higher-education. Yet there seems to me to be such a distinctive connection between our selves as researchers and our selves as instructors that speaking to one feels like speaking to the other. The obvious overlap between what professors teach and what they research is the graduate student, for whom the dissertation advisor is their guide in both the classroom and the library.[9] Though Real never labels his theory as such, I believe that his suggested practice of collaboration is indeed a critical pedagogy for the graduate student classroom, which seems to be a particularly understudied pedagogical area.

Thus, while 'critical pedagogies' is not a term I come back to often within my dissertation, it is a term that encompasses all of those pedagogies for which I advocate throughout this work. I understand 'critical pedagogies' to include the teaching theories and practices that challenge and continuously question the traditional or normative teaching practices currently at work in the

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[9] I mean this primarily metaphorically, by way of saying that the supervisor directly teaches their graduate student in the classroom and continuously guides the graduate student through their research, at the library or elsewhere.

higher-education classroom. I advocate for a variety of these pedagogies throughout my dissertation, at times focusing on specific methodologies such as Universal Design for Learning and Trauma-Informed Teaching. These pedagogies and their terminology are considered within the relevant chapters themselves. Ultimately, I want to advocate for exactly what critical pedagogies call for on a broad scale: a challenge to teaching traditions and norms, which is to say, a way of teaching that continuously questions itself and never ceases to reengage, readapt, and redefine. Simply put, rather than agonizing over what we teach, it might be more productive for us as instructors to delve into how we teach. Every new classroom presents us with a new set of individuals, a different group dynamic, and another chance to adapt to current pedagogical approaches by rethinking our methods with a new cohort of students.

An Epistolary Continuation

Letters have always been, and remain, my primary literary interest, as well as one of my favorite topics to teach. The way in which two individuals negotiate their worldviews, opinions, and identities with each other through correspondence fascinates me. It is a medium that is both old-fashioned and relevant to our own day and age. While today it is rare for anyone to be in regular correspondence with someone, written exchanges have only become more prevalent with the advent of emailing and texting. Though of course quite different in form and content, the spread of written kinds of communication speaks to the genre's relevance. In fact, in Western countries, we are writing more today than we have ever written at any other period of history. And letter writing itself is not a lost art. Ultimately, I do believe that epistolarity still has its place in our lives to this day, in all of its traditional garb. It is, after all, the letters, hand-written and hand-delivered, that students have written me, most often at the end of a semester, that have had the greatest impact

on me. For now at least, it seems that even the newest generations consider the letter as symbolically meaningful. It would seem that the student's ability to hand over a letter, a physical token rather than a technological blip, allows them to express themselves freely, and to put into words what our pedagogical space, what our community, has meant to them. But I believe it is equally true that students turn to the epistolary medium to express these particular sentiments because the letter comes dressed in a semblance of traditionalism and formality, all the while allowing for a sentimentality that often feels out of place in emails. This is the letter's strength in the twenty-first century; it has become infinitely more formal than it was in the past, but it remains deeply personal. The formality signals the weight of the letter's message. Students write a letter in order to circumvent sending an email, which is not quite so meaningful, in its professional and technological undertones.

Nor have traditional letters disappeared from our art or entertainment. Generation Z is still entranced by the mysteries and possibilities of the letter today, as evidenced by the raging success of the young adult romance "To All the Boys I've Loved Before" in 2020, as I write this very dissertation. The text was popularized by the film released in 2019 on the streaming platform, Netflix, with a script based on the novel. At the start of the film, Lara Jean's younger sister secretly mails a series of love letters that Lara Jean had written to the boys whom she had loved over the course of her life. The plot revolves around the aftermath of letter-gate, proving the letter's relevance today. More importantly, it shows that even the youngest generation, as noted in my own experience with my students, recognizes the weight and irreplaceability of the letter. Even as a young adult who grew up in the age of technology and with the inescapability of social media, Lara Jean chose to write traditional love letters. The novel's author, Jenny Han, highlights the letter's importance in her young protagonist's life with the wonderful equivalency, "[if] love is

like a possession, maybe my letters are like my exorcisms" (3). Han's novel is a reframing of the epistolary romance for a modern age. Lara Jean uses the letter not as a way to communicate with her lover(s), but simply as a way to exteriorize her all-consuming thoughts. The physicality of the letter allows Lara Jean to imagine her feelings out of herself and into her writing: "My letters are for when I don't want to be in love anymore. They're for good-bye. Because after I write my letter, I'm no longer consumed by my all-consuming love...My letters set me free. Or at least they're supposed to" (3). The letter's tangible and sentimental nature makes epistolary writing a rite of sorts. While emails and texts seem to vanish into the ether of the internet, a void that none of us can quite come to visualize in any meaningful way, letters remain fixedly there, undeniably real, and outside of ourselves, while containing so much of what is inside ourselves.

Of course, it later comes out that Lara Jean addressed and stamped her letters because, on some level, she did want them to be sent. The drama of the letter finds its way into even the most contemporary texts. It is in fact so deeply ingrained in our cultural backdrop that generations of individuals who have never had to send a letter out of necessity continue to send letters, perhaps out of love, perhaps as exorcisms. Regardless, the depth of the letter remains, in my opinion, unparalleled as a communication method in 2020.

Focus of Chapters

My first chapter explores the ways in which Sand engaged in collaborative meaning-making through her epistolary exchanges, thereby allowing her to create a complex and authentic identity for herself that was not limited to the nineteenth-century understanding of gender, sexuality, occupation, etc, and yet was recognized by even the most stubborn and traditional of nineteenth-century individuals such as Balzac and Flaubert. In arguing this, I further posit that we,

as researchers and instructors, should carry this knowledge into our classroom, which is to say, engage in teaching practices that allow for this diversity of identity exemplified by Sand. If we, as Sandian researchers and critics, laud Sand's multiplicities and ability to continuously push the boundaries of one's identity, we should, I think, extend this same courtesy to our students. In our French classrooms, for instance, we might acknowledge the existence and legitimacy of gender non-conforming, gender neutral, and trans-students by implementing small but meaningful pedagogical practices centered on gender in French and French-speaking countries. In so doing, we would be creating learning spaces in which I believe individuals and thinkers such as Sand would have thrived.

My second chapter seeks to complicate Sand's collaborative paradigm, whereby individuals naturally come together to form complex meaning and more inclusive truths. I argue that, in *La Vagabonde*, Colette shed light on the difficulties of collaboration for individuals who have experienced trauma. Ultimately, however, it is my contention that epistolary correspondence helps Renée reconstruct a fully self-aware individual, and thus Colette showed us how letter writing can play an important role in the healing process for individuals who have suffered traumatic experiences. I contend that Colette also revised our understanding of the letter itself through *Mitsou, ou comment l'esprit vient aux fille*s, by describing the letter as a physical experience rather than a transitory substitute for the other's presence. Colette thus showed how epistolary correspondence, while not necessarily simple, ultimately affects the ways in which we consider our narratives and shape ourselves in positive and empowering ways. In relation to Colette, I consider two significant pedagogical questions. The first is the implementation of Trauma-Informed Pedagogy into our learning spaces and the other is the pedagogy of online classrooms, and our understanding of 'presence' in these classrooms. In speaking to these

pedagogies, I hope to show how we can permit students to learn and be present in spaces that feel less restrictive, or even potentially threatening, by granting them autonomy over their bodies and their environment in our classrooms.

My final chapter tackles the issue of contemporary correspondence, and the place of epistolarity in our lives today. I argue that Amélie Nothomb has managed to transform her novels into collaborative exchanges, thus turning the author/reader relationship into a correspondent/correspondent one, rebalancing the scales of power and authorship in fascinating ways. I believe that collaboration can and should happen within hierarchies, and that rebalanced scales do not signify the disappearance of hierarchical roles. In considering this idea in the context of the classroom, I encourage us, as instructors, to carefully consider our relationships with our students, and how we might maintain a non-threatening and appropriate role in their educational lives while still, like Nothomb, occasionally rebalancing the scales to open up a world of collaborative possibilities.

Critical/Research Methodology

In addition to consulting academic publications, I used three other resources in the writing of this dissertation that are, I think, worth mentioning. The first of these is non-academic articles that I was able to access for free online. I believe in the importance of including such articles in our work not only to make our work more accessible, but also to attempt to widen the small circle of individuals who can research and publish on these topics within academia. Once graduate students are no longer a part of a university program, they lose access to the hundreds of thousands of academic articles supplied to us by our libraries; or, they are asked to pay exorbitant prices to access them. I am not suggesting that anyone with or without a degree can or should publish in the

sphere of academia. But I believe we might be closing the door too soon, and on too many individuals. Perhaps making room for non-academic publications in our academic work might allow a few of these individuals room to negotiate their place in academia before such a chance disappears entirely.

I further conducted interviews with professors on the UT Austin campus as a way to, essentially, practice what I preach, which is to say, engage in collaboration. While publications are important sources of information for us, interviews with individuals, 'specialists' or not, broaden the type of voices we might include in our work, while also turning what is often considered a lonely endeavor (the process of writing a dissertation) into an interpersonal and collaborative one. Speaking to individuals one-on-one allowed me to connect with professors I might not otherwise have encountered, and to access information that is not necessarily a part of their publication history (naturally, then, speaking one-on-one was most useful in my research on critical pedagogies).

Finally, though I use these only briefly, George Sand's unpublished lessons to her granddaughter referenced in my first chapter were crucial to my approach to Sand as a pedagogue and to my position on teaching more broadly. I therefore want to mention explicitly the opportunity I had to use the Harry Ransom Center on the UT Austin campus. It is important to be aware of and make use of our university's resources thereby honoring our privilege as academics. I also believe that, like interviews, engaging with original material is an experience that allows us to step outside of ourselves and our offices, and enter into conversation with knowledgeable staff and exclusive material. It is, in other words, in engaging in these collaborative endeavors that a university becomes an interactive community.

Overview & Stakes

This dissertation argues for the importance of epistolary correspondence, namely in its ability to exemplify, more successfully than any other medium, the spirit of collaboration in the negotiation of meaning both on a personal scale and on a broad social scale. Collaborative meaning-making allows for multiplicities of identities and truths, thus constructing diverse environments that welcome individuals and ideas that are constantly in motion and in progress, rather than accepting static and limiting definitions. Additionally, this dissertation explores how we might use this understanding of collaborative mediums to improve our own collaborative spaces, namely, our classrooms.

I am therefore entering into many important and complex conversations, including, first and foremost, the wide breadth of research already in existence on each of my three authors— George Sand, Colette, and Amélie Nothomb. I will be engaging with the most prolific Sandian scholars, from the early 1990s to today, including, though of course not limited to, well-known critics such as Naomi Schor, Nigel Harkness, Alexandra Wettlaufer, Isabelle Naginski, and Janet Beizer. For my second chapter on Colette, my primary references come from established Colette scholars such as Margaret Crosland, Elaine Marks, and Judith Thurman. For my final chapter on my most contemporary author, Amélie Nothomb, I delve into current publications on the author, referencing scholars such as Laureline Amanieux, Michel David, and Karen Ferreira-Meyers.

I will also naturally be entering into the conversation on epistolarity, a long-standing topic of academic research across disciplines, one whose history I attempted to trace in the above section "Defining the Terminology." I will largely be using this research (see Roger Chartier, Janet Altman) as a basis for my understanding of the letter's significance for my authors, and how this medium affected them and their daily lives. I hope this will allow me to add my own voice to the ongoing epistolary discussion amongst some of the most well-known scholars. Finally, and

perhaps unexpectedly in the context of a literary dissertation, I will enter into the realm of pedagogy, engaging with its researchers and critics as well as a variety of theories, including, specifically, a number of inclusive pedagogies such as Trauma-Informed Pedagogy; as noted above, these are often called 'critical pedagogies,' a term that encapsulates all pedagogies that center on a constant revamping of the teaching process. Critical pedagogies challenge the status-quo, and insist, like letters, on the persistent revision of how we negotiate meaning amongst each other.

I hope that this dissertation provides a deeper understanding of authors' engagement in collaborative exploits, and a broad but practical understanding of pedagogical practices to engage our students in collaborations of their own. I believe that higher-education professionals would be better served if teaching were considered a more legitimate area of inquiry in academic research, rather than one that falls outside of their purview. Specifically, as I will argue, it might benefit from a greater collaboration between educational research and literary scholarship. In asking themselves how their research applies to their classrooms, professors would be broadening the reach of their research and putting their arguments into practice. Academic research can have an important impact beyond journals and conferences exclusive to the higher-education world; in considering how our research and our teaching can collaborate and build upon each other, we are opening the doors of academia to individuals beyond the walls of our offices and libraries.

Chapter 1: A "Bisexual Nymphomaniac" and a "Misanthropic Recluse"[10]
Make Sense of Things: an Analysis of Sandian Correspondence

Introduction: "Première Leçon"

"Pour comprendre [les mots] il faut savoir à quoi ils servent, et pour bien s'en rendre compte, il faut savoir leurs noms." (Sand, 1ère leçon, 4)

In the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas at Austin, there is a short and incomplete text by George Sand entitled "1ère leçon." Sand wrote the text for her granddaughter and the lesson is a conversation between herself and the young Aurore, who is just learning to read and write. It begins, "Nous allons apprendre à lire mais d'abord il faut savoir ce que c'est que parler: sais-tu parler?" (1).[11] The handwriting is somewhat neater than Sand's usual letters, almost as if she meant this text as a letter to her granddaughter. Sand begins the lesson by emphasizing that, in order to read or write, one must first learn to speak. Logically, this is most often how learning to make meaning goes—children learn to speak well before they learn to read. I want to suggest, however, that Sand is doing more than pointing out the natural order of things to her granddaughter. Instead, she is insisting that in order to complete an independent activity (reading/writing), we must first have learned a collaborative activity (speaking). She implies that before we are able to make meaning for ourselves, we must first learn to make meaning in collaboration with others.

In fact, this is exactly what Sand does in this first lesson; she enacts collaborative meaning-making in this strange, short "conversation" with Aurore, recorded as "1ère leçon." She continues her discussion with Aurore with the question, "Sais tu de quoi on se sert pour parler?" Aurore responds that we use our mouths and our voice, and, prompted by Sand, Aurore continues to

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[10] Jack, *A Woman's Life Writ Large*, 3

[11] Sand does not number the pages of her document, but as the text is only 8 pages long, it was easy enough to assign them numbers myself, beginning with "1ère leçon" on page 1.

explain that with our voice, we form words, which are arranged into sentences. In an almost Saussurean manner, Sand deconstructs the act of speech, emphasizing the importance of individual words, through which we are understood. The goal, as Sand explains it to Aurore, is indeed to make oneself understood by the other. She reminds Aurore of a time before she could speak words, during which her granddaughter pronounced mere screams and cries, "et tu souffrais de ne pouvoir être compris" (4). In her very first lesson to her granddaughter,[12] Sand teaches her that not to be understood is to suffer.

Sand pens this document around the same time that she composes her *Contes d'une Grand-mère* (1873-1876). It would seem that, in her final years, Sand was primarily concerned with matters of pedagogy, and teaching her granddaughter her most valued lessons before she died. This chapter will explore Sand's pedagogy more broadly, and the lessons she sought to impart to her readership and her community. More specifically, the chapter will explore the Sandian spirit of collaborative meaning-making, as she teaches it to Aurore, and how the author enacted this collaboration both in her correspondence and in her published works. It might be interesting, then, to begin with a text that is both a correspondence and a published work.

Sand Enacts Collaborative Meaning-Making in *Elle et Lui*

Twenty-five years after the end of her passionate affair with Alfred de Musset and one year after his death, George Sand published *Elle et Lui*, a revised (and somewhat fictionalized) version of their correspondence under the epistolary pseudonyms Laurent and Thérèse. The correspondence and accompanying narrative commentary recount Thérèse and Laurent's first

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[12] The 1ère leçon ends abruptly on page 8, in the middle of a sentence. The notebook in which she wrote the lesson seems intact, suggesting that Sand was interrupted in the act of writing of this text, and did not take it back up.

encounter, their subsequent courtship, their emotional stay in Venice, the tumultuous relationship that ensues, and Laurent's capricious artistic tendencies. Their relationship, as so many in the Sandian fictional universe, borders on incestuous, with numerous remarks on Laurent's childishness, Thérèse's motherly nature, and Thérèse's financial and emotional support of the young intellectual. Laurent is unstable, and wavers between a dramatic and obsessive interest in Thérèse and a vengeful hatred of the independent and otherwise engaged artist. Sand paints Laurent, throughout the text, as the victim of his own terrible and engrossing artistic genius.

Alfred de Musset of course described his own version of events in the popular 1836 novel, *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, positioning himself, in the guise of a fictional narrator, as an everyman whose relationship with a deceitful woman ruins his belief in love and relationships more broadly. Historically speaking, we might read this text as the Romantic's dying call as Realism settles into France and throughout Europe, as told through Musset's personal relationship with a down-to-earth and infinitely astute woman whose sense of self sets her definitively apart from the quasi-obsession with the beloved expected of relationships during the Romantic era. In his introduction to an annotated publication of the Sand-Musset correspondence, Paul Mariéton explains,

> On disait du poète, du poète de la jeunesse, que l'amour d'une femme avait éveillé son génie, pour le faire mourir. On savait aussi que cette maîtresse «qui voulait être belle, et ne savait pas pardonner» avait auréolé la plus glorieuse carrière, d'une vieillesse entourée de vénération. On n'osait franchement plaindre l'un ni excuser l'autre. (8)

Mariéton provides commentary and context for many of these letters, noting when sentiments expressed in letters seem far-fetched or even invented, when facts seem misunderstood or misrepresented. Mariéton published this text in 2009 as blame continued to be assigned alternatively to the two authors. But the Musset-Sand relationship remained elusive enough that,

as Mariéton puts it, the public could never quite find it in themselves to either pity or excuse either Sand or Musset in any meaningful manner.

Musset's version of events as presented in *Confession* is that of a young and naïve man whose lover—who quickly becomes "cette femme"[13]—has permanently scarred him to such an extent that he falls into a deep angst. The novel is autobiographical in nature, if not in title.[14] In fact, in the many rewritings of this relationship, I am particularly fascinated by the matter of titles. In titling his novel *Confession d'un enfant du siècle*, Musset is declaring himself—or at least his fictionalized stand-in—a representative of an entire generation of individuals with whom he claims to share feelings of deep disillusionment and dissatisfaction. The novel's first chapter is only a paragraph long. In this short preliminary space, Musset explained that this text would relate a period of three years, during which he was "atteint […] d'une maladie morale abominable" (1). "Si j'étais seul malade," he continued, "je n'en dirais rien; mais, comme il y en a beaucoup d'autres que moi qui souffrent du même mal, j'écris pour ceux-là" (1). Had he been alone in his torment, he might not have written the novel. But it seems that, to the author, his torment was of the exact same nature as that of his fellow Frenchmen's. Musset, then, claimed to speak for a whole population of people, declaring himself the voice of a nation disabused of Romantic notions of love.

This is in direct opposition to what I argue to be Sand's purpose in publishing her own version of the story, which she released only after Musset's death. Before arguing my own understanding of Sand's text, however, let me make room for the voices of the many scholars who have already contributed to this controversial conversation. Indeed, the reason behind Sand's

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[13] Opening randomly to page 31, "cette femme" appears three times on the page; "ma maîtresse" appears once.
[14] It is not an autobiography in the strictest sense as outlined by Philippe Lejeune, since its focus is only specific instances of the author's life, rather than a narration of his life from childhood.

publication of her own version of the affair in the form of *Elle et lui* (1859) is a fascinating

conundrum; certainly, as Joseph Barry suggests in his introduction to the 1986 edition of the text,

Sand hoped that the publication "garantirait sa propre version des faits et établirait son innocence

dans l'épisode vénitien" (17). Perhaps, as Thierry Bodin believes, "Par l'écriture, elle se libère du

poids du souvenir" (36). Surely, though, these are but a few of many reasons for which Sand

wished to publish this text. She must have anticipated the furious reactions from the readership,

splitting the audience still further into two opinionated factions: the mussettistes and the sandistes.

In fact, she infuriated the readership enough to turn them into authors in their own right: Alfred's

older brother Paul de Musset penned *Lui et Elle*, and Alfred's *maîtresse*, the poet Louise Colet,[15]

in turn wrote the poorly received *Lui*. The authors of these three texts shift the titular object

pronouns around, placing the emphasis more heavily on Musset with each publication: *Elle et Lui*

becomes *Lui et Elle*, which Colet turns cheekily into *Lui* alone.

This multitude of rewritings begs the preliminary question: who had access to the actual

correspondence? Ownership of letters is a fascinating component of epistolary history, and indeed,

the question of correspondence ownership was often debated and rarely settled in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries. Did husbands have the right to read their wives' correspondence? And

what should one do with a correspondence once the recipient has died?[16] It was generally accepted

in the nineteenth century that in the case of the recipient's death, the correspondence was to be

returned to the original writer. As for the legal matter of whom letters belonged to once recipient

and writer both were deceased, it was often discussed and settled before such an event. Indeed,

Musset and Sand had chosen their common friend Gustave Papet as the depository of their

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[15] Louise Colet was herself a well-regarded poet, and, what's more, both Musset and Flaubert's lover at some point in time, making her competitiveness with Sand somewhat natural.

[16] Roger Chartier discusses these questions in his text *La Correspondance* (277).

correspondence. Upon Musset's death, Papet handed Sand two sealed envelopes containing hers and Musset's correspondence; Musset's brother, Paul, came to Paris to reclaim Musset's side of the exchange, but Sand claimed that the letters were under lock and key in Berry.[17] Sand therefore remained in possession of the correspondence, and published the infamous *Elle et Lui* soon after Musset's death. The correspondence itself was subsequently published in bits and pieces for years before being collected and released in *Histoire d'amour*.[18] This negotiation of ownership, however, underlines an important aspect of epistolary correspondence that tends to be forgotten in contemporary considerations, which is to say that letters were not as private as one might expect. It was common practice for letters to be read aloud in the drawing room, and if one wanted a certain section to remain between themselves and the recipient, the writer was to specify this explicitly within the letter.

The question of collaborative meaning-making within the space of a correspondence, then, becomes slightly more complex. Rather that two writers and two recipients, we suddenly understand a correspondence to entail a much larger communal enterprise. It is as a larger communal enterprise that I want to briefly analyze *Elle et Lui*, rather than as a singular correspondence later published. As her friend Buloz so neatly puts it, Sand must have known that "le public qui ne sait pas tout [...] pourra vous trouver un peu sévère."[19] Why does Sand take this risk, then? What meaning is Sand trying to make of her relationship with Musset in rewriting their correspondence, and in turn, their relationship and rupture, and in publishing this text? My argument revolves around the concept that Sandian theory, from Joseph Barry to Martine Reid to

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[17] The history of the Sand-Musset correspondence is outlined by Barry and Bodin in their introductions to the 1986 edition of *Elle et Lui*.

[18] "La Revue de Paris" published Sand's letters to Musset, and subsequently her letters to Sainte Beuve, swaying public opinion repeatedly one way or the other. Loyalties to Musset or to Sand shifted with the appearance of new letters and new biographical and historical information (c.f., Mariéton, 14).

[19] *Elle et Lui*, 23

Manon Mathias, from the seventies to today, consistently comes back to, which is that of multiplicities. While Sandian scholars often analyze Sand herself as a complex individual who *contained* multiplicities, and refused to simplify these complexities for readers, lovers, or friends, I rather want to engage with Sand as an individual who *created* multiplicities. Yes, Sand certainly presented and represented many different identities over the course of her life (woman, man, author, friend, philosopher, lover), none of which seemed to impede upon the existence of the other, which is quite extraordinary. But I would like to focus on what Sand brought out in others, which is to say, a recognition of those same multiplicities within themselves.

It is my contention that, at its best, writing engages its audience to respond—it impassions and enlivens such that readers become meaning-makers in turn, and in this way, original texts, rather than standing as sacred vessels to be analyzed, become conduits for further thought and even, in some instances, subsequent publications. Sometimes, as is the case with Paul de Musset and Louise Colet, the engagement with the text goes so far as to inspire the reader to respond literally by rewriting their own versions of the story and ensuring that this version makes out into the world. Sand, I will argue, understood writing to entail a collaborative process in which writer communicates with reader, and reader in turn is inspired to respond or engage actively with the text. This is evidenced in her voluminous letter-writing, in which Sand passionately engaged all through her life, as well as in her fiction. In its most collaborative and communal form, which Sand would understand to be its best form, literature engenders literature, and responses to texts are multitudinous, infinite. This approach to publishing her texts completely inverts Musset's claim that he spoke for the many who suffered the same fate as him. Sand instead claimed only to speak for herself, and in fact, I believe, anticipates and encourages variability in storytelling. If Musset set out to explain the supposedly singular 'Truth' to his readers, Sand set out to explain only a

version of herself and of Musset to her readers, a version of themselves that she understood to be one of many.

Consider for a moment Barthes' essay "La mort de l'auteur," which argues for the diffusion of the singular authority of the writer and suggests instead that texts enact multitudes of meaning through a reader's engagement with the text, rather than with a reader's engagement with the author's life. Barthes goes so far as to claim, "pour rendre à l'écriture son avenir, il faut en renverser le mythe: la naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l'auteur" (67). The reader becomes the text's very future, and the significance of the author becomes almost irrelevant: "l'unité d'un texte n'est pas dans son origine, mais dans sa destination" (66). Thus meaning proliferates and builds on itself. When read with this Barthian lens in mind, *Elle et Lui* becomes Sand's most successfully collaborative work. A correspondence, her own with Alfred de Musset, engenders a *roman à clef* work entitled *Elle et Lui*, which in turn inspires impassioned responses from Musset's older brother as well as Louise Colet, which is not to mention all of the ink critics have spilled discussing this contentious series of texts over the century and a half since their publications. Thus an intertextual collaboration is taking place. A Sandian reading of Barthes' theory, then, advocates for a more extreme version of this diffusion of authority originally posited by the 'death of the author,' and inspires readers, such as Paul Musset and Louise Colet, to become not merely readers, but meaning-makers and even authors (published writers) in their own right.

We might return, then, to the critics' theories as to why Sand penned and published such a controversial text. Joseph Barry, we remember, suggests that Sand hoped the publication would prove her innocence in her relationship with Musset (*Elle et Lui*, 17), while Thierry Bodin believed, "Par l'écriture, elle se libère du poids du souvenir" (36). Rather than guaranteeing or establishing any singular point of view, or liberating herself from burdensome memories, Sand, I argue, had

instead anticipated the proliferation of responses that would ensue, the multitude of viewpoints that her own text would engender. While Musset had literally passed on, the death of the author in relation to *Elle et Lui* refers, in my view, to Sand's understanding that this text was but one of many to represent her relationship with Musset. In fact, in a letter from Sand to Musset dated May 12, 1834, she insisted: "fais ce que tu voudras, romans, sonnets, poèmes; parle de moi comme tu l'entendras, je me livre à toi les yeux bandés" (Corr. 591). Sand's use of the term "livrer" seems to imply that she delivered herself over almost as one would a letter, an appropriate term for an individual who understood that there are infinite versions of an event, a relationship, and a self. What she delivered to Musset, what she allowed him to put out into the world, is whatever version of herself that he held. She will in turn deliver her own version of him, and of their time together. Her audience will read her text, decide upon their own meaning, and in turn, create their own version. Each delivery will hold its own meaning and divulge its own truths. Sand possessed a unique understanding of the multiplicity of meaning.

That Sand anticipated, and even welcomed, the many different versions of this tale that her own text spawned is merely a theory, one that I can only support through a more general reading of Sand, one that argues for this multiplicity of meaning and the paradox of truth, that being that many versinos of an event can simultaneously be accurate and authentic to an individual experience. But before delving into further considerations of meaning-making in the Sandian universe, I can offer this piece of evidence from the final letter of *Elle et Lui*: "c'est ta réalité, à toi, c'est ton talent, c'est ta vie: n'es-tu pas artiste?" (180). This is the last letter that Thérèse writes to Laurent, in response to a vengeful note from her lover accusing her of abandoning and ruining him. Thérèse sends this letter in return, level-headedly and lovingly encouraging Laurent to embrace what talent and joy he has in him. As this advice is placed within a novel, however,

Laurent is not the sole recipient of Thérèse's suggestions. In these final moments of her novel, Sand spoke to her audience as Thérèse speaks to Laurent, insisting that, while they may not like the version of events she has penned, it is but one reality of many. She challenged us as readers and individuals to consider our own truths, create our own meanings. After all, are we not artists as well? If *Elle et Lui* proves anything, it is that the tortured male genius we see embodied in Laurent is not the only genius capable of producing art. Thérèse and Sand are proof of it. If, as Barthes argues, the author is dead, his death has made room not only for readers but for authors, for plurality of truth, that Sandian insistence that truths, like identities, don't necessarily negate one another, and that many truths and many identities can reside within an individual while remaining entirely authentic.

Madame Maître: Making Meaning of Gender in the Sand-Flaubert Correspondence

Musset is far from the only tortured male genius to attempt to make meaning with and of the joyful and loving Sand. The Sand-Flaubert correspondence is a space in which meaning-making through collaboration thrives as two very different individuals attempted to make sense of their identities and their surroundings amidst social and political upheaval. While it would be impossible to address how Sand and Flaubert create meaning together across the correspondence as a whole, it is profitable to consider how they negotiate meaning through the lens of a specific topic, particularly one that is as dichotomized as gender among nineteenth-century society. Through their discussions of gender in their letters, in Flaubert's adoption of both male and female pronouns and agreements to refer to Sand, in their negotiations of definitions, we see how Sand and Flaubert create a space for Sand's unique gender identity. "To make meaning" is often taken to imply "to define" or reduce the scope of a concept in some manner. The Sand-Flaubert

correspondence challenges this understanding of meaning-making in beautiful and complex ways, and exemplifies how making meaning can entail a collaborative process that creates multiplicities rather than an authoritative process that dictates definitions.

Of course, Flaubert is neither the first nor the last individual to discuss Sand's gender identity with the author. In a letter from April of 1835, George Sand wrote to Adolphe Guéroult: "Mon ami, j'admire beaucoup vos perplexités à propos du titre que vous devez me donner. Il me semble que je m'appelle Georges et que je suis toujours votre ami [with the masculine agreement], ou votre amie [this time with a feminine agreement], comme vous voudrez" (Corr., 353). We note Guéroult's confusion ("perplexités") at correctly identifying a title for the author.[20] Is she *monsieur* or *mademoiselle*? Is she the *madame* with which Flaubert will begin all of his very first letters to her, or the *cher maître* with which he will continue to address his letters to her once their friendship is cemented? Sand offered no simple solution for Adolphe, to whom she suggested both female and male titles, offering that he adopt whichever gender he would prefer. She insisted only, in the simplest of terms, that she was Georges.[21] Guéroult's inquiry echoes in the Sand-Flaubert correspondence, and into future centuries. Nineteenth-century readers attempted to define Sand's complex gender identity, as twenty-first century scholarship defines and redefines her. She is, for certain scholars, clearly masculine and virile, for others clearly feminine and motherly, a "frigid, bisexual nymphomaniac" at times, "the Good Lady of Nohant" at others (Jack, 3). This paradoxical identity strikes fear and discomfort in the hearts of many. It is a fear so thoroughly absolute that Baudelaire insists, in regard to Sand, that "Je ne puis penser à cette stupide créature, sans un certain

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[20] I use this quotation as a starting point to analyze Sandian gender, but in fact, I am being overly kind towards Guéroult. He did not much care to respect Sand's decision as to her identity, and this question reads, in context of the rest of his letter, as almost sarcastic. Sand seemed, in response, amused rather than offended, as seems to have been her nature.

[21] The manner in which Sand spelled her name changed over the course of her literary career. Her very first publications include the final "s" in Georges, while later ones do not: another layer of Sand's complex identity and shifting persona over the years.

frémissement d'horreur. Si je la recontrais, je ne pourrais m'empêcher de lui jeter un bénitier à la tête" (Baudelaire, 110).

Rather than labeling Sand's gender identity, I want to look at how she and Flaubert constructed and deconstructed gender in their epistolary exchange, which is to say: how Sand and Flaubert, together, made meaning of gender from 1862, the time of her first letter to Flaubert, to 1876, which marks her death and thus her final letters to him. I want to underline the deconstruction and reconstruction, by both authors, of the act of gendering, and ultimately, to arrive at an understanding of how social discourse on gender did, or did not, take place in the nineteenth century. By delving into the implicit mediation that takes place between these two nineteenth-century friends, I hope to contribute a deeper understanding of how gender was negotiated within the framework of the nineteenth-century social contract. But I want to consider, also, how modern criticism chooses to identify Sand, how we have made meaning of her gender since her passing, and what these understood or imposed identities imply for Sand and for gender studies more broadly.

In their very first letters dated 1862, Flaubert addressed Sand respectfully and expectedly as "Chère Madame" (Corr. 1); by 1866, without any explicit discussions of the shift in greeting, she had irrevocably become "chère maître" (Corr. 9, onwards), in all of its grammatical contradiction. Flaubert ignores the masculine gender of the word "maître," as opposed to "maîtresse," yet uses a descriptor with a femine agreement, "chère." I disagree with critics such as Naomi Schor who argue that "castration [...] is the hidden pivot on which this correspondence turns. This is particularly true in the case of Flaubert's address to Sand. There is an extraordinary instability in his gendering of his correspondent" (Schor, 198), and Martine Reid, who, as Schor puts it, argues that "misogyny (as well as heterosexism) underlies Sand and Flaubert's complicity,"

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though "one must not therefore conclude that sexual difference is absent from either their relationship or their correspondence. For if Sand is transsexual, Flaubert, for his part, describes himself as a hysteric and thus a hermaphrodite" (Schor, 198). I argue, on the contrary, that there exists a full and fully respectful discussion and negotiation of gendered terminology in their correspondence.

It would be best, perhaps, to start by defining those gendered terms of 'man' and 'woman,' and eventually 'third sex,'[22] for indeed, there are subtle but explicit explorations and negotiations of these terms within the Sand-Flaubert correspondence. We might begin with Sand's musings on hysteria, which she discussed with Flaubert in January of 1867: "Et pourquoi une telle maladie aurait-elle un sexe?" (72), she insisted, highlighting the socially constructed nature of the problematic disorder. "Et puis encore," she continued, "il y a ceci pour les gens forts en anatomie: *il n'y a qu'un sexe*. Un homme et une femme, c'est si bien la même chose, que l'on ne comprend guère les tas de distinctions et de raisonnements subtils dont se sont nourris les sociétés sur ce chapitre-là" (72). The statement complicates both sex and gender in numerous ways, most notably by implying that only those weak in matters of anatomy would identify this duality of the sexes. The statement seems paradoxical, especially in the context of nineteenth-century conceptions of sex (for which we might turn to texts such as Michelet's *La Femme*):[23] those who properly understand anatomy, Sand argued, could not understand its correlation with gender identity. Long before Simone de Beauvoir's appearance onstage, Sand was already explicitly stating that those differences between man and woman are nothing more than socially imposed notions. In fact, 'man' and 'woman' are labels with no real meaning whatsoever. Yet she continued in a

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[22] Flaubert will refer to Sand in one of his letters as a creature of the *troisième sexe*.
[23] In his text, Michelet delves into anatomical, social, and temperamental differences between the two sexes and determines and describes the makeup of "la femme" based on these differences. Woman is "l'adorable idéal de grâce dans la sagesse" (66).

confounding manner to conclude, "J'ai observé l'enfance et le développement de mon fils et de ma fille. Mon fils était moi, par conséquent femme bien plus que ma fille qui était un homme pas réussi" (72).[24] Now Sand is in fact differentiating between 'man' and 'woman,' presumably according to those culturally constructed definitions. What is fascinating beyond the definitions in this instance is Sand's implication of gender and sex as scaled: her son is 'much more woman' than her daughter, her daughter therefore 'much more man' than her son. Sand's description of her daughter as an imperfect man, "un homme pas réussi," suggests the possibility of a perfect man, such that 'man' and 'woman' become two ends of a sliding scale, rather than fixed states. The statement also implies what will echo again and again into almost all future nineteenth-century literary texts: a woman who exhibits masculine traits is "imperfect," often even monstrous. A man who exhibits feminine traits is the perfect *androgène*.[25]

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars will often argue over Sand's place on this gender spectrum. Naginski is one of the major players in this debate.[26] In her 1991 book entitled *George Sand: Writing for her Life*, one of the most established Sandian scholars of our era, Isabelle Naginski, sets out to settle the divide between the "cigar-smoking young woman dressed in men's clothing" who "devoured her lovers, one after the other" and the "bonne dame de Nohant," "a portly chatelaine, a matronly do-gooder" (2). In an attempt to reconcile these incongruous representations of the self, representations that were always either heavily traditionally feminine or heavily traditionally masculine, Naginski chose to identify Sand with the notion of androgyny.

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[24] A. L. Mckenzie translates this portion of Sand's letter in the following manner: "I have observed the infancy and the development of my son and my daughter. My son was myself, therefore much more woman, than my daughter, who was an *imperfect* man" (emphasis mine) (160).
[25] We see this exemplified in texts such as Balzac's *Beatrix*, in which the titular character is but a side note to the character of Camille Maupin, the powerful and masculine figure who writes popular novels under a penname. Camille Maupin is, of course, based off of Sand herself. While the handsome and effeminate young Calyste is praised for his androgynous traits, Camille Maupin is deemed monstrous and dangerous by the inhabitants of her town.
[26] Others, such as Nigel Harkness, are elaborated upon later in the chapter.

Naginski points to moments in her correspondence that underline Sand's unease, moments in which she declares that she is "not entirely a woman," and yet decidedly is a woman "like all others," moments in which she recounts dreams of becoming a mosaic, "counting very carefully my little squares of lapis lazuli and jasper" (Naginski, 21). Naginski refers to this apprehension as the "anguish of the fragmented body" (21). What this fusion ultimately results in for Naginski, then, is the *absence* of both masculine and feminine. She explains, "if [women] refuse, as Sand did, to work within the confines of either model, if they reject both phallocentrism and the feminine ghetto, they become creatures of a strange sex, neither male nor female" (27). In 1991, at the time of this publication, refusing to remain strictly within categories of 'feminine' or 'masculine,' as Sand did throughout her correspondence and her life, meant exclusion from both. Naginski notes the shifting gender pronouns when Sand refered to herself in letters, citing this as an example of "epistolary androgyny" (28), turning this *doubling* of Sand's gender, in which Sand is alternatively male and female, into a *negation* of her gender, in which Sand is neither male nor female.

