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Nathan K. Hensley

Georgetown University, nh283@georgetown.edu

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FIGURES OF READING

Nathan K. Hensley

Garrett Stewart, *Novel Violence: A Narratography of Victorian Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009. Pp. 268. \$45.00 cloth.

If you've browsed the Internet or visited a blog at any point in the past decade, then you probably already know that reading is dead. Doomsday reports in the popular and academic presses conspire with our own daily experience, as we tweet and text (or don't), to suggest that the data-processing function called reading has morphed forever into browsing, skimming, multitasking. These shifts in everyday life have found institutional corollaries in literary studies, as older methods now feel called upon to justify their relevance in the face of new processes like data mining, information aggregating, *n*-gramming. "Today," says Franco Moretti with ambiguous tone, "we can replicate in a few minutes investigations that took a giant like Leo Spitzer months and years of work."¹

Moretti is citing a study in *Science* heralding a new species of technological reading, "Culturomics"—a rival, it would appear, to his own. Such advances in literary numerology transform quality to quantity on a massive scale, reconceiving reading as data analysis, hermeneutics as information science. With just a keystroke on Google's Ngram website, anyone can graph a word's frequency in printed books since 1500—or at least those scanned by Google—test driving what even the *New York Times* now calls "Humanities 2.0."²

Depending on how you view it, this transformation has either

chipped away at what makes the humanities human or helped outfit English for a renovated world. Within the discipline, the digital turn has generated dynamic new subfields, but has also enabled critics in historical areas to rethink reading from the ground up. Led by Nicholas Dames, Caroline Levine, Alan Liu, Deidre Lynch, Mary Poovey, and Leah Price, these critics have reached beyond new historicism and cultural studies to examine our place in the history of reading and to question the metaphors that define—or should define—our engagement with text-based information. Should the reading we do be *close* or *distant*? Deep or superficial? Fast or slow? And *is* literature information or something, well, better?

In a much-discussed 2009 special issue of *Representations* called “The Way We Read Now,” Sharon Marcus and Steven Best catalog alternatives to the interpretive reading-for-depth they claim has become orthodox in literary studies.³ Their proposal, *surface reading*, combines methods that linger instead on the manifest, the tactile: from book history and autotelic formalism to Marcus’s *just reading*,⁴ a theoretically elaborated version of what students sometimes call not reading too much into it. Leah Price, for her part, suggests “we do not, and need not, *read* books at all.”⁵ Against such invocations of surface and speed are arrayed defenses of the deep and

slow. Thus, for example, Jane Gallop has indexed the losses already suffered by fine-grained reading and called for a reinvigorated curriculum of closeness. For Gallop, intimate reading at small scales defeats preconceived notions of what a text “will probably say,” short-circuiting prewired expectations. This ability to register particularity is the very justification for teaching literature in the first place—and not, as the New Critics had it, the other way around.⁶ In ways Best and Marcus do not, Gallop therefore makes explicit that by redrawing the boundaries of what reading is and should be, critics also (whether they like it or not) take positions on larger questions about the nature of the humanities in the contemporary marketplace of ideas. If the new austerity has made humanities an endangered species, does a shift to what has been called *distant reading* hasten or slow their extinction? In a universe organized according to principles of numbers-based rationality, should literary analysis become more efficient, more transparent, more informational—or less so?⁷

Without citing any of this, Garrett Stewart’s new book intervenes into recent debates about reading by showing how the slow and deep can share space with the quick and new. Despite its own claims, *Novel Violence* is less an investigation into violence or an announcement of a new method (“narratography”) and more a love letter to reading