But let us return to the Sand-Flaubert correspondence, for back then as now, Flaubert and Sand attempted to find a term for what Naginski termed androgyny. In order to resolve this confoundingly complex gender negotiation, Flaubert concluded in a letter from September of 1868 that Sand is of the "troisième sexe" (Corr., 132), a rhetorical move that might be compared to classifying Sand as queer, or genderqueer, today, a notion for which we might turn to Katherine Watson, who, in her overview of concepts of queerness, explains that queer theory "has been primarily interested in how such categories as 'heterosexual', 'gay' and 'lesbian' came to be seen as stable identities and, in the process, reveals them as fragile constructs, constantly reliant on the successful performance of gender" (67-68). Queerness destabilizes the "unified 'self'" (68). This destabilization of the unified self echoes throughout Sand's epistolary writings, in all of those

moments in which she declared herself "not entirely a woman" and yet a "woman like all others" (Naginski, 21), moments in which she declared that, "A présent que je ne suis plus une femme, si le bon Dieu était juste, je deviendrais un homme" (Corr., 21). Naginski, despite her use of the term androgyny in her analysis of Sand's gender identity, speaks of exactly this destabilization of the self in her analysis of the mosaic image. This destabilization, which Naginski describes as the "anguish of the fragmented body" (21), seems to trouble the critics, as it troubled the society of Sand's own time, and all will attempt to resolve this destabilization into something more concretely definable. In *Someone: The Pragmatics of Misfit Sexualities from to Colette to Hervé Guibert*, Michael Lucey underlines

> the perils of translating certain kinds of identities across time (as well as across geographic and cultural space). Such an act of translation can involve associating an attribute taken as an index of identity at one moment of time and in one set of cultural circumstances with an attribute taken as an index of another identity at a later time and a different culture, assuming we will concur both in the parallelism of the two identities and the parallelism of the attributes or emblems associated with them. (8)

This phenomenon that Lucey calls a translation seems to speak to the persistent discomfort all time periods and all cultures face in not having a specific term for identifying myriad parts of a person's identity, including gender identity and sexuality.

There seems to be a sense, from the nineteenth century to the present day, that there is something fundamentally 'true' to be discovered and defined within Sand, within any individual: contemporary scholarship is constantly adding onto the gender of Sand, because they never seem to feel satisfied that they have uncovered and revealed her 'true' self. I want to linger on this notion of truth, and the idea that nineteenth-century society believed to know what was true of Sand's identity. In reference to Sand, another nineteenth-century French author, Émile Zola, explained that,

> On la jugeait bien mal, lorsqu'on voyait en elle un réformateur, un révolutionnaire entêté dans sa haine de la société. Pour moi, elle est simplement restée femme, en tout et toujours. [...] femme attachée fatalement à son sexe, le subissant et découlant de lui. Sous sa redingote d'étudiant [...] elle gardait ses cheveux longs, sa poitrine qu'une émotion agitait, son coeur de mère et d'épouse qui obéissait impérieusement aux lois naturelles. (Zola, 419)

Zola first touched on the identity that the general French populace saw in Sand, a bull-headed revolutionary with a deep hatred of society (an unrecognizable description of Sand for all of us who have read her novels and letters). Zola then claimed that in fact, in his opinion, Sand remained simply 'woman.' His insistence that under her student's frockcoat lay her long hair and easily-agitated bosom proves that Zola considered Sand's male attire and conduct nothing more than a disguise, a layer of falsity beneath which continued to exist Sand's original and socially-conforming self. Zola's use of the term 'restée' re-inscribes Sand's self into the identity with which she was born rather than that which she creates for herself over her lifetime. Zola's diction, 'fatalement,' 'subissant,' 'obéissait,' inarguably puts Sand back in her place, as Zola saw it, thrusting her back into the restrictive female identity that Sand sought to complicate. This is not my attempt to categorize Sand as male, or strip her of her femininity. Ultimately, Sand, as countless scholars who have come before me have argued, was multitudinous, never one to choose one identity over another, but always, in all matters, unbounded by restrictive definitions. I mean instead to underline Zola's certainty that there existed a singular *true* identity to be uncovered, that Sand, underneath the student's garb, underneath the male pseudonym, was hiding something that had to be found out and reestablished. By uncovering her original identity, by *insisting* on her original identity as Amantine Dupin, as a woman fatally attached to her sex and servant to its feminine whims, Zola could rest assured that Sand had been safely recategorized, contained within the singular identity that was imposed upon her at birth.

Contemporary criticism meanwhile rejects by and large the notion that Sand must be feminine, but continues to insist that she must be categorized. In his 2007 book *Men of their Words*, Harkness addresses the "strong critical temptation to resolve the tensions between masculine and feminine in Sand through the totalizing figure of the androgyne" (6-7). He allows that Naginski convincingly argues for this androgynous identification. Yet, by pointing to Sand's gender duality rather than her negation of gender, Harkness implies the same problematic aspect of 'androgyny' already discussed. Rather than attempting to reconcile Sand's feminine identity with her masculine identity, Harkness "aims to situate [Sand] within the masculine, though as a troubling presence on its margins" (9). This shift in theoretical work, from one that seeks to negotiate Sand's identity into a single term to one that instead focuses on a single one of her performances, seems to signal a shift in contemporary critics' approach to gender more broadly. Both Harkness's work and Janet Beizer's later book, *Thinking Through the Mothers*, will choose to focus on either the masculine or the feminine, recognizing the duality in Sand's gender identity, but seemingly finding any kind of reconciliation or negotiation of the two an unnecessary, or perhaps impossible, endeavor. Harkness's use of the term 'troubled' underlines the crux of the matter: Harkness, like Naginski, attempts to categorize Sand, to find a term that best suits her work, and therefore herself. Yet no matter which term is chosen, Harkness, like Naginksi, must add a caveat. For Naginski, she is androgynous, but only if we are to consider androgyny something other than what it really is; for Harkness, Sand is masculine, but only 'as a troubling presence' on the margins of masculinity. For Janet Beizer, she is feminine; but then again, not entirely. Her critics, then, from Naginski to Harkness to Beizer, from 1991 to today, consider Sand as an imperfectly gendered individual, "mal réussi" (Corr., 72), to borrow from Sand's own diction, much as Sand considered her daughter an imperfect man.

I would argue, however, that it is not the imperfections or discomfort of these gender negotiations that stand out to me in reading this correspondence. I want to emphasize not the destabilization or the fragmentation of the individual or the mosaic, but rather the wholeness of these two parallel creations. After all, the beauty of the mosaic comes not from its pieces taken individually, but from the view of the whole, a beauty impossible without the presence of multiplicity. And while Sand certainly mirrored the fragmentation of the mosaic, she more importantly, more extraordinarily perhaps, mirrored its wholeness, as well, a fact I find most aptly represented in a letter that Sand wrote to Flaubert in January of 1869: "L'individu nommé George Sand," she assured her friend, "se porte bien: il savoure le merveilleux hiver qui règne à Berry, cueille des fleurs…, coud des robes et des manteaux pour sa belle-fille…, habille des poupées, lit de la musique, mais surtout passe des heures avec la petite Aurore, qui est une fille étonnante" (Corr., 150). There is absolute tranquility in Sand's description of her daily routine, but also in her pronoun slippage, in the ease with which she identifies with a masculine noun and thus uses the masculine "il" throughout, all the while detailing traditionally female labor and pastimes. In fact, Sand insisted, "il n'y pas d'être plus calme et plus heureux dans son intérieur que ce vieux troubadour" (151). For centuries now, her readers and critics have attempted to label her, supporting various pieces of the mosaic as most prominent over the years. It is good to know that, by 1869 at least, Sand had no such worries, and rather than agonizing over which pieces or labels were most prominent, she simply lived her life in adoration of the whole. As Joseph Barry states in his exceptional biography of her, "She was too faithful to herself to be faithful to the men of her time. Fidelity to oneself is the very theme of living an unfragmented life" (xv). Indeed, this is what Sand lived: an unfragmented life, a true mosaic in her wholeness, rather than in her pieces.

There is surely also something to be said here about the translation, and the nature of French versus English more broadly. For in French, Sand cleverly and consistently makes use of a male noun to describe herself rather than simply using the first person (*ce troubadour*, *cet individu*, *ce personnage*, to name a few examples), to thus allow for usage of male pronouns in relation to herself throughout the rest of the paragraph, a unique grammatical twist to a language that is so often thought of as restrictive in relation to gender. In the English translation of Sand's letters, A. L. McKenzie translates the above excerpt as follows: "There is not a more tranquil or happier individual in his domestic life than this old troubadour" (McKenzie, 45), replicating the male pronouns, as I believe is right, though in English, the brilliant linguistic play is not quite so evident.

I want to return to the final piece of the extraordinary letter from January of 1869, the piece that I find most moving and most important. In it, Sand reminded Flaubert that, "Ce pâle personnage a le grand plaisir de t'aimer de tout son coeur," describing Flaubert as a fellow troubadour, "confiné dans sa solitude en artiste enragé, dédaigneux de tous les plaisirs de ce monde" (Corr., 151). It might seem that I am straying somewhat from my intention to speak of gender negotiations; yet these negotiations of Sand's over the course of her epistolary correspondence with her friend touch on something greater. In this letter, Sand summarized hers and Flaubert's friendship by explaining that, "Nous sommes, je crois, les deux travailleurs les plus différents qui existent; mais, puisqu'on s'aime comme ça, tout va bien. Puisqu'on pense l'un à l'autre à la même heure, c'est qu'on a besoin de son contraire; on se complète en s'identifiant par moments à ce qui n'est pas soi" (151). She is speaking, here, of her relationship with Flaubert, but perhaps it is also true that she is speaking of her relationship with herself, and the many mosaic pieces that make up her whole, particularly those pieces which seem so paradoxical to a carefully gender-conforming society. With these words, Sand is encouraging us not only to acknowledge

and come to know those others who are so opposite to us, but to acknowledge and come to know those others within us, those parts of ourselves that seem contradictory. In reading Sand, we might be encouraged to explore both the feminine and the masculine within us, to express both the "frigid, bisexual nymphomaniac" and the "Good Lady of Nohant" sitting side by side in the mosaic of our selves, to acknowledge and come to adore both the extroverted and loving artist and the solitary and disdainful artist. For indeed, all of us have "a need of his opposite"[27] (Mckenzie, 304), and it is only in exploring these apparent oppositions that our fragmented pieces will come together to resemble whole mosaics.

Helping Students Make Meaning: Spivak, Sand, and Critical Intimacy

We should consider, also, matters of pedagogy, and how we teach authors like Sand, authors who continue to challenge us still today. How do we make meaning of Sand and her identity in conversation with her texts and our students? Our inability to categorize Sand continues to confound us all, and while scholars laud Sand's multiplicity in academic articles, the author is often left off of our syllabi. Flaubert, Balzac, Zola, Baudelaire, are all names that inevitably make an appearance in our graduate and undergraduate courses. Of course, Sand hasn't simplified the task for us. We might feel a twinge of discomfort, for instance, placing Sand on a list of 'nineteenth-century female authors' when we remember her threat, "Ne m'appelez [...] jamais femme auteur, ou je vous fais avaler mes cinq volumes et vous ne vous en releverez jamais" (Corr., 16). In fact, as noted above, scholars have spent decades categorizing and recategorizing her: male or female, androgynous, bisexual, and most recently queer. And this confusion as to what terms to use or not use to refer to past historical figures is not a discussion that is limited to academia; it is

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[27] A. L. Mckenzie translation.

one that is taking place throughout the educational world. Last November, the California State Board rejected several K-8 textbooks partly because the texts "failed to detail the sexual orientation of historical figures such as literary luminaries Emily Dickinson, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman" (Harrington, EdSource). The commission explained that, "The absence of specific labels regarding sexual orientation creates an adverse reflection because the identity of these individuals is not honored and demeans their contributions to history." In response, the publisher in question, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, stated that they feel "that the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer are contemporary terms that may not map well on past lives and experiences." Of course, Sand did not identify with any of these particular labels, most of which are quite contemporary. How then, shall we refer to her? Which labels can or should we ascribe her? How do we make meaning of her, and of these terms? To this day, we desperately want to categorize her, claim her as genderqueer, queer, bisexual. We want, in other words, to make meaning of her in familiar ways, using established categories and definitions.

But it is precisely the resistance to categories that is both so beautifully exceptional and so human in this author, her ability and insistence to live life permanently in a state of becoming, her insistence on making and remaking meaning repeatedly throughout her life and her works as her understanding of herself and of her world shifted. I would like to advocate then, for what Gayatri Spivak termed de(con)structive pedagogy, which, she notes, "like all good teaching in the humanities, [is] hopeful and interminable" ("Who Claims Alterity"). In this address, Spivak uses Derrida's theory of deconstruction to discuss current (post)colonialist power structures. We might dwell, for a moment, on the Derridean notion of *différance*, and what it is Spivak problematized in 1989. In his book *On Grammatology*, Derrida challenges the speech/writing hierarchy, in which speech stands as the more privileged concept within the binary. In putting forth the notion of

différance versus *différence*, Derrida instead privileges writing, inversing the binary hierarchy: "depending on whether it is spelled with an 'a' (-'ance') or an 'e' ('-ence'), [the word] could mean either 'to differ' or 'to defer' […]. [T]he difference between the two words—'différence' or 'différance'—cannot be heard. It can only be seen. The difference is therefore solely graphic" (Gendren, 107). Without seeing it physically written on a page, it is impossible for a listener to know whether Derrida refers at any moment to the notion of differing or deferring, allowing Derrida to consider written language to be the superior form of language.

However, Derrida notes the instability of such an inversion, and insists instead that, rather than placing speech or writing at the center of meaning, categories should be continuously questioned and hierarchies dismantled. In the late twentieth century, Spivak used Derridean deconstruction theory to analyze the power differential in those individuals or communities who decide upon these displaced hierarchies and those whose influence cannot reach far enough. Using deconstruction as a base, she thus explains the fundamental flaw in our political and educational systems whereby those in power refuse to dismantle and rearrange the hierarchical structures in place.

Spivak's critique speaks directly to academia, in which dominant discourses highlight the privileged population's voice, and leave masses of individuals and communities unheard. In her 1989 address, Spivak called for "the persistent establishment and re-establishment, the repeated consolidating in undoing, of a strategy of education and classroom pedagogy attending to provisional resolutions of oppositions [...] by teasing out their complicity" ("Who Claims Alterity"). Spivak asks us to question these supposed dichotomies, to deconstruct these historically embedded definitions and do the work of regularly putting back into question oppositions that we have put in place. We might shift our focus, then, as scholars and educators, to those individuals

who not only choose independently (name, gender, and all), but to those individuals who are always in the process of choosing, of defining and redefining, those individuals who undo the definitions imposed upon them to reconstruct a new self, not once, but again and again. In focusing on those individuals who are always in progress, we might in fact begin to look beyond the definitions.

Sand, of course, did not identify with any of the labels later attributed to her (queer, genderqueer, bisexual, etc), most of which are somewhat contemporary to our 21st century cultural mindset. Yet in higher-education, instructors have much more freedom and control over what, whom, and how they teach; academia largely remains a space in which textbooks and their restrictive nature do not have to make an appearance in our syllabi. Holding space for this complicated discussion on identity is important in and of itself. In the university context, our students are ready and well prepared to discuss the complexity of identity politics. In a pedagogical context, then, critical intimacy can mean, quite simply, holding space for a discussion to take place in our learning spaces, without imposing identity markers onto the author we are teaching. In relation to Sand, these discussions lead naturally into a conversation on gender terminology in French. While the thought may well make the "Imortelles" of the Académie Française squirm, it remains a fact that trans-, gender non-conforming, and queer individuals exist across French speaking countries, and that terminology to identify themselves as such exists. Countless resources created by individuals within the queer community can be found on the internet, from articles to YouTube videos. This is one of our many advantages as higher-education instructors—our material does not have to come from textbooks. As publishers and state boards carry on this vitally important discussion, our learning spaces do not have to be constrained by these same complicated political barriers.

It is, of course, important to be honest with our students about the general (in)acceptance of these identities in Francophone countries. But acknowledging the intolerance of individuals in various cultures and countries should not translate into replicating those viewpoints in our classrooms. Our duty as instructors is to create a space in which students can learn most effectively—a classroom in which students' and authors' identities are denied is a classroom in which many of our students will quickly withdraw. In rethinking our language classrooms, we might carefully consider our own language when speaking to our students. Simply stating that there are no linguistic options for queer or gender non-conforming individuals in French is not only incorrect, but dismissive of these identities. In accordance with Spivak's theory of deconstructive pedagogy, we might pause, individually as we create our syllabi and curriculum and collectively with our students, to pull apart our assumptions and reconstruct, again and again, a space that welcomes students, whether they would be welcomed in all French-speaking communities or not.

Open and honest discussions are one way to ensure that our language classrooms are inclusive,[28] and there are countless other small pedagogical practices that we might include into our teaching that will further create a welcoming environment.[29] Conscientiously rethinking our pedagogical methods to make even the smallest changes to our classrooms is vitally important, and it is a process that should take place at minimum at the beginning of each and every semester, throughout our teaching careers. It is a response to Spivak's call to all instructors to engage in a

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[28] In my own pedagogical endeavors, I try to avoid the term "safe space," as I feel that there is no way for me to guarantee that my classroom will in fact feel safe—some students, particularly those suffering from PTSD, depression, and/or anxiety, will not feel safe in any space. That does not mean that the space cannot be inclusive.

[29] Instructors might, for instance, as mentioned in the Introduction, begin the semester by passing out notecards and asking students for their name as it appears on the roster, their preferred name, and their pronouns. Avoiding calling out students' names on the first class day will prevent language instructors from inadvertently outing a trans-student whose name on the roster is not their preferred name, for example, while asking for their pronouns not only prevents instances of misgendering, but sends a message to our students, one that underlines our acknowledgment of their identities in this learning space.

"strategy of education and classroom pedagogy attending to provisional resolutions of oppositions" ("Who Claims Alterity"). However much we grow as instructors, Spivak reminds us that any resolutions we come to are, or should be, provisional. For inclusive classrooms to exist, our pedagogical methods and strategies must be reconstructed over again, only to be deconstructed soon after. This is how we can practice critical intimacy in our classrooms—not only by questioning our pedagogy and learning space as a loving insider, from inside the classroom community, but by doing so relentlessly, year after year, and classroom after classroom.

In a 2016 interview for the Los Angeles Review of Books with Steven Paulson, Spivak commented on deconstruction: "It's not just deconstruction. It's also construction. It's critical intimacy, not critical distance. So you actually speak from inside. That's deconstruction. My teacher Paul de Man once said to another very great critic, Frederic Jameson: 'Fred, you can only deconstruct what you love.' Because you are doing it from the inside, with real intimacy" ("Interview with Steve Paulson"). Critical intimacy is exactly that which Sand applied to her life and work. Rather than accepting the categorical definitions others handed her, 'woman,' 'wife,' 'author,' 'idealist,' Sand lovingly and intimately questioned these categories as an insider. This critical intimacy allowed Sand to negotiate complex and multitudinous meanings and to search for meaning in the paradoxical rather than in the categorical.

The *Dédicace* as Letter

Embracing the paradoxical as the locus of meaning, however, is not simple for all of us. While Sand flourished in the paradoxical space of multiplicities and indistinctness and familiarized Flaubert with this space through their correspondence, he had more difficulty than Sand in accepting such complexity. In a letter from October of 1872, Sand wrote to Flaubert: "Vivre en soi

est mauvais. Il n'y a de plaisir intellectuel que dans la possibilité d'y rentrer quand on en est longtemps sorti; mais habiter toujours ce *moi* qui est le plus tyrannique, le plus exigeant, le plus fantasque des compagnons, non, il ne faut pas.—Je t'en supplie, écoute-moi!" (Corr., 334).[30] To which Flaubert rather comically responded, "Mon moi s'éparpille tellement dans les livres que je passe des journées entières sans le sentir. J'ai de mauvais moments, il est vrai, mais je me remonte par cette réflexion: 'Personne, au moins, ne m'embête.' Après quoi, je me retrouve d'aplomb" (337). Though Flaubert's answer is perhaps lighthearted in this instance, it reflects Flaubert's difficulty in embracing the self as a multiplicity. As evidenced through their correspondence and passages such as the one noted above, the self for Sand existed only insofar as it was shared with others. "Intellectual pleasure," which I understand to imply meaning-making, exists as a collaborative process that takes place outside the self in conjunction with the other, in spaces like a correspondence. But Flaubert stubbornly resisted this openness and multiplicity. He seemed inifintely skeptical of this dispersion of the self, or at least, of sharing himself with others rather than with the books on his shelf, taking the scattering of the self that Sand used to construct a network of meaning as a dispersion of the self that instead nullified meaning. In discussing the nature of the "true" artist, Sand warned Flaubert that, "il sait qu'il ne peut pas se livrer sans s'anéantir" (45).[31] It is this terrible fear of the annihilation of the self that seems to be at the heart of Flaubert's much contested and most enigmatic work, *Un Coeur Simple*, which he in fact dedicated to Sand.

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[30] This is an excerpt from an exceptionally Sandian letter in which she worries, following the death of one of Flaubert's closest friends, for Flaubert in his loneliness and implores him to find a woman he can marry or a son he might adopt so as to be able to escape himself: "N'as-tu pas une femme que tu aimes ou par qui tu serais aimé avec plaisir? Prends-la avec toi. N'y a-t-il pas quelque part un moutard dont tu peux te croire le père? Élève-le. Fais-toi son esclave, oublie-toi pour lui" (335).

[31] Letter from Flaubert to Sand, November 30, 1866

I want to take a moment, before delving into the tale itself, to consider the *dédicace* and its purpose within the literary work. Rather than considering the *dédicace* as a paratext of the literary work, I would like to consider how the *dédicace* might serve instead as an intertext to the work. In his work *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Gérard Genette defines the paratext as "More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a threshold" (1-2). Derrida also famously comments on the *dédicace* and paratextual material more broadly, claiming that there is no such thing as *hors-texte*[32]—all material surrounding the text should and must be read as an integral part of the work, rather than as peripheral to the work. In conversation with Genette's definition and Derrida's specifications, we might consider how the *dédicace* and the text work together to create meaning, so that the extraneous nature of paratext becomes instead the collaborative nature of the intertext. In relation to Flaubert's dedication of *Un Coeur Simple* to Sand, I want to consider how Flaubert uses this space to enact the Sandian concept of multiplicity in writing a tale in which various interpretations proliferate and singular readings are inevitably flawed and almost impossible.

I must pause again to note my own broad use of the term *dédicace*, for, as printed versions prove, Flaubert never wrote out or explicitly dedicated the story to Sand. Still, he wrote the story for her, as evidenced by his correspondence with his friend, as well as with her son after her death. On May 29, 1876, Flaubert wrote to Sand: "Vous verrez par mon *Histoire d'un coeur simple* où vous reconnaîtrez votre influence immédiate que je ne suis pas si entêté que vous le croyez. Je crois que la tendance morale, ou plutôt le dessous humain de cette petite oeuvre vous sera agréable" (Corr., 461). Only a year later, after Sand's passing, he wrote to her son Maurice on August 29, 1877: "Vous me parlez de votre chère et illustre maman! Après vous, je ne crois pas que quelqu'un

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[32] C.f. *De La Grammatologie*, Derrida

puisse y penser plus que moi! Comme je la regrette! Comme j'en ai besoin! J'avais commencé *Un Cœur simple* à son intention exclusive, uniquement pour lui plaire. Elle est morte, comme j'étais au milieu de mon œuvre. Il en est ainsi de tous nos rêves" (Corr., 468). It is rather strange for Flaubert to claim his work, one that was always intended for publication, as written for "son intention exclusive." In leaving out any explicit *dédicace*, however, it is my contention that Flaubert in fact enacted the beautifully Sandian concept of communal meaning-making. He wrote this text for Sand, undoubtedly,[33] but what better way to pay homage to the paradoxical author than by publishing his text "à son intention exclusive" to a whole community of readers, thereby allowing meaning-making to proliferate?

In reading the correspondence and Sand and Flaubert's works in conversation with each other, Nicholas Cronk explains that "intertextuality is a powerful (dialogic) means of correcting this tendency of literature to preach (to be monologic)" (159). In writing this story for his dear friend and *maître*, Flaubert contradicted all of his monologic literary instincts, which insisted that, "L'art n'est pas fait pour peindre les exceptions, et puis j'éprouve une répulsion invincible à mettre sur le papier quelque chose de mon coeur. Je trouve même qu'un romancier n'a pas le droit d'exprimer son opinion. Est-ce que le bon Dieu l'a jamais dite, son opinion? Voilà pourquoi j'ai pas mal de choses qui m'étouffent, que je voudrais cracher et que je ravale" (Corr., 49),[34] or then again, "le grand art est scientifique et impersonnel" (53). Rather than working according to his own 'scientific' literary rules, Flaubert broke all of these rules in writing and publishing this strange story, and instead enacted the wonderfully Sandian concept of dispersion, by which one

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[33] Not all critics agree with this reading of the letters whereby Flaubert's assertion in his letters to Sand and Maurice represent his actual thought-process. Alphonse Jacobs, for example, states, "Après coup seulement, son plan déjà bien établi et la première partie du texte écrite, il se rend compte de la joie que doit éprouver sa «chère maître» à la lecture de cette tendre histoire" (Jacobs, 12).

[34] Dated December 5, 1866

shares their thoughts, beliefs, and deepest selves with the world. As Sand herself explained so well, "on écrit pour tout le monde, pour tout ce qui a besoin d'être initié; quand on est pas compris, on se résigne et on recommence. Quand on l'est, on se réjouit et on continue. [...] Qu'est-ce que c'est que l'art sans les coeurs et les esprits où on le verse? Un soleil qui ne projette pas de rayon et ne donnerait la vie à rien" (25).[35] This text, then, is Flaubert's attempt to enact Sandian dispersion, which she literally referenced in calling to mind the artist and individual as a sun; this infinitely strange, beautiful text is Flaubert's attempt to allow for this multiplicity of meaning.

This approach to the *dédicace* and the broader significance of intertextuality follows Naomi Schor's call to multiple readings, or Nathaniel Wing's astute paradoxical suggestion that we read the text "beyond, though not outside, irony" (90). Schor explains that she will be "breaking with a long tradition of readers who insist that the text must be read either as an ironic mockery of its simple-minded protagonist or [...] as a moving 'hagiography' of its saintly heroine" (Schor, 204), and suggests instead a dual reading that encapsulates both analyses of the pathetic but loving, and lovable, Félicité. While succinctly summarizing my intent in straying from more traditional and authoritative readings of this short story, I break away from Schor's analysis of the text, which she considers as a commentary on class and gender. I want to focus instead on the work as a commentary on how meaning proliferates rather than collapses under the weight of multiplicity, and how easily this multiplicity of meaning came for Sand, and how difficult it was for Flaubert.

We might begin with the strange character of Félicité, starting with her very name. The association between Félicité and the divine is powerfully felt in Flaubert's text, and the connection to the saint whose name Félicité inherits merits consideration. Encyclopedias of saints, such as those from which I draw the images shown at the end of this chapter, mention the 2nd-century

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[35] Dated October 1st, 1866

Roman martyr only briefly, if at all, but the few details given underline meaningful aspects of her namesake. There are few certainties about the life of Felicitas of Rome, but legends abound, the majority of which center on Felicitas's identity as a mother in her martyrdom. The accounts of Felicitas relate the wrath of emperor Marcus Aurelius against the charitable, Christian mother. It is said that pagan priests ordered her to deny Christ, making the same demand of each of her seven sons. All refused and were sentenced to death. Felicitas was made to watch each of her sons be executed before her eyes; her own death, in 165, came last. She is said to have suffered eight deaths, one for each of her seven sons, and finally her own. *The Nuremberg Chronicle*, an illustrated rendition of biblical histories that appears in 1493, portrays Felicitas of Rome lovingly cradling a sword along which rests seven small heads, representing each of her sons.[36] A halo crowns her own head, and she wears a benevolent and calm smile. Her sons' heads, discomfiting metonymies of their relentlessly faithful selves, also bear serene expressions, eyes closed, as if they were merely asleep. This rendition of the mother with her seven small, metonymous heads is unsettling, yet peaceful. Here is our first image of Felicity, blissful in all of her ill fate, faithful to the last.

A later, somewhat more troubling image of Felicitas from the 1660 Dutch collection of hagiographies,[37] *Martyrs Mirror*, depicts the mother standing amongst a pile of limbs and bodies (her sons'), a lone head rolling towards the foreground of the image in a still more disturbing manifestation of the metonymy. As a sword is being held to her son's neck, Felicitas seems to be delivering a speech; all eyes, including the doomed son's and the executioner's, are on her. Against a backdrop depicting the great Roman city, she holds out one hand towards her son, while the other points to the heavens, perhaps showing him the way. In this image, she is a leader, an orator; and

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[36] Figure 1
[37] Figure 2

yet the gross physicality of the scene, the splayed limbs and severed heads, invoke a perturbing, rather than a reassuring, kind of authority. This almost vulgar corporeality is, then, perhaps a general facet of sainthood; as Flaubert would further demonstrate in *St. Julien*, achieving sainthood seems to be a somewhat gruesome journey. Though he may not have been aware of this specific image, in choosing the figure of Felicité, Flaubert was nonetheless drawing from a religious tradition in which beauty and holiness were intimately linked to corporeal decay and violence, to physical grotesqueness. The visual representations of the saint highlight key features of Felicity; her motherhood, her relentless tranquility in the face of the destruction and deterioration of the body, her ability to live through and for others—an expansiveness that parallels the Eucharistic ritual in which Christ's body is physically made manifest in the host and wine. Félicitas is said to have died eight deaths; Flaubert resurrected her once more.

In Flaubert's short story, Félicité shares many of the saint's most beautiful and most troubling characteristics. From out-of-body experiences to believing that Victor lives on in the taxidermized parrot, Loulou's corpse, Félicité seems to have little concept of boundaries between individual selves. She lives a metonymous existence, in which she substitutes loved ones for each other and with objects almost indiscriminately. Nathaniel Wing describes Félicité's ability to find fulfillment in the objects with which she replaces loved ones as "pure affirmation," creating a character that is "an impossibly literal figure" (97). And in the ultimate synecdochous image that I delve into below, Félicité becomes the Eucharist—a symbol that stands for the simultaneous disappearance and expansion of the self. Dedicated to his ever-social friend, the text becomes representative of Flaubert's relationship with Sand, whom he deeply adored but consistently disagreed with in respect to the care of the self. Sand relished this life outside of the self and found meaning in the multiplication of the self; Flaubert feared this multiplicity terribly, considering it a

disintegration rather than a replication of the self. *Un Coeur simple*, then, is both a strange love letter to his dear friend, and a complicated (perhaps failed, but certainly authentic) attempt at making meaning of multiplicities.

At the beginning of the story, we find Félicité working tirelessly for her *maîtresse*. The narrator describes Félicité in detail: "En toute saison, elle portait un mouchoir d'indienne [...], un bonnet lui cachant les cheveux, des bas gris, [...], et par-dessus sa camisole un tablier à bavette, comme les infirmières d'hôpital" (20-21). Félicité seems to be covering herself up as much as possible: a bonnet to hide her hair, an apron to hide her clothes, nothing, in other words, that might differentiate her as an individual. Her clothes resemble those of hospital nurses, essentially a uniform, whose very purpose is to do away with differentiation, to turn the many into one and the same. The narrator ultimately describes her as "une femme en bois, fonctionnant d'une manière automatique." She seems, initially, to avoid anything that might reveal her to be an individual. When her lover kisses her, "elle disparut dans l'ombre" (23), as if she were nothing more than a shadow herself. We see this desire to fade into the crowd, to escape herself, again in her brief desire to join a nunnery, where self-abnegation is the very goal.

It is only upon finding a community of others that she begins to come to life. Though she reneges any defining characteristics of her own body, she has a very definite sense of others' bodies. The narrator's description of her 'wooden' body contrasts with Félicité's impression that Paul and Virginie are made "d'une matière précieuse" (24). Félicité seems aware of this discrepancy, and is desperate to keep these 'more valuable' selves as close to herself as possible, to such an extent that "Mme Aubain lui défendit de les baiser à chaque minute" (24-25). Félicité's happiness lies in other selves, which might be translated, in Flaubertian terms as not having a definite sense of her own self and in Sandian terms as existing multitudinously for and through

other selves. We might relate this desire to live outside the self to the question of gender, specifically to Michelet's conception of the 'ideal' woman as outlined in his 1860 work, *La Femme*. Woman, for Michelet: "rayonne de tous côtés, par sa grâce, comme une puissance harmonique qui [...] peut dans la société projeter des cercles plus grands" (284). Woman radiates outward, expanding her self into others so as to become a harmonious power.[38]

Michelet further described woman as "la religion elle-même" (284). Flaubert's concern with the expansion of the self seems deeply rooted in Christianity as well; Félicité's need for the other is evidenced still more forcefully in her deep adoration of the Holy Spirit, who exists only in relation to the Father and the Son. Félicité revels in the fact that she cannot imagine the Holy Spirit's "person," "car il n'était pas seulement oiseau, mais encore un feu, et d'autres fois un souffle" (34). He is as she aspires to be: multiple, multitudinous, and existing only as a part of a whole. She has a similar fascination with the Eucharist, a ritual that breaks down the boundaries between self and God as the parishioner takes in Christ's body. The Eucharist then is yet another manifestation of Félicité's ultimate desire: to exist not as a self or a body, but as part of a whole. She seems, in other words, to laud the synecdoche, much as she embraces the metonymy; both represent the relational, rather than the individual, existence. Pierre Fontanier, who so carefully distinguished between figures of speech (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony):

> argues that metonymy takes place through relations of correlation or correspondence; synecdoche takes place through relations of connection. By correspondence, Fontanier refers to the relation that brings together two objects, each of which constitutes 'an absolutely separate whole'. In the relationship of connection, the two objects form an ensemble or form a physical or metaphysical whole; the existence or idea of one is included in the existence or idea of the other. (Hasan Al-Kawwaz, 13)

According to Fontanier, then, the synecdoche is the more intrinsically interdependent of the linguistic tropes; as Hasan Al-Kawwaz summarizes, in the case of the synecdoche, one cannot

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[38] In this description, we recognize Sand's description of the artist as one who radiates outwards, towards the other.

exist without the other. But whether through correlation or connection, these synecdochous and metonymous (dis)embodiments are, by definition, parts or representations of a whole, existing communally—in relation to others.

Félicité even begins to confuse herself with Mme. Aubain's daughter, Virginie. She imitates all of her practices, fasting with her, attending confession with her. Physically and emotionally, they are painted as having become the same person, their bodies experiencing the same routines, their souls receiving the same confession. Flaubert returns to Eucharistic imagery when Virginie receives her first communion, walking as one with her fellow catechists. Félicité confuses herself with the child: "il lui sembla qu'elle était elle-même cette enfant; sa figure devenait la sienne, sa robe l'habillait, son coeur lui battait dans la poitrine; au moment d'ouvrir la bouche, en fermant les paupières, elle manqua de s'évanouir" (35). In this last sentence, pronouns referring to Virginie become indistinguishable from the pronouns referring to Félicité, and even the reader becomes lost in the jumble of selves that comes to seem almost erotic, almost climactic. And when Félicité returns to mass alone the next day to receive the Eucharist, "Elle la reçut dévotement, mais n'y goûta pas les mêmes délices" (35). Through Virginie, Félicité is able to experience a climactic moment of sensorial pleasure so intense that she almost faints. But the experience loses meaning when Félicité is alone, and the Eucharistic ritual once again becomes mere symbol rather than a physical exchange, a transsubstantiation.

Upon Virigine's departure to school, Félicité, losing another member of her community, devotes herself to her nephew, Victor. When Victor in turn departs, Félicité becomes bored, lost even, but feels that "un lien de son coeur les unissait, et leur destinée devait être la même" (39). She has become a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, existing only in her love for Virginie and Victor. Victor perishes mysteriously while on his voyage to America, and shortly after, Virginie

becomes incurably ill. Félicité spends two days and two nights with Virginie's body, whose hands are clasped tight and whose mouth is open in a perverse echo of her first communion and Félicité's out-of-body experience. In death, Virginie's body mocks Félicité's inability to experience the joy of a shared existence. Having now lost both Victor and Virginie, Félicité takes a big golden lock from Virginie's head—the ultimate Romantic synecdoche—and places it close to her chest, swearing never to part from it.

This desire to have some physical component to associate with Victor and Virginie's memories leads to Félicité's strangest relationship of the story, her relationship with Loulou, the parrot, whom she inherits from a departing neighbor. Félicité's passion for the parrot stems from its having traveled with the Larsonnière family all the way from America, where Victor met his end. Loulou and Victor thus become inextricably linked in her mind, and the parrot, who is rather disruptive and rude, becomes the new center of her life. Shortly after having inherited the parrot, both Félicité and Loulou fall ill. This strange parallel existence between Félicité and Loulou in which they simultaneously experience the same illness seems to signal a new shift in Félicité's sense of self; now removed from any kind of community, Loulou takes on any and every role in Félicité's life; "[il] était presque un fils, un amoureux. Il escaladait ses doigts, mordillait ses lèvres, se cramponnait à son fichu; et, comme elle penchait son front en branlant la tête à la manière des nourrices, les grandes ailes du bonnet et les ailes de l'oiseau frémissaient ensemble" (51). The parrot becomes a son, a lover, her only friend, her very own self. As with Virginie, Félicité seems to live in unison with Loulou. In the sensorial nature of the scene, we note once again the quasi-erotic relationship between Félicité and the parrot. Child, nephew, friend, lover, bird: Loulou mirrors the Holy Spirit's ability to contain many selves, a metonymy come to life. Loulou completes Félicité's series of substitutions: the parrot is a metonymy for Victor, the lock of hair a

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synecdoche for Virginie, the Eucharist an embodied metaphor of her ability to turn one thing into another on a quasi-literal level. We are clearly seeing, I believe, Flaubert's attempt to acknowledge the selflessness and beauty of living relationally and communally with the other—the kind of multiplicity embodied by Sand—and coming up against his own fears and judgments.

Loulou inevitably dies, as unexpectedly as Virginie and Victor. Félicité takes it a step further than she had with Virginie; instead of contenting herself with a lock, or a feather, she has Loulou stuffed. He returns to her, "splendide, droit sur une branche d'arbre, qui se vissait dans un socle d'acajou, une patte en l'air, la tête oblique, et mordant une noix, que l'empailleur par amour du grandiose avait dorée" (53). A tacky, inanimate version of his former self, Loulou is locked in Félicité's room and worshiped from his pedestal, a fetish incarnate—the substitute of a substitute. Indeed, Félicité attends mass only to notice that the Holy Spirit resembles closely her beloved parrot: "Avec ses ailes de pourpre et son corps d'émeraude, c'était vraiment le portrait de Loulou" (54). This strange confusion between Loulou and the Holy Spirit has of course been noted by many critics before. Wing explains this passage as one in which Félicité "'literalizes' the metonymic process; contiguity of association is accompanied by literal contiguity of the objects" (98). Schor notes "the general drift of the tale toward conflation, culminating in the spectacular equation of the stuffed parrot and the Holy Spirit, the inanimate and the transcendental" (Schor, 206). I believe that this "general drift toward conflation" is at the heart of Flaubert's story, for it is in this conflation that he expresses his terror at the potential annihilation of the self in the face of the other—an annihilation that Sand alone could have convinced Flaubert to attempt even as a mere theoretical and literary exercise—and this sense of conflation and confusion only intensifies as the story reaches its infinitely strange ending.

With the death of Mme. Aubain, Félicité, like the house around her, disintegrates. Loulou rots alongside her, the worms eating at him from the inside out. Everyone Félicité has loved is now gone, and she is left to decay little by little. In her final, hallucinatory state, Félicité imagines the procession for the festival of Corpus Christi from her bed and sees herself physically rejoining Loulou. In the climactic final moment, Flaubert once more turns to the notion of transubstantiation—a form of consumption that no longer merely *represents* an assimilation of the other, but, in the Christian tradition, physically manifests that assimilation. Félicité becomes the other in an echo of Christ embodied in the Eucharist. Whether this echo represents a laudatory and hagiographic depiction of Félicité or rather bears blasphemous or mocking implications surely falls under Schor's insistence that the text be read doubly (Schor, 210). In detailing these final moments, Flaubert describes the procession as made up of a number of people from the village, but they all move as one body. Félicité, in her final throes, relishes the idea that the individuals have become a single group, in which is hidden her deified parrot, whom she has given as an offering for the occasion. As she lies in her death bed, she exults in the ultimate realization of her desires; "une vapeur d'azure" takes over the room, "en la humant avec une sensualité mystique"; her heart slows, her breath expires, and the heavens open up: "elle crut voir, dans les cieux entr'ouverts, un perroquet gigantesque, planant au-dessus de sa tête" (61). Her body finally expires, and she rejoins Loulou, fading with him and into him amongst the azure vapor. She smiles as her body and her self finally become one with another. In these final moments, I believe that Flaubert embraced the paradox of Félicité's persona, abandoning authorial sovereignty and granting the narrative, and the maddeningly complex character, free rein of his text—by the end, it has become impossible to claim Félicité and the text as a whole as representative of any one notion. He is no longer the sole meaning-maker in his own story. Flaubert made evident Félicité's

generosity and kindness while complicating her character with a pitiful life and a simplistic understanding of religion and love. It is an honest, imperfect attempt at acknowledging the beauty of a relational existence in which one lives with and for others. In this attempt, Flaubert is faced with all of his own fears in relation to the other, but ultimately created a text that is so full of meanings and truths that still today, no critic or scholar can agree, or disagree, with each other's complex and paradoxical interpretations.

The question of alterity, of course, did not become prominent until the late twentieth century. Yet Flaubert, in his life as a quasi-recluse, in his deep distrust of others and of humanity in general, seemed to have been obsessed with the dangers that accompany forming deep bonds with others and the even greater danger of losing our self in the process. In *Madame Bovary*, for example, we witness the downfall of a woman who throws herself again and again into her relationships, her books, her art, anything that is outside of herself. She is desperate to connect yet is constantly thwarted in her attempts to find the meaningful kind of connection she seeks. We witness Flaubert's concern with alterity again in his extensive correspondence with George Sand analyzed above. While he reveled in his solitude, she viewed life as an opportunity for outwards expansion. In Sand's own words in her letter from June 14, 1867: "Je sais si bien vivre *hors de moi*!"[39] (Corr., 89). But therein lies the danger, or at least the question, for Flaubert: is living outside of yourself too great of a risk? In Félicité's case, attempting an answer only created further questions. The character of Félicité, and the tale as a whole, is utterly Sandian in its inexplicable, paradoxical existence as both pathetic and saintly, repulsive and beautiful. Sand continued to argue with him on the matter of alterity, and in a lengthy letter from September of 1871, in the midst of the *Commune de Paris*, she told him in no uncertain terms: "Tu auras beau être prudent et reculer,

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[39] Emphasis hers.

ton asile sera envahi à son tour et en périssant avec la civilisation humaine, tu ne seras pas plus philosophe pour n'avoir pas aimé [....] Notre vie est faite d'amour et ne plus aimer c'est ne plus vivre" (273). In response, Flaubert wrote back, "Le milieu de votre lettre m'a fait verser un pleur, sans me convertir, bien entendu. J'ai été ému, voilà tout, mais non persuadé" (283). Flaubert's view is that to love another above oneself, to allow the self to exist for and through others, runs the risk of self-annihilation, and Sand will not persuade him otherwise. *Un Coeur Simple* speaks to his confusion in the face of such exteriority and connectedness and it remains Flaubert's most heartfelt work in its honest attempt to live as Sand always wanted him to live, in communion and collaboration with others.

Who is right, then, the inwardly-focused lover of the individual or the outwardly-focused lover of the world? To attempt an answer, we might turn to Kristeva's theory of abjection. In *The Power of Horror*, Kristeva describes abjection as,

> one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside [...] It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. [...] But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (1)

In Kristeva's abjection, we have the embodiment of the Sandian impulse towards the Other and the Flaubertian repulsion of this assimilation. And we have, perhaps, the beginnings of a disturbing answer; the self will always be drawn towards and repulsed by the Other. Our identity is inescapably disturbed; but the impulse remains, driving one "literally beside himself." Kristeva herself might provide us with an answer to this dilemma in *Strangers to Ourselves*, in which she explains,

> the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him

within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself, a symptom that precisely turns "we" into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible. (1)

Kristeva is calling us to recognize those 'others' within ourselves. Only then can we begin to accept those 'others' exterior to ourselves. As seen in Sand and Flaubert's letters, this is a skill that Sand excelled at—we might recall her suggestion that she and Flaubert need each other precisely because of how 'other,' how fundamentally different, they are. And, from these same letters, we also know that living through and for others was an act of recognition and acceptance that Flaubert feared too much to enact. He preferred his solitude, his books, and the simplicity of never questioning his own identity and exploring those others that might otherwise proliferate within him.

It is only in reading Flaubert in conjunction with Sand that we can begin to fully make meaning of his work. I therefore want to suggest that this *dédicace* of sorts might be read as a letter to Sand, an extension of their correspondence, which he was unable to deliver to Sand directly, as she passed away before he finished the work. Instead, in a beautiful homage to Sand, he delivered the letter to a communal readership, thereby enacting the Sandian concept of offering oneself up to a multiplicity of others. In publishing this letter, as I see it, Flaubert enacted the principle of the multiplicity of meanings —in opening the letter up to multiple recipients, he thereby opened it up to countless readings, allowing meaning to proliferate across his readership and into the 21st century as critics continue to analyze his strange, paradoxical, confounding tale—no two critics will ever agree on what Flaubert intended in writing it. Thus, though it may seem like I have strayed from my intention to discuss the correspondence as a space in which collaborative meaning-making proliferates, I in fact want to push the epistolary argument further to consider

how Flaubert beautifully enacted collaborative meaning-making by publishing this final letter to his friend and thereby, upon her death, opening up this correspondence to a communal readership.

Balzac's Letter to Sand: *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*

Balzac also dedicated a novel to Sand, *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées*, which was serialized in 1841. This non-typical Balzacian oeuvre was accused of grotesqueness for its descriptions of childbirth and deemed unethical for its manner of considering motherhood a holy calling. It was too honest for the good people of France—it was, in effect, Sandian in its authenticity. I want to read this dedication as well as a letter to Sand, delivered via a larger communal readership, and perhaps a more complete homage to Sand's personhood in its very nature as an epistolary text itself. The most human aspect of the letter is that it embodies the very concept of paradox—as so much epistolary theory underlines, the letter is authentic and constructed, tokens of our metaphorical presence and reminders of our literal absence. As early as 1962, Jean Rousset explained, in his text *Forme et Signification*, the particular paradox of the letter as one that is equally simulated and authentic. Again, only a decade later in 1973, Janet Altman argued for the wonderful and peculiar paradox of the letter genre: bridge/barrier, *confiance/non-confiance*, writer/reader, I/you, here/there, now/then, closure/overture, unit/unity. It is this paradoxical nature of the letter that makes it the perfect medium for Sand, the quintessential paradox.

Balzac embodies the paradoxical natures of both the letter and of Sand in this beautiful, epistolary tale of friendship, so unlike traditional Balzacian works. *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* recounts the journeys of two young women, Louise and Renée, whose natures differ greatly from each other. Louise is romantic and idealistic, a young woman whose grandmother

leaves her a significant inheritance after her refusal to partake in an arranged marriage. Granted this independence, Louise moves to Paris and lives a lavish life, where she falls into a loving but tortuous romantic affair filled with jealousy. The relationship takes a toll on the husband, who dies an early death and leaves Louise widowed at a young age. Unlike Louise, Renée lives in accordance to her duties and enters into a loveless marriage during which she will bear three children. However, Renée finds solace and intense joy in motherhood, and devotes herself body and soul to it. Her family becomes the focal point of her life in such a powerful manner that even her initially loveless relationship with her husband becomes a caring and companionate affair. Louise falls into another impassioned love affair, which leads her further down roads of jealousy and anxiety. When she learns that her now-husband is financially supporting another woman, the emotional toll leads to her untimely death. Renée, who has run to Louise's rescue after receiving a frightening letter from her about her suspicions, learns too late that the woman her husband has been supporting was in fact his late brother's wife and his nephews, and not, as Louise suspected, a mistress.

The ways in which the narrative relates back to George Sand are plentiful, but it might be most useful to begin where Balzac does, which is not with the narrative itself, but rather with the following dedication:

À GEORGES SAND.

> Ceci, cher Georges, ne saurait rien ajouter à l'éclat de votre nom, qui jettera son magique reflet sur ce livre ; mais il n'y a là de ma part ni calcul, ni modestie. Je désire attester ainsi l'amitié vraie qui s'est continuée entre nous à travers nos voyages et nos absences, malgré nos travaux et les méchancetés du monde. Ce sentiment ne s'altérera sans doute jamais. Le cortège de noms amis qui accompagnera mes compositions mêle un plaisir aux peines que me cause leur nombre, car elles ne vont point sans douleurs, à ne parler que des reproches encourus par ma menaçante fécondité, comme si le monde qui pose devant moi n'était pas plus fécond encore. Ne sera-ce pas beau, Georges, si quelque jour l'antiquaire des littératures détruites ne retrouve dans ce cortège que de grands noms, de nobles cœurs, de saintes et pures amitiés, et les gloires de ce siècle? Ne puis-je me montrer

plus fier de ce bonheur certain que de succès toujours contestables? Pour qui vous connaît bien, n'est-ce pas un bonheur que de pouvoir se dire, comme je le fais ici,

Votre ami,

de Balzac.

Paris, juin 1840.

Unlike Flaubert's *dédicace*, Balzac's *dédicace* to Sand is explicit, and not nearly as simple as a standard "À Georges Sand." Balzac began his text by addressing the book to Sand, almost as one would address an envelope to send a letter, and continued with a traditional epistolary greeting: cher Georges. The formal resemblances between these two genres, the letter and the *dédicace*, encourages the reader to consider the whole of the text as a letter in itself, such that letters written diegetically to Louise and Renée are also extradiegetically addressed to Sand, as well as to the readers themselves. The multiplicity of correspondents already entails a multiplicity of meaning, wherein each reader makes their own meaning of the text. The genre of the letter within a novel thus enacts the Sandian multiplicity of meaning in its very nature, in its series of correspondents, and its multitude of meanings.

Balzac further told Sand and his readership in this *dédicace* that her name's splendor would reflect magically upon his book. Embodied in the very concept of reflection is the notion of multiplicity. Sand is in fact famous for her literary use of mirrors and reflections, as evidenced in texts such as *Indiana*.[40] It is more than mere multiplicity which Sand enacts in her letters and her literature, however. What Sand displays through her literary characters, and through her own life, is the soundness of the paradox as a concept. Through her correspondence and her texts, she exemplifies how male/female, self/other, Bonne Dame de Nohant/"bisexual nymphomaniac"

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[40] Specifically evidenced in scenes such as the famous "bedroom scene" of *Indiana*, in which Noun poses as Indiana in her bedroom, and Colonel Delmare confuses Noun's reflection with Indiana's own image, though Indiana herself is absent from the room.

coexist within every one of us. It is this soundness of the paradox, and its implicit humanity, that I want to explore further through Balzac's text.

In considering Balzac's *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* and questions of identity, of self and other, we might turn to Edgar Pich's 2004 commentary on the text entitled *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées d'Honoré de Balzac: Un roman de l'identité*. Pich begins by making a genre argument, claiming that the text is not an epistolary novel, despite appearances, since the letters do not advance the plot or result in any sort of action.[41] In fact, he claims, the letters influence each other very little, and ultimately, Louise's side of the correspondence is much more significant in terms of bulk. Pich then rejects the possibility of classifying the text as a memoir, since the letters are not written *a posteriori*, and memoirs necessarily must be written after the fact, rather than in the moment. Rather than classifying or reclassifying the text in any one particular genre, I want to underline the importance of this difficulty in classification. I argue that Pich's difficulty in classifying the text reflects a similar difficulty in the scholarship's attempts to classify Sandian texts. In writing *Elle et Lui*, for instance, Sand uses primarily letters, but does not shy away from interjecting with third-person narration when she deems it useful, which is quite often. And while Sand's novels are often categorized as falling under the umbrella of Idealism or classified as pastoral novels, they are repeatedly reclassified by the criticism.[42] In composing a frustratingly

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[41] This is quite a limited definition of the epistolary novel. As early as the 1960s, François Jost had differentiated between several different types of epistolary texts (singular recipient, multiple threads of correspondence, one-sided correspondence). By 1973, Janet Altman had outlined two fundamental uses of letter: static/passive method whereby the letter reports events and the writer/recipient play a passive role versus the active/kinetic method wherein action progresses through the letters themselves and function as agents in the plot in her text *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*. Balzac's might be said to function as the former kind of epistolary novel, though at the very least, the final letters do instigate plot movement, as Louise's final letter to Renée convinces Renée to come to Louise rescue and discover the truth behind Louise's husband's strange actions.

[42] In *George Sand and Idealism*, for example, Naomi Schor's intent to recanonize Sand results in Schor's reconsideration of Realism as it constructs and supports the phallo- and ethnocentric social order we so often confuse with reality: To recanonize Sand will call for the elaboration of a poetics of the ethical (54). In her text, Schor thus aims to redefine both Realism and Idealism.

unclassifiable text, then, as Pich proves in his analysis of the novel, I argue that Balzac imitated

Sand's refusal to limit herself to singular categories.

Pich ultimately claims that this strange novel exemplifies what he terms a kind of Balzacian

schizophrenia, describing Louise and Renée's characters as "deux sœurs siamoises [qui] vivent

une situation fusionnelle et s'opposent en même temps, exprimant ainsi la schizophrénie

constitutive du génie balzacien" (25-26). Pich does not specifically define this Balzacian

schizophrenia, and as Keri Berg notes in her review of the novel for Nineteenth-Century French

Studies, "cette 'schizophrénie,' son rôle dans les œuvres de Balzac, mériterait d'être précisée,

solidement étayée, or, elle ne l'est pas, évoquée seulement comme une évidence" (Review of

Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées). This Balzacian schizophrenia, while intriguing, certainly

merits further explanation. Furthermore, this argument, claimed as "une évidence" by Pich, seems

to ignore the *dédicace* entirely, and sets aside Sand's "magique reflet" which Balzac expressed the

hope would be evidenced throughout the novel. Rather than expressing the schizophrenia

fundamental to Balzacian genius, I argue that this is in fact the multiplicity fundamental to Sandian

genius, which Balzac sought to pay homage to and reflect in this singular text. Pich dismisses the

collaborative nature of the text that Balzac layed out for his readers in explicit terms in the

dédicace, dismissing the notion that there is no *hors-texte*, as Derrida phrases it. In noting Sand's

influence on his own work, Balzac made explicit the dialogic exchange between his works and

Sand's, or at the very least, between *this* work and Sand. In Mikhail Bahktin's notion of dialogic

imagination, which we should perhaps reference if we are to speak of dialogism more broadly, lies

the concept of collaboration: texts and authors should be read *in conversation* with each other. But

whether we call it a dialogic exchange or simply a collaboration, the conversation between Sand

and Balzac is fundamental to my reading of Balzac's epistolary text. Yet Pich refers only to

Balzacian schizophrenic genius. In the term 'schizophrenic,' used in a broad, unscientific manner that is perhaps dismissive of its psychological origins and its relation to mental health, there lies the implication of innate contradiction, "of mutually contradictory or inconsistent elements" ("Schizophrenic." *Oxford English Dictionary*).[43] There lies, in other words, a quintessential paradox, which is to say, a Sandian spirit of multiplicities of identity in this text. What we see enacted throughout this text is not Balzac's schizophrenic genius but Sand's "reflet magique," in all its multitudinous and paradoxical splendor.

In constructing his argument, Pich primarily focuses on a close analysis of letter 25 of Balzac's text. Perhaps, then, it would be best to use this very letter to discuss my own argument of Sandian multiplicity. It seems that this letter, in which Renée contrasts her own measured and carefully regulated life to Louise's romantic escapades and luxurious adventures, embodies the very paradox which Sand represented for so much of nineteenth-century society and so many scholars to this day. In Renée's description of Louise's "vie animée par les fêtes, par les angoisses de l'amour, par ses colères et par ses fleurs" (142), we recognize Sand's extroverted, extravagant and excessive lifestyle evidenced in her impassioned love affairs and her disinterest in societal approval. In Louise's refusal to accept an arranged marriage, we hear echoes of Sand's refusal to sit quietly in a loveless marriage of own.[44] And yet, in Renée's description of her own life, "réglée à la manière d'une vie de couvent" (142), we note its evident resemblance to Sand's "Good Lady of Nohant" (Jack, 3), in all of its motherly and respectable nature. Renée explains to Louise, "Nous nous promenons après le déjeuner. Quand les journaux arrivent, je disparais pour m'acquitter de mes affaires de ménage ou pour lire, car je lis beaucoup, ou pour t'écrire [...]. Louis est si content, que sa joie a fini par réchauffer mon âme. Le bonheur, pour nous, ne doit sans doute pas être le

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[43] Naturally, a male author's mutual contradictions and inconsistent elements would prove his genius.
[44] By which I refer to Sand's marriage at 18 years old to Casimir Dudevant.

plaisir" (142-143). I cannot help but think, in reading this section of the letter, of Sand's letter to Flaubert in January of 1869: "L'individu nommé George Sand se porte bien: il savoure le merveilleux hiver qui règne à Berry, cueille des fleurs…, coud des robes et des manteaux pour sa belle-fille…, habille des poupées, lit de la musique, mais surtout passe des heures avec la petite Aurore" (Corr., 150). In both of these letters, we find the pleasure taken in small daily tasks, the contentment in domestic enterprises, and, above all, the adoration and fulfillment of (grand)motherhood. Of course, the resemblances between the two recipients of Balzac's text and Sand are far from unequivocal. Yet it seems to me that her "reflet magique" is present throughout the text.

In dismissing Sand's place and influence in this Balzacian epistolary text, Pich risks leaving the dialogic exchange between these two authors unexamined. It is this very process by which meaning is made, by letter writers and recipients, by authors and their literary critics, by teachers and students. In concluding this chapter, then, I want to turn once again to pedagogy, and the process by which we make meaning in the classroom not *for* our students but rather *with* our students.

A Pedagogical Conclusion: Applied Literature and Student-Centered Learning

In considering what role literature can play in the ESL classroom, Gillian Lazar explains that "unraveling the plot of a novel or decoding the dialogue of a play is more than a mechanical exercise—it demands a personal response from learners and encourages them to draw on their own experience" (773). Lazar calls this concept applied literature, a wonderful term that refers back to fields such as applied linguistics, and reminds literary scholars that literature is more than a field of theoretical study, it is also endlessly applicable within a larger social context. Lazar ultimately

underlines how literature is embedded in broader socio-historical notions of identity. The identities in question in the classroom are our students' identities. In the spirit of applied literature, as we research George Sand and discover the beauty of multiplicity and the soundness of the paradox, let us remind ourselves to ask our students for their pronouns in the classroom, much like Sand's correspondents asked about her own gender in letters to the beloved author centuries ago. Let us remember that our students cannot leave their identities at the door of the classroom, nor would Sand, who invariably refused to simplify or deny her identity, have wanted any individual to set their identity aside in any given space. In analyzing and writing about the two literary geniuses that were Flaubert and Sand, "les deux travailleurs les plus différents qu'il existent" (Corr., 151), let us create learning spaces in which individual student identities can flourish, and let us imitate Sand in reveling in this multiplicity of selves, fearing not "the anguish of the fragmented" classroom (Naginski, 21), but rejoicing in the mosaic of meaning created through its multiplicity.

Figure 1:   "The Nuremberg Chronicle," 1493
Felicitas of Rome lovingly cradles a sword along which rests seven small heads,
representing each of her sons

Figure 2: *Martyrs Mirror*, 1660
Felicitas stands amongst a pile of limbs and bodies (her sons'), a lone head rolling towards the foreground of the image

Chapter 2: Complicating the Sandian Paradigm of Collaboration through Colette

Introduction: From Sand to Colette

Colette once commented on Sand's bountiful life and works, asking,

Comment diable s'arrangeait George Sand? Cette robuste ouvrière de lettres trouvait moyen de finir un roman, d'en commencer un autre dans la même heure. Elle n'en perdait ni un amant, ni une bouffée de narghilé, sans préjudice d'une *Histoire de ma Vie* en vingt volumes, et j'en tombe d'étonnement. [...] Je n'aurais pas su en faire autant, et là où elle pensait à la grange pleine je me suis attardée à regarder la verte fleur du blé. (*Vesper*, 214)

In her 1973 book, *Colette, the Difficulty of Loving*, Margaret Crosland notes that "a comparison between Colette and George Sand is inevitable at a superficial level at least because no other French women writers have known such fame and been so closely identified with their own works" (169). Undoubtedly, there are myriad ways in which these two prolific authors could be compared, from their name changes to their popular reception to their controversial lifestyles. As Elaine Marks notes in the forward to *Colette, the Woman, the Writer*, "There is a crossing, a mixing in all of Colette's texts of genders (male and female), of social classes, [...] of cultures, [...] and most importantly of genres (narrative and dramatic fiction, autobiography, biography)" (X). This sentence could just as well have been pulled from a book on Sand. These similarities are fascinating, but it is their method of production that most interests me. How did Colette write, both her fiction and her correspondence? In other words, how did Colette make meaning for herself, and make meaning in collaboration with others? In the quote noted above, Colette laments, "Comment diable s'arrangeait George Sand?", referring to Sand's innumerable works and inexhaustible productivity, but of course the question of how George Sand managed extends beyond her literary achievements. As Colette noted, Sand did not give up anything in order to produce. Even as she wrote entire novels in the time that it took Flaubert to compose the first page

of *Madame Bovary*, Sand was reveling in her mountain of correspondence, her beloved family, her cherished lovers, her masculine and feminine expressions of identity, her excess. Sand, as I argued in the previous chapter, was never one to choose. She rejected the simplistic and normative model of identity that insists we must be one thing or another and instead embraced and embodied the beauty and humanity of the paradoxical. But while Sand's expression of identity and her life are admirable, Colette's question is well-placed. How the devil *did* she do it?

Few authors have been as wildly prolific as Sand, while at the same time living seemingly without restraint. Certainly, this does not seem to have been the case for Colette. Her writing, whether it be her novels or her correspondence, is a testament to the immense effort that Colette put into making sense of her identity, and life and love more broadly. Crosland comments on this difficulty, explaining, "Life was to be a long search for happiness; whether happiness was in any way connected with love was one of the problems that was to preoccupy her most" (47). The mere fact that Crosland's book is entitled *The Difficulty of Loving* is telling. The ease with which Sand appeared to write and love and live is exceptional. Not so for Colette; Crosland asks whether happiness, for Colette, was connected with love. I doubt that many would argue that romantic love brought Colette much happiness (her relationship with Missy and her third husband are perhaps the exceptions). Her first husband, Willy, infamously cheated on her, took advantage of her artistry, kept her locked in a room when she didn't produce enough pages in a day, and then proceeded to steal her royalties. Her relationship with Henri de Jouvenel (most commonly referred to as Sidi) was passionate but complicated and consisted mainly of arguments at the end of which they would decide to separate (but inevitably never would, until of course, they did). Crosland explains, "She found it hard to be so much in love, for she was no longer used to being dominated" (116). The belief that love and freedom are diametrically opposed will permeate all of Colette's

writing. In her personal correspondence, we sense that relationships did not come easily to Colette; where Sand, as Colette noted, seemingly created deep and intimate ties at the drop of a hat without fear of losing her freedom, we find in Colette's words an apparent struggle to understand where freedom fit within the confines of a relationship.

Colette even struggled to write prose, despite her popular and critical literary success. In her 2004 biography of Colette, Julia Kristeva notes, "Throughout her life Colette always said writing was alien to her and adamantly denied any literary vocation. [...] The literary critics mocked her: 'It's all a pose! She's just being provocative!' The psychoanalysts go one better: 'It's a denial of writing!'" (74-75). Kristeva, however, suggests that we might take Colette at her word, and analyses this comment in relation to Colette's shift in writing style in post-Claudine novels. Kristeva thus considers Colette's apparent disdain towards her art as representative of her difficulty in producing fiction, which "required that she 'wrest' herself from lived experience" (75). We should, I think, as Kristeva suggests, take the author at her word; but I am not certain that Colette is telling the whole story. In a letter to her nephew Pierre Moreno, Colette explained, "If I don't write it's because I'm writing" ("Belles Saisons," 1913). [45] Presumably, Colette is here excusing herself for not writing Moreno more letters, explaining that she has been busy writing her prose. But we might just as accurately read it the other way around: the reason she wasn't writing her prose was because she was always busy writing letters. This is evidenced again and again in Colette's laments at having to write novels, and her plentiful correspondence with friends, family, and lovers on a daily basis. If prose writing felt alien to Colette, letter writing certainly did not. Rather, it seemed to bring great comfort and joy.

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[45] Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Colette's letters are by Robert Phelps.

The conundrum that Colette summarized so well in her statement, "If I don't write it's because I'm writing" is at the heart of what I will explore in this chapter. While Sand was capable of producing consistently and with apparent ease, Colette struggled to produce her prose, and stated explicitly, and repeatedly, that she wrote these solely for the purpose of paying rent. Yet she easily and consistently wrote multiple letters a day. Of course, the letter and the novel are conceptually and practically different genres and frameworks, and there are countless reasons that Colette may have preferred letter writing to novel writing. But as with Sand, I want to explore how collaboration played into Colette's writing, how it affected it and what it resulted in. Cleverly if somewhat obviously, Colette thought to write epistolary novels, but the endeavor proved difficult; in a letter to Georges Wagues, she explained, "Here is an 'early version' of *La Vagabonde*, which, as you can see, was originally to have been an epistolary novel. But this experiment limited itself to fifty pages" ("Belles Saisons," 1913). In *Approaches to a Form*, Altman defines epistolarity as "the use of the letter's formal properties to create meaning" (4). Colette does not explain the trouble with the experiment, but if we are to go by Altman's definition of the epistolary, it would seem that Colette had trouble writing a protagonist, Renée Néré, that was able to create meaning for herself or perhaps with others. The letters of *La Vagabonde* appear only near the end of the novel, when Renée leaves behind her old life to perform on the road, at which point the relationship that Renée and Max Dufferein-Chautel had shared progressively disintegrates. Six years later, Colette wrote *Mitsou, ou comment l'esprit vient aux filles* (1919), in which she presented the reverse phenomenon found in *La Vagabonde*: the relationship that thrives through a correspondence quickly disintegrates when the couple come together for a night. What is Colette saying, then, about letters, and the collaborative work of epistolary correspondence? Do they sustain or even

create deeply meaningful connections, or do they cause them to break down? And why, when she so easily wrote letters on a daily basis, couldn't she translate this ease into epistolary texts?

I will explore these questions in this chapter to understand how Colette created meaning for herself—which is to say, how she defined notions such as love and letters for herself—, whether she, like Sand, understood meaning as being born out of collaboration, and how the letter served to help or hinder her in the composition of her novels. We might come back to *The Difficulty of Loving* and Crosland's assertion, "whether happiness was in any way connected with love was one of the problems that was to preoccupy her most" (47). Love for Colette did not seem to come as easily as it did to Sand, much like novel writing for Colette did not come easily. Yet I think Colette's life revolved around exactly these two acts—loving and writing, both of which, in theory, necessitate the presence of another. It seems natural, then, that Colette should turn to Sand and demand to know, how the devil *did* she manage? If the first chapter explored how meaning-making happens most productively in collaborative spaces, this chapter will problematize this paradigm, and look at how and when collaboration might instead impede our search for meaning, and how we might then adapt collaborative spaces to make room for different kinds of meaning-making.

A Note on this Chapter's References

Of the three authors in this dissertation, Colette's letters are by far the most difficult to comprehensively study. Amélie Nothomb's are the easiest for the simple reason that they do not exist for public consumption in any form. They have not been published, and Nothomb, as discussed next chapter, is protective of her correspondence and is not one to share these with researchers or scholars—at least, not yet. George Sand, having been a definitive if controversial part of the French literary cannon for some time now, is more easily accessible, and her

correspondence is published in numerous volumes according to recipient (such as the Sand-Flaubert correspondence) or time frame. Colette's correspondence is more difficult to track down because many of her letters remain unpublished in the hands of friends and amongst private collections. Colette scholars might have access to these collections through personal connections, such as Jean Challon, whose fascinating biographical text, *l'Éternelle apprentice*, contains many unpublished letters from the private collection of Mme Maurice Goudeket, whom Challon explains, "m'a donné une très grande preuve d'amitié et de générosité en me permettant de consulter ses archives, en me confiant ses souvenirs, et en m'autorisant à publier certains passages des lettres que Maurice Goudeket adressait à Colette" (415). He further recognizes Foulques de Jouvenel, and Anne and Hugues de Jouvenel, for allowing him to publish "certains textes inédits de Colette dont je possédais les originaux ou les photocopies" (415). Oftentimes, Challon quotes Colette's letters without providing context or dates. This makes it impossible to know the specifics around certain quotations of Challon's—when context is available, it is always provided in this chapter to the extent that is possible according to Challon's descriptions.

Challon is not alone in putting aside contextual details such as recipient and date when quoting Colette, especially her letters, and there therefore often remains an air of mystery to Colette's words and the quotations attributed to the author. I suggest we consider the scholars' tendency to omit contextual details as exemplifying Shoshana Felman's theory, in which she proposes "the reading of a text alongside its readings, that is, a double reading" to reveal "how the text re-articulates and reenacts itself in the rhetoric of the critical debates surrounding it" (Caraman-Pasa, 5). In accordance with Felman's theory that a text's critical analysis reenacts the text's own rhetoric, we might consider how Colette scholars imitate written tendencies of hers, such as omission of facts, details, and context—whether this imitation is unintentional and due to

Colette's influence on her readers, or intentional and used as an homage of sorts to the author would be difficult to determine. Regardless, the ease of Colette's writing in her letters and the heart and excitement with which she composed these seems to me to be reflected in a wonderful manner in the Colette scholarship. However, it often makes citations in this chapter seem unwieldy, and I hope the reader will either excuse any awkwardness that stems from this confusion, or, like me, choose to see it as an interesting side-note to my own analysis of Colette whereby the critics play by the same (non-)rules as Colette herself.

Defining the Letter in the Context of Colette

Before considering questions of imitation and homage, however, we must first try to understand what Colette herself saw in her writing, and how she defined different genres of writing for herself. Following her marriage to Willy, Colette explains, "The great event of our engagement for me had been our correspondence, the letters that I received and wrote freely" (as quoted by Crosland, 39-40). For Colette, then, the letter is neither a genre nor a framework, but an event. It exists in time and space as an experience, similarly to how one might describe their wedding day. More notably, perhaps, than this wonderful conceptualization of the letter is Colette's use of the word "freely." Not all of Colette's writing was undertaken freely; she famously began her literary career as "an unpaid ghostwriter for her husband Willy" (Eisinger & McCarty, 3). Though Erica Eisinger and Mari McCarty argue, "Colette nonetheless transformed the instrument of her oppression—forced writing—into her means of liberation" (3), it remains the case that Colette struggled to write and produce novels all her life. If her works were empowering and liberating to women, they do not seem to have had quite the same effect on Colette. Of course, Colette gained her financial and physical independence from Willy as her writing became successful, a highly

significant form of freedom. But that Colette's literary writing liberated her seems to contradict Colette herself in her letters, which express an explicit and unabashed frustration with her novels and her work. At times, it almost seems as if Colette was hostage to her prose.

Her letter writing, on the other hand, did seem like a true escape for her, or at least, letter writing seems to have come easily to Colette as a framework in a way that the novel did not. In a letter from early July of 1933, she tells her friend, the literary critic Edmond Jaloux, "On écrit toujours pour quelqu'un. Rarement pour quelques-uns. Jamais pour tout le monde" (*Lettres à ses pairs*, 304). It would seem that, in this statement, Colette was not necessarily stating what *is*, but rather, what should be. Or perhaps she was suggesting that this fact holds true for all authors, in which case, novels in general become a different sort of animal. What is certain is that this statement goes a long way in explaining Colette's frustration at writing novels. If she was always writing for someone, and never writing for everyone, writing for the purpose of publication must have been quite maddening, or perhaps even frightening, for the author. It seems as if, when Colette spoke of "everyone," she was really experiencing it as "no one." To write her prose, then, must have felt like speaking into the void. The letter, however, fulfilled Colette's writerly wish, that one always write to a singular individual, rather than a mass of individuals.

The importance placed on singularity calls to mind Crosland's comment that Colette's letters are "talked" rather than written (142). Her letters are filled with questions so simple, so quotidian, that it does almost seem as if one were reading a conversation: "Do you recognize me, Jeanne? I'm wearing an apron with pockets" (15), "What do you think of the new fountain pen I'm writing with?" (15), or the wonderful inquiry, "Does my letter smell of garlic?" (23).[46] The first quotation speaks particularly well to Colette's assertion that one always writes to a singular

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[46] These translations are Crosland's.

person; she asked her recipient, "Do you recognize me, Jeanne?" Colette asked this not as if, in accordance with epistolary tradition, the letter were a mere metonymy for the self, but as if she were literally physically present. In her article, "Colette's Correspondence, or 'Ceci N'est Pas Une Lettre, C'est Un Petit Bulletin Sanitaire,'" Catherine Slawy-Sutton calls this "écritures du corps" (8), arguing that what Colette delivered with her letters was "material tokens of her simple presence" (4). Colette's letters are wonderfully conversational, unquestionably authentic to her character. A conversational tone is, as Judith Coffin points out, a fundamental component of the "epistolary craft" (133)—Colette was, I think, exceptionally skilled at conjuring her presence in the hands of her interlocutor through her letters. Colette's letters, rather than anticipating an eventual epistolary response, seem to mimic a real-time dialogue. This, I think, is a wonderful exercise in collaboration; even if the exchange cannot literally or immediately take place, Colette asked questions of the recipient as if they could insert their responses right into the letter she sent them. The other is deeply and immediately present in Colette's letters.

Colette never adhered to the letter in form, or as a framework. She entirely abandoned epistolary tradition and expectations. Crosland notes, as previously mentioned, that, "Colette never dated letters" (64). She most often completely did away with greetings and signatures as well, her letters at times resembling telegrams in their conciseness. Colette herself insisted that these were not, in fact, letters: "ceci n'est pas une lettre" (Slawy-Sutton, 1). At times, they are "un bulletin de santé" (2), at others a note quickly dashed with a promise that "une vraie lettre" will come later (2). Even as she wrote dozens of letters a day, Colette distanced herself from the letter—she confoundingly insisted that she was not writing letters. Why distance herself from a form of writing that she was clearly attached to? In arguing for Colette's letters as "tokens of her presence" as Slawy-Sutton does, or as "talked" rather than written (4), the criticism seems to distance Colette

from the letter as well. She wrote a form of dialogue, or else merely mimiced speech without adhering to epistolary expectations. Eisinger and McCarty argue, "Her favored narrative structures employ traditional female reflexive forms: letters, journal, self-portraits" (3). Yet there doesn't seem to be anything traditional about Colette's use of these reflexive forms.

It surely remains unclear what, exactly, constituted a letter for Colette. But I think the difficulty of defining is exactly the point. Colette often avoided calling her correspondence with others 'letters,' and the criticism in turn often calls these letters telegraphs or speech. Colette rejected the traditional framework for the letter, much like she rejected the traditional model for life, and for novels, and for self-portraits, and for love. Sand reveled in belonging to numerous, often paradoxical categories. Sand said "yes" to everything; she identified with notions of male as well as female, she took numerous, often controversial lovers yet embodied for so many the *Bonne Dame de Nohant*, she was a rebellious trailblazer, all the while also effortlessly fitting into the category of caring and domestic mother and grandmother. Colette, meanwhile, seemed to reject all of the categories she was offered, to say "no" to everything. No, she would not even concede that she wrote letters. Slawy-Sutton comes to a similar conclusion in her article on Colette's correspondence:

> In Colette we do not find any articulation of "ce que je voudrais faire," as in Flaubert's correspondence, nor do we find any desire to be a witness of her times, or anything precise on the evolution of her work. Her letters are not to be assimilated to "French compositions"; they do not participate in an esthetic of "Belles-Lettres." (6)

Even when she was critically praised for her work she never believed her success to reflect the reality of her talent: "Le plus grand prosateur français vivant, moi? Même si c'était vrai, je ne le

sens pas, comprenez-vous, au dedans de moi" (Challon, 223).[47] This is Colette's response, as Challon relates in *l'Eternelle Apprentie*, to the critic André Billy's praises of *Aventures Quotidiennes*. She rejected the notion of 'greatest' and the fact of her success. She does not identify or feel any kind of link to this identity—to the identity of woman, to that of greatest prose writer, to that of letter composer. What can we make of these consistent denials, of these adamant "no"s?

The Pedagogy of Feeling Like a Fraud

I think we should, like Kristeva, take the author at her word. But perhaps there is something more behind these rejections, more than pose or provocation or even, as Kristeva suggests, simple honesty. In 1985, Peggy McIntosh, the program director at the Wellesley Center for Research on Women, published an article entitled "Feeling like a Fraud." In this article, McIntosh writes back against the notion that women should change the way they speak in order to sound more confident or capable, which is to say, more like men. The idea is that women have been taught to speak hesitantly, to over-apologize, in other words, to signal that theirs is an opinion rather than a fact, that they are not necessarily the final word on the topic. The disparagement of these speech patterns has permeated academia, but it is present outside of academia as well. Online, you can find guides on how to write emails 'correctly' (without exclamation points and free of apologies),[48] blogs on

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[47] This quotation from Challon's text is an example of the reenactment of Colette's written tendencies in her scholars' texts. Challon, with access to two private collections that remain unpublished, does not mention the precise context of this excerpt (i.e., when it was said, who exactly was present, etc).

[48] See, for example, Monica Torres' article, in which she explains: "Apple strongly advises its advertisers to avoid it in their promotions. People who are against its use believe exclamation points are insincere — is anyone *ever* that enthusiastic about submitting expenses — and a sign of unprofessional behavior" (Torres, "Exclamation Points are the Answer"). Kevin Daum dedicated a whole article to the matter entitled "Why We Should Stop Using Exclamation Points at Work," and this title represents the vast majority of articles written on the issue when conducting a simple Google search. As for apologies, we might turn to articles like the Child Mind Institute's "Why Girls Apologize Too Much," TED Talk "Do you say sorry too much? What to say instead", and CNBC's claim that "over apologizing" can "damage your reputation" (Hall, "Stop Saying I'm Sorry").

how to get rid of upspeak, YouTube videos that prep women for interviews, going over all of the 'feminine' traits that they should avoid. We are made to understand that the women who refuse to mimic the speech patterns associated with men (i.e. normative speech, by which I mean speech that is associated with professionalism and success) will never succeed. The message is clear: this is a man's world, and women either adapt or fail. In response to this cultural practice that asks women to sound more like men, McIntosh comes to the defense of women's speech patterns. McIntosh argues, "Apology and self-disparagement may indicate an honest refusal to internalize the idea that having power or public exposure proves one's merit and/or authority" (1). McIntosh posits that the women who have succeeded, who are in power and in the public eye, persist in using speech patterns associated with women because they want to make the very point that normative speech tries to deny; they are acknowledging that their opinions and beliefs are no more legitimate than the next person's simply because they are powerful or successful.

Women's speech patterns, then, leave room for someone else to enter into the conversation. McIntosh explains, "Apologetic or hedging speech may indicate uneasiness with rhetorical or coercive forms of speech and behavior, and may signal a desire to find more collaborative forms" (1). McIntosh does not ask that women change their language, or even suggest that women should be able to use whatever language they want and still succeed. Rather, she argues that these speech patterns that we have culturally associated with women are performing important and empathetic social functions. She describes normative speech as rhetorical and coercive, the end goal of which is persuasion rather than communication. It follows that non-normative speech, speech that is often apologetic, sometimes hesitant, occasionally even self-disparaging, engenders empathy and, ultimately, in not closing the door on the other, the potential for collaboration. These women who

refuse to adapt to normative speech patterns are insisting on the importance of collaboration over control.

Applying McIntosh's argument to Colette's self-deprecating remark might provide us with new insight into the author. Colette's refusal to accept the title of 'greatest writer' might explain Colette's attitude towards her writing and popularity more broadly. She insisted, throughout her life, that her success did not stem from an exceptional talent. Perhaps then, rather than reading this statement as a pose to seem more likable, or as a way to provoke a reaction, or even as an honest admission of feelings of inferiority, we might consider McIntosh's theory. We might read it as an uneasiness with the hierarchical structure she is being pushed into, a "refusal to internalize the idea that having power or public exposure proves one's merit" (McIntosh, 1). Colette is refusing to partake in this patriarchal language of "greatest alive." Perhaps her distaste for this language even speaks to her frustration with prose writing; she saw both normative language and prose writing as individualistic endeavors. They impede, perhaps even preclude, collaboration. They are monologues, rather than conversations, and uninteresting in their one-sidedness and simplicity.

McIntosh's argument echoes in modern pedagogies such as Affective Education. Affective Education suggests that the most effective learning happens in tandem with the students' personal and social education. It dissipates the traditional hierarchical structures of the classroom by valuing the student's humanity as a whole, rather than their performance alone. It requires that we openly communicate with our students, and that they, in turn, openly communicate with us. It is a collaborative endeavor. It values and allows different voices to be heard. We might implement affective teaching or acknowledge McIntosh's work in myriad small ways in our classrooms. We can start by allowing our female students to employ whatever speech pattern they think is right for them. After all, why should women adapt to the men's speech patterns—especially when the

speech patterns women employ propagate empathy and collaboration. We might also call for a modern, intersectional approach to the texts we include in our syllabi (syllabi that often primarily feature white/male voices).

Where does Colette fit into all of this, then? Affective Teaching seeks to dismantle the purely rhetorical methods of traditional pedagogies by acknowledging intuitive and emotional responses in the classroom, thereby recalibrating the rhetorical/emotional hierarchy in which the emotional is considered lesser. Colette explained that "even if it were true," even if she were the greatest French prose writer alive, "I don't feel it." I believe that she intentionally minimized the importance of "greatest," and focused instead on how she felt. In fact, it seems to me that Colette had very little interest in the question of who is "greatest." "Greatest" belongs to the hierarchical world of men and rhetoric and power. Colette does not seem to have been motivated by competition or praise. Rather, this disdain in the face of traditional hierarchical structures seems to me to stem from a draw to more collaborative paradigms. This collaborative spirit is something we can see reflected in the author's life, the manner in which she chose to spend her days, and the many ways she found to turn writing from a singularly solitary experience into a two-person project. Colette's inclination towards collaboration is exemplified, for instance, in her artisitic endeavors with other artists across disciplines. Remembered primarily for her fiction-writing, Colette spent much of her time turning her fiction-writing into other forms of art that forced collaboration into the equation. For example, she turned to her friend Léopold Marchand in order to adapt *La Vagabonde* into a play. Her partnership with Ravel also comes to mind, a relationship which led to the creation of an opera.

And of course, to delve into her collaborative spirit, we must turn to her volumous epistolary correspondence, the form of writing that she indulged in when fiction writing felt

beyond her capacity. Colette, as noted above,[49] tended to consider her letters as something other than missives in the traditional sense. Near the end of her life, during her uniquely loving and respectful relationship with Maurice, Colette even began to turn her letters into games of sorts. In one letter, Colette responded to Maurice's assertion that his desperation for her had rendered him "un collégien en délire" (Challon, 273), by role playing a young collégienne herself: "Colette joue, à son tour, à la collégienne et envoie une lettre en forme de coup de téléphone, "Allô, allô? Tu as bien dormi? Bonjour. Excessivement bonjour. Qu'est-ce-qu'on fait dans la suite du temps?"" (273). Her letters call for collaboration, not only in the sense that they are filled with questions to the other, but also in the sense that she pulls the correspondent in to engage in a game of exchange with her. This letter is a two-person match of questioning and role-playing, collaborative to the extent of taking on the shape of game-play.

"Renée Néré?": Foregoing Epistolary Collaboration in *La Vagabonde*

Yet the types of collaboration that Colette presented in her texts are complicated, sometimes to the point of being detrimental to those who engage in these collaborations. In thinking through how collaboration plays into Colette's texts, we might begin with her most famous text, *La Vagabonde*. In her 2016 book on the controversial French author Irène Némirovsky and the *Bildungsroman* as a genre, Susan Rubin Suleiman writes repeatedly about Colette. Suleiman refers to Colette's 1910 novel, *La Vagabonde*, as a "female *Bildungsroman*" (188); the qualifier of "female" is important, as the *Bildungsroman* has primarily been a genre belonging to angst-ridden, young, male protagonists. *Bildungsroman* means, literally, a novel of education. It is the young man's journey to finding an 'inner' self of sorts, or, as Susan Fraiman

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[49] See page 91

puts it in *Unbecoming Women*, the story of "a purposeful youth advancing toward some clarity and stability of being" (ix). In differentiating from the male *Bildungsroman*, Abel, Hirsch, and Langland, in their edited essay collection, *The Voyage In*, have provided us with a wealth of definitions of the "female novel of development," to use their term (vii). Specifically, they associate the traditional male *Bildungsroman* with notions of "a coherent self…faith in the possibility of development….and emphasis on social context" (14). In their introduction to their collection, the scholars give examples of the shift towards the *Bildungsroman*, explaining that,

> Whereas Miles charts a movement in the male Bildungsroman from "the world without to the world within," from Wilhelm *Mesiter's Apprenticeship* to *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, from the adventure tale to the confessional novel, and finally to parody, we see, in fictions of female development, a movement from the world within to the world without, from introspection to activity, from the "Confessions of a Beautiful Soul" to *The Adventures of Fanny Hackabout-Jones*. (13)

La Vagabonde is an interesting case-study in the redefinition of the *Bildungsroman*. Abel, Hirsch, and Langland suggest the female novel of development is meant to follow a certain trajectory: a movement from within to without, both literally and metaphorically. The heroine gains independence but becomes an essential part of a community as well, leaving one environment to find their place in a more modern and more accepting space. This seems to be the case in *La Vagabonde*; Renée Néré escapes her seemingly suffocating apartment where shadows of a traumatic past lurk in corners, and departs for the provinces, leaving her admirer, Max Dufferein-Chautel, behind. She becomes integrated into a larger social structure, and her final letters suggest that she comes into her own by looking outwards, as the scholars of *Voyage In* suggest, and unshackling herself of the trauma of looking inwards.

Many scholars have studied the reconstructions of the genre that take place in the female *Bildungsroman*. Suleiman remarks, "Traditionally, women protagonists did not easily fit into any

version of the *Bildungsroman*, no doubt because the genre presumes a degree of autonomy and choice as well as self-centeredness that were denied to most women" (176). Alexandra Wettlaufer also writes on the play within the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, noting,

> Sand's idealist Bildungsroman […] departs from the French model established in *Le Rouge et le Noir* and *Illusions perdues* in its optimistic conclusion: rather than death for the solitary hero, she proposes success through collective love and identification with the community. (93)

It is exactly this kind of Sandian play on the *Bildungsroman* genre that I want to examine in *La Vagabonde*. If Colette was less interested in the individualistic than in the collaborative, and if the genre is inherently masculine, why did she write a *Bildungsroman*? And how did she, like Wettlaufer argues Sand did before her, negotiate the traditional components of a Bildungsroman to create a new kind of text? In the introduction to *Colette, the Woman, the Writer*, Erica Eisinger and Mari McCarty argue, "Colette's work is a celebration of woman, of her strength and elasticity, of her gift for endurance [...] Colette's writing was intimately connected with her experience as a woman in a way that earlier writing, that of George Sand's for example, was not" (1). I will not argue whether the whole of Colette's writing represents her "experience as a woman" or "a celebration of woman," or whether she is the first author to achieve this exercise quite so successfully. However, I do think that gender is important in our examination of the text as a *Bildungsroman*, since "the fully realized and individual self that caps the journey of the *Bildungsroman* may not represent the development goals of women, or of women characters" (Abel et al, 10-11). How then, does gender play into *la Vagabonde*, and what can we infer about the female *Bildungsroman* from Renée's journey?

The first time we see Renée in her home, which houses "toute une colonie de dames seules" (10), she laments, "Oh! Je peux chercher partout, dans les coins, et sous le lit, il n'y a personne ici,

personne,—que moi" (10). Renée repeatedly remarks that there is no one in the room, except, she adds as an afterthought, her own self. Her insistence that no one is in her living quarters, like the detachment and disregard Renée holds for the person she sees reflected in the mirror at the performance hall in the beginning of the novel, suggest that Renée has very little concept of her personhood, of her identity. She does not really count, or if she does, it's merely as an afterthought. A few pages later, Renée writes a whole paragraph disparaging various parts of her body:

> Que je n'aime pas me voir cette bouche découragée, et ces épaules veules, et tout ce corps morne qui se repose de travers, sur une seule jambe!...Voilà des cheveux pleureurs, défrisés, qu'il faut tout à l'heure brosser longtemps pour leur render leur couleur de castor brilliant. Voilà les yeux qui gardent un cerne de crayon bleu, et des ongles où le rouge a laisse une ligne douteuse…." (12)

Renée can barely conceive of herself as an embodied being; the few times she does acknowledge herself as embodied, it is to denigrate the body she is in. This dissatisfaction, almost disgust, with the self is classic of the *Bildungsroman*. And, much like the traditional *Bildungsroman* protagonists, there seems to be a level of self-hatred that leads to isolation.

But Renée's isolation is not a literal one, nor is it quite an isolation from society. I believe Renée's isolation represents a dissociation of the self and from the self. Renée seems to desperately want and attempt to isolate herself, but cannot quite achieve the aloneness she seeks. Renée recounts a conversation with Brague during which he asks, "Si tu vis toute seule, [...] c'est parce que tu le veux bien, n'est-ce pas?", and Renée responds, "Certes, je le veux 'bien,' et même je le *veux*" (12). Here, Brague draws attention to the ease with which he assumes anyone can live alone. He reasons that she lives alone because she is willing to live alone, but she corrects him, stating that, not only is she willing to live alone, but she *wants* to live alone. If she insists that she does, in fact, *want* to live alone, it is perhaps that she *can't* live alone. She cannot stand her own presence, which feels to her essentially like no presence at all, but it seems that she *is* feeling some other

presence, and that other presence, I will argue, is the trauma of an abusive relationship, which haunts her even in her empty apartement.

One of the defining factors of the *Bildungsroman* is the protagonist's inability to integrate into society or find a place for themselves within it. Yet, again, there seems to be more to it than self-discovery in the case of Renée, because her experience of trauma stunts her ability to have a sense of self at all; she will find this self only when she picks up pen and paper, and once again takes up letter writing. As so many scholars studying the genre argue, the essence of the *Bildungsroman* lies largely in one's freedom (or absence thereof): development, or "apprenticeship," as Fraiman calls it, "seem to imply choice" (5). Suleiman uses the fundamental necessity of choice in the *Bildungsroman* to argue that the genre cannot truly be recreated with a female protagonist, since the *Bildungsroman* requires the protagonist to have autonomy. However, she considers Colette's *La Vagabonde* an exception, as Renée seeks independence and ultimately proves herself as an artist (176-177). It seems, though, that for Renée, it is more than a matter of reclaiming freedom in *La Vagabonde*; claiming that Renée has autonomy and choice seems somewhat overly simplistic. In fact, it seems to ignore the presence of explicit violence and abuse that permeates the novel, abuse that strips her of her individuality and freedom. On this journey to selfhood, Renée will acknowledge, process, and reframe this violence. But her relationship with Taillandy and his abusive behaviors create a hurdle that must be overcome before she is able to begin the *Bildungsroman* process, the process of self-discovery.

The presence of interpersonal abuse in the text can easily be overlooked, as is often the case in everyday life. Renée only presents snapshots of the violence scattered throughout the narrative, and even then, she uses language that softens it. Though I don't think it is necessarily useful to 'diagnose' characters in a novel, I do believe that reading this text through the lens of

gender and trauma is important, for the literary purpose of contextualizing our analysis of the text, and for the pedagogical purpose of naming interpersonal violence when it is in the texts we choose to research or present to our students. I will not argue that Renée is a victim or survivor—those words are not for me to impart onto her. But it should be said clearly and explicitly that Adolphe Taillandy is a perpetrator of physical and emotional violence. Renée herself describes it quite extensively, but is careful to diminish its importance: "Il lui arriva, quand je me montrais trop rétive, de me battre, mais je crois qu'il n'en avait guère envie" (*Vagabonde*, 35). Renée depicts the violence as minor, and ultimately uncharacteristic of Taillandy. Renée tells us, or herself, that he did not *want* to beat her, suggesting that he *had* to beat her, which points back at herself as deserving of the abuse. She claims responsibility for the violence, contextualizing his abuse with "bad" behaviors of her own. She will later state, "J'appartenais à la meilleure, à la vraie race des femelles: celle qui avait la première fois pardonné devint, par une progression habilement menée, celle qui subit, puis qui accepte" (35). Having forgiven Taillandy once, she now belongs to the class of women who submits and accepts the abuse to which they are subjected. It is she who submits, she who accepts. She never phrases the abuse such that Taillandy is the subject of the sentence—Renée is the actor here, in her mind, at least.

In these moments, Colette replicates the language surrounding abuse and interpersonal violence that persists to this day, language that emphasizes the victim's role rather than language that acknowledges the abuser's role. Feminist linguist Julia Penelope cites this phenomenon as part of a larger social tendency that she calls 'Male Speak.' Male Speak includes many linguistic tendencies, but it is the use of Agent Referent language, by which we discuss violent events or perpetrators of violence without naming them explicitly ('the incident' rather than 'the rape,' for example), that maps so explicitly onto Renée's language. In her book *Speaking Freely: Unlearning*

the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues, Penelope explains, "Agent deletion is a dangerous and common mind-muddying flaw" (5). In *La Vagabonde*, the domestic violence inflicted by Taillandy on Renée is not obvious, because Renée uses language that obfuscates the violence. Willy inflicted his own violence on Colette in forcing her to write, stealing her art and her royalties for years, emotionally abusing her, taking her very name from Colette, quite literally, since he claimed the texts as his own, imprinting his name and expunging hers from the copies of her novels. In claiming Colette's works as his own, Willy erased Colette from the narrative. Again, I will not label Colette as a victim or survivor, and I do not want to misrepresent Colette's experience. But perhaps Colette's difficulty in writing this particular novel stems from the abuse in her own life. Willy and Taillandy inflict such violence upon Colette and Renée that their identities, their names and professions and physical wellbeing, are compromised.

Renée does not move past this violence easily. Despite the fact that she is no longer within Taillandy's physical reach, the fear she experienced remains: "Voilà quel fut, tout de suite, mon lot, mais aussi la défiance sauvage, le dégoût du milieu où j'avais vécu et souffert, une stupide peur de l'homme, des hommes, et des femmes aussi" (40). She diminishes her trauma as "stupide," and she specifies that the fear is not merely of Taillandy, or of any singular man, but "de l'homme," of society in general. Renée seems trapped in her trauma, and as a result, continually diminishes and degrades herself, only ever considering her physical presence as a mere afterthought, fearing society and the world at large. It is like she is trying to erase herself from her own narrative, deny her own identity in order to dismiss her trauma.

This brings me to the matter of the letter. In order to compose a letter, in order to write our own narratives and create a dialogue with the recipient, the writer must have a sense of self, even if that self is in the making, as all selves inevitably are. As Judith Coffin outlines in her book on

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Beauvoir, "To be human was to develop all of one's possibilities, to "open" or "project toward" the future, to be self-creating, to seek to be able to transform oneself and one's world" (104). Renée could not self-create, did not have the capacity to transform herself and her world. I think, then, that Colette could not write the entire novel as an epistolary one because Renée had yet to reclaim herself as an active agent. The first-person point of view that narrates the novel feels distant, detached to some degree from Renée; letters impose the personal onto the writer. We know, in fact, that Renée is either unable or unwilling to write letters at the beginning of the novel. When her admirer, Max Dufferein-Chautel, visits her living quarters for the first time, Renée contrasts what he sees to what really is: "Le joli coin intime! Ce soir là, derrière son dos, j'ai ri avec amertume [...] le passant, ébloui et superficiel, imagine, entre les murs d'un vert éteint, une vie retirée, pensive et studieuse [...] il n'a vu ni l'encrier poudreux, ni la plume sèche, ni le livre non coupé sur la boîte vide de papier à lettres…" (104). Renée cites the empty inkwell, the dry quill, and the empty box of *papier à lettres* as evidence of her desolation and loneliness, items that all refer back to letter writing. Violence has claimed Renée's identity to the extent that it seems as if she would not know how to write, were she to take up the quill; if she feels herself to be no one, she cannot then pen a letter, generally composed of opinions, routines, events, and a signature that points to the substantial, undeniable, on-paper existence of an individual self, in this case, that of Renée Néré.

Renée does, however, write letters at the end of the novel, all addressed to the love-struck Dufferein-Chautel. Renée's letters begin like traditional love letters; in fact, they seem almost like exemplars of love letters rather than personal expressions of love: "Hélas! Mon amant, je n'ai besoin ni d'argent, ni d'or, mais seulement de vous" (254). But these hackneyed declarations of love represent only a portion of Renée's letters. The rest of the letters detail her daily life, the city

she is in, the weather, the success of her shows. In other words, they constitute Renée's identity as an individual, one that is in no way dependent on Dufferein-Chautel, or any other man. Her language and sentence structure shift so that she becomes the author of her narrative, a move that the letter encourages in its very nature. It is this absence of individual identity in Max's letters that Renée begins to abhor; Renée complains that Max's last letter "remplit quatre pages, huit pages, de quelques 'je t'adore', de maledictions amoureuses, de grands regrets tout brûlants. Cela se lit en vingt seconde! […] Et puis, vous n'y parlez que de moi!" (256). Renée sends Max accounts of her day and details of her life; in return, he consistently sends variations of the same love letter, extolling Renée. This is not collaboration, in which minds play off of each other; this is uninteresting dependence, without any substance. Having newly discovered her own individuality, Renée is bored and irritated by Max's constant references to her in letters in which he consistently fails to construct an identity of his own, ideas and opinions of his own for Renée to discuss.

But despite Max's inadequacy as a letter writer, Renée gains new life as she pens her own letters: "Quatre grandes feuilles, sur la table, témoignent de ma hâte à écrire, non moins que le désordre du manuscript, où l'écriture monte et descend, se dilate et se contracte, sensible…" (298). This sentence is full of movement, liveliness. Her materials are witness to her haste to get her thoughts down on paper, as if Renée had been held back for so long that, free at last, it must all come tumbling out hurriedly, excitedly. The disorderly manuscript, humanly imperfect and messy, displays writing that seems to have a life of its very own. It ascends and descends, moving freely, at the whim of Renée's desire or mood. It dilates and contracts, as if Renée were finally breathing freely, her writing imitating inhalations in and out. Renée's empty inkwell and dry quill finally gain new life, and as Renée composes these letters, she gains new life along with them.

Eventually, the exchange between Max and Renée seems to become a different exchange, between Renée's old and new self. Upon sending off one of her letters to Max, Renée says confusedly, "Il m'arrive rarement de relire mes lettres. J'ai relu celle-ci,—et je l'ai laissée partir, avec l'étrange impression que je commettais une maladresse, une erreur, et qu'elle s'en allait vers un homme qui n'aurait pas dû la lire" (277). She begins to realize that the letters she composes were never meant for the unfortunately banal Max; they were meant for Renée herself, as she creates a new life post-trauma and abuse, and tries to reconcile the young woman who lived with and loved Taillandy with the *vagabonde* who abandoned her lover in favor of independence. Max becomes nothing more than the "cher intrus, que j'ai voulu aimer" (334), an unwelcome guest in their correspondence. Taken as letters between her two selves as they come to terms with each other, the letters read very differently. In her question to Max, "C'est bien pour moi, tout ça? Vous êtes sûr?" (291), we hear Renée consciously and explicitly deciding for herself. Is she choosing the right path? Is she really sure? "Ne regrettez-vous pas d'avoir choisi seulement Renée Néré?" (291). Will she regret having chosen herself over a traditional relationship, and the safety of another? Her signature, in this letter, becomes a question: "Renée Néré?", embodying Renée's conscious creation of her own identity. The identity of the lover is ultimately irrelevant; he could have been anyone. But their correspondence is important. It is through this exchange, in which Max fades and a new Renée begins to appear, that Renée rewrites herself into consciousness.

If Colette switched to an epistolary form at the end of the novel, I believe it was to signal that Renée had reclaimed herself as the subject of her own narrative, having embarked upon a journey of self-actualization, like male *Bildungsroman* protagonists, but having *additionally* overcome her abuser's reach, both mentally and physically. Renée, in these letters, reclaims her own language, through which she can curate a new self, separate from Taillandy and the abuse he

inflicted upon her. I believe that Colette only presented Renée's side of the correspondence as an homage to Renée, a way of truly granting Renée control over her new narrative. The novel's narrator, who recounted memories of abuse and trauma, fades, as does Maxime, in celebration of Renée's new self, as she moves past the violence of her old life. In *The Difficulty of Loving*, Crosland laments, "The saddest aspect of *La Vagabonde* is the impression that the heroine cannot accept love" (104). I would argue that the most hopeful aspect of *La Vagabonde* is that the heroine, by the end of the novel, refuses to accept love that stunts her. If these are love letters that Renée composes, they are to herself, much more than they are for Max. More than anything, more than her artistry and independence, it is the act of composing letters that, to me, truly signals the beginning of Renée's journey to recreating an authentic self.

Trauma-Informed Teaching and the Humanities Classroom

When instructors choose to include *La Vagabonde* in their syllabus, there is usually not much thought given to the novel's treatment of trauma. Awareness and recognition of trauma outside of courses that deal explicitly with the topic are rare, but vitally important. In the context of *La Vagabonde*, the trauma Renée experiences is a form of domestic violence and abuse. In our classrooms today, sexual assault is the most common trauma experienced by undergraduates. Sexual assault and domestic violence are different forms of abuse, and the trauma that results from the violence, and the communal denial or ignorance of its presence, link the two together. It would be somewhat hypocritical, I think, for me to advocate for the recognition and analysis of trauma in *La Vagabonde*, and yet ignore the trauma that we know is present in our students in all of our classrooms.

According to the World Health Organization, 35% of all women are survivors of some form of violence, with 68% of rapes going unreported (WHO 2016).[50] On college campuses in the United States, one in five women reports having experienced sexual violence, with 80 percent of cases going unreported (WHO 2016). These statistics grow with the presence of certain groups or organizations on campus, including fraternities (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007), and men's athletic teams:[51] One study "showed that [while] college athletes make up 3.3 percent of the male students," they make up "19 percent of those accused of sexual assault" (Luther, 2016). We might focus on our own institution. As of the March 24, 2017 e-mail sent to all UT Austin faculty, staff, and students by President Gregory Fenves, CLASE (Cultivating Learning and Safe Environments) released survey results conducted by the University of Texas System at 13 UT institutions across the state in the previous year (2016). The report revealed that, "15 percent of undergraduate women at UT Austin reported that they had been raped, either through force, threat of force, incapacitation or other forms of coercion such as lies and verbal pressure. Furthermore, 28 percent of undergraduate women at UT Austin said they were the victims of unwanted sexual touching, and 12 percent experienced attempted rape. Thirteen percent of graduate and professional school women said they experienced crude sexual harassment perpetrated by a staff or faculty member" (President Gregory Fenves, March 24, 2017). Of course, these numbers represent only cases that are reported, a minority of incidents. Some basic recognition and awareness of trauma then, and some training to address the topic, seem to be important, I would even argue essential.[52]

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[50] This number is only growing as individuals who have suffered assault come forward a little more often. The advent of the "Me Too" movement, for instance, has revealed some much darker truths about the statistics presented here.

[51] UT Austin currently has over thirty fraternities.

[52] Various studies have shown the prevalence of students who have been exposed to trauma, and the negative effect these experiences can have on students' academic performance. Among college students in the United States, 66%-94% of students report exposure to one or more traumatic event (Frazier et al., 2009) and rates of posttraumatic stress disorder are estimated at 9%-12% (Butler et al., 2014). Exposure to sexual assault, unwanted sexual attention, and family violence are associated with the highest levels of distress among undergraduates (Frazier et al., 2009).

Trauma-informed care has principally been implemented into areas that directly address trauma survivors, such as shelters and clinical services more generally. However, trauma-informed practices are increasingly being implemented into other disciplines as knowledge of the prevalence and impact of trauma increases. Many K-12 schools have implemented trauma-informed training programs and sessions. In the higher-education classroom, trauma-informed practices are gaining in momentum. This is not an innovation—it is not a new, untested pedagogical framework. The literature on teaching narratives that address trauma in the Humanities classroom abounds.[53] As discussed above, the abuse in *La Vagabonde* is not immediately evident, nor is it in any way foregrounded by the narrator. But a student who has experienced interpersonal violence is likely to recognize it. At the very least, this student will notice when the abuse is glossed over in the classroom; circumventing the subject would surely be most instructors' instinct. It was certainly my own instinct before I was made aware of trauma-informed practices. But silence only serves to further stigmatize the topic. How, then, can we acknowledge these sensitive topics appropriately, without risking retraumatization, in our classrooms?

The pedagogical practices that trauma-informed pedagogy suggests are easily implementable into our classrooms, regardless of what these learning spaces look like. They are certainly not an overhaul of current teaching methods. Research in the field of trauma-informed pedagogical practices offers recommendations like limiting overall exposure levels, varying the intensity of material, and providing information on self-care (Zurbiggen, 2011), conducting check-ins during class in particularly difficult sessions, as well as providing warnings that detail the content, severity, and duration of the violent event(s). These may be verbal warnings ahead of

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Negative adjustment to an academic setting as a result of trauma can result in students dropping out (Duncan, 2000), poor academic performance, and may be related to attrition (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004).

[53] See the literature review, "Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in the Higher-Education Classroom," in Appendices for references.

time, or online warnings prior to viewing electronic postings (Butler & Carello, 2015). Humanities professors implementing trauma-informed pedagogy have said that these warnings help students handle difficult material better. It might be helpful to ask what the students found most difficult in the material and start the conversation there. It is also important to allow students not to participate, thus respecting their limits and letting them take responsibility for their own well-being (Butler & Carello, 2015). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, trauma-informed pedagogy underlines the importance of instructors knowing the resources available to students, and having specific information to pass on to students every time it is appropriate.[54] These resources should be included in the syllabus, and referenced again in emails and in person when necessary.

These are all suggestions, ones that have proven to help with student retention and student success in the classroom, as evidenced not only by the wealth of literature and statistics on the implementation of this pedagogy, but on its successful implementation at our own university. Professors such as Dr. Steve Lundy, formerly of the Classics Department, who taught an online course on Greek mythologies, stories involving a plethora of instances of interpersonal violence, have proven the success and meaningfulness of these practices (as evidenced by data collected at the end of each semester, such as that presented in Annex 1).[55] Like Renée's descriptions of violence, our acknowledgement of trauma and violence in our classrooms need not be constantly foregrounded. But in order to establish a collaborative mindset in our learning spaces, we must model for our students what mindful teaching and thoughtful engagement look like, with the knowledge that no student can leave their identity or experiences at the door of our classrooms.

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[54] At UT Austin, this might include the Counseling and Mental Health Center, Voices Against Violence, Services for Students with Disabilities, Student Emergency Services, and the Ombuds office, among others. When providing a reference for a student, we should also provide a phone number or email address and ideally a contact person. Students are much more likely to reach out with this information in hand.

[55] See. data collected in Figure 3, below, from a UT Austin online Classics course on mythology taught by Dr. Steve Lundy.

The manner in which we read, teach, and analyze the texts we study plays an important role in dictating the language and approach to topics such as trauma in a broader context. Like Renée, I believe we should carefully consider and perhaps revise the language that we employ in our writing and our research, as well as the pedagogical practices that we implement in our classrooms. The dissemination of our work, whether through our students' education or our individual publications, impacts the community at large. We should, I think, take responsibility for the reach and influence of our position as educators and researchers. Without considering our practices and analyses as dictating the correct way of looking at a text or the world at large, we might keep in mind how our voice is amplified by our position within the teaching and academic communities. And it is my contention that we should continually reconsider and potentially revise our language and our very points of view. Our pedagogy, our research, our social discourse, should grow as we grow, and as our understanding of the texts we cherish and analyze shifts. Literary scholars know better than anyone how the reading of a text can and does change not only from person to person, but from one reading to the next. A change in analysis, like a change in pedagogical practice, is not a conviction of our previous actions and readings. It is a natural growth that, at our best as instructors and researchers, we embrace. Colette herself, as I will explore in the next section, was not one to shy away from revising previous viewpoints, or reconsidering her position on a matter. In fact, as regards letter-writing, it seems that Colette reconsidered and revised her viewpoint several times throughout her life, or so it would seem in analyzing her epistolary fiction.

Absence in *Mitsou, où comment l'esprit vient aux filles*

If, in *La Vagabonde*, the relationship begins to disintegrate once it becomes an epistolary exchange, Colette confoundingly presented us with exactly the opposite situation in her 1919 novel, *Mitsou, ou comment l'esprit vient aux filles*. In *Mitsou*, the titular character begins a touching romantic correspondence with a man which the reader primarily knows as "le lieutenant bleu,"[56] after the color of his uniform. They meet when Mitsou, the 24-year-old star of the Montmartre theatre, briefly hides two lieutenants in her *garderobe* as a favor to her friend, Petite Chose. The blue lieutenant subsequently sends her a short letter of thanks, along with a few small gifts. Mitsou goes to great lengths to find an address for the lieutenant, as he hadn't included any return information on the envelope. Their exchange is lengthy, and the novel comes to a climax when the lieutenant announces he will be returning to Paris. He and Mitsou reunite, only for the lieutenant to be seemingly disappointed by Mitsou in the flesh and their one-night affair. The point of view shifts to the lieutenant's during the night, and he concludes, "J'ai cessé, en la voyant, d'être amoureux de Mitsou" (108). Mitsou's narration of that same night suggests some disappointment on her part as well, though ultimately, she declares, in her final letter, that she loves him still. The relationship then, rather than disintegrating when it is epistolary, as in *La Vagabonde*, flourishes for as long as the lovers communicate through letters and falls apart only when the correspondents come together, in direct opposition to Renée and Max's situation in *La Vagabonde*.

In her 1983 book on epistolarity, *Approaches to a Form*, Janet Altman discusses the role of the letter as a mediator of desire. Here Altman presents the now widely recognized theory that the letter serves as a stand-in for the lover. She explains the letter as metonymy for the beloved, a concept she argues is an ever-present conceit in romantic epistolary tales. This metonymous

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[56] His name is mentioned once, by Mitsou, near the end of the novel, on the night that they come together. The fact that Robert wishes to remain anonymous throughout their correspondence, to remain the "lieutenant bleu," perhaps also speaks to the difference in desire between the epistolary correspondent and the physical person.

displacement is most evident in texts like Laclos' *Liaisons Dangereuses*, in which desire is played out within the letters as well as with the letters themselves as physical replacements for the absent sendee. Altman describes this epistolary phenomenon as "the letter as object rather than the letter as message" (18). Altman adds that it nonetheless also emphasizes the difference between the image created by the letter and the lover themselves (27). The letter, then, according to Altman, is an ambivalent intermediary, a temporary and inaccurate replacement for what cannot be had in the flesh. It is, as the term 'mediator' would suggest, an indirect connection to the object of interest.

Yet the letter seems like more than a mere mediator of desire in Colette's text. It seems to me like a version of desire in and of itself. In an early letter to Robert, Mitsou writes,[57] "Ce que vous n'imaginez pas c'est que je n'ai encore correspondu avec personne […]. Je voudrais vous faire bien comprendre que c'est un événement dans ma vie que de commencer à écrire des lettres, et que ce soit des lettres pour vous" (57). Several aspects of this declaration are striking. The first is that Mitsou's explanation of the correspondence as "un événement pour moi" echoes, almost reiterates, Colette's own feeling, following her marriage to Willy, that, "The great event of our engagement for me had been our correspondence" (Crosland, 44). Hearing Colette's own words reproduced in Mitsou's letter marks the significance of the sentiment, but perhaps more importantly, its appearance in a work of literary fiction marks it as a sentiment to which Colette believes her readers will relate. Colette, in reproducing this sentence in a work of fiction, claims the sentiment as one that readers will identify with. It is not just that Colette felt her correspondence with her lover to be 'an event;' it is that she believed people understood this to be true more broadly, that it was, in a sense, a natural description of what constitutes a correspondence. In this way, as argued above in relation to Colette's own declaration of the letter as event, the letter exists

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[57] The blue lieutenant's first name, as we find out quite late in the book.

in time and space not as a mere object, but as an experience, and not just for Colette, but more generally as a concept recognizable to her readership.

What then, does it mean to experience a letter? It seems to me that it consists of an intimate event, a physical experience, one that directly fulfills desire, rather than merely expressing it secondarily for lack of immediate contact. Returning to the quotation above, "Ce que vous n'imaginez pas c'est que je n'ai encore correspondu avec personne […]. Je voudrais vous faire bien comprendre que c'est un événement dans ma vie que de commencer à écrire des lettres, et que ce soit des lettres pour vous" (57), we recognize the language that one might use to describe a first ever sexual encounter. Swapping concepts of 'correspondence' and 'letters' for concepts of 'sex' and 'virginity,'[58] Mitsou's assertion brings to mind the prototypical young adult explaining to their partner that this is their first time, and the partner must not take it lightly—this act is an event, it is momentous. And they, the correspondent, the partner, have been chosen. The event (the correspondence, the sex) is not mediating the desire—it fulfills it. It is as direct an expression of the desire as could be conceived. The letter doesn't mediate desire; it doesn't serve as an indirect connection. It isn't an intermediary agent. It is the agent; it is the fulfillment of desire and it is the love interest itself, rather than a temporary replacement for desire, or a frustrating stand-in for the lover.

In her book, Altman analyzes *Mitsou* as a particular type of epistolary text, one in which "the romance breaks down once it is no longer mediated by letter" (27). She draws our attention to the striking moment in which Robert, while physically present with Mitsou, "translates her spoken words into epistolary form" (28), concluding that the novel "stresses the power of absence rather than presence to draw humans together" (28). The moment that Altman here references

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[58] A definition of "virginity" and its socio-cultural implications could be a dissertation unto itself. I use the term only to exemplify how significant corresponding seems in Mitsou's life in particular.

directly follows the unnarrated intercourse, after which we are told: "la phrase que vient de prononcer Mitsou, il lui semble qu'il la lit et la relit, là-bas, dans un lieu dépouillé, sous le rayon qui glisse entre deux murs de terre: "Je n'ai jamais été amoureuse, à présent que la suis…" "Elle aurait sans doute mis un z à été…Que j'aime ce z…" (118). Robert describes a scene different from the one he is engaged in, one that does not include Mitsou in person, but rather Mitsou in writing. Can we truly call this replacement an absence, though? What Robert imagines is a scene full of physical and tangible objects. He vividly describes the two walls that entrench him in the space, the bareness of his surroundings, the sentence he reads and re-reads, a sentence that is no longer spoken but corporeally present on paper, down to the pleasure he experiences in the letter 'z.' It is not a conceptually heavy passage—it is a passage that focuses on the physical, on the bodily experience of the dirt walls and the slithering sunlight and the letters themselves: "Que j'aime ce z." There is pleasure in this passage, desire for the physical experience of reading a letter. We could perhaps claim that Robert mourns the difference between the Mitsou of letters, who is naïve and uses 'z's to signify *liaisons*, and the Mitsou of flesh and blood, who seems not to measure up to his expectations. Yet Robert consistently comments on the ways in which Mitsou, in fact, surpasses his expectations: "Il baisse les yeux, rougit légèrement sous son beau hale doré, comme chaque fois que Mitsou, sans effort, dépasse ce qu'il espère d'elle" (105). It is not that Mitsou is not enough, or that she falls short of his expectations; he attests to the opposite numerous times. It is that he realizes that his desire was for a different kind of intimacy, a different kind of physical experience, a different kind of *presence*.

In a letter expressing his deeply emotional state in reading *Mitsou*, Proust wrote to Colette,

si j'ai pleuré, ce n'est pas de tout cela, c'est en lisant la lettre de Mitsou. Les deux lettres finales, c'est le chef-d'œuvre du livre. Mais pour Mitsou il y a dans sa lettre des choses qui me sembleraient pas trop "jolies" si je n'avais trouvé dès le début (comme vous n'est-ce pas?) que Mitsou est beaucoup plus intelligente que le lieutenant bleu, qu'elle est admirable,

> que son mauvais goût momentané en matière d'ameublement n'a aucune importance [...], et que du reste ce progrès miraculeux de son style rapide comme la Grâce, répond exactement au titre: "Comment l'esprit vient aux filles." (Proust, Lettre à Colette)

I agree entirely with Proust's assessment of Mitsou's character in relation to Robert's. She is certainly more intelligent than her correspondent; she is wittier and has more depth. Her letters convey an authenticity that the blue lieutenant's letters never come close to rivaling. I am not trying to save Robert's reputation as an epistolarian. I am not even trying to save him from his reputation as a somewhat uninteresting character, there merely to propel Mitsou's narrative trajectory forward. To grant Robert some credit, he almost seems aware of his place within this narrative; after all, all he wants are Mitsou's letters, her words, her 'z's, her witticisms—he even refrains from naming himself, almost as if he were trying to remain a background character. He yearns for the beauty and humor of her letters much as we do as readers.

But he serves a further purpose, as well. Through his character, Colette presents us with a fascinating rebuttal to the admittedly logical idea that the letter is stand-in for the lover, that the pleasure one experiences in receiving a letter is a stand-in for the pleasure you have in being with the lover. The letter has often been considered a temporary mediator, a mere shadow of the actual desired object. Not so in *Mitsou*. In this text, the letter is not displaced desire—it is the desire. It is physical, intimate, comparable, in fact, to sex itself. Colette wants us to understand, "que c'est un événement dans [la] vie que de commencer à écrire des lettres" (57). It is a presence, a very real, very physical presence, rather than an absence. It presents us with a fascinating insight into Colette's mind, for whom, evidently, composing a correspondence was a different sort of engagement and relationship than any lived visitation from the person themselves. Again, we might come back to the question of novel and letter composition for Colette, and why she so disdained the former. If we are to go by *Mitsou*, we could, I think, conclude that the mass-produced

novel, mere object, could never compare to the physical, sexual *event* that is the letter.

'Absence' in the Classroom

      In reconsidering what constitutes absence, we might also question what we mean when we think of presence and absence in the context of the classroom. It is a question that, in the last thirty years or so, has most often been discussed in relation to the online classroom—without physically being in the same space at the same time, can students really be considered present? What are the pedagogical costs of this absence, if indeed it is one? In the same way that the letter is considered a stand-in for the correspondent, a lesser means of mediation that does not measure up to the experience of being with the correspondent at the same time and place, so is the online classroom often considered, amongst many pedagogues, a less effective form of teaching that will never quite compare to the face-to-face classroom. For many, there seems to be a disturbance in the connection between instructor and students, and between the students themselves, in the online classroom, a snag in the collaborative pedagogical process. Researchers have dubbed the exploration of the questions posed above, Transactional Distance Theory (Moore & Kearsley, 1996). Thus follows research on how to diminish the "distance" as much as possible.[59] Instead of turning to this research and questioning its conclusions in a theoretical manner, however, we might instead turn to a pedagogue who has taught both online and face-to-face classrooms within the past several years, ensuring that the information is drawn from a personal and deep understanding of the question, as well as ensuring its present-day relevance. Many of these articles were, after all, written a decade or more ago, and the framework of the online classroom has drastically changed since then.

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[59] See, for example, McBrien, Cheng, Jones (2009).

On the 9th of January, 2019, I conducted an interview with Dr. Steve Lundy, mentioned above in the Trauma-Informed Teaching portion of the chapter, on his experience with absence and presence in the context of the online classroom. For years, Lundy has taught an online mythologies class of over 300 students, as well as a much smaller online Latin course. I met with him to get a first-hand and up-to-date perspective on this issue. What Lundy expressed during this hour-long interview clearly signaled a meaningful connection between himself and his students, one in which nothing was absent from the relationship. Of course, he admitted how different the online classroom is from the face-to-face classroom, and yet told me that he feels no differently towards his online students—in grading, in moderating online, in engaging with them on an intellectual and creative level; Lundy felt that, though the mediation of the relationship was different, the relationship itself remained the same. He explained, "The failure that I see in people that diminish the online classroom tends to be this belief that the online classroom is mediated and the face-to-face classroom is unmediated. All interaction is mediated." This, I think, should tell us much about 'absence' in the online classroom. The manner in which the students' presence is mediated within the space of the classroom may very well be unlike that of the face-to-face classroom. This by no means negates the mediation, or turns it into an absence.

Dr. Lundy even speaks to the manner in which conducting an online classroom has led him to reframe the ways in which he uses myriad pedagogical tools within the classroom, including the face-to-face classroom: "What you end up discovering is that there are lots of places in the face-to-face classroom that you think of as being mundane, like the syllabus or class time or the blackboard. Those are actually profound points that can become either mundane or really important—when you start teaching an online classroom you start thinking about these spaces differently." Having taught an online classroom has enriched Lundy's experience in other learning

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spaces, as he comes to view the daily, inanimate components of the classroom setup as opportunities for further mediation, and further collaboration.

In fact, Lundy explained his relationship with his online students not as an online one, but as an epistolary one. "In many ways it's a traditional epistolary relationship," he told me, describing the kinds of emails that he and his students would send each other weekly, compared to the often nonexistent personal written communication that took place with his face-to-face students. The reason for this is evident; in the space of the face-to-face classroom, questions can be asked in person. Yet Lundy described the existence of this prolonged and consistent epistolary correspondence as one that brought him close to his students in a way unlike anything he had experienced in the face-to-face classroom. He expressed pride in this epistolary relationship, "achieving goals of being responsible, responsive, caring all within the medium of emails." The closeness is not better or worse—nor is it a question of presence or absence. It is, as with Mitsou and the blue lieutenant's letters, a differently mediated but equally meaningful method of teaching or interacting with the other. Lundy never experienced it as an absence. His students were very much present, on a day to day basis, as much as his face-to-face students had been. It was never a question of absence versus presence—it has always been a question of different kinds of mediated presences. In fact, the one question that Lundy explicitly told me he asks himself of his pedagogy is in relation to the environment and not in relation to the medium: "Are my students entering into this space willingly, joyfully, safely?" These, surely, are the kinds of pedagogical spaces we are hoping to create for our students, regardless of the manner in which the mediation takes place.

At the end of our interview, Lundy handed me an article he had printed out for its relevance to my questions. The article was Megan Watkins' "Desiring Recognition, Accumulating Affect," published in a collection on affect theory in 2010, in which Watkins argued for the cumulative and

relational nature of affect, in contrast to the literature's depiction of it as fleeting and preconscious: "Affect, as a bodily phenomenon, is typically conceived as fleeting, whereas emotion, with its cognitive dimension, is viewed as long-lasting" (278). Watkins linked affect to recognition, which is to say, the importance of students and teachers recognizing and valorizing each other, within the hierarchical setup of the classroom. It is, according to Watkins, in receiving this consistent form of approval, that affect "and […] its accumulation within the body [...] promote the desire and capacity to learn" (279). The capacity and desire to learn, then, become possible in the collaborative affective efforts between students and instructors. It is an accumulation that Watkins describes as a phenomenon more complicated than the bodily and temporary traditional definitions of affect. Watkins' more nuanced, perhaps more interesting, take on affect, leaves room for different kinds of mediation, different kinds of classrooms, and a different kind of presence. The accumulation of affect that engenders the will to learn comes not from a body's mere presence in the classroom—this presence, like any other, is meaningless, unless something collaborative and cumulative takes place within the learning environment. In other words, affect happens in a well taught classroom, one in which students and professors work together, without necessarily disassembling hierarchical structures. It is in this way that affect leads to engagement in the classroom, and engagement can take many forms, whether online or face-to-face.

I have argued that, through the characters of Mitsou and the blue lieutenant and their exchange of letters, Colette exemplified the way in which 'presence' is more variable in its manner of existing than is currently accepted. An epistolary other is not an absent other, but a present, if differently present, other. This is true in our classrooms as well, as Lundy summarizes by describing his relationship with his online students as an epistolary one. Desire to learn in the space of the classroom works, I believe, like desire in *Mitsou*—physical presence does not have to exist

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for the desire to manifest itself. Desire will manifest itself in different, no less impactful, ways.

Conclusion: **Collaborating on Volumes of Nothing**

We might return, by way of conclusion, to Colette's frustrated exclamation in relation to George Sand, "how the devil did she manage?" For Colette, managing did not seem to come easily. Reading biographies of Colette became, at times, an intense and somewhat stressful endeavor because of Colette's own difficulties in making sense of life and writing. Managing her novel-writing felt like a chore; managing her love-life felt overwhelming, as Crosland explains in her book *Colette, The Difficulty of Loving*, "if she had found loving so difficult it was because she had expected too much and had also been afraid; she had wanted to give and take everything all at once" (139). Somehow, the excess in Colette's life didn't seem as manageable as the excess in Sand's. I argued, in the last chapter, that one of the most important ways by which Sand managed this wonderfully complex life of hers was by way of collaboration. She didn't seek to define masculine and feminine, but rather spent her time thinking about how they collaborate together within her person; the same is true for many of the supposed dichotomies we saw in Chapter 1. But Colette complicated collaboration. In *La Vagabonde*, Colette showed us how collaboration can be impeded when an individual is faced with trauma. But she also shows how collaboration can happen within oneself, how the self that lived through the trauma and the self that is growing past the trauma can work together towards acceptance and independence, specifically through letter-writing.

In considering the conventions of the letter in Colette's epistolary texts, the signature has been a matter of some interest this chapter. It helps Renée Néré consider the choice she makes in leaving behind a traditional path in order to pursue independence, and, as I argue, to begin coming

to terms with the version of herself who has suffered years of trauma and abuse. It allows Robert, or the *Lieutenant Bleu* of *Mitsou, ou comment l'esprit vient aux filles*, to express new forms of desire by differentiating between his and Mitsou's epistolary selves and their in-person selves.[60] Robert may not love Mitsou the individual, but he loves Mitsou, in her epistolary manifestation, in her signature form, on paper. It remains a physical connection as well as an emotional one, such that the letter comes to parallel carnal acts of desire such as sex. The one signature I haven't dwelled on in this chapter is Colette's own. In fact, we might remember that Colette did not adhere to epistolary traditions and expectations. In her own letters, greetings, signatures, and dates, were often left out entirely. Crosland argues that Colette "considered dates so unimportant that she tended to be vague or inaccurate about them" (64). This is a wonderful observation; it is not so much that Colette did not recognize the formal components of a letter, that which structures the letter itself, it is, according to Crosland, that she considered them "so unimportant" as to do away with them entirely. In analyzing *La Vagabonde*, I argued that one of the reasons that Renée could not compose letters at the start of the novel was because her identity was still too tenuous, too closely linked to trauma and the recoiling of the self in the face of trauma. Signing her name would concretize her identity, I argued, in a way that Renée was not yet able to face. This is not what I am arguing in relation to Colette, and the absence of her own signature in her actual correspondence.

Crosland's suggestion that these epistolary customs were of no interest to Colette, that they were entirely unimportant, does indeed reflect Colette's witty intellect, and her broader disinterest in adhering to conventions, be they literary or otherwise. This absence of the epistolary conventions that normally mark the text as a letter is reminiscent of Colette's comment, in a letter

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[60] I hesitate to use terms like 'physical' selves or 'present' selves, since my argument centers in large part around the notion that their epistolary selves are equally present, even equally physical, as their epistolary selves.

to the Comtesse Anna de Noailles: "I have very often deprived myself of the necessities of life, but I have never consented to give up a luxury" ("Belles Saisons," 1932). This sentiment seems to echo throughout all of her correspondence, in long letters that discuss food and the flowers of her garden extensively, only to note at the very end, seemingly as an afterthought, "I am now divorced, you know" ("Belles Saisons Scrapbook," 1910). The luxuries of the letter, for Colette, are the crux of it: the handwriting and the paper, the smell of a letter, all of those unremarkable things that do not insist upon the need to communicate but rather celebrate the joy of sharing, of collaborating with another in order to recreate the beautiful mundanities of a world they do not physically share. The excitement and pure joy she exuded in her correspondent's handwriting, in the kind of paper they wrote on, speak to the importance of these luxuries. These are the wonders of the letter, not its so-called necessities, such as greetings, signatures, and dates.

The wonders of the letter don't even lie in its ability to impart the great events of life to another, the important moments that a friend or family member should and would like to know of, like a divorce. Rather, the wonders of the letter are in the nothings we share with each other. In a letter to Madame Léopold Marchand, Colette gushed, "I have nothing much to tell you, volumes of nothing" ("Belles Saisons," 1938). In corresponding with Picard, Colette at one point wrote two whole letters speaking almost exclusively of Picard's parakeets. She loved to write, also, of garlic and cats. She loved to speak of flowers, of which she seemed to have an encyclopedic knowledge. In her correspondence and in her life, Colette made the fabulously paradoxical point that when one does not have life's necessities, such as physical and literary freedom, ownership of one's work, money enough to feel at ease, a country at peace, one must content themselves with life's luxuries. Therefore, as the Second World War came to a head, as she was deprived of food and her animal companions, as she lost friends to old age and to violence, as she struggled to understand love and

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struggled to manage finances, she reveled in garlic, in cats, in parakeets, in handwriting and letter paper, and volumes of 'nothing,' through her correspondence. The luxuries of life and of letter writing, of dwelling on details even as major events loomed overhead, this was the great joy of Colette's life. She was able, through her correspondence, to create a world filled with beautiful, unimportant details in collaboration with her correspondents. Colette may have struggled more than Sand in novel writing, in love, and in self-creation, but, through her epistolary collaboration with friends and family, she was uniquely able to create a world of fabulously inconsequential nothings that made up the wonders of her life, and make the wonders of ours. As Colette so beautifully explained herself, "là où [Sand] pensait à la grange pleine je me suis attardée à regarder la verte fleur du blé" (*Vesper*, 214). Sand had the necessities of life in hand. She had control over who she was. She was financially stable, and her life was filled with love and good food and good company. The greater picture was taken care of in Sand's life. Colette, rather than looking at the grange as a whole, thought to spend time on the individual blades of wheat. Colette teaches us, in her epistolary novels as in her own correspondence, that while necessities are well and good, luxuries are the true material of life, and that of these luxuries, letter writing is surely one of the most precious.

Addendum

While I have thus far refrained from bringing current events and my own teaching experiences into the chapters of this dissertation, which remains an analytical work, the current unprecedented state of things has led me to reconsider this distanced perspective. I opted to include this addendum in my chapter on Colette as part of my argument on Trauma-Informed Pedagogy, discussed above in relation to *La Vagabonde*.

In early to mid-March 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic began to make its way around the world. Schools and colleges across the country progressively closed their doors to students. In a university context, that means not only the sudden cessation of face-to-face courses, but also the forced removal of students from safe housing and access to consistent nourishment. Many students have gone home to unstable environments where their identities are denied and where they are not welcome. All of our students who relied upon on- or off-campus work study programs and jobs have seen their financial income lapse unpredictably. We also know that LGBTQ+ populations continue to be at higher risk during this pandemic than the general population.[61] Our response to this pandemic within our communities, then, is not only an academic question of teaching our material—it is a question of social justice.

UT Austin, like colleges and universities across the country, has scrambled to transfer their content online. While some organizations on our campus, such as the Center for Women's and Gender Studies, the LGBTQ Center, and the Faculty Innovation Center, have worked tirelessly to provide resources as quickly as possible, the focus, amongst all of the inevitable trauma taking place, has largely been our syllabi and our exams, our lessons and our grades. As an educational institution, this is, to a large extent, natural and appropriate. And yet, this might be a good moment to pause and consider what it is, exactly, that we, as an institution of higher-learning, are trying to teach our students. In an article entitled, "What do we Teach Now," published online on Inside Higher-Ed only a few days after the shelter-in-place mandate, professor of sociology Deborah Cohan argued, "It's simply not the time to fetishize methods or to add more content or more to the to-do lists. A crisis should not prompt us to add more; it should encourage us to distill things to an essence and to model for students how and what to prioritize. Keep busy, they say. Get still and

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[61] See Candace Bond Theriault, "COVID-19: A Black, Queer, Feminist Grounding and Call for Self and Community Care", MS Magazine, March 26, 2020. Accessed April 1, 2020.

centered, I believe." Cohan explains that her own response has been to remain kind to herself as fear washes over her, and to instill this as a priority in her students as well. She reminds us that so often, what students retain from our courses are not the details or even the content, but rather our approaches. She focuses, in the article, on how we as instructors show up for our students, "bearing witness and paying attention." I would add to Cohan's list of valuable approaches: how we teach our students to process and analyze (traumatic) times, and what it is that we are modeling for our students in our own processing choices.

Cohan ends the article by stating, "I need and want what I instinctively believe my students need and want: reassuring leadership, humor, quiet and rest, joy and beauty, a departure from the mania, and a release to be still." I would encourage us as instructors to ask these same questions posed by Cohan in her article, to critically examine our approach to this historical and traumatic event, and to consider what we want the place of higher-education to be in the lives of our students. Approaches and processes will, I think, serve our students better than facts and figures at the end of the day. And while we should of course be teaching our students the necessary content on our syllabi, we might dwell on *how* we are teaching this content. I commend Cohan's sense that, "I need and want what I instinctively believe my students need and want," yet I would push instructors, in the spirit of keeping our students' education student-centered, to ask our students explicitly what it is they need and want from us. There is so much that we cannot or should not provide for our students—Trauma-Informed Pedagogy disapproves of any therapeutic approaches to the student-teacher relationship. But there is more that we can and should provide them than the content of our syllabi, such as on- and off-campus resources, amended and flexible assignments, explicit statements on prioritizing physical and mental health, and so on. Research on trauma in

the classroom tells us,[62] without a shadow of a doubt, that critical pedagogies such as Trauma-Informed Teaching make the difference between successfully helping a student navigate the classroom, and unintentionally pushing our students away from our classrooms and outside of higher-education more broadly. In this time of international pandemic and panic, it is more necessary than ever to recognize the whole humanity of ourselves and our students. Neither they nor we can leave our traumas and selves at the doors of our virtual classrooms in a time like this. We would do well, for the sake of our students and social justice broadly speaking, to stop and ask ourselves what and how we are teaching our students in any moment of crisis.

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[62] For references, data, and further information on TIP, see Appendices for a complete layout.
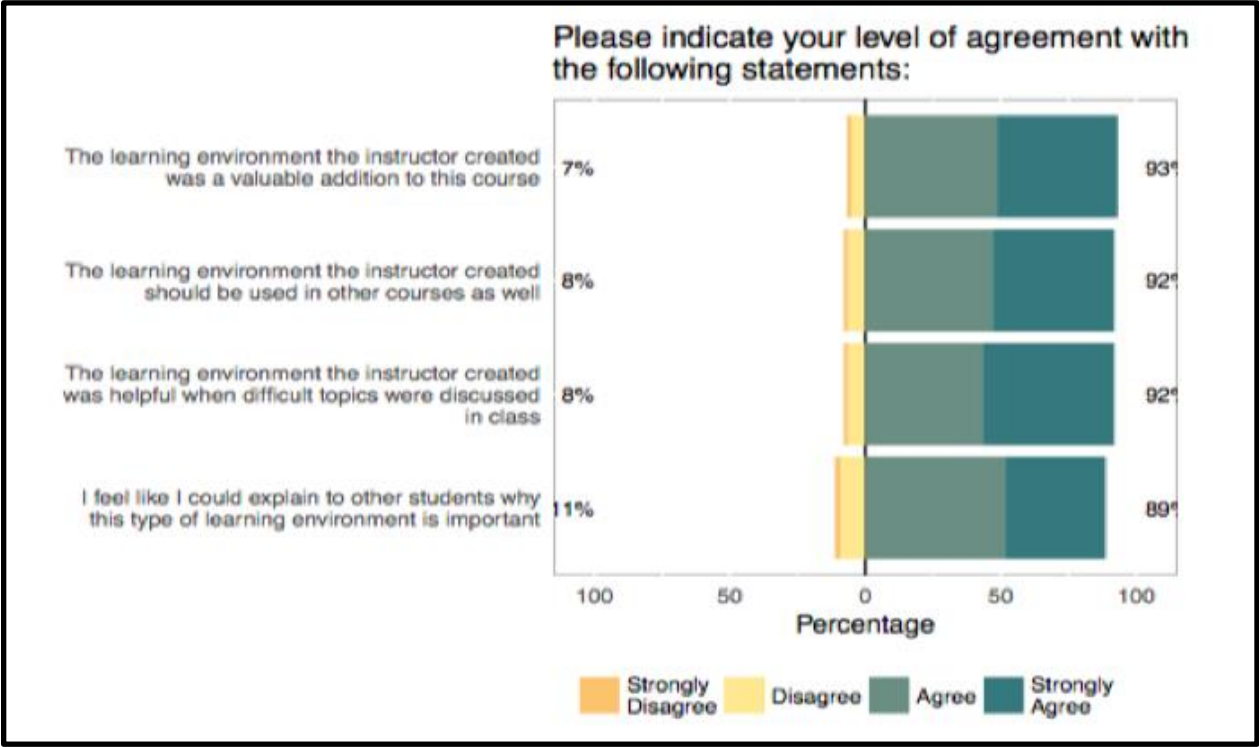
Figure 3: CC 303 (Mythology Course) End-of-Semester Feedback (Fall 2017, Spring 2018, Summer 2018)

Chapter 3: Amélie Nothomb, Autofiction, and Contemporary Takes on Collaboration

Introduction: Tracing Nothomb's Epistolary Development

We might begin this final chapter, as with Colette, by defining what constitutes a letter for Amélie Nothomb. Corresponding under this epistolary form has long been a part of Nothomb's life, despite its apparent outdatedness. Nothomb's mother, according to the author herself, has always been an avid letter composer. The author explains that her mother:

> [N]'en parle pas mais elle écrit très bien. C'est une épistolière extraordinaire. Elle a toujours écrit des lettres très longues avec tous les détails de ce que nous vivions. C'était souvent à mourir de rire. Toute la famille connaît ses lettres. Nous les photocopions, nous nous les passons. (Cited in Zumkir, 14)

We immediately notice how Nothomb's concept of recipient and correspondent is somewhat more complicated than traditional epistolary exchanges, in which there is theoretically but one intended recipient, especially in our contemporary conception of letter-writing. The singularity of the letter (one writer, one recipient, one missive) is complicated in this familial practice of photocopying and sharing this correspondence. Nothomb is already challenging our conception of the letter in her description of this childhood tradition. Singular correspondent becomes multiple listeners; in other words, recipient becomes audience. Despite contemporary beliefs, this practice is in line with old-fashioned traditions relating to the letter. In fact, it was common, as noted in the first chapter, to gather in the drawing room to read letters aloud. Only an explicit request to keep a portion of a letter to themselves would lead a recipient and reader to omit a section of the text. Perhaps, then, rather than considering this familial letter-reading as unusual, we might consider the manner in which this traditional practice stages the letter writer and recipient very differently, expanding the two-person exercise of writing and reading into a communal and collective exercise. Kern establishes the author as a letter composer from a very young age, quoting Nothomb as stating,

> Mes parents ont exigé de leurs trois enfants qu'à partir de l'âge de six ans, nous écrivions une lettre hebdomadaire à notre grand-père, inconnu, qui vivait en Belgique. Ca a été une clé—la clé, sans doute—puisque ce grand-père finalement a joué un rôle absolument capital. Nous ne savions pas qui il était, et il fallait lui écrire une lettre, à cet inconnu chaque semaine. (Cited in Zumkir, 242)

Nothomb, in referring to her grandfather as an "inconnu" twice in this quotation underlines the one sidedness of this weekly epistolary undertaking. Her first encounter with the letter then, is by way of writing to a correspondent who never responds. Yet Nothomb calls this exercise the key, explaining how crucial this grandfather was to her. Nothomb doesn't specify what he was the key to, but I think we can say with some certainty that corresponding with him was the first step in her epistolary development. The practice of writing to an unknown and unresponsive recipient might imply that the importance of the letter exists in the writing of one's life, as suggested by Rousset, rather than in the exchange of ideas, as we saw with Sand in the first chapter. This is indeed a unique and interesting way to learn to write, and of learning to stage the self. In this epistolary exchange that contains no quid-pro-quo, Nothomb must then imagine an interlocutor for herself, inventing what is essentially a reader rather than a correspondent, since no specifics about the recipient can be gathered. This imaginative exercise presumably becomes a fundamental component of the epistolary process for her, so often is it repeated in her childhood. Nothomb's whole relationship with correspondence begins with a non-respondent and an unknown, though one who is nonetheless an important part of her own self and body in his familial link to the author. The unusualness of this epistolary education will inform how she writes novels, and how, specifically, she is able to imagine her audience, and easily consider that audience to be, from the start, a (silent) interlocutor. In having to imagine her grandfather when composing letters to him, Nothomb thus develops the ability to turn an unknown correspondent into an imagined conversant. Rather than assuming that, due to this unresponsive epistolary exchange, Nothomb learned to write

with no one in mind, we might instead consider that Nothomb learned to always write with an imaginary someone in mind. She achieves, in other words, singularity across writing genres, the singularity that led Colette to love the letter so deeply and despise the novel so completely.

The relationship between Nothomb and her readers is a fascinating aspect of Nothomb's celebrity status. Nothomb in fact speaks of, and is questioned about, her correspondence with her readers often. Her habit of responding to almost every letter herself has become famous. We know Nothomb to be an author who carefully curates her image, who appears on talk shows and regularly accepts interviews, and whose presence in the public eye is therefore significant. Those who work for and around her are also often asked to speak to the author's persona. In one such interview, Nothomb's publisher is asked, "Lisez-vous le courrier qu'[Amélie] reçoit?", to which her publisher responds, "Personne d'autre qu'elle ne le lit" (Cited in Zumkir, 76). The publisher does not simply answer for himself—he answers for everyone. As either a rule or a non-verbalized agreement, it is made clear that Nothomb, and Nothomb alone, lays eyes on these missives. Nothomb further insists on the importance of the correspondent and her own careful response to that singular recipient and that precise letter. She explains in a televised appearance of her own, "je ne suis pas du style à écrire une lettre de politesse, quand j'écris c'est une vraie lettre. Je réponds vraiment à ce qu'on m'a dit" (Cited in Zumkir, 39). Nothomb deeply values the singularity of the letter, evidenced in her refusal to let anyone else respond to her readers' correspondence, even when it would considerably lessen her workload (the enormity of which she mentions often). In writing to every single reader herself and refusing to involve anyone else in the process, Nothomb creates an intimacy between herself and her readers, readers that she has been trained, since childhood, to visualize and come to care for, despite not knowing them personally.

Defining the Genre: Autofiction, Epistolarity, and Authorial Pacts

Before delving into Nothomb's works, fictional and otherwise, we might begin by considering how scholars have defined the complex genres that the author plays with, in order to properly understand what rules Nothomb is breaking, or perhaps even creating for herself. In defining these genres, I will attempt to understand the 'pact' that exists (or not) between author and reader based on various factors, mainly the classification, or presumed classification, of the work upon its publication (autobiography, fiction, autofiction, non-fiction, etc.).

We might begin with the very notion of 'pact,' since it is largely the thread that ties author and reader together, and defines the relationship between them. Philippe Lejeune was one of the earliest scholars to codify an author/reader pact in his 1975 work *Le Pacte autobiographique*. He proposed the following definition for autobiography: "Récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (14). Lejeune noted that the pact is often *implicit*. Therefore, the rules around such a pact become difficult to regulate. If, as Lejeune explained, the pact is indeed implicit, then many aspects of it necessarily remain a mystery, such as when (or even if) a pact takes place, who can or does break the pact, and the possibility of partaking in the pact without adhering to its rules. Lejeune spent the rest of this section, entitled "Pacte," elaborating on the various aspects of his definition, the understanding being that a work is considered an autobiography when an author adheres to these conditions. When an author chooses to replicate these conditions (i.e., for autobiography, a work written in the first person, about the individual experience rather than broad social or historical moments, in which the main character is the author themselves), then the author *implicitly* engages in the autobiographical pact with their reader. The reader, in turn, according to Lejeune, is asked to take the author at their word, but it is evident that the author's responsibility

far outweighs that of the reader. Of course, Lejeune spoke extensively to the many complications and exceptions that arise in defining this (and any) genre, specifying:

> Certaines conditions peuvent être remplies pour la plus grande partie sans l'être totalement…C'est là question de proportion ou plutôt de hiérarchie: des transitions s'établissent naturellement avec les autres genres de la littérature intime…. Et une certaine latitude est lassiée au classificateur dans l'examen des cas particuliers. (14)

He mentioned two conditions, however, that are essential to the autobiography, not in degrees but in an absolute fashion: firstly, that the text relates a biographical narrative, and secondly that the text be entirely personal.

This brings us to 'autofiction,'[63] the genre under which so many Nothombian works are published. In his article "L'autofiction, les femmes, les autres," Arnaud Genon points to the difference between autobiography and autofiction in terms of the author/reader pact:

> Ce chemin vers l'altruisme annoncé par le titre trouve de même sa réalisation dans le pacte propre au genre. Le pacte autofictionnel, contrairement au pacte autobiographique, n'entraine pas forcément l'adhésion du lecteur. Tout au moins, le lecteur reste-t-il libre d'accorder ou de suspendre sa croyance en ce que le narrateur lui soumet. (1)

Genon thus places the reader at the center of autofiction right next to the author as one who is free to decide whether or not to take the author at their word. There seems to be, then, an inclination towards a more egalitarian outlook in the genre of autofiction in its shift from the self in the autobiography to the self and the reader in autofiction. Genon further notes, "on comprend que l'autofiction, loin d'être un repli sur l'identité et le soi, constitue une ouverture vers l'autre, vers tous les autres" (1). This, I think, is a striking description of autofiction as a genre, one that recognizes the reader as a free agent rather than as a coextension of the authorial mind by which we are meant to believe that what we are told by the author is the 'truth.'

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[63] A term coined by Doubrovsky.

Notions of truth are complicated, and autofiction acknowledges, and plays upon, this. Louis Aragon's short-story "le Mentir-vrai," in which he described a factually imprecise childhood in the early twentieth century, coined the titular term that would long be associated with autofiction by scholars such as Karen Ferreira-Meyers: "[l'auteur] ment en toute sincérité; en quelque sorte ses mensonges représentent l'autofiction, ce "mentir-vrai" d'Aragon" (205).[64] Ferreira-Meyers equates the very terms 'autofiction' and 'mentir-vrai,' defining the latter as the act of lying in all sincerity. Similarly, Chloé DeLaume explains, "L'autofiction implique un pacte extrêmement particulier entre l'auteur et le lecteur. L'auteur ne s'engage qu'à une chose: lui mentir au plus juste" (67). As we will see later in the chapter, the 'sincere lie' is a method of meaning-making that Nothomb is particulary fond of—she seems to see a more important and fundamental truth hiding under the lie's surface. The lie itself almost becomes negligible; what counts is the truth that readers take away from the lie, not in terms of facts, but in terms of affect. Based on Aragon's notion of 'mentir-vrai,' Ferreira-Meyers' notion of "mentir en toute sincérité" (Ferreira-Meyres, 205), and DeLaume's idea of "mentir au plus juste" (67), I venture that the autofictional pact, if any such thing exists, might be enacted under the following seemingly paradoxical conditions: the author is speaking about a true *version* of themselves, and laying bare their personal truths all the while relating what are, on the surface, evidently lies; the reader, in turn, engages in the search for meaning rather than facts, giving the author total leeway in terms of bibliographical information but expecting to find, in this autoficial narrative, a more important truth about the author or the author's beliefs.

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[64] This assertion is in reference to a character in Nothomb's *Une Forme de vie*. I analyse this quotation contextually in a later section specifically on Nothomb's novel. For now, I am seeking definitions of autofiction in a broader sense.

We might finally turn to this dissertation's primary focus, the letter, and to Nothomb's use of the term "vraie lettre," 'true letter,' above (Zumkir, 39). She explains to her interviewer, "Je reçois un énorme courrier de lecteurs qui me ravit, mais je ne peux pas répondre à tout, car il est trop important. C'est très fatigant" (39). The exhaustion that comes from letter composition for Nothomb might be linked to her habit, developed at a young age, of essentially creating an interlocutor when she writes, an imaginative exercise that requires a significant and unusual level of constant mental exertion. Before she can respond, and as she responds, she must envision and keep imagining that other that is reading her words. The letter in Nothomb's life thus becomes confused with the novel—the construction of an epistolary correspondent renders writing to an unknown reader a familiar undertaking. But Nothomb emphasizes repeatedly throughout her countless interviews that when it comes to letter-writing, familiar is not a synonym for comfortable or easy. In a 2010 interview with Albin Michel, Nothomb goes so far as to state, "C'est [...] une forme d'esclavage, puisque j'y réponds" ("Interview," Michel). Nothomb often speaks as if she is captive to her letters, much like Colette wrote as if she were captive to her prose. Nothomb pushes the matter further still, noting not only the ways in which composing a letter is important yet exhausting, but the ways in which reading a letter is equally draining. A 'real letter,' then, as defined by Nothomb, is exceptionally burdensome, inevitably heavy in a quasi-literal sense. In defining a 'real' letter in the Nothombian universe, we might also remember that epistolarity is a genre that becomes confused for the author with other forms of writing; her epistolary recipient takes on the shape of an unknown reader. We, as scholars and part of the general public, don't have access to any of Nothomb's letters, as we did with Sand and Colette. This absence makes it trickier to understand why Nothomb persists in this form of communication, despite its outdatedness and its apparently unbearable weight.

In pondering this, we might consider the final pact to be discussed: the epistolary pact. Letters and autofictions have several points in common. Both are constructions of the self for another; both are acknowledged to be simultaneously authentic and constructed, to varying degrees; both are, as Annie Richards describes autofiction, a genre that exists in total ambiguity, mixing self-creation with the reality of the self. Jean Rousset describes this as, "un moyen de simuler ou de dissimuler tout autant que de se dire spontanément" (80). But the letter and autofiction have at least one important difference. The letter anticipates a response, and "cette présence constante du destinataire change le monologue en dialogue" (Rousset, 72). Therefore, the pact between reader and writer in autofiction has little to do with the pact between writer and recipient in correspondence. What is the epistolary pact, then, and does Nothomb uphold this pact with her correspondents?

While the autobiographical pact is famously defined in Philippe Lejeune's *Le Pacte autobiographique*, epistolary correspondence, while sharing many similarities with autobiography as it does with autofiction, requires its own pact. Janet Altman provides a solid foundation for defining the epistolary pact in *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*:

> I insist upon the fact that the reader is 'called upon' to respond. [...] To a great extent, this is the epistolary pact—the call for a response from a specific reader within the correspondent's world. Most of the other aspects of epistolary discourse [...] can be seen to derive from this most basic parameter. (89)

Over time, scholars have added several components to Altman's definition of the epistolary pact, including, "relationality, referentiality, temporality, and reciprocity" (Stanley, Salter and Dampier, 281). I argued above that, reading scholars such as Genon, we come to recognize autofiction as a genre in which the reader is more involved in the narrative than they are in the autobiography. When it comes to autofiction, the reader is meant to question facts, and understand the author's

deeper meaning, going beyond the narrative's accuracy. We might consider the epistolary pact, then, the writer/reader agreement in which the reader is the *most* involved. Based upon the above reflections, the epistolary pact is enacted upon the letter writer's (often implicit) desire for and expectation of a response. There may even be an additional step to the epistolary pact, whose conditions are seemingly not quite fulfilled until the letter-reader responds and becomes in turn the letter-writer.

In attempting to tease out some answers, I have thus far relied on Nothomb's way of discussing the letter in interviews and televised appearances, of which there are many. I want to turn, now, to her 2010 novel, *Une Forme de vie*, in which a fictional Amélie Nothomb explains, "ma capacité à supporter la douleur d'autrui était à bord de la rupture" (23). Nothomb will say as much repeatedly in her many interviews, describing how these readers' letters sap her energy and leave her close to a breaking point. Before delving into the novel itself, and its implications for Nothomb's views on epistolarity, however, I want to draw attention to scholarly analysis of the author, not only to contextualize my own analysis, but to contextualize this contemporary author's place in the literary and epistolary world thus far.

Gorging and Purging: Rethinking Metaphors for the Letter in *Une Forme de vie*

Unlike Colette with her persistent and categorical 'no's, Nothomb, like Sand, would rather take it all on, regardless of repercussions or consequences. Nothomb herself describes this compulsion to always take on more: "à tout prendre et définitivement du côté des goinfres, je préfère le problème de trop plein" (Zumkir, 245). Nothomb phrases the dichotomy (not enough versus too much) in terms of food, a diction her critics inevitably pick up on and imitate in their analyses of the author and her novels. Her use of the term "goinfres" suggests a gluttonous desire

for more and more letters, despite the exhaustion that this excess brings. Nothomb's identification with the "goinfres" of the world imbues the category with notions of animality, with those creatures whose urges are never resisted. Her critics follow suit in relation to her terminology. Zumkir, for example, considers the author "une boulimique de correspondance" (Zumkir, 38). Zumkir's language, one taken from the medical lexicon of eating disorders, calls to mind the idea of gorging and the subsequent purging that often follows. Though the excess in Nothomb's lifestyle might mirror the excess we noted in Sand's own lifestyle, the language surrounding this excess varies drastically between Sand and Nothomb. Sandian readers and critics deemed the author a "bisexual nymphomaniac" whose excess inspired such fear in Baudelaire that he only barely refrains from throwing buckets of holy water at the controversial author (Jack, 1). Her excess is tied to images of overt sexuality, terrifying devilishness, gender shifts and name changes. In other words, the excess is tied to constant and unapologetic recreations of the self.

Not so for Nothomb, whose desire or tendency to overdo consistently comes back to notions of food and (mal)nutrition. Specifically, these images related to either under- or overeating serve as metaphors for Nothomb's epistolary tendencies. Frédérique Chevillot similarly uses the language of food and excess, though she takes the metaphor in the opposite direction: "Amélie Nothomb, 'éternelle affamée' expertement révélée par Laureline Amanieux, s'est beaucoup attachée à mettre en valeur dans ses textes, l'importance de la faim, à tous les sens de désir de vie et de contrôle du corps évoqués par le terme" (Chevillot, 14). More starkly still, Chevillot claims, "De fait l'écriture d'Amélie Nothomb relève totalement de l'anorexie mentale dont a souffert la romancière" (Chevillot, 15). In fact, disordered-eating terminology is almost inevitably associated with Nothomb's work and correspondence, such as Zumkir's use of "boulimique" or Chevillot's "anorexie mentale" (Chevillot, 15). I want to pause here, to note that, however understandable,

since, as noted already, much of Nothomb's work addresses questions of the body and hunger, including the author's own anorexia, I believe that the appropriation of these disordered-eating terms in reference to anything other than the clinical conditions themselves to be troubling. The transference of concepts such as bulimia, anorexia nervosa, and other disordered-eating conditions onto other forms of trauma (i.e., Nothomb's personal struggles as she composes her novels, or war trauma, in the case of *Une Forme de vie*) minimizes the impact of these terms and confuses the general understanding of the severity of these disorders (as well as the severity of that other trauma being compared to the eating disorder), and risks romanticizing eating disorders by tying them to Nothomb's novels and by extension, her success as an artist. Susan Sontag phrased it succinctly and eloquently in 1978, stating that, "illness is not a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness—and the healthiest way of being ill—is one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking."[65] Sontag deems these metaphors "lurid" and sought decades ago to free our language of these problematic tendencies. Therefore, I want to veer away from this terminology, all the while acknowledging its importance in Nothombian texts and criticism. I want to consider this language of weight and disordered-eating and attempt to separate it from the analysis of epistolarity in Nothomb's life and texts, so as to posit as-of-yet unexplored approaches to the author's relationship with and conception of epistolarity. Ultimately, I want to offer a different set of metaphors, a new terminology, for Nothombian texts, and steer the critical discussion in another direction entirely.

Though we do not have access to Nothomb's own letters to her friends, family, or readers, as stated above, we have something that is perhaps more interesting still in its capacity for self-reflection; we have a novel written from the author's (auto)fictionalized perspective, recreating a

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[65] Online access.

fictionalized correspondence with a reader, *Une Forme de vie*. The short novel features a fictional correspondence between Amélie Nothomb,[66] who, as in life, is an author who avidly responds to readers' letters, and Melvin Mapple, who introduces himself to the author via letter as a lonely and depressed US Army soldier stationed in Baghdad. It is only towards the end of the novel that Melvin reveals he is not, in fact, an American soldier in Iraq, but rather an unhappy computer programmer who works from his parents' basement in Baltimore. Much of what Melvin writes to Nothomb concerns his obesity, which he claims to have developed as a response to the trauma he experiences at war. Once Amélie learns that there was no experience of war, she nonetheless understands Melvin's biographical fabrications to express something true. Whether or not the precise circumstances Melvin relates are factually true, Amélie believes in the emotional distress at the heart of Melvin's lengthy revelations relating to his weight and, more broadly, relating to some form of trauma in his life. This form of obscured metaphorical truth is enough for Amélie to accept Melvin and his narrative, regardless of how he chose to portray that narrative in writing to her.

To contextualize the work and its historical reference to a very real phenomenon, it might be best to begin by laying out the extradiegetic events that inspired Nothomb to write such a novel.[67] Nothomb claims that the premise for her epistolary novel is a newspaper article she read while visiting the States that outlined the rising rates of obesity in the American army. In interviews, she recounts wondering at this trend, which she describes as "une véritable épidémie d'obésité de soldats Américains en Iraq" ("Interview," Michel). She wanted to assess what relation

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[66] In order to distinguish between the Amélie Nothomb of *Une Forme de Vie* and the real author herself, I will hencerforth refer to the fictional character as "Amélie" and the actual author as "Nothomb." Though it may not be an ideal solution, it is, I think, less awkward than constantly having to specify "the fictional Nothomb" or "the real Nothomb."

[67] Acknowledging the very real trauma experienced by American soldiers that inspired Nothomb is important to the retention and understanding of these historical traumas by readers.

there could possibly be between obesity and being an American soldier. Presumably, the article does not offer explanations for this phenomenon, and Nothomb explains that this novel came out of a fascination with this seemingly inexplicable connection, rather than any explicit desire to explore the author-reader relationship through a simulated correspondence. The basic premise that rates of obesity[68] in American soldiers is growing consistently is true outside the world of the novel. In fact, it remains true almost a decade after Nothomb publishes her novel. In September of 2019, the *New York Times* published an article entitled "Trouble for the Pentagon: The Troops Keep Packing on the Pounds" (Philipps). The article presents "striking" statistics on obesity rates, and outlines 'solutions' that the army has implemented in an attempt to end this trend, such as keeping gyms open 24/7 and adding salad bars while limiting fried food in cafeterias on military bases across the country. Articles published in the *Military Times*, *Business Insider*, and the *Washington Times* present similar content, with critical headlines such as "U.S. Troops Too Fat to Fight?" and "America's obesity is threatening national security."

Nothomb's text uses this premise to compose her epistolary novel, though she comes at the matter from an entirely different perspective. Placing herself in the mind of an American soldier struggling with his body and his weight, she imagines what could cause this phenomenon, rather than analyzing statistics and offering 'solutions' to the epidemic. It is natural then that scholars would in turn come at the issue of Melvin and his narrative in terms of weight. After all, his story is based on obesity as a phenomenon in the army, so transferring matters of physical obesity into theoretical ones becomes easy. Michel David, for example, posits, "Melvin Mapple essaiera, par le biais d'une correspondance, d'un transfert déclaré à la romancière, de se constituer un remparts de lettres, de s'inventer un *corps* de lettres venant tenter de dire ou de contenir la monstrueuse

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[68] Defining and explaining the problematic nature of the term "obesity" would, once again, be a dissertation unto itself. I use the term when and as it is used by Nothomb, or the article writers.

obésité mortelle [...] qui le *dévore*" (David, 208; my emphasis). David uses the concept of a body of work, specifically a body of letters in this case, to argue that Melvin uses his correspondence with Amélie as an attempt to contain his "monstrous, deadly obesity." Again, terms like "devour" and, quite literally, "monstrous," project inhumanity onto the obese body, and Melvin himself as a person more broadly. In his own analysis of the text, Kern argues, "Le corps déformé de Melvin Mapple demeure l'enjeu capital de la correspondance; il est la motivation principale pour l'échange des lettres" (Cited in Zumkir, 147). I want to pause, once more, to emphasize the implication of the criticism's lexicon. Words like "monstrous" and "deformed" are attributed to Melvin's body, the obese body, seemingly without consideration for the connotations of such terms. It is important to simply recognize the problematic mirroring of Amélie's or Melvin's language as *characters* in an explicitly fictional realm onto the critics' language as experts and professionals in language and literature. Melvin's "deformed" body and his weight become the entire focus of the text in their critical analyses; it becomes the catalyst, perhaps even the entire basis, for Amélie and Melvin's epistolary exchange.

I want to challenge this argument and suggest that while the conversation around weight is certainly central to Amélie and Melvin's exchange, it is not the primary purpose for their exchange. Rather, it is the conduit to a more important conversation on epistolarity itself. In her 2012 article "L'Autofiction Épistolaire," Ferreira-Meyers notes the shifting dynamic between author and reader throughout the text, explaining that, "lecteur et auteur croisent leur plume jusqu'à inverser leur rôle, puisque Mapple est doté d'une puissance équivalente à l'écrivain : il ment. Et comble du génie, il ment en toute sincérité; en quelque sorte ses mensonges représentent l'autofiction, ce "mentir-vrai" d'Aragon" (205). *Une Forme de vie*, then, is about the process by which a reader becomes an author. Ferreira-Meyers seems to suggest that Melvin gets the better of Amélie within

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the novel. Not only does he lie, which puts him on par with all other authors, but he lies 'in all sincerity,' a trait that is not only authorial, but, according to the scholar, genius. It is Melvin himself, as character turned author, whose lies come to represent the concept of autofiction, in Ferreira-Meyers' analysis; she does not credit Nothomb with this same literary manoeuvre extradiegetically, within the larger cadre of the novel itself. Ferreira-Meyers only argues for Melvin's tactical use of lying, claiming,

> Mapple, écrivant à Nothomb, invente le roman de sa vie, Nothomb répondant à Mapple écrit le roman du Lecteur idéal de sa vie. *Une Forme de vie* est une mise en abîme de la fiction où le lecteur accompli est celui qui tend son miroir sur les plates-bandes du romancier, c'est à dire qui vit comme il ment, mystifie la réalité pour qu'ensemble ils construisent une oeuvre. (205)

Ferreira-Meyers explains that, in this text, Melvin constructs the novel of his own life, while Amélie constructs the novel of the 'ideal reader' of *her* own life. Ferreira-Meyers' identification of Melvin as an ideal reader is interesting, whether we agree with the analysis or not; if we do consider him the ideal reader, then we must assume that the ideal correspondence is risky, as so much of the novel revolves around Amélie's fear and hesitation in responding. Amélie is consistently questioning whether or not she should write back to Melvin—there is clearly something at stake for Amélie in this exchange. In other words, the collaboration is decidedly not a comfortable one. But perhaps this is part of Nothomb's commentary on epistolarity more broadly—constructive collaboration is not always cozy and intimate. An epistolary collaboration, when correctly undertaken, is an interpersonal risk.

Whether Melvin Mapple is Amélie's "ideal reader" or not, we might, as does Ferreira-Meyers, reframe the novel in such a way that decentralizes weight and instead refocalizes on the epistolary game, by which Amélie and Melvin are created by and create each other as their correspondence progresses. Their codependent relationship is in fact often discussed explicitly

throughout the course of the novel, almost as if they were settling the terms of an agreement, or perhaps more accurately, almost as if they were clarifying the status of their relationship. In the process of reassuring Amélie that he is not mistaking her for his psychiatrist, Melvin explains, "Ce que j'attends de vous est différent. Je veux exister pour vous. Est-ce prétentieux?" (57). Melvin understands that he is created and solidified by the active collaboration of the other; when the exchange is epistolary, it is also almost always by nature reciprocal.[69] But while much of the scholarship dwells on Melvin's need for Amélie, we might instead consider what it is that Melvin brings to the relationship, and the ways in which he constructs Amélie in return throughout the novel.

Melvin is not merely creating his own narrative in communication with her; he is contributing to Amélie's narrative, as well. Melvin's existence and correspondence allows Amélie to create a very specific and curated image of herself: "Pendant ma tournée américaine, je ne manquai pas de répéter à qui voulait l'entendre que je correspondais avec un soldat basé à Bagdad qui avait lu tous mes livres. [...] Je ne savais pas au juste de quelle aura cette information me couronnait, mais l'effet semblait excellent" (*Forme*, 17). Amélie uses Melvin's name and her connection to him as one would a celebrity's name to bolster the image and importance of oneself. If Melvin is the ideal reader, as Ferreira-Meyers suggests, then Amélie uses his readerly perfection to paint herself as the ideal author, whose skill is such that it touches individuals as different from her as American soldiers stationed in Baghdad. Melvin is more than a "lecteur idéal de sa vie" (Ferreira-Meyers, 205). He actively contributes to the narrative of her life; his exchange with Amélie over the course of the novel allows her to compose new versions of herself, as much as Amélie contributes to the creation of new versions of Melvin. In an early letter, Amélie explains,

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[69] Reciprocal at least in the embeddedness of the other within the letter, if not always in the presence or existence of a response from the recipient.

"J'ai parlé de vous partout: regardez cet article du *Philadelphia Daily Report*" (19). While she phrases this as though Melvin himself were the topic of interest, the only person of interest in this article is of course Amélie and the image she creates of herself for the media, for the public at large, and perhaps for herself, as well. In these instances, it is Melvin who gives her substance and importance as an author. They validate each other's existence, and allow each other to write and rewrite themselves and each other as characters within their own narratives. He writes her, just as she writes him throughout this text, and it is only in collaboration with each other that "ils construisent une oeuvre" (Ferreira-Meyers, 205). What is built within the text, then, is neither Amélie's self nor Melvin's self, but an oeuvre. Much of the criticism echoes Amélie's claim that she surely cannot emotionally handle an American soldier's confessions and that it is he who burdens her with his unbearable weight, when in fact, the characters give each other weight, which is to say, substance and importance.

The problem with analyzing the novel through the lens of real and metaphorical weight is that it does the epistolary process (even a simulated epistolary process) a disservice by creating a definitive imbalance within the exchange. It places all of the weight onto Melvin, and accuses him of displacing all of this weight onto Amélie through their correspondence. Kern phrases it perhaps the most forcefully when he states, "Peu importe s'il s'agit d'amitié ou d'amour, les relations interpersonnelles sont toujours un combat à mort dans lequel l'un cherche à incorporer l'autre" (Cited in Zumkir, 151). Yet the relationship between Amélie and Melvin seems much more complex than a fight to the death in which one correspondent violently incorporates the other. Even while they remain epistolary writers, they are constantly in negotiation of which of them is authoring their shared narrative. Melvin explains, "Il me faut un être humain qui soit en dehors de tout ça et qui en même temps soit proche de moi: c'est ça, un écrivain, non?" (56). The role of

'écrivain' is not stable throughout the novel, though. Beyond the basic premise of its epistolarity, which creates some sort of balance, however imperfect, they also collaborate in writing each other's narratives, and thereby create a third narrative, which allows them not only to switch between recipient and writer, but between character and author.

While Melvin helps create an Amélie that is more worldly, a quasi-universal author capable of touching every reader, Amélie helps create a Melvin whose body is part of a larger artistic narrative rather than the central aspect of his self, a Melvin whose friends are invested in him and whose body has the potential to become something more than a reminder of traumas, whether they are war traumas or not. Unlike Kern, then, who believes that, "L'envahissement par l'autre, voire l'envahissement de l'autre, est le conflit centrale d'*Une forme de vie*" (Cited in Zumkir, 151), I believe that the central 'conflict' of the story is the negotiation between author and character, creator and created, Amélie and Melvin. It is only through the collaborative process of their epistolary exchange that either takes on substance in this "oeuvre" to which they contribute together (Ferreira-Meyers, 205). They are, in some sense, writing each other's autofictions, all the while Nothomb herself is also writing an autofiction. In differentiating between autofiction and the letter, I would underline the role of the other in these genres. Autofiction is the construction of the self through a *mentir-vrai*. While there may or may not be an intended (or unintended) audience, the role of the other is not the primary component of the text. The letter, however, is a construction of the self in relation to and explicitly for the other—the recipient is always present, and fundamental to the writing process. The mise-en-abyme of *Une Forme de vie* is a little dizzying in its complexity. Autofiction can be confusing enough in itself, as evidenced by its paradoxical description of a truthful lie. Together, Melvin and Amélie alternately take on the role of author and that of reader, lying to each other in all sincerity, as Ferreira-Meyers puts it. Melvin eventually

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expresses the feeling, "C'est comme si j'avais une autre vie ailleurs" (61), 'autre' being a key component of this sentiment, as is the ambiguous 'ailleurs.' Melvin hasn't 'incorporated' Amélie or set himself up within her in some metaphorical capacity. What they have both done is create a separate space *ailleurs* for new narratives. It is not each other that they are occupying; rather, through their epistolary correspondence, they create other narrative spaces for them to occupy. The mise-en-abyme, then, serves to reinforce the reader's role as an active participant, and as Melvin becomes author to Amélie's life, we as readers are left wondering about our own role within this complicated literary exchange.

In fact, in writing a novel in which a version of Nothomb's own self features as a main character,[70] it is natural to take a moment to consider what the novel might mean for the author, and for her own avid readers and correspondents. Should we understand from the novel that she is reaching a breaking point in accepting her correspondent's letters? Alternatively, can we understand it as a Nothombian ode to the reader, in all of its Nothombian strangeness? In a 2010 interview for *Le Monde*, Michel David references Nothomb's comments on reader-writer correspondence: "Les lettres autorisent selon elle 'la lecture [qui] permet de découvrir l'autre en conservant cette profondeur que l'on a uniquement quand on est seul.'"[71] Stepping away from metaphors of weight, burdens, invasions, and violence more broadly, we might focus instead on Nothomb's metaphor of depth, which she mentions more than once in relation to epistolarity. In a separate interview, Zumkir quotes the author stating, "tant de gens m'ont lue, et tant de gens m'ont bien lue. Il s'est passé entre moi et ces gens que je n'ai pas forcément rencontrés des relations d'une profondeur absolument extraordinaire" (157). In these instances, Nothomb does not portray

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[70] For further analysis of the problematic nature of simulating the writing and experience of a soldier stationed in Irak, see passages below on notions of 'truth' in literature starting on page 153 of this document.
[71] Interview by Michel David, Le Monde, 2010. See Works Cited for complete source information.

epistolary correspondence with readers as creating burdens, but rather as creating depths, which can admittedly be trying, difficult to enter into and difficult to come out of; but difficult is not equivalent to burdensome, a weight is not the same as a depth. It cannot be denied that Nothomb herself, both in novels and in interviews, often comes back to weight—in texts and in person, she focuses on her own and others' weight, particularly on the anorexia she suffered from as a young woman. But it is only within her fiction that she relates physical weight to epistolarity and the process of knowing the other. Acknowledging the manner by which Amélie comes to understand Melvin's weight within *Une Forme de vie* is important, but perhaps there are other lenses through which we should explore this text.

In David's interview referenced above, Nothomb is asked about *Une Forme de vie*, and whether she meant the text as a representation of her correspondence with her readers. She reiterates that the novel is fictional, that no such person as Melvin has ever existed. Her reason for writing the text is unusual and complex. She explains, "Ce livre ci, c'est la confidence de la confidente. Tant de gens m'ont pris pour leur confidente, et là c'est la confidente qui vous prend cette fois ci pour confident. Vous voyez ce que c'est d'être la confidente de tant de gens? Croyez vous qu'on s'en sort?" Again, Nothomb returns to notions of depths with expressions such as 's'en sortir,' and again, the image emphasizes the difficulty, and not necessarily the burden or weight, of a correspondence. What is particularly interesting about this explanation, though, is that Nothomb essentially states that her novel is meant to function as a letter. The *confident(e)* is a traditional actor in the epistolary genre. In *Epistolarity, Approaches to a Form*, Janet Altman warns against extremes in her analysis of *La Nouvelle Héloise*; too much or too little *confidence* leads to trouble (52). But as noted earlier, Nothomb, '*plutôt goinfre*,' is not one to shy away from extremes. In the interview, Nothomb comes back to the difficulty of the letter, specifically the difficulty of

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reading and processing so many individuals' stories and traumas. Nothomb then sets up a parallel; she concedes how difficult it is to take on the role of confidant for so many epistolarians, and defiantly proclaims her readers to be the new confidants of *her* letter (in the form of her novel), this time. Her sudden shift from the distancing third person ("tant de gens," "leurs") to the more direct "vous" within the same sentence signals, I think, a realization on the part of Nothomb, a shift in her thought process. It is as if, halfway through her sentence, the emotional toll of her role as confidante strikes her, and she becomes almost threatening, "Vous voyez ce que c'est d'être la confidente [...] Croyez vous qu'on s'en sort?" If this is the parallel that Nothomb sets up (readers take her as confidante in writing her letters, and now she takes them on as confidante in this novel), it suggests that *Une Forme de vie* functions as the letter in this exchange between herself and her readers by which she will force the reader into the role of epistolary confidant. It isn't only that the novel itself is an epistolary one, then; it is that Nothomb intends this novel as an epistle. Nothomb's tone is alarming. She sounds as if she is challenging the reader to take up the confidante mantle. In fact, it seems as if Nothomb is looking for retribution; she has been all of her readers' confidant for too long.

In a broader sense, then, I argue that the statement reveals that Nothomb thinks of her novels, at least in part, as letters to her readers. It seems paradoxical that Nothomb would write a novel to show her readers how difficult it is to have so many correspondents, when she herself is instigating the correspondence by writing texts that she sees as letters. From the publication of her very first novel, Nothomb's readers have sent her letters; and from the very beginning, Nothomb has responded to them. She must, then, have anticipated that her readers would send her letters in regard to this novel, as they have for every other text she has published over the past two decades (twenty-seven years to be exact, which is to say, twenty-seven novels). Even as Nothomb writes

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an epistolary novel about the dangers and difficulties of epistolary correspondence, she is all the while ensuring that the correspondence she struggles through within the text—that of her own correspondence with her readers—continues outside of it. Ultimately, then, I argue that this novel, while diegetically an epistolary novel about the difficulty of letter reading and writing, is extra-diegetically one more novel amidst Nothomb's dozens of novels that functions as a letter to ensure that the author's epistolary relationship with her readers continues.

Nor would a true Nothombian reader be deterred by the argument within the novel. They would, I think, hear the invitation to a correspondence behind her character's epistolary complaints. In an interview for *Le Monde*, Nothomb considers the process of writing *Une Forme de vie*, and concludes, "Quand j'ai commencé à écrire le livre je ne savais pas du tout que c'était ça" ("Interview," David). The "ça" refers to her own correspondence with her readers, the interviewer expressing the opinion that the novel explores this theme above all others. It wouldn't do to dwell on Nothomb's apparent (perhaps feigned) obliviousness in not having any idea that her novel, which is about an author named after Nothomb herself corresponding with a reader, is on some level about her own correspondence with her readers. But perhaps, as with Colette's refusal to accept that she might be the greatest prose writer alive, there is something more to this comment. We can, I think, explore this comment of Nothomb's while still taking her at her word, as Kristeva does with Colette. Nothomb has stated that, "Même avec une personne que je vois au quotidien, il y a ce besoin d'écrire. Sinon il manque quelque chose à notre relation" (David, 10). Of course, Nothomb isn't referring to text messages and emails here, though we might easily consider these modern methods of communication to be the contemporary replacements for the letter. The fundamental method of communication for Nothomb remains the letter, even with people she sees every single day. Despite the intensity and weight of corresponding that Nothomb

speaks to in *Une Forme de vie* as well as in interviews about the novel, she insists on filling her relationships of all kinds with letters, even those relationships that would not traditionally call on any kind of epistolary exchange—otherwise, Nothomb claims, they lose substantiality. In titling her only epistolary novel thus far *Une Forme de vie*, I argue that Nothomb underlines the link between life and letter writing; she seems to suggest that letter composition is a form of life or living, in and of itself. We might explore, then, the expectations at play in Nothomb's epistolary world.

Nothombian Novels and the Author/Reader Pact

In her November, 2019 publication in the New York Review of Books, "Fascinated to Presume: in Defense of Fiction," the extraordinary author Zadie Smith makes an argument for the fundamental right to write from different perspectives, to inhabit individuals with whom we share no cultural heritage or personal traumas. She blames a modern "hypersensitivity to language" to be one of the root causes of our skepticism of those who write from identities and viewpoints other than their own. "Full disclosure:" says Smith near the start of her article,

> what insults my soul is the idea—popular in the culture just now, and presented in widely variant degrees of complexity—that we can and should write only about people who are fundamentally "like" us: racially, sexually, genetically, nationally, politically, personally. That only an intimate authorial autobiographical connection with a character can be the rightful basis of a fiction. I do not believe that. I could not have written a single one of my books if I did. (4)

Deconstructing and attempting to define 'Truth' is *not* one of my objectives in this chapter. However, the question of whose truths can be divulged and by whom is relevant. In this article, Smith also presents, just as eloquently, the counterargument to her own belief:

> The risk of containment is the risk of false knowledge being presented as truth—it is the risk of caricature. Those who are unlike us have a long and dismal history of trying to

contain us in false images. And so—the argument runs—if we are to be contained by language, let that language at least be our own. (8)

Though I stand, myself, on the latter side of the argument, which Smith outlines so well, I am not sure that the primary question in terms of writing is about 'truth' and 'fiction.' Those are matters that apply only to our individual selves—is this narrative 'truly' the author's? Has it been appropriated? The question I want to look at is an interpersonal one; after all, authors write for readers, so the act of writing is naturally an exchange. My question lies in the exchange, or in our expectations of the exchange: what kind of pact exists between author and reader, and when is it that one or the other feels that the pact has been broken? These are the questions that I would like to explore—and further elaborate upon in re-contextualizing these questions into the realm of teacher/student pacts in our classrooms—in this final section on Nothomb and her particular connection to her readers.

In arguing that the novel functions as a letter for Nothomb, the stakes and expectations of her texts, in other words, the pact by which she abides, have suddenly entirely changed. In writing, for example, *Une Forme de vie* as autofiction, she abides by the *mentir-vrai* coined by Aragon as outlined earlier in this chapter. There is an autobiographical level to the text, and it reflects a larger extradiegetic issue, but in terms of plot and characters, it remains fiction. If, as Chloé Delaume explains, autofiction is a matter of lying truthfully (Delaume, 67), then Nothomb upholds this pact of autofiction with her reader. We might recall the definitions of the epistolary pact outlined at the start of the chapter: the letter anticipates a response, and "cette présence constante du destinataire change le monologue en dialogue" (Rousset, 72). Or, as Altman puts it, "the reader is called upon to respond" (89). Does Nothomb uphold this pact with the reader as well? Based on these definitions, Nothomb abides by certain aspects of the pact, but not others. Certainly, Nothomb writes novels such that readers are 'called upon' to respond, since inevitably, they do respond, by

the thousands. The call must be in the text somewhere. But Altman specifies that "the call for a response [comes] from a specific reader within the correspondent's world" (89). In Nothomb's case, the call cannot be said to be to a "specific reader," though, since novel-writing involves mass audiences, the very fact that so troubled Colette in writing her own novels. But we might remember that Nothomb is used to writing letters without much of a 'specific reader' in mind. From the age of six, she composes countless letters to her grandfather, who is, for all intents and purposes, an unknown entity. He is a single recipient, but not quite a 'specific' recipient. Nothomb could not write anything that specifically pertained to him, since she had no basis for his character or his interests, and she already knew not to expect a response. Stanley, Salter and Dampier condense Altman's argument into the phrase, "ingrained assumption of reciprocity" (277). Such a concept was never ingrained in Nothomb, however. Can one break an epistolary pact when its "most basic parameter" is not part of one's epistolary education (277)?

Not even Nothomb's letters, much less her novels, would pass the test of the epistolary pact if we were to consider all of the individual components listed above as prerequisites. We have already seen how Nothomb's correspondence with her grandfather, for instance, does not necessarily accomplish any sort of reciprocity. It is reasonable to conclude that, as with the autobiographical pact, not every single property of the epistolary pact must be adhered to for the pact to take effect. One question that might be further investigated is that of consent. Altman defines the epistolary pact as the call to respond. But when does the pact take effect? After all, the notion of the pact implies that the agreement has been solidified in some formal manner between the parties. Since this pact isn't made explicit in the letter exchange, who has the right to decide whether the pact has been broken, and how does such a breaking happen? With all of this ambiguity

surrounding the epistolary pact, it would be difficult to ascertain whether Nothomb or either of her characters are in breach of this 'contract' of sorts.

I would venture that Nothomb, whose epistolary development was unique, is less constrained by notions of pacts, be they epistolary or otherwise. After all, the epistolary pact, like the autobiographical pact and other agreements, is about expectations above anything else, and the expectations that Nothomb attributes to letter-writing are unusual—in fact, it is almost as if she approaches the letter, as the novel, without expectations, or at least that most basic of epistolary expectation of reciprocity. She writes without expecting a response, since her epistolary habits grew from a non-reciprocal relationship. As a child, Nothomb writes letters to a depersonalized grandfather who remains a stranger and who, as far as we know, never writes back. Thus the importance of both the reciprocity and the singularity of the letter fade. She learns to write letters to someone who is no one in particular, that she must herself imagine and give shape to, and to write them without expecting a response. Yet she discovers, from the publication of her very first novel, that these texts, unlike her letters thus far, *will* instigate a response, and ultimately lead to a correspondence. Nothomb explains,

> Trois jours après la publication de mon premier livre, *Hygiène de l'assassin*, j'ai reçu ma première lettre de lecteur. Et ça, je ne savais pas que ça allait se produire. [...]. Ca m'a stupéfiée. Ces gens de l'autre côté du papier commencent à m'écrire et cette fois-ci c'est eux qui ont pris l'initiative. (Cited in Zumkir, 233-234)

Finally, then, someone hears Altman's "call to respond" in Nothomb's writing (89). That this call did not always exist for her in relation to the letter, but manifested itself in her novels, blurs the boundary between letter and novel in Nothomb's world. Not only are the characteristics of the epistolary pact unclear, but which pact it is that Nothomb should be adhering to (autobiography, autofiction, fiction, epistolary) is itself unclear. In essence, Nothomb holds no expectations from

readers or recipients. The lack of expectations sets up a particular kind of collaboration, in which what one brings to the text is entirely undetermined—there are no rules.

There being no clear pact between the author and the reader (or letter writer and recipient) in the Nothombian literary realm could be problematic. We know that these pacts do, in fact, matter very much to readers. This has been evidenced again and again with multiple published works. For instance, James Frey's infamous *A Million Little Things* (2003), published as a memoir in which he claims a drug addiction, among other traumas, caused nation-wide controversy when "The Smoking Gun" published an article, cheekily titled "A Million Little Lies" (January 8, 2006), denouncing the author's many fabrications. At the heart of this outcry is exactly the same controversy as that found within *Une Forme de vie*;[72] it is specifically the appropriation of trauma that shocks and enrages the public. "The Smoking Gun" explains it as follows,

> Frey [..] invented a role for himself in a deadly train accident that cost the lives of two female high school students. In what may be his book's most crass flight from reality, Frey remarkably appropriates and manipulates details of the incident so he can falsely portray himself as the tragedy's third victim. It's a cynical and offensive ploy [...]. (January 8, 2006)[73]

The diction is telling. The anonymous journalist denounces the so-called memoir as appropriation and manipulation, acts that are, according to the article and the interviews of the public within the article, especially "crass" because these attributions lay claim to someone else's trauma, allowing Frey to paint himself as "the tragedy's third victim." The betrayal here seems twofold; readers, according to the information collected in this article, feel that Frey has claimed someone's very real traumatic narrative without suffering any of the effects of this trauma, and they feel that Frey has used them somehow, 'manipulated' them. Strangely, when Frey's fabrications came to light

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[72] The controversy with *Une Forme de vie*, however, exists only diegetically. It is Amélie as a character/reader who is taken in by Melvin's personal and presumably factual narrative, rather than Nothomb herself who tricks us, as readers, into a factually untrue narrative. Though whether or not the latter is true as well remains up for debate.
[73] Accessed October 18, 2019

three years later, he doubled down on the authenticity of every detail, insisting that only names were changed for the purpose of anonymity. But eventually, Frey explains himself in a manner that resembles the way in which Amélie ultimately explains away Melvin's fictionalized trauma: ""I was a bad guy [...]. If I was gonna write a book that was true, and I was gonna write a book that was honest, then I was gonna have to write about myself in very, very negative ways."[74] In a January 2011 interview with CNN's Larry King, Frey stands by his book, and calls it "a truthful retelling of the story" (Wyatt, *New York Times*). This notion of telling a factually inaccurate narrative in order to get at something truer is exactly that which Chloé Delaume and others define as autofiction's purpose (see Delaume, 67). Frey was therefore abiding by one literary pact, that of autofiction.

But this becomes irrelevant in the face of the "memoir" attribution upon publication, so much so that readers sued Frey, demanding refunds for the partially falsified memoir.[75] Amélie, within the novel, is nonplussed by Melvin's revelation. She understands his tale to be a more truthful version of his trauma than any factual narrative. In justifying her apparent indifference to this confession, Amélie humorously, though in all seriousness, claims that attachment to 'truth' is a particularly American characteristic, implying that she is European enough to understand truth is a complex, and decidedly non-factual, phenomenon. Amélie, then, within the novel, attempts to deconstruct the epistolary pact, and the responsibility of each party, to provide more leeway within the pact, or perhaps to do away with the pact altogether.

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[74] As quoted by "The Smoking Gun," pulled from an interview on the Oprah show.

[75] Interestingly, if somewhat of a side note to my main argument, the exact opposite situation is possible as well, as evidenced by Karl Ove Knausgaard's provocative *My Struggle* (2009), which the author publishes a text as fiction, but writes what is essentially as a memoir. The press quickly attempted to find and contact the members of his family mentioned in the novel, leading to intense scrutiny and distress for the members of the family.

I argue Nothomb ultimately manages to build a new pact, redefining the author/reader relationship entirely. To begin making sense of this new Nothombian pact, it might be useful to consider the history of the author/reader relationship, or at least its recent history. Henry Jenkins, a media scholar who has spent his career researching the relationship between authors or creators and their fans, redefined fans as active participants in the creative process, as opposed to passive recipients of art, as fans were often portrayed prior to his publications. In *The Drama of Celebrity*, Sharon Marcus complicates Jenkins' argument, explaining that Jenkins, in revering the active forms of fandom (such as writing fan fiction), is only denigrating passive forms of fandom (simply reading a text or watching a film). Marcus argues that, "only a handful of fans express themselves by producing original and autonomous objects" (95). Marcus' argument lies in defining a liminal space for fans, whom she insists are not passive, but active in more subtle ways (collecting, displaying, contemplating, etc) (96). She says that even those fans who actively participate in producing works of their own in relation to the art they love favor "genres such as scrapbooks and fan mail, which foster proximity, familiarity, and interdependence" (96). I am less interested in whether the fans' actions are passive or active, and more interested in what it is that these actions foster. All fans' actions foster some form of collaboration—whether it is only by engaging with an author's text, or whether it is by creating works based on that text, organizing conventions, or pursuing any other form of connectedness outside of the self. But the expressions of fandom that most interest me are the ones that engage with the author in such a way that deconstructs the author-reader (creator/fan) hierarchy. Though Jenkins speaks to this idea in his work, he describes communities that are almost cliques. Marcus describes these communities Jenkins researches and promotes as "'adversarial' collectives that resist and oppose dominant powers and mainstream culture" (94), suggesting that readers are not so much collaborating in the creation of the author's

influence and world, but rather rewriting these. This is not entirely a deconstruction of the hierarchy; it is perhaps better described as a redistribution of power. Adversarial collectives are unlikely to collaborate.

What Nothomb creates with her novels is more than a creatively independent fandom that rewrites and expands upon her narratives. In returning to my earlier argument, I believe that Nothomb creates a conscientiously collaborative author/reader relationship, by which her published texts function more as letters than novels. Her epistolary development, as analysed in the early portion of this chapter, and her subsequent publications, as seen through her own words during interviews and as well as through the example of *Une Forme de vie*, invert the expectations of each genre, such that letters don't instigate responses and are not necessarily written to a known individual.[76] Her novels, however, to her great surprise, do instigate responses.[77] In answer to her novels, readers send her letters of all varieties, and answering these missives becomes for Nothomb almost a compulsion.[78] She seems to regard it as a duty of sorts, which perhaps means that she considers herself the instigator of an epistolary pact by way of her novels, which might explain the responsibility she feels in responding to dozens of correspondence daily. If this analysis of Nothomb's relationship to her novels holds, Nothomb seems to manage what Colette wished she could accomplish: she redefines the novel as an interdependent process between reader and author, disassembling the hierarchy between the two such that publications become exchanges.

Teaching Nothomb and the Matter of Pedagogical Pacts

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[76] See her letters to her grandfather discussed at the start of this chapter.

[77] See analysis of her response to the letters that begin pouring in from readers upon her first publication, which she discusses in interviews quoted in this chapter.

[78] See her remarks on responding to readers' letters during interviews, as analysed early on in this chapter, describing her insistence on writing back to readers as a weight or burden.

Disassembling pacts between consenting individuals (such as author and reader) is fascinating, but introducing ambiguity into a pact does leave room for questionable ethical practices, as evidenced by Frey's story. And if ambiguous pacts might have a place in literature with certain texts and readers, as executed successfully by Nothomb and unsuccessfully by Frey, ambiguous pacts become troubling when they enter our classrooms. Despite the problematic nature of ambiguity in a pedagogical context, there is no abundance of literature on the student/teacher pact, especially within the higher-education context. Yet this context is entirely different from any other instructor/student relationship, college students being, generally speaking, more independent than ever and legally speaking, adults—the relationship is, in theory, between one adult and another. Of course, due to power dynamics, financial aid awards, paid positions, and so on, the relationship between undergraduate or graduate student and instructor is much more complicated than this. Though not evidently directly related to the Humanities pedagogical field, there is a 1990 text, *Curriculum Revolution: Redefining the Student-Teacher Relationship*, written by a group of nurses in which they reconsider the social setup between nurse and nursing student. In her chapter, Jean M. Symonds outlines the problematic nature of hierarchy in these contexts, explaining,

> The social relationship between students and teachers are arbitrarily made unequal and are identified by binary opposition. In teacher versus student, teaching versus learning, and identity versus difference, the first term is accorded primacy and the second term is denoted as weaker; yet the first term derives its meaning from the second term. (47)

In her chapter, Symonds calls for a feminist approach to pedagogy, defining feminism in a way that speaks to the text's 1990 publication date. She mentions four fundamental aspects of feminism, including the idea that women and women alone have a say in what the term 'feminine' entails (51). She does not specify what she means by "women." Despite the misguidedness of this particular sentiment, Symonds' overall point remains relevant today: the vertical power dynamic should be questioned, and eventually reconstructed as more of a diagonal, if not horizontal,

communal dynamic. This is, after all, what I have been advocating for throughout this dissertation—a collaborative, rather than hierarchical literary and pedagogical dynamic. Symonds gives examples from various studies, suggesting pedagogical methods that encourage community over authority. These small teaching practices include setting the desks up in a circle, and having the instructor take part in that circle rather than stand in front of the class, as well as beginning each class session with a 'check-in' period. These practices are meant to acknowledge students and teachers holistically, rather than strictly in their role as members of an academic institution, thereby humanizing both parties.

In writing novels that function as letters, Nothomb is similarly minimizing the power differential between author and reader, creating an engaged community of correspondents where there would otherwise be an authorial monologue. In so doing, she reinvents the pact between author and reader, or at least her own pact between herself and her readers, such that the pact becomes reciprocal in nature; she will write to readers as readers will write to her. Symonds seems to be arguing for a similar destabilization of the hierarchical teacher/student relationship, presumably also based on some version of an unspoken pact. Is Symonds right in wanting to equalize the student/teacher relationship, as I argue Nothomb does in her published works? More broadly still, how might we define the student/teacher pact, if indeed there is one? Of course, universities, like all teaching institutions, have some explicit rules regarding the relationships between its professors and their students. Do these rules act as the components that make up the pact itself? Are they part of the pact, or entirely separate from the pact, if we are to consider pacts as personal agreements, and consider rules as institutional agreements? And what is to be done when, as is the case with most institutions across the States, the rules aren't, in fact, explicit or clear at all?

We might preface this discussion with the fact that professors and educators in colleges and universities across the country are largely not supported in their efforts to focus on pedagogical matters. For instance, few universities consider teaching records as a primary measurement for a professor's tenure candidature. In their book *Rethinking Reflection and Ethics for Education*, Scott Webster and John Whelen regret the separation of teaching from ethics, which they argue,

> has offered teachers a limited, partial and caricatured vision of what teaching and learning might be. Without the teacher being urged to reflect on this turn towards the meaning of their work, and perhaps in the absence of having sufficient tools with which to do so, the task of confronting a constantly demanding policy environment is made all the more difficult. (2)

Instructors and professors, placed in charge of dozens to hundreds of students a year, are rarely offered the support they need from higher-education administration to (re)consider their teaching philosophies and materials each year, much less each semester. Webster and Whelen explain the role that teachers play in students' lives eloquently, as follows:

> [B]ecause teachers exist as human persons in a holistic sense, with their emotive and aspirational dispositions, they share an existence (sometimes 'online') with other persons; therefore, an inescapable ethical context arises in which we must be continuously mindful of—reflect on—our relationships with and influence on others. (1)

They insist that ethical matters can never be considered as secondary to intellectual or pedagogical matters, because ethics permeate these realms as well. There is no separation of the pedagogical from the ethical. Thus far, they argue, approaches to classroom management "generally fail to recognize the *humane*[79] context in which education should take place" (4). They call for a pullback from "psychologists and scientistic approaches to learning," and ask that education allow "teachers a chance to 'rethink' the nature of reflection and ethics in the context of *education*" (5).[80]

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[79] All emphases Webster and Whelen's own.
[80] Specifically, Webster and Whelen argue that educators return to the writings of Dewey (1989), who stated that "all thinking 'involves a moral outlook' as teachers are in important relationships with their students who are not

Researchers, administration, students, and teachers alike recognize the difficulty of educators' positions within higher-education. They are asked to serve a multitude of functions, often primarily as researchers, advisors to countless students, as well as active members of their research communities, journal editors, article reviewers, and of course, teachers. Academia seems to either lack or intentionally do away with explicit codifications and detailed descriptions of professorial expectations. Perhaps they, like Nothomb, feel the ambiguity to be a productive one, in which professors are allowed the room to stretch in whichever direction they feel most appropriate at any given time. But this can present evident difficulties for faculty, who are provided only with vague but intense levels of expectation without specific rules to follow and codes by which to act.

In her 2010 article for the online journal *Sexuality & Culture*, "Hot for Teacher: The Ethics and Intricacies of Professor-Student Relationships," Lisa Barbella delves into the complexities of the wrongs and rights of this academic interaction. On the UT Library Systems website, the article is one of the first results in a list of articles that primarily address, as is so often the case with pedagogy, the K-12 classroom. The article is close to a decade old, but very little, if anything, has changed in the conversation around the professor/student relationship since that time; at the very least, close to nothing has been published on it. Above her article appears a series of keywords, where "Romantic Relationship" is sandwiched between "Sexual Harassment" and "Unfair Treatment." Barbella begins her article in a manner that suggests that she sees the system as problematic and that the norms of conduct in professor/teacher relationships should be codified:

> Compared to most professional work environments, where typically extensive training on sexual harassment and intra-office romantic relationships is given, there is a relative lack of formal policy on many college campuses, and students and professors receive little or no briefing on this topic. [...] The line of propriety in student–professor relationships is blurry at best and invisible at worst, even amongst experienced education professionals.[81]

merely 'learners' but are human persons understood in a holistic sense, and who are intimately connected with life beyond the classroom" (5).

[81] Online article—no page numbers.

A codification of the professor/student relationship does in fact seem like a logical and simple enough solution. Yet, despite the fact that rules of this nature are enforced in almost all work places, many in the academic community consider these policies to be an infringement of fundamental individual freedoms. In fact, Barbella herself unexpectedly concludes the article by seemingly aligning herself with this viewpoint, stating that, "Ultimately, college students are adults and thus have the legal and ethical right to choose with whom to engage in a personal, romantic or sexual relationship as long as his/her partner is a consenting adult" (Barbella, *Sexuality & Culture*). This is the current situation, as most university laws stand today. But whether a legal right constitutes an ethical right seems questionable, though Barbella makes this leap without hesitation or explanation. Additionally, what constitutes a "consenting adult" seems dubious at best in this context. How could power dynamics not complicate "consenting" as a concept, considering that these hierarchical structures ensure that the freedom necessary to make a decision is at the very least stunted by the risk of loss (of one's job, position, funding, academic support, etc.)?

The policies that currently exist around student/professor relationships can primarily be traced back to TITLE IX, but these policies are often difficult to find, unacknowledged during departmental or staff meetings, and somewhat ambiguous. As outlined by Title IX, "Consent is not effective if it results from: (a) the use of physical force, (b) a threat of physical force, (c) intimidation, (d) coercion, (e) incapacitation, or (f) any other factor that would eliminate an individual's ability to exercise his or her own free will to choose whether or not to engage in sexual activity." This list, though explicitly not exhaustive, makes no mention of position or power. The ambiguous final component, "any other factor," holds very little meaning in a context in which specifics are essential. Meanwhile, on this same TITLE IX website, a "responsible employee" is defined as "a University employee who has the authority to take action to redress an alleged

violation of this policy; who has been given the duty of reporting such allegations to the University Title IX Coordinator or designee; or whom an individual could reasonably believe has this authority or duty." A responsible employee is notably not defined as one who must not perpetrate these acts, but simply as one who must report them. This implies that a university's staff and faculty's duty is to the university itself, and to upholding the institution's reputation, rather than to their students. Staff and faculty must report these incidents so that the university might respond as it sees fit—which is to say, respond in any way that avoids legal entanglements for the institution. At no point in all of the TITLE IX website's many definitions is it made explicit that simply working in a position of authority makes it difficult for consent to be granted freely by an employee or student (graduate or undergraduate); at the very least, power that comes from position makes it impossible to establish whether or not power dynamics and hierarchical structures played into the decision to enter into a relationship of any kind with a supervisor or advisor.

As was the case with Nothomb's authorial pact, it seems difficult, almost impossible, to establish a professorial pact. Readers who feel that an author has broken the unspoken authorial pact inevitably feel betrayed. When an instructor breaks the unspoken professorial pact, however, there is more at risk than a sense of betrayal; the student's education and safety can, in certain instances, be put directly at risk. University policies might represent a starting point from which to build an explicit and unambiguous pact. But while policies fit neatly into the category of legal agreements, pacts fit more comfortably in the category of ethical agreements, despite the fact that pedagogical critics such as Barbella consider these two categories one and the same, or at least as implicating each other. Perhaps, then, rather than large-scale institutional policies, individual departments might start with smaller-scale departmental pacts. Instead of focusing on the establishment of legal rules and procedures through a campus-wide effort, we should begin with

department-wide efforts. Mandatory meetings for professors and graduate students, the departmental community, might include the discussion and creation of what Gloria González-López has termed "rules of engagement,"[82] and that could, I believe, also be referred to as a pact. Departments should reconsider the roles within their community, such as those of professor and advisor. Collaboratively, students and instructors could co-author a pact, to be signed by each departmental member, clearly and explicitly establishing the rules of engagement and expectations as regards students and their instructors and advisors. Special consideration might be given to the situation of graduate students, and how instructors might best interact with their students and advisees. Professors and graduate students alike are confused, and oftentimes uncertain and uncomfortable, of what constitutes appropriate engagement within the university context. Many professors have close, personal relationships with their students, and socialize with them off-campus with ease and without discomfort on the students' part. Yet at times, the same gesture by a different professor can, perhaps unjustly, create an adverse reaction, and great discomfort for students. For the peace of mind and general wellbeing of both students and professors, then, the professor-student pact should be codified explicitly, even though, as we have seen throughout this chapter, pacts are so often implicit and based solely on the fulfillment of expectations rather than on explicit agreements. And if official organizations such as TITLE IX, whose job it is to create these policies, and universities themselves will not establish these unambiguous policies, then departments should take it upon themselves to establish pacts.

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[82] The University of Texas' Dr. Gloria González-López, of Sociology, makes use of this term in her classroom. This document, for her, is one that all students create together on the first day of the semester in relation to how they will be conversing with each other over the course of difficult discussions. Dr. González-López has her students sign the document, and she returns to this document during sessions when necessary or helpful (i.e., when a student is breaking one of the rules established by themselves and their classmates).

Pacts are all the more empowering to students in that they signify a two-way agreement, whereas rules and policies are enforced by an authority, and therefore do not represent any kind of collaboration. Pacts are personal, and in graduate school, where relationships with professors and advisors are often more important than in college, the personal matters. These are the same professors and advisors who will be helping you work through a dissertation and writing you letters of recommendation for academic and non-academic positions alike, on a basic level. They represent, more broadly, a lifeline for graduate students, whose experiences in academia often result in depression and/or anxiety. Mental health in graduate students is a question of justice. As Colleen Flaherty notes in her 2018 article,

> Consistent with other research on nonstudent populations, transgender and gender-nonconforming graduate students, along with women, were significantly more likely to experience anxiety and depression than their cisgender male counterparts: the prevalence of anxiety and depression in transgender or gender-nonconforming graduate students was 55 percent and 57 percent, respectively. Among cis students, 43 percent of women had anxiety and 41 percent were depressed. That's compared to 34 percent of cis men reporting symptoms of anxiety and 35 percent showing signs of depression.[83]

Flaherty further notes, "Graduate students' relationships with their advisors or principal investigators are [...] known to impact the quality of their experience," reinforcing the urgent need for explicit training and unambiguously worded rules of engagement or pacts for instructors in all positions, especially those who serve in any advisory capacity. In fact, professors are the exception in the pedagogical realm of teaching; they are the sole instructors not required to attend teacher trainings every year (or, in fact, at most higher-education institutions, at all). Yet they are entrusted with newly independent students, living on their own, struggling financially, and more often than

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[83] Though Flaherty does not mention this, I wonder to what extent cisgender male graduate students are less likely to report mental health crises than, for instance, their female counterparts. We know, for example, that cisgender men are even less likely than cisgender women to report assault (and women are already rarely reporting—the reporting rate for women is currently at 20%, but is suspected to be even lower). It is worth considering if this pattern might replicate itself in reports of mental health as well.

not, trying to manage a mental illness, many for the first time. Professors often are not made aware of student resources on campus, are not trained to approach the topic with their students and advisees, and do not have the pedagogical tools to properly help their students. This lack of training only further underlines the need for explicit pacts and collaborative agreements.

Ultimately, I want to stress that, while authorial pacts are at times ambiguous, and that this ambiguity can make for richer relationships between reader and writer, ambiguity does not always have a place in pacts. Explicitly worded pacts for students and professors should be collaboratively created, agreed upon, and regularly updated. If there is an organization on campus that specializes in graduate student life and faculty and staff wellbeing, such as UT Austin's Faculty Innovation Center or the Dean of Student Affairs, the pact would ideally be run by their office after it has been created and agreed upon by the department in question. Alternatively, a representative from the organization could be present during the creation of these rules of engagements. Professor/student pacts, like authorial pacts, matter greatly. Unlike authorial pacts, professorial pacts will directly impact the lives and wellbeing of all graduate students. Discussing and establishing these methods of engagement can only benefit both the instructor and the student, and if unambiguous policies cannot be determined on a macro scale (state/university-wide), then explicit pacts should be determined on a micro scale (department-wide).

Conclusion: Contemporary Collaborations and Constructive Ambiguity

Though not simple, I believe that pacts represent a collaborative pinnacle of sorts. Rules are abided by, policies are followed, but pacts are agreed upon (explicitly, but much more often implicitly) and willingly entered into. Pacts are promises we make to each other, they are collaborative agreements of mutual respect and understanding. As such, they are complex, and can, at times, seem ambiguous. In the context of literary relationships, such ambiguity can be

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productive. If, as I argue, we consider, for a moment, Nothomb's novels as letters that are meant to instigate a correspondence between herself and her readers, such that a form of the epistolary pact takes effect, then certainly, this pact is neither explicit nor evident. The epistolary pact, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, like most literary pacts, is most often implicit, and only exists upon the fulfillment of a certain number of specific expectations. The existence of an epistolary pact between Nothomb and her readers then is less clear and more complex than ever. Perhaps it is even an unfulfilled pact, one that cannot ever truly be said to exist because the reader, who has picked up a novel and not a personalized letter, is unaware of any epistolary negotiations—they are expecting to engage in an autoficional pact, if anything, since the book is labeled and marketed as belonging to the genre of autofiction. Yet, whether the epistolary pact also implicitly exists between reader and author in Nothombian novels, or whether the balance between author and reader might be restored by such a pact is not the relevant question; rather, I think the importance of pacts, such as they are, lie in their authentic desire to engage with the other.

This authentic engagement is exactly that which I believe instructors should bring into the classroom, not expecting or working to do away with the undeniable—and important—hierarchy of the professor/student relationship, but rather remaining open to a genuine collaboration in the exchange of ideas within the space of the classroom, as opposed to establishing an authoritative point of view by which a discussion becomes a monologue. I want to stress, however, that I do not think that this pedagogical pact by which authentic engagement and genuine curiosity become the standard of interaction implies the undoing of the pedagogical hierarchy. While it is evident that our students, especially our graduate students, are adults who are of-age and fully capable of making their own decisions, this fact does not imply that these same students are able to make their

own decisions with total freedom in the workplace or classroom context. Academia is not exempt from these workplace hierarchies.

In fact, academia is a space in which competition for publication, funding, and positions is intensely present. A professor's letter of recommendation, or an advisor's help in securing funding, can change the course of a student's academic career, and one's relationship with their advisors and professors inevitably influences many of these opportunities. This is not troubling in and of itself; it is, surely, somewhat inevitable. But certain versions of professor/student relationships are perversions of the advisor/advisee collaboration. This can look like a romantic relationship or a sexual involvement, but it can also look like many other things; for graduate student teaching assistants, for instance, this has often looked like turning the professor/student relationship into a professor/personal assistant relationship.

The particular author/reader paradigm discussed in this chapter, then, by which Nothomb, to some degree, undoes the traditional writer/reader hierarchy by turning both herself and her readers into epistolarians, is not a paradigm that should be mirrored in the classroom. What professors and advisors have to offer their students is tangible—it is professional help, financial security, and general stability in a context that is, as seen in this chapter, one that is especially likely to lead to anxiety and depression and is fraught with uncertainty. The pact between an author and their reader can benefit from some degree of ambiguity. Some uncertainty can result in deeper discussion, longer correspondence, and plenty of room for interpretation. Any ambiguity in the professor/student relationship, however, can only lead to confusion for both parties, with potentially major consequences for the students.[84] Thus I believe that the teacher/student pact

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[84] The consequences for the professors involved in these incidents are often low stakes, at best, and non-existent, at worst. Even when consequences are established, the soundness of the decided upon repercussion is questionable. A professor who is granted paid leave as a result of a harassment case, for example, is really only a professor who has been gifted a year to delve into their research and progress on their writing.

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should look less like the author/reader pact—it should be made explicit, its conditions outlined, and its implementation monitered. While this may rob the pact of its poetic interpersonal uncertainty, it will surely benefit every member of the university community. University-wide efforts to codify these relationships have yet to be successfully implemented. Without legislated policies, then, professors and individual departments should take it upon themselves to create and enforce ethical pacts.

Nothomb as an artist encourages us to consider the nature of our collaborations carefully. She acknowledges how her readers' letters affect her, and how she feels compelled, almost obligated, to respond to them. Yet she rejoices in the correspondence, and explains that it is the fulfillment of what she dreamed of as a child: a mailbox full of letters. The weight of these collaborations and correspondence is felt throughout Nothomb's works. If we are to include Nothomb on our syllabi, then, as we rightly should, we must, as always, practice what we teach by recognizing and carefully considering the nature of our own relationships. A classroom in which students and instructors work together to make meaning is not one in which power dynamics have disappeared. Hierarchical relationships can remain uneven while becoming collaborative relationships. As Symonds notes in her research on nursing education, our positions as researchers within a university depend on students' presence on our campus, and their continued interest in our material. I would argue that granting time to updating our pedagogies is becoming increasingly important as the Humanities and the Arts struggle to attract significant numbers of students, and as, amidst a pandemic, attending college itself has become an open ended question rather than an expectation. If it is a student's job to care, then it is a teacher's job to give them a reason to care. We can no longer afford to view pedagogy as outside the scope of higher-education matters.

Conclusion: The Afterlife of Letter Writing

Sand, Colette, and Nothomb Come Together

This dissertation began, as most things in my life do nowadays, with George Sand. In my first chapter, I argued for collaboration as Sand practices it, which is to say, in a manner that proliferates ideas, texts, and ways of living. While critics such as Martine Reid, Joseph Barry, Isabel Naginski, and many others, have beautifully argued for Sand's ability to contain multiplicities, I chose to focus on her ability to create multiplicities. Sand was not one to live according to societal definitions or pressures, and she was, above all, an individual and artist who relished the complications and confusions of gray areas. While some might consider the author paradoxical, Sand's insistence to exist in a liminal state, by which I mean, between categories and amongst them rather than outside of them, inspired the brightest minds of that time to reconsider their categorical notions of Sand and of their own convictions. We might consider, for instance, her bullheaded correspondent, Flaubert. Throughout this epistolary exchange, Sand exemplified the manner in which collaboration, at its best, produces not singular agreements, but complicated and revisable truths.

Collaborations, however, are not often entered into or practiced so easily and openly as Sand's were. In my second chapter, I explored how Colette complicated the concept of collaboration by showing how, for instance, individuals who have experienced trauma may be unable to enter into collaboration with others, because their selves have been put at risk in the past in the context of collaborations. Yet regaining that sense of self can happen in collaborative spaces, such as the letter, as I argue Colette exemplified in *La Vagabonde*. In this text, Renée uses the letter as a collaborative space between her past traumatized self and her healing independent self, exemplifying how epistolary collaborations can take on many different forms, and that the other

with whom we communicate and collaborate can exist within ourselves. I further argued for the importance of the correspondence itself, not as temporary stand-ins for a beloved or another, but as experiences, or, as Colette called them, events, in their own right. A letter is not a replacement for the other when a face-to-face meeting is impossible; it is the fulfillment of one kind of desire, a physical desire at that. Colette thus helped redefine the letter's function in our daily lives, encouraging us to reconsider both the definition of an epistle and the manifestation of desire.

Lastly, there came a third chapter on Amélie Nothomb. In line with Nothomb's texts and her own self-presentation, my argument is untraditional. In this final chapter, I argued that Nothomb entirely redefined the relationship between correspondence and collaboration by redefining the novel as a collaborative endeavor, a process by which her readers become her correspondents. In blurring the boundary between letter and novel, and in anticipating, even encouraging, epistolary responses to her works of fiction, Nothomb rewrites the author/reader pact, insisting that readers are not passive vessels but active participants in the creation of other worlds, as laid out quite explicitly in *Une Forme de Vie*.

All three of these authors, then, contribute to my understanding of collaboration, in all its various guises and in the countless ways it can be practiced both in our inner lives and in dialogue with others. At the risk of reducing this concept of collaboration to a singular and categorical notion and undoing much of this dissertation's work, I would suggest that one interpretation of collaboration, the one I have studied in this dissertation, is the manner by which we make meaning of ourselves and the world in conversation with the other. I would add the caveat that by 'meaning,' I want to imply that this understanding of ourselves and our surroundings achieved through this collaborative process can be, and most often is, paradoxical and multifaceted. The meaning of woman, man, and third sex, as collaboratively interpreted by Sand and Flaubert, for instance, does

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not align with the nineteenth century's strict definition of these terms, and changed over time throughout their epistolary correspondence. I would also ask us to remember that Colette exemplified how this other with whom we collaborate can exist within ourselves, thereby expounding upon the meaning of 'collaboration' beyond the simple 'self' and 'other' opposition. Finally, I would specify that Nothomb practices this notion of multiplicities to an extreme (as is her want), by turning her readers, with whom she has a one-way monologue, into correspondents, with whom she has countless dialogues. Collaboration happens between individuals, but also, perhaps paradoxically, within ourselves, within hierarchies, and within murky, complicated and endlessly evolving circumstances. Only those who practice collaborative meaning-making, above independent study and singular definitions, will benefit from its multiplicities of revelations, and will both contain and create multiplicities of their own. I might amend my above definition then, to reflect what I argue to be a fundamental aspect of collaboration: constant revision of the meanings created together. Collaboration is the manner by which we *re*make meaning, over and over again, of ourselves and the world in conversation with the other. It is an endlessly revisionary process.

Putting Our Research into Practice

Of course, in outlining these three chapters, I have only mentioned one part of this dissertation's argument. Much of this dissertation has been about pedagogical matters, not as a turn away for my research, but as a natural and necessary subsequent step in my research. We should, I think, regularly ask ourselves, as academics and instructors, how our research influences what and how we teach. If the answer to this is, "it doesn't," perhaps we should consider the benefits of collaboration, and the possibility for personal and communal progress, outlined in this dissertation. I believe that it would be beneficial to establish a collaboration between our research and our

pedagogy, that we should apply our research to our classrooms, which is to say, we should practice what we preach in our work. For instance, in analyzing Sand's multiplicities in gender, how is it that academics do not carry this analysis into their classrooms and put their research into practice? Why do they not advocate for the multiplicities of gender identity in their classrooms, and practice pedagogical methods that make space for this diversity by, for instance, asking for pronouns and modeling the use of non-binary pronouns in French in their classrooms? All academics in the Humanities can, I think, agree that research on a text is ever-evolving, and will change with each reader and each reading. This can be true of our pedagogy as well, if we acknowledge that every topic we teach, and each classroom of students, is an opportunity for a new reading, and a different method of teaching. Our knowledge and understanding of pedagogy are constantly evolving, and each instructor can bring something innovative to their classrooms, regardless of how many times they have taught their topic, or how much of an expert they are in the matter.

As research currently stands, pedagogy is most often discussed in the context of the K-12 classroom. I believe that we, as experts in our fields and as teachers ourselves, could be filling in these gaps in pedagogical development. Humanities professors are, more than any other field or persons, perfectly placed to do so, as instructors who teach and have taught a higher-education classroom as part of their job for years, often decades. If our research and our teaching are not in collaboration with each other, how will our research ever move outside of our academic spaces, our journals and conferences?

In an article published in the Smithsonian Magazine in March of 2014, Rose Eveleth writes,

There are a lot of scientific papers out there. One estimate puts the count at 1.8 million articles published each year, in about 28,000 journals. Who actually reads those papers? According to one 2007 study, not many people: half of academic papers are read only by their authors and journal editors, the study's authors write. (Eveleth, "Academics Write Papers Arguing Over How Many People Read Their Articles")

But, she continues, "not all academics accept that they have an audience of three." Many scholars are on a mission to prove otherwise, debating the exact number and writing countless articles over the course of decades on this question. The statistic cited by Eveleth in the article, "an audience of three," refers to scientific papers—not the statistically lesser-read humanities papers. But that does not make academics uninfluential, nor does it make humanities scholars less influential than scientific scholars. Because, in fact, Eveleth's statistic is incorrect, or at least misrepresentative; it ignores an entire population of people who interact with academics on an almost daily basis. Academics do not have "an audience of three." They have an audience the size of their classrooms, plus three.

How, then, might we use the knowledge that our greatest audience lies in our students? And how can we incorporate the benefits of collaboration into our classrooms? The question, really, aims to be an application of my argument—how can I use this research, this dissertation, to influence my pedagogy, and vice-versa? I have spoken at length about the value that my three authors found in letter-writing. That is all well and good, but realistically, letter-writing is not often practiced nowadays. If something has taken the place of the letter, we might easily consider its replacement the email—a form of writing in which rules and expectations exist but are often disregarded, in which one person has the space to speak freely before the other responds. It is used for countless purposes, much like the letter was in the nineteenth century. The mysteries of the letter, the oft anxiety-inducing pause between responses, the unprovable identity of sender and recipient, the abundant misunderstandings that so often results from written communication, remain today the mystery of the email. While this may seem like a romanticization of the email, a medium which perhaps sounds vulgar in comparison to the letter, consider this equivalency: *Liaisons Dangereuses* is to letter-writing as "You've Got Mail" is to email. Though the tone of

these two works is incomparable, similar difficulties arise in the form of delayed responses, disappearing correspondents, uncertain love stories and complicated romances, and unknown identities. But written communication has grown well past emails in the last two decades. With the advent of texting and social media came an onslaught of never-before-seen forms of communications, where the rules were unknown or unestablished, and the question of privacy, a question so crucial to epistolary correspondence, became endlessly more confusing and less certain, and increasingly beyond our control.

Regardless of the similarities and discrepancies between nineteenth-century and present-day written communication, the question posed above remains to be answered. Can we bring collaborative forms of written communication into our classrooms in a productive and innovative manner? The answer must be an emphatic "yes," since pedagogues from around the country have been researching and incorporating these technological forms of communication in their classrooms for years. Examples abound, but we might again begin within our own community at the University of Texas. Professors like Dr. Thomas Garza of the Slavic Studies Department who teach large lecture classes have found provocative ways to excite and engage their students using social media as a medium. Capitalizing on social media's instantaneousness, for example, Dr. Garza has each of his students create a Twitter account specifically for his course. During lecture, students log into their collective Twitter page, which Dr. Garza projects onto the screen, to ask questions of each other and of the professor, to share insights, to signal confusion, to communicate with each other and the professor. This collaborative work allows students to help each other, instantaneously, and it allows the professor to step in all the while continuing with his lecture. Most importantly, this innovative pedagogical technique creates a community of engaged students who are making meaning of the professor's knowledge together, negotiating their understanding

of the topic amongst each other. In other words, through the incorporation of a technological medium into the classroom, Dr. Garza has successfully created a community that collaboratively builds upon each student's voice and ideas, all within the hierarchical space of the classroom.

Bringing the Letter into the Classroom

In considering the benefits of the letter and all of its developmental capacities, we might consider, one last time, how we can make use of this knowledge in our classrooms. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the collaborative nature of the letter can surely be drawn upon to create learning spaces that are equally collaborative. In constructing lesson plans about the epistolary genre, then, or even lesson plans that include the genre, we might focus primarily on methods of collaboration. While written language assignments often take place as independent projects, it would be to our students' advantage to begin negotiating meaning and tone with one another as early in their linguistic careers as possible. After all, negotiation of meaning is, in almost all language classrooms, the goal—learning a language is learning to discuss and exchange ideas with the other, and thus create new ideas and ways of thinking. Why not, then, rethink our writing assignments such that collaboration becomes a primary focus? Whether it be a single letter exchange or a semester-long correspondence, letter composition will help our students develop skills that they could not develop by writing solely independently.

In teaching the Sand-Flaubert correspondence, for instance, we might have our students imitate Sand's epistolary style, thereby allowing them to practice grammatical skills such as gender agreements while also ensuring that the content is meaningful. We might alternatively have them imitate Flaubert's epistolary style and exchange letters with each other, so that they can respond as the other (Sand or Flaubert). Let them practice the negotiation of meaning that necessarily takes place in a correspondence, while proving their knowledge of the material by imitating the author's

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style and expounding on the course's content. In teaching Colette, we might have our students imagine the continuation of Renée and Max's exchange. In teaching Nothomb, we might ask our students to write a letter to the author. We could even send these letters, with our students' permission, so that the students themselves become a part of the story they study in a concrete and exciting manner. Essentially, I believe we should encourage our students to actively take part in the material that they are learning (by having them engage in a correspondence, for instance), thereby allowing them a deeper and more practical understanding of the material in the syllabus.

These pedagogical suggestions are merely ideas, because, as has been repeated consistently throughout this dissertation, the research-based pedagogical material in relation to the French literature classroom, or even the second language literature classroom, is sparse. Most sources are years, even decades, old (c.f., Robert Hansen & Neil Oxenhandler (1961), Lars Erickson (2009), Mortimer Guinée (2004), Charles Stivale (2004), etc). Perhaps the most relevant and most recent study on the pedagogy of French literature is Nicole Meyer and Joyce Johnston's collection of essays, "Rethinking the French Classroom," published in 2019. These efforts, and their success, are laudable and are certainly making an impact on the teaching of literature. However, I believe that there is further to go, not only in the quantity of material published on pedagogy, but also in its content; separating the literary from the pedagogical inhibits both areas from benefiting from one another. I hope that Meyer's and Johnston's books represent a step in the direction of bringing pedagogy into the academic's field of vision, and that eventually, academia will realize where its most important audience lies: not in its three article readers, but in its classroom of students.

Within these chapters, I often, but not always, consider my pedagogical research and suggestions specifically from the perspective of the second-language classroom. The pedagogies for which I do not focus on second-language acquisition are those which, I believe, extend beyond

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the language classroom and into educational spaces more broadly. For instance, while I specify the type of language and resources we might use in relation to gender within our French language classroom, I do not, within the chapters, delve into the interplay between second language acquisition and critical pedagogies such as Trauma-Informed Teaching. The topic merits consideration, however, and I therefore want to briefly address the specific methods by which our language classrooms might benefit from these critical pedagogies.

We might, for instance, question whether we should engage in these pedagogies with our students in English or in the target language. When discussing a difficult and potentially traumatic narrative, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy encourages us to include content warnings for the material, to offer alternative assignments, or to remind our students that they can 'check out' of particularly difficult discussions if and when necessary. Should we explain this all in English in upper-division second language classrooms that should ideally be led entirely in the target language? At this point, I am not able to find research that addresses this specific question regarding language acquisition and critical pedagogies. I would therefore encourage instructors to use their best judgment, to ask for feedback from their students regarding these particular pedagogical methods, and, as always, to consistently reconsider and revise their methods as new pedagogical research comes to light and as they become more familiar with these teaching practices. Perhaps professors might even start including such experiences in their own research, even if as an annex to their articles.

I hope that this work—in its attempt to consider pedagogy and research as intrinsically linked and mutually beneficial to each other—helps initiate discussions in classrooms and academic settings on the potential of collaboration between our two primary expectations within our universities, and the many ways in which our passion for our subject area can grow in unexpected directions when brought into the classroom.

Appendices

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy & the Higher-Education Classroom Guidebook

Developed by Sarah Le Pichon,
In collaboration with Lauren White (LMSW)

Thanks & Recognition:

This guidebook and the research it is based on could not have been possible without the expertise and commitment of Lauren White (LMSW), with whom the entire foundation for this project was developed. Infinite thanks to you, Lauren. A big thank you also to the professors who agreed to share their practices with me, in particular Dr. Steven Lundy and Dr. Gloria González-López. Thanks is also due to the Faculty Innovation Center at UT Austin, whose continued support helped this work grow. Finally, I of course must credit all practices gathered here to the brilliant academics and researchers who have published on this topic. All of my sources are credited within the literature review and in References & Further Reading, at the end of this guidebook.

Permission regulations for sharing this work:

In the spirit of ensuring the work's integrity, if you would like to publish this work anywhere or use this material as school policy please contact Sarah Le Pichon (lepichonsarah@gmail.com) first.

TRAUMA-INFORMED PEDAGOGY

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC) define a trauma-informed approach as including four primary notions:

1. Realizing the prevalence and influence of trauma.
2. Recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved in the system.
3. Responding with trauma-sensitive practices and policies.
4. Actively working against re-traumatization (SAMHSA NCTIC, 2013), secondary traumatization and new traumatizations in the delivery of services (Butler & Carello, 2014).

Suggested Pedagogical Practices

Before class:

· Inform students that you are employing a trauma-informed approach; solicit and integrate feedback

· Use warnings that detail content, severity, and duration of material that you think might be triggering

· Limit overall exposure levels and vary the intensity of particularly difficult material

· Provide information on self-care practices and resources on your syllabus with specifics for each resource

· Consider policies and practices that help avoid shame, such as grace periods

During class:

· Use verbal or written check-ins to help determine how students are doing emotionally and whether adjustments are needed; journal check-ins for larger or online classes

· Ask what the students found most difficult in the material and start there; keep the conversation student-centered

· Normalize your students' feelings and reactions

· Allow students not to participate, thereby respecting their limits

· Give students permission to tune out or leave the room briefly to attend to emotional needs when necessary; remind them of this during difficult discussions

After class:

· Be prepared to provide referrals (e.g. to organizations like the Counseling & Mental Health Center), and make sure you have specifics on the referrals

· Follow up with students who express concerns via email. You may want to follow-up with an e-mail only to the student for whom you are concerned, if you feel comfortable doing so. However, you may also wish to simply send an email out to the class, reminding them of your office hours and availability and on-campus resources.

For questions or further resources, please contact Sarah Le Pichon at lepichonsarah@gmail.com

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UT Austin Resources and Contact Information

- Counseling and Mental Health Center (and VAV)
  (512)-471-3515
  https://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/vav_contact.html

- Services for Students with Disabilities
  (512)-471-6259
  Email: ssd@austin.utexas.edu

- BCAL (Behavioral Concerns Advice Line)
  (512)-232-5050
  Submit concerns here: https://utexas-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report/index.php/pid471457?

- Ombuds Office
  (512)-471-3825
  Call to schedule an appointment

- Student Emergency Services
  (512)-471-5017
  Email: studentemergency@austin.utexas.edu

Trauma Informed Pedagogy Worksheet

Worksheet Developed with the help of
the Center for Skills & Experience Flags

Example Practice:	Practices I can integrate in my classroom include…
Before Class: Integrate policies and practices that help avoid shame, such as grace periods.	
During Class: Normalize feelings and reactions	
After Class: Be prepared to provide referrals to on-campus resources, with specific contact information.	

Trauma-Informed Practices in the Higher Education Classroom Literature Review
Authored by Sarah Le Pichon

Abstract
Trauma-informed care has principally been implemented into areas that directly address trauma survivors, such as shelters and clinical services more generally. However, trauma-informed practices are increasingly being implemented into other disciplines as knowledge of the prevalence and impact of trauma increases. Many K-12 schools have implemented trauma-informed training programs and sessions. In the higher-education classroom, TI practices are gaining in momentum as trauma studies and trauma narratives become more common in the humanities classroom. This review focuses on trauma-informed programs successfully implemented in the educational setting, and successful trauma-informed practices that might be implemented into the classroom by individual professors.

This literature review focuses principally on articles written in the last decade on the subject of trauma-informed practices and trauma-informed schools published in psychology journals, for better access to measurable outcomes and data. However, certain articles, such as Liora Gubkin's trauma-informed approach to teaching the Holocaust (2016), come from humanities and/or religion journals, in an effort to shed light on the possibilities of trauma-informed practices in a single classroom and/or by a single teacher without extending the research to the entirety of a program or school.

Statistics on Rape, Sexual Assault, and Trauma
The World Health Organization reports shocking statistics on rape, sexual assault, and trauma. Globally, the WHO reports that 35 percent of all women are survivors of some form of violence, with 68 percent of rapes going unreported to law enforcement (WHO, 2016). This problem is not limited to developing countries. On college campuses in the United States, one in five women reports having experienced sexual violence, with 80 percent of cases going unreported (WHO 2016). These statistics grow with the presence of certain groups or organizations on campus, including fraternities (Murnen & Kohlman, 2007), and men's athletic teams: One study "showed that [while] college athletes make up 3.3 percent of the male students", they make up "19 percent of those accused of sexual assault" (Luther, 2016).

Beyond the WHO, various studies have shown the prevalence of students who have been exposed to trauma, and the negative effect these experiences can have on students' academic performance. Among college students in the United States, 66%-94% of students report exposure to one or more traumatic event (Frazier et al., 2009) and rates of posttraumatic stress disorder are estimated at 9%-12% (Butler et al., 2014). Exposure to sexual assault, unwanted sexual attention, and family violence are associated with the highest levels of distress among undergraduates (Frazier et al., 2009). Negative adjustment to an academic setting as a result of trauma can result

in students dropping out (Duncan, 2000), poor academic performance, and may be related to attrition (DeBerard, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004). Similarly, when poorly addressed, classroom exposure to traumatic narratives may result in poor student performance, missed class, or students dropping out (Horsman, 2000; Lindner, 2004; Swartzlander et al., 1993).

The literature underlines the fact that, while certain courses address difficult topics such as rape and others do not address such topics in any manner, it is common for professors and teaching assistants, including male professors and male teaching assistants, to be informed of a student's rape: "This situation can arise in any class, not only in those that deal with rape. The diminishing stigma of having been raped means that some young women feel ready to speak of it to a professor or TA, in a fairly matter-of-fact way. Disclosure of rape to college instructors is thus increasingly likely" (James, 2014, p. 173). It is therefore in students' best interest that the school or program implement a professional development training, so that all teachers, staff and school personnel understand the impact of trauma and develop the skills to address it most effectively.

At-Risk/Marginalized Populations
Certain populations are disproportionately affected by sexual violence. According to RAINN, the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, "21% of TGQN (transgender, genderqueer, nonconforming) college students have been sexually assaulted, compared to 18% of non-TGQN females, and 4% of non-TGQN males" (Cantor et al., 2015). The prevalence of forced sexual intercourse also varies by race and ethnicity, with African American female adolescents being at a disproportionately high risk as compared to Caucasians (Thomson, McGee, & Mays, 2012). Of all populations, indigenous populations are at the greatest risk for sexual assault, and are twice as likely to experience rape/sexual assault as all other races (Department of Justice, 2004). As quoted on the RAINN website, 33% of women who are raped contemplate suicide, and 13% of women who are raped attempt suicide (Kilpatrick et al., 1992).

Beck et al. emphasize that the needs of these marginalized populations are often not represented in response programs, which impedes their access to care. It is our duty to "identify and learn more about the unique barriers faced by these communities" (Beck et al. 2016). Beck et al. note the relation between social and health inequities, underlining the importance of intersectionality. To acknowledge intersectionality in populations, Beck et al. insist that primary prevention efforts move beyond single identities/group-specific concerns. Bowleg (2012) underlines the importance of understanding intersectionality (how multiple social categories intersect) in order for us to "identify health disparity" (p. 1270).

Sexual Violence and UT Austin
As of the March 24, 2017 e-mail sent to all UT Austin faculty, staff, and students by President Gregory Fenves, CLASE (Cultivating Learning and Safe Environments) released survey results conducted by the University of Texas System at 13 UT institutions across the state last year (i.e.,

2016). The report revealed that, "15 percent of undergraduate women at UT Austin reported that they had been raped, either through force, threat of force, incapacitation or other forms of coercion such as lies and verbal pressure. Furthermore, 28 percent of undergraduate women at UT Austin said they were the victims of unwanted sexual touching, and 12 percent experienced attempted rape. Thirteen percent of graduate and professional school women said they experienced crude sexual harassment perpetrated by a staff or faculty member" (President Gregory Fenves, March 24, 2017).

President Fenves further stated: "I have said throughout my presidency that sexual misconduct will not be tolerated. Every individual who serves our university must feel valued, respected and free to learn and work in a safe environment. But what this survey makes clear is that many on our campus have not had that experience. We have let them down and we need to improve — not in a year, not in a month, but right now. The first injustice committed in every assault or inappropriate behavior is the act itself, but the second injustice is often the silence of the community surrounding that victim. We must not be silent anymore, and we must not be afraid to face this problem."

Beck et al. note that a single campus constituency cannot eradicate sexual and interpersonal violence by itself, and a campus should work together and acknowledge that violence on campus is a public health issue that affects everyone in the community. Beck et al. advise that the campus should form a "robus, trauma-informed coalition" (p. 51). To create this coalition, they recommend:
1. Engaging in deliberate efforts at a positive campus climate through prevention and response strategies.
2. Providing regular training and support to all employees and students.
3. Using data-driven feedback from students, faculty and staff to identify and reduce sexual and relationship violence (Beck et al. 2012, p. 51).

Trauma-Informed Practices, a Definition
The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC) define a trauma-informed approach as including four primary notions:
1. Realizing the prevalence and influence of trauma.
2. Recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved in the system.
3. Responding with trauma-sensitive practices and policies.
4. Actively working against re-traumatization (SAMHSA NCTIC, 2013), secondary traumatization and new traumatizations in the delivery of services (Butler & Carello, 2014).
This framework is sometimes known as the four "R's," which stand for realization, recognition, response, and resistance (to practices that could retraumatize) (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet,

Santos, 2016). Although trauma-informed care was initially developed for the purposes of clinical practice and delivery of social services (Harris & Fallot, 2001), it has started to be implemented in other disciplines and settings, including educational settings.

The Role of Schools

Schools can play an important role in aggravating or effectively managing students' stressful and traumatic experiences. As our understanding of the prevalence and impact of trauma has increased, so too has the push for schools to provide trauma-informed practices and services (SAMHSA, 2014), in part due to the success of school-based trauma-informed intervention in the reduction of retraumatization and traumatic stress (Rolfsnes & Idsoe, 2011). Persons suffering from traumatic experiences attempt to manage their symptoms in the classroom, where "even traditional curricula and assignments can become overwhelming or triggering" (Emerson and Lovitt, 2003). School staff and teachers may serve as strong and positive models for these students by implementing trauma-informed practices into their teaching methods (Crosby, 2015). Teachers have "a front row seat to the behavioral, academic, and socioemotional issues that traumatized students encounter" (Crosby, 2015, p. 7), but rarely receive training or information on how to best address trauma in the classroom as a part of their professional formation (Splett, Fowler, Weist, McDaniel, & Dvorsky, 2013). Officials and teachers can advocate for trauma-informed practices in their school and across their district. In Massachusetts, the Act Relative to Safe and Supportive Schools, signed into law in 2014, serves as an example of a trauma-sensitive K-12 school initiative. As the degree to which cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed practices can be implemented into the curriculum is most often at the discretion of teachers and staff who interact with students, it is important that staff and teachers are knowledgeable about trauma and effective ways to address it (Crosby, 2015).

While trauma-informed schools are not the norm by any measure, they are nonetheless present in an important number of states. As of February 2016, there are 17 states in which trauma-informed schools have taken root (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). In some cases, this is happening at a district-wide level (e.g. California, Pennsylvania), in others, at a state-wide level (e.g. Massachusetts, Washington, Wisconsin) (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016). In December of 2015, congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (Pub.L. 114-95), which "makes explicit provisions for trauma-informed approaches in student support and academic enrichment and in preparing and training school personnel" (Prewitt, 2016). Schools with such programs in place are responding to the prevalence of trauma among youth, and demonstrating an increased understanding of the negative impacts of chronic exposure to trauma (Hamoudi, Murray, Sorenson, & Fontaine, 2015).

Despite programs like this being implemented in K-12 schools all over the country, trauma-informed approaches have yet to be implemented effectively in higher education (Butler and Carello, 2015). In their 2015 study on implementing trauma-informed practices in the higher

education classroom, Butler and Carello note that: "As instructors who teach classes on both trauma and trauma-informed care (TIC), we have been struck by a growing realization that our process of teaching should be informed by and consistent with the implications of the content we teach. In short, we should be practicing what we teach" (Butler & Carello, 2015, p. 264). The initiative suggested by Butler and Carello in this study is called trauma-informed educational practice (TIEP) (their initiative is discussed in more detail in the following sections).

Implementation of trauma-informed practices can be difficult in a school-setting, with push-back from teachers and administration who have been functioning in a certain way for an extended period of time (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, Santos, 2016); to help with the process of implementation of trauma-informed teaching, Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, & Santos suggests following these steps:

1. Align with district goals
2. Focus on measurable outcomes
3. Make decisions based on data and local context characteristics
4. Prioritize evidence-based practices
5. Formally assess implementation integrity

In implementing a session or training on trauma-informed pedagogical practices, UT Austin would be joining a growing movement of trauma-informed schools who are at the forefront of this particular pedagogical initiative.

Review of Trauma-Informed Practices in School Settings
A number of different frameworks currently exist that guide teachers and school administrators in the principles of trauma-informed education (Crosby, 2015). These models are primarily aimed at primary education facilities, and include the C.A.P.P.D model ('calm,' 'attuned,' 'present,' 'predictable,' 'don't let children's emotions escalate your own') (Perry, 2009), Making SPACE for Learning (Australian Childhood Foundation, 2010), the Flexible Framework (Cole et al., 2005), and the Compassionate Teaching model (Wolpow et al, 2009), which defines a compassionate school community as a space that is welcoming, affirming, and safe. Compassionate teaching also emphasizes shared control between the students and the teacher (Perry, 2009), and asks that teachers consistently challenge their own assumptions about students, and their pedagogical methods (Wolpow et al., 2009). Initial pilot studies demonstrate "that students' posttraumatic stress symptoms significantly decreased during a school year when school educational and support staff participated in ongoing trauma-informed training" (Crosby, 2015, quoting Day et al. still in press).

It is also essential for trauma-informed schools to create a democratic partnership among all school personnel for the care of the students (Bloom, 1995), and all classroom staff should be

included as equals (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015). School staff should also receive adequate training and support, and professional development for classroom staff (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015). Essentially, one of the biggest steps towards implementing a trauma-informed school is providing trauma-informed training to school staff during their professional development, and/or during their regularly scheduled faculty and staff meeting (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015). The workshop can begin with a nominal needs assessment in which the staff writes down their top five professional development needs, as carried out by Anderson, Blitz, and Saastamoinen, after which the researchers developed a series of four workshops based on these needs (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015). These workshops touched on the neurohormonal impact of trauma and toxic stress on students' behavior and learning, and strategies for classroom intervention. The researchers conducted surveys on the workshops at the end of the school year. The workshops focused on the collective rather than the individual and fostered free expression of ideas (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015).

Thus, one of the key components of trauma-informed schools is professional development training, so that all teachers, staff and school personnel understand the impact of trauma and develop the skills to "create an environment that is responsive to the needs of trauma-exposed students" (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, Santos, 2016). Such training has been shown to change attitudes and build knowledge in favor of trauma-informed practices (Brown, Baker, & Wilcox, 2011). Trauma-focused professional development training "typically aims to create a shared understanding of the problem of trauma exposure, build consensus for trauma-informed approaches, and engender attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors conducive to the adoption of system-wide trauma-informed approaches" (Overstreet & Chafouleas, 2016, p. 2). Simply receiving professional development targeted for their needs seems to positively influence school staff (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015). These trainings may also include a focus on the neurobiological impact of trauma, de-escalation strategies to avoid re-traumatization, and staff self-care that touches on vicarious traumatization (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, Santos, 2016).

Common practices of trauma-informed schools include staff and teachers recognizing traumatic triggers and staying attuned to student behavior that indicate the student(s) may require a break from the class period or lesson plan (Perry, 2009). This is often referred to as being 'emotionally present' (Perry, 2009).

Trauma-informed practices are further discussed in more detail in the section on trauma-informed teaching in the college classroom below.

Trauma in the Humanities Classroom

Trauma theory and research are progressively being used more frequently in nonclinical courses in higher education humanities classrooms, in courses like literature, women's studies, film, anthropology, etc (Butler & Carello, 2014). Overstreet & Chafouleas refer to it as "the epidemic of trauma exposure facing our youth" (2016, p. 4). Traumatic material in these courses can be presented indirectly, in the form of texts/films that include traumatic events or directly in nonclinical fields such as trauma studies (Butler & Carello, 2014). In both of these contexts, "some instructors promote potentially risky pedagogical practices involving trauma exposure or disclosure despite indications that these may be having deleterious effects" (Butler & Carello, 2014, p. 153), increasing the risk of retraumatization and secondary-traumatization. Butler and Carello propose similar pedagogical methods to those mentioned above, focusing primarily on recognizing risks and prioritizing the emotional safety of the students. This does not mean ignoring the issue or removing all trauma narratives or discussions from the classroom. In fact, doing so would come with important risks, like perpetuating shame, secrecy, and stigma (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2007; Jolly, 2011).

Instructors themselves have reported that their students, when faced with traumatic narratives, have experienced retraumatization or secondary traumatization in the form of anxiety, depression, or suicidal feelings (Berman, 2001). Instructors have their own emotional responses and past trauma and are often ill-prepared to respond to students coming forward to speak of their trauma (Horsman, 2000). Butler & Carello point out the alarming fact that many instructors believe that these intense emotional responses and retraumatizations are signs of effective teaching (p. 159), and that the students' ability to work through and resolve the experience is a pedagogical success (Felman, 1991). These beliefs exemplify a severe lack of understanding concerning trauma and retraumatization (Butler & Carello, 2014): "We know of no evidence to indicate that experiencing fear, horror, and helplessness are precursors to effective learning or that the development of PTSD symptoms is evidence of effective teaching" (Butler & Carello, 2014, p. 160). Meanwhile, instructors at times have trouble acknowledging the line between professor and therapist, and believe, in fact, that the line is quite blurred (Desser, 2006; Hood, 2005). As a result, students often believe that papers and discussions recounting traumatic or highly emotional events earn the highest grades (Swartzlander et al., 1993).

Many students are not able to self-regulate what they are capable of managing, will push themselves to please the instructor/authority figure, and will put themselves in danger for those reasons (Butler & Carello, 2014). Other students may respond not with empathy but with pity, guilt, vengeance, or disinterest as a result of desensitization (Zembylas, 2008).

Trauma-Informed Pedagogical Practices in the College Classroom
The American College Health Association (ACHA) recommends the implementation of a trauma-informed framework into the higher-education classroom, and has tailored their guidelines to the college environment to optimize the health and wellness of college students

(Beck et al. 2016). In line with ACHA guidelines, schools must "adopt, publish, and enforce policies and procedures regarding sexual violence" (Beck et al. 2016, p. 4). Adopting trauma-informed practices will ensure that UT is in line with the ACHA guidelines. ACHA guidelines also state that "campus leadership must create a campus climate of health and well-being not only for students, but also for staff and faculty" (Beck et al. 2016, p. 6), and adds that all members of a college campus community should be trained in trauma-informed approaches).

While we need to teach trauma, we must be mindful of how we teach it, and how we teach trauma survivors (Butler & Carello, 2014). It is one thing to read for pleasure or literary analysis; it is a wholly different thing to read with a sense of ethical responsibility (Douglas & Barnett, 2014). In teaching literatures of trauma in the classroom, we risk exploiting the subject and the suffering of others, or else "packaging suffering for consumption" (Douglas & Barnett, 2014, p. 52), in addition to risking (re)traumatization of students in our classrooms.

Research in the field of trauma-informed pedagogical practices offers recommendations like limiting overall exposure levels, varying the intensity of material, and providing information on self-care (Zurbiggen, 2011). As Butler & Carello note, however, much more research is needed in the area, but as "theory and research concerning this topic develop, and ethical necessity to protect student safety becomes more widely recognized, resources and guidance will ideally become available to aid instructors to become trauma-informed in the classroom, just as there are materials currently available to journalists concerning the reporting of violence and tragedy and the treatment of victims" (Butler & Carello, 2014, p. 163).

To this end, Butler & Carello suggest the following practices:
- Identify learning as the goal and student emotional safety as the necessary condition to learning
- Recognize that many of your students will have a history of trauma and integrate that knowledge into your educational practice
- Be prepared to provide referrals
- Appreciate how trauma may affect student performance
- Familiarize yourself with scientific research on trauma to better understand your students' and your own response to traumatic material.

One of the trauma-informed pedagogical practices encouraged by Butler and Carello is that of warnings that detail content, severity, and duration, stating that their experience has shown these warnings to help students handle difficult material better. These may be verbal warnings ahead of time, discussion of the material during class, and online warnings prior to viewing electronic postings (Butler & Carello, 2015). It might be helpful to ask what the students found most difficult in the material, and start the conversation there. It is also important to allow students not to participate, thus respecting their limits and allowing them to take responsibility for their own

well-being (Butler & Carello, 2015). All of these practices encourage a positive atmosphere in the classroom all the while promoting "individual competence in self-regulation" (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, Santos, 2016, p. 149). Butler & Carello also remind students that it is okay to tune out or leave the room briefly to attend to emotional needs when necessary. It is tremendously important to acknowledge and discuss, and therefore normalize, difficult feelings that come from learning about trauma and its victims (2015). They further recommend implementing policies or practices regarding assignments that help avoid shame, such as initiating a late-day policy in which all students get extra days over the course of the semester to turn in work without having to provide an excuse and without penalty (Butler & Carello, 2015). It may also be helpful to inform the students that you are employing a TI approach, so that you might solicit and integrate their feedback to maintain a safe environment (Butler & Carello, 2015).

They also encourage verbal check-ins during the class period to help determine how students are doing emotionally and whether adjustments are needed. Brief written check-ins at the start or end of class can also be helpful, and it is important to follow up in person or by e-mail with students who express concerns, and to use their feedback to help inform/revise class material (Butler & Carello, 2015).

Spear (2013) always includes topics and texts on healing in her course on trauma literatures, which often involves texts, theoretical or (auto)biographical, in which authors and scholars overtly acknowledge their healing process (Spear, 2013). Spear notes that this often extends to a focus on communal healing, since the authors often see their narratives as a means to reach others and aid in their healing journey (Spear, 2013). Thus Spear touches on a number of traumatic narratives (from natural disasters to incest to illnesses), but continually returns to healing throughout the course of the semester. There is another side to this 'healing narrative' coin, however, which is the risk of "redemptive closure," which, as Liora Gubkin writes in her article on teaching the Holocaust to college students, risks "speaking for others in ways that can trivialize others' experiences if we privilege redemptive narratives in the classroom (Alcoff, 1996)" (2015, p. 109). Thus 'redemptive' narratives might be chosen with care and discussed with continued awareness of the trauma being addressed.

Gubkin, in her college course on the Holocaust, has her students keep a journal, which is another possible pedagogical practice to implement in the trauma-informed classroom. Gubkin notes that the journal serves multiple purposes, providing the students with a space in which to keep track of their reading summaries, critical reflections, and emotional responses (2015, p. 110). This is part of a practice that Gubkin terms "engaged witnessing," which "recognizes emotion as an important and fragile source of knowledge and provides structured opportunities for analysis of affect without exploiting students' emotional vulnerability" (Gubkin, 2015, p. 113). This practice, which Gubkin also calls affective analysis, allows the students to view their emotions

and emotional responses as a legitimate and useful source of knowledge and understanding, and creates a space to engage as an 'ethical witness,' leading students to realize the extent of the trauma without blurring the boundary between self and other and thus without putting the students' emotional health and safety at risk (Gubkin, 2015). In fact, UT Austin's James Pennebaker has carried out extensive research on the benefits of journal writing in which individuals express their emotions and experiences (Pennebaker, 2004). Pennebaker notes that these journals do not require transference (i.e., do not have to be shared with another person) for beneficial processing to occur.

James, in teaching her Classics course that includes Ovid's Metamorphoses, makes a clear announcement at the beginning of the first day of class: "I say that rape was common in the ancient world, as it is now, though it was defined very differently—a subject to be discussed as it arises; I further add that judging from my past experience more than a few students in the class know someone who has suffered sexual assault, and that they will find the materials upsetting. I let them know that they can come to my office, that I'll never ask anybody any personal questions, and that I'm not a counselor or therapist but can direct them to on-campus resources if they're interested" (James, 2014, p. 178). While James' announcement is specific to her course and material, its explicitness and neutral language reflect the practices of a trauma-informed pedagogical classroom.

Beck et al. recommend emphasizing "Empowerment, Voice, and Choice" (Beck et. al. 2016, p. 7), and suggest involving students serving on advisory boards, offering campus climate surveys, and conducting focus groups to obtain deeper feedback and understanding.

At minimum, Butler & Carello suggest including a self-care statement on course syllabi that emphasize the importance of and the instructor's expectations with respect to student self-care, and providing links to such resources (the University of Buffalo where these researchers work has its own self-care page). James (2014) also underlines how often a student has come to her office and revealed that they have been the victim of rape or some form of sexual violence, underlining the importance of having a list of resources with which to provide them readily available. James' experience with such revelations also highlights the importance of such faculty training—whether a professor or TA is directly addressing the issue of rape and sexual violence in class or not, it is likely that they will be faced with a discussion related to it at some point in their career.

Trauma-Informed Pedagogical Practices at UT Austin

The following are practices I have learned from a workshop and conversations with one of our Latina professors at UT Austin. <u>Dr. Gloria González-López</u> is a sociology professor at UT Austin with an MA in couple and family therapy, whose work focuses primarily on sexuality and gender in Mexican populations. Dr. González-López believes in the relevance of emotional knowledge and understanding in intellectual pursuits. To this end, she has implemented the following trauma-informed practices into her courses:

1. Set up the classroom in a circle. Conduct a 10 minute check-in with the students, asking each, in one sentence, to express their reaction to the reading for that day. She may expand the 10 minute check-in when/if needed.
2. Switch gears to a more analytical mode, remaining aware and sensitive.
3. Follow up with a 10 minute check-out to make sure students do not leave the classroom at risk. She may expand the 10 minute check-in when/if needed. Recommend your students only share in the classroom or with the professor if it comes from a place of empowerment, rather than fear or emotional fragility. This is for the comfort of the student(s) involved, and so she/he/they have control over their personal histories and stories.
4. Let your students know that they do not have to share anything, but provide them with a space to share if they wish, i.e. the 10 minute check-in/10 minute check-out periods, any time during discussion, or individually with the professor after class discussion.
5. Use a blue book as part of your syllabus, where students share the most important lessons they have learned that week. Have them write it by hand.
6. Stay after class to be available for further conversation and checking in with students who seem highly affected, or may want or need to continue discussing individually.
7. Follow-up by e-mail with students when they seem highly affected if they do not stay behind after class.

Dr. González-López promotes trust and respect in her class without blurring the line between professor and counselor, and her practices in no way impede upon the intellectual and analytical readings and discussions, which make up the majority of the class period.

<u>Dr. Steven Lundy</u> is a professor in the Department of Classics, whose online course, "Introduction to Classical Mythology," includes texts depicting violence, particularly sexual violence. He has implemented the following trauma-informed practices into his course:

1. Dr. Lundy has Voices Against Violence, a comprehensive violence prevention and response program, come speak to his class at the start of the semester.
2. The syllabus contains a late day policy in which all students get extra days over the course of the semester to turn in work without having to provide an excuse and without penalty.

3. Dr. Lundy outlines a self-care statement and includes a content warning, along with specific referrals to on-campus resources, in his syllabus.
4. Prior to taking on the more violent myths that address rape and sexual assault, Dr. Lundy films a session with Voices Against Violence advocates to discuss the best ways in which to approach these difficult topics in a classroom setting.
5. Journal writing and online forum posts are an important portion of this class, allowing for the students' writing to serve as a processing tool. Students submit a private journal once a week, which serves the purpose of processing things learned in class and starting a conversation with the teaching team, if required. They have the option of writing "follow-up" in these entries, which signal the professor/TA that they need to check in with this student. The online forums operate based on a class etiquette policy encouraging civil, respectful conversation and forbidding trolling.

Self-Care Statements in the Syllabus

1. Below, you will find an example of a self-care statement that has been used on the syllabus of Dr. Lundy's Classics course at UT Austin:

Greek and Roman myths contain many stories depicting violence, including sexual violence. Many students understandably find these topics challenging, and should be forewarned that we will be discussing violent subject matter in this course. Students will not be required to directly analyze, write about, or participate in discussions pertaining to these episodes as part of their grade, but they may be required to demonstrate an awareness of these episodes as part of the broader inquiry of the course.

Students with concerns related to these topics may wish and are encouraged to consult the following resources:

· UT Counseling and Mental Health Center: https://cmhc.utexas.edu

· Voices Against Violence: https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/index.html

· SAFE (Stop Abuse For Everyone) Austin: http://www.safeaustin.org

2. For a less specialized statement, you might consider the following language:

In this course, we will be working with material that depicts violence, including _____. To this end, I will be employing a trauma-informed approach. This means acknowledging that each individual has their own lived experience, and we cannot leave our traumas or experiences at the door when we enter the classroom.

The TI approach is meant to help students succeed in the classroom by acknowledging the student's experiences and identities. In this class, it includes grace-periods for 2 assignments a semester and the possibility of alternative assignments. I also encourage you to make use of UT's many resources, noted on our syllabus.

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The University of Texas at Austin
Humanities Institute

TA/AI Guide to Difficult Dialogues
Developed by Sarah Le Pichon

OVERVIEW

This resource was compiled by Sarah Le Pichon (French & Italian, PhD candidate) based on a series of workshops in affiliation with the Humanities Institute. The workshops, the TA/AI Guide to Difficult Dialogues, were modeled off of Dr. Pauline Strong's Difficult Dialogues series. This resource is meant to provide guidance to TAs & AIs on difficult pedagogical topics that are often not covered in traditional 398-T courses. This resource will be periodically updated, as more workshops are developed. As no guide could ever address all pedagogical questions we might come across in our careers, see last page of document for a list of UT Austin resources, complete with contact information and brief descriptions.
For questions, please contact Sarah Le Pichon at lepichonsarah@gmail.com

WORKSHOPS

DISCUSSING RACE IN THE HIGHER-EDUCATION CLASSROOM
Facilitator: Gloria González-López

Dr. González-López is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Her research focuses on sexuality and gender with populations of Mexican origin in both the United States and Mexico, and social inequality. All of this work is powered by feminist theory, and how this feminist work might facilitate collective healing and social justice. Dr. González-López is very interested in engaging questions of self-care and ethics, especially as related to research on sensitive or dangerous issues. She is a trained therapist, and has worked with Latina immigrant women with histories of sexual violence. Dr. González-López is also an academic consultant for professionals working in sexual violence prevention and treatment programs at grassroots organizations and academic institutions in Mexico. Dr. González-López says that she wants to "die very old, and feeling unfinished"—she is always in progress.

Suggested Pedagogical Practices

1. *Checking-in*

    Take the first few minutes of class to check-in with students, asking them to share in just a few words how they are feeling, or how they felt about the day's reading. For example, ask them how they felt when reading about slavery, immigration, etc. Make sure you yourself share—model for the students that it's okay to be human. This helps create an intellectual community in which the entire humanity of the student is valued. It helps the classroom be inclusive of all voices and gives the students permission to show who they are.

2. *The Intellectual Community*

    Introduce the idea of creating an intellectual community at the start of the course to establish norms of intellectual engagements. It is not always possible to create a "safe space" (some of us are not going to feel safe in any space), so instead, create a space of respect and honesty. As a community, come up with your own norms of intellectual engagement: brainstorm as a group, and spend a good 20 minutes on the first day of class on this. Norms of intellectual engagement established by the class might include: no interruption, no judgements, no assumptions. Take notes as the students are talking. You as the teacher should feel free to introduce what you think is important based on what you've learned both as a student and a teacher.

3. *Rules of Engagement*

    Now you have a blueprint for the Rules of Engagement. Next, clean it up and type up these rules. Make it sound like a constitution of sorts, "we the students, under the supervision of …. are establishing the following as our rules of engagement". You now have a contract that you can revisit during the course of the semester. Go through it again on the second day of class, edit and make any amendments as you and the students see fit. Write *Do not distribute* at the top of this contract: it is a document you all created together and it is an intimate document; honor your students' work.

4. *Intellectual Vulnerability*

    Introduce the concept of intellectual vulnerability, a concept which means that you are opening yourself up to learning; explain to them that you are the oldest student in the class. Discuss the differences between critical thinking and dogmatic thinking—encourage them to think about ideas and concepts from different angles and to come up with solutions that are sensitive to different ways of engaging with these difficult topics.

5. *Gaps in Knowledge*

    Try to be fear-free as an instructor. Don't be defensive; students will bring up issues you're not aware of, and even if you want to come across as an omniscient being, you're

not there! You don't have all of the answers; tell them 'That's an interesting point/question that I don't know the answer to. Perhaps someone else in the class has an answer, or some information on this? If not, while you work on your bluebooks, I'll work on learning more about this issue'. This allows room for students to share their knowledge. If you feel there is still something to be said about the issue, you can do research and report back to them the next day or next class period. Let students know you are always in progress and teachable as an educator.

6. *Privilege and Doubts*

   Revisit your own unresolved issues and your own privilege as an instructor and an individual. You might turn to your colleagues or mentor(s) for help in this process. Process *with* your colleagues: the more comfortable you feel with yourself, the more comfortable your students will feel in the classroom. Touch base with mentors and see what lessons they can share with you. When you're in the classroom, acknowledge your experience and share it with your students but only to a point where it doesn't trigger fear in you. Give yourself permission to be where you are as an instructor, even if you are not exactly where you would like to be. Be honest with your students, and tell them if/when you have discomfort or concerns.

7. *Moral Discomfort and Feeling Knowledge*

   You might consider introducing and discussing the idea of moral discomfort with your class. Our goal as an educator is to create moral discomfort as a source of intellectual growth and development. Along these same lines, consider the idea of "feeling knowledge": while we're learning, it is crucial that we *feel* and remain engaged. Think of learning as a process that is deeply felt rather than one that is merely understood.

Remember: These techniques work in different ways depending on where you are in your career/grad school trajectory; we can adapt depending on where we are in our careers. Sometimes, you will have to play it safe.

TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING
Facilitators: Lauren White, Sarah Le Pichon

Lauren White is Prevention and Outreach Specialist for Voices Against Violence on the UT Austin campus. Lauren works first and foremost with primary prevention, awareness, bystander intervention and self-care. Sarah Le Pichon is a PhD student in French Studies, whose research focuses on identity and autobiography of female authors in the nineteenth century. Lauren and Sarah came together to work on Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in the Spring of 2017.

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy aims to create an inclusive environment for all students, paying special attention to those many students who have experienced interpersonal violence or other forms of trauma and might therefore be put at risk with certain texts. TI pedagogy, rather than encouraging the removal of these difficult texts, encourages an open dialogue and sets up specific practices for the success of all students in our classrooms. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care (NCTIC) define a trauma-informed approach as including four primary notions:

1. Realizing the prevalence and influence of trauma.
2. Recognizing how trauma affects all individuals involved in the system.
3. Responding with trauma-sensitive practices and policies.
4. Actively working against re-traumatization (SAMHSA NCTIC, 2013), secondary traumatization and new traumatizations in the delivery of services (Butler & Carello, 2014).

This framework is sometimes known as the four "R's," which stand for realization, recognition, response, and resistance (to practices that could retraumatize) (Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, Santos, 2016).

Suggested Pedagogical Practices
Before class:

· Inform students that you are employing a trauma-informed approach, so that you can solicit and integrate their feedback

· Use warnings that detail content, severity, and duration of material that you think might be triggering

· Limit overall exposure levels and vary the intensity of particularly difficult material

· Provide information on self-care practices and resources on your syllabus with specifics for each resource

· Consider policies and practices that help avoid shame, such as grace periods for a certain number of assignments a semester

During class:

· Use verbal or written check-ins to help determine how students are doing emotionally and whether adjustments are needed; you might consider journal check-ins for larger or online classes.

· Ask what the students found most difficult in the material and start the conversation there, keeping the conversation student-centered

· Normalize your students' feelings and reactions

· Allow students not to participate, thereby respecting their limits

· Give students permission to tune out or leave the room briefly to attend to emotional needs when necessary. Remind them of this during difficult discussions.

After class:

· Be prepared to provide referrals (e.g. to organizations like the CMHC, Student Emergency Services, Voices Against Violence, Services for Students with Disabilities), and make sure you have specifics on the referrals.

· Follow up with students who express concerns via email. You may want to follow-up with an e-mail only to the student for whom you are concerned, if you feel comfortable doing so. However, you may also wish to simply send an email out to the class, reminding them of your office hours and availability and on-campus resources.

For further details and/or resources on Trauma-informed Teaching, please consult the following literature review: Trauma-Informed Teaching Literature Review

Trauma Informed Pedagogy Worksheet
Developed by the Center for Skills & Experience Flags and Voices Against Violence

Recommended Practice	Example	In my classroom…
Before class: Inform students that you are employing a trauma-informed approach	· Identify learning as the goal, and student emotional safety as the necessary condition to learning · Craft a syllabus statement that articulates your approach and offers self-care strategies · Use warnings that detail content, severity, and duration · Consider policies and practices that help avoid shame (e.g. a no-penalty late policy)	
During class: Use in-class strategies to promote learning for all students	· Appreciate how trauma may affect student performance · Use verbal or written check-ins to help understand how students are feeling · Normalize feelings and reactions · Allow students to check-out of the conversation discreetly	

After class: Follow up with students who express concerns	· Stay after class to be available for students who need/want to continue discussion · Follow-up via email with students who seem highly affected · Be prepared with to provide referrals to on-campus resources	

UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING
Facilitator: Adria Battaglia

Adria Battaglia is a Curriculum and Instructional Designer at the University of Texas's Faculty Innovation Center, though Adria considers herself a community builder more than a curriculum and instructional designer. She has fourteen years of teaching experience in higher education, and has worked as a lecturer and assistant professor. At the Faculty Innovation Center, Adria works tirelessly to provide support for thoughtful teaching to faculty, staff, and students. She recently organized an Inclusive Teaching Symposium, bringing together staff and faculty from across the campus to share and discuss diverse teaching practices under the umbrella of inclusive teaching and learning.

[Center for Applied Special Technology](#) (CAST) defines Universal Design for Learning as "an educational framework that guides the design of learning goals, materials, methods, and assessments as well as the policies surrounding these curricular elements with the diversity of learners in mind." In UDL fashion, designing for learner variability is key: there is no such thing as an 'average student,' and yet we often continue to design learning environments and processes for a culturally-conceived notion of an "average student.". Implementing UDL into our classrooms is really about reducing barriers (communicative, attitudinal, and systemic) needed for some, but in ways that benefit all. In thinking about the structures that are in place in our system, we can think about how to give students easier navigability in our classrooms. UDL thus provides flexibility and reduces barriers for all of our students. The outcomes of the workshop were outlined as follows:

1. Explore the mindset of Universal Design for Learning
2. Identify strategies for effectively implementing UDL
3. Perform a UDL audit of one of your activities or courses

Suggested Pedagogical Practices
+1 Thinking
Think about just a single thing you can do to implement UDL into your classroom, and start there. We know that 60% of students with disabilities will not report their disabilities to their school. Below are some of pedagogical practices discussed during this workshop. Use whichever practices make the most sense for you and your classroom.
I. **Provide Multiple Means of Representation**
  1. *Caption your media*
     Any time you assign a video or recorded dialogue to your students, make sure to caption your media. This is helpful not only to students with disabilities, but to ESL students, and many other types of learners as well.
  2. *Provide Time Cues*
     Let students know how long it will take them to complete an assignment: giving people more information allows them to make more informed decisions about when to complete assignments and fit things in in a way that makes sense to them. A good rule of thumb for gauging time cues is to add 5-15 mins depending on how long it takes you to complete the work.
II. **Provide Multiple Means of Expression**
3. *Give options for deliverables*
Build choices in for your students in terms of assignments and deliverables, and allow students to showcase their skills in different manners. Various types of assignments and deliverables will let different kinds of learners show you that they know the information you've learned in class.
4. *Let them do it their way*
Make your classroom as student centered as possible. Open up choices to your students to

complete assignments in different ways, and display their knowledge through various deliverables. Let students use their preferred learning style, and go at their own pace.

III. **Provide Multiple Means of Engagement**

5. ***Go step-by-step***

Keep your students engaged by using active learning: change up the activities that you're doing in class regularly during the class period. Include pauses/short breaks or regular checks during the class period to make sure your students remain engaged with the material.

6. ***Start with text***

Make notes taken during class or prepared for class accessible to all students, thereby providing the information shared in class in multiple ways. You can ask for volunteers or rotate the responsibility of having a notetaker in the class.

7. ***Set the content free***

Make as much of your content available to students as possible. For example, make tutorial videos, and put all of your material on Canvas. Making material and information as accessible as possible to students will ensure that class time is not the only time they have access to the information and points you share.

MYTHS and FACTS About UDL

1 MYTH UDL has no research behind it.

FACT UDL is grounded in brain research and other empirical data. *To see the research behind UDL principles, guidelines, and checkpoints, explore the National UDL Center's articles at www.udlcenter.org/research/researchevidence.

2 MYTH UDL is just differentiation.

FACT Differentiation is a component of UDL. Differentiation helps teachers focus on the unique levels of readiness, interest, and the learning profiles of each student. UDL addresses the learning environment first.

3 MYTH UDL is only good to use when you have students who have IEPs.

FACT UDL grew out of accommodating the needs of students with disabilities. But because every student is a variable learner, UDL is a helpful framework to use in any classroom.

4 MYTH If you purchase a UDL product, then you're doing UDL.

FACT UDL isn't something you buy or "do"; it's a set of principles to use as a decision-making framework. True UDL implementation begins with creating a learning environment and lesson plans that meet all students' needs.

5 MYTH UDL is just good teaching.

FACT A person implementing UDL might be described as a good teacher. But "good teaching" has no agreed-on definition, and UDL is a framework with clear principles, guidelines, and checkpoints. Unless teachers are referencing the UDL framework to make decisions, they are not implementing UDL.

6 MYTH To make UDL work, you have to use technology.

FACT Tech can enhance lessons, but UDL helps teachers look at all available resources—including no-tech or low-tech options—and identify new ways to use them.

Adapted from *Design and Deliver: Planning and Teaching Using Universal Design* for Learning by Loui Lord Nelson, Ph.D. www.brookespublishing.com | 1-800-638-3775

*CAST, 2011. Types of evidence supporting UDL. Retrieved from www.udlcenter.org/aboutUDL/udlevidence

Universal Design for Learning Worksheet
Developed by the Faculty Innovation Center

Examine the materials for one course offered, and use the following "look-for" categories to:
·   report on one example from each category or
·   suggest how access to a course element in each category could be expanded.
You may wish to limit your examination of course materials to a single week or unit. Use the plus-one test in order to determine how universally-designed a given interaction is in the course materials or environment.

"Look-For" Categories	Definition	Ideas for Your Assignment/Course
Student Choices	Students are provided choices in how they gain information and show what they know.	
Flexibility in Instructor Presentations	The course content or instructor presents information using multiple methods. Text, image, audio, and verbal presentations complement one another in order to support and challenge diverse learning preferences.	

Metacognition	Students are provided ways to understand how choices in learning are designed to · help them learn, · plan for ways to learn that work best for them, and · reflect whether the choices they make work for them.	
Framing Choices	Materials or presentations describe choices students have in the learning process and explain why the instructor believes they may be beneficial for students.	
Coaching on Choices	Discussions or guidance are provided to students individually or in groups on which learning choices may work best for them.	
Reflection on Choices	Materials or presentations provide a method for students to reflect on and/or plan for effective choices in learning and demonstrating knowledge.	

Practical Applications & Model Instructors

In the spirit of collaboration, I am including below a few pedagogical methods we might follow when teaching difficult texts, such as those mentioned in this dissertation.

I. "Correspondence," George Sand:
- Acknowledge your students' gender identities as you will be acknowledging Sand's. Pass out notecards on the first day of class asking for each student's name as it appears on the registrar, their preferred name, and their pronouns. If you want to do roll call out loud the first day, stick to students' last names so as not to accidentally out a trans- or gender non-conforming student whose legal name is not the one they go by.
- Have open and honest discussions with your students in which you acknowledge the difficulty presented by labeling individuals such as Sand. Go over how Sand referred to herself, how scholars have referred to her, and have students discuss what this means in the historical context of the time.
- Make clear the current situation in France in relation to gender identity. Which terms are widely used? Which ones are legally recognized? What does that tell us about the language and its culture?

II. *La Vagabonde*, Colette:
- Provide your students with content warnings for interpersonal and domestic violence. Flag the specific page numbers students may want to skip if they would still like to engage with the text but not those sections.
- Remind your students of their resources throughout the time you work on this text. Provide specifics for these resources (title of organization, phone number, email address). For resources specific to UT, see the "Resources" section in the Trauma-Informed Teaching in the Higher-Education Classroom Guidebook.
- Discuss the language that is used surrounding violence by the text's narrator. What kind of language does she use? What does that language imply? Is there a shift in that language as the story develops?
- Provide your students with alternative texts and alternative participation methods if they feel that they need to sit this text out. Choose a text that addresses the same general concepts you wanted to discuss in *La Vagabonde* (for example, refer them to *Mitsou* to gain a similar understanding of Colette's creation of the self, the purpose of performance, etc.) You might offer office hours as an alternative method of participation the week you are teaching this text to those students who do not feel prepared to engage with the violence in *La Vagabonde*.

III.   *Une Forme de vie*, Amélie Nothomb:
- Provide content warnings for disordered eating, body shaming, and (the Iraq) war
- As with Colette, provide your students with alternative texts and alternative participation methods if they feel that they need to sit this text out (see above for specifics).
- Have an open conversation with your students about the text's depiction of the body and of body dysmorphia and acknowledge the colonialist and racist nature of terms like "obesity" (and, by association, "BMI").
- Remind your students of their resources throughout the time you work on this text. Provide specifics for these resources (title of organization, phone number, email address). For resources specific to UT, see the "Resources" section in the Trauma-Informed Teaching in the Higher-Education Classroom Guidebook.

I would like, also, to acknowledge the work that is being done in favor of inclusive teaching practices such as these at our university, UT Austin. Instructors like Dr. Gloria González-López, Dr. Thomas Garza, Dr. Steve Lundy, and Dr. Richard Reddick are only a few of the dedicated and innovative teachers we have on our campus who are helping higher-education evolve as our students and society evolve. For specific practices used by some of these instructors, please consult the "UT Austin" section in the Trauma-Informed Pedagogy in the Higher-Education Classroom Guidebook.

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