in all its semierotic complexity. Fanatic in its dedication to detail, playfully idiosyncratic in its execution, it operates as a kind of anti-informational manifesto even as it activates many of Moretti's own categories—mediation, data processing, idiosyncrasy—to vastly different ends. *Novel Violence* operates microscopically rather than macroscopically, working not broadly on databases or genres but narrowly on selected literary works and selected words within them—sometimes even on syllables within those words or, in one audacious case, on an individual letter (“z” in one line of *Little Dorrit*). Its archive doesn't seek to be comprehensive, since only “the richest . . . novels” exhibit “that post-Romantic density of phonetic language” necessary to repay the kind of scrutiny Stewart risks here (2, 4); only certain texts exhibit the “phrasal and figural density of . . . prose” that makes narratography stick (9). At its best, *Novel Violence* shows what surprises can be unearthed and what secrets unlocked—more on these metaphors to come—when a hyperbolically gifted reader registers the “pulse and tone” of a given text's “micropoetics” (9, 10) and then transforms those miniscule findings into the very hinges of larger thematic problems. Stewart is no latecomer to virtuosic reading, and there are echoes of his earlier work from *Death Sentences* (1984), *Reading Voices* (1990), and *Dear Reader*

(1996) to make sure we know he's been doing this a long time. But the new book also builds on Stewart's more recent thinking, in *Between Film and Screen* (2000) and *Framed Time: Toward a Postfilmic Cinema* (2007), to argue for narrative prose as a distinctive media technology.

Like any other media form—digital cinema or video games, say—narrative prose demands a reading practice appropriate to its specific capacities for reconfiguring content. In calling for “novel criticism as media study,” as his afterword puts it (220–38), Stewart effectively splits the distance between new-media theory and old-fashioned close reading. Taking measure of those media objects called Victorian novels requires renewed attention, Stewart argues, to the “frictions” (229) and “reverberant tensility of narrative prose in its every turn of its onrushing differential signification” (229). Framed in Stewart's characteristically baroque prose—itself a kind of sticky, thick medium—this tensed attention is what constitutes “narratography.” Unlike *narratology*, which looks at big pictures and static structures, *narratography* is “the reading of prose fiction for its words, word for word if called upon—called upon, that is, from within the rush, throng, and drag of phrasing” (6); where *narratology* goes large, *narratography*'s attention falls on “microgrammar” (7), the “internal tensions and resolutions in the

pace of prose” (10) “from line to line, frame to frame” (13). Where narratology deals with a text as synchronic unit, narratography (in italics this time) is “*the apprehension of mediated narrative increments as traced out in prose or image by the analytic act of reading*” (9). The neologism was announced in *Framed Time* as a way to engage cinema that postdated physical film; here it is advertised, over and over again, as a method uniquely able to register the mediating abilities, or what media studies calls the “affordances,” of written prose.

Narratography does what seems like everything: it pays attention to the minute but links up to larger plot details; it focuses on form but “doesn’t relax into formalism” (8); it is not historicism but is attuned to history; it is not genre criticism but demands awareness of genre’s shaping power. The sheer flexibility of this method means that Stewart’s polemic efforts to differentiate it from extant practices can seem erratic. Discussing Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), for example, critique falls on what’s represented as the secret union between Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault:

Bakhtinian prosaics as well as many of the historicist approaches that his work (along with that of Foucault) indirectly licenses would map [*Tenant’s*] intersecting social

idioms—religious, medical, devolutionary, patriarchal, and so forth—at given junctures. But only narratography would engage the very prose of such junctures as the lexical and syntactic momentum by which plotting gets on with it. (117)

Here narratography rises against vulgar historicism as a kind of heroic close reading, one concerned with internal texture rather than external context. Later, though, narratography takes measure of “the fit and slippage of [genre’s] encompassing structural conceit” (125), outdoing genre criticism at its own game. At still other points, it emerges as a particularly sensitive form of what Best and Marcus describe as “symptomatic reading.”⁸ This is the hermeneutic process they associate with Fredric Jameson by which critical activity transforms *depth* into *surface* in an operation of interpretive digging, making the latent manifest. Symptomatic readings, say Best and Marcus, “often locate absences, gaps, and ellipses in texts, and then ask what those absences mean, what forces create them, and how they signify the questions that motivate the text, but that the text itself cannot articulate.”⁹

Later chapters deploy narratography to differing ends, but Stewart’s opening argument is an object lesson in this method.

During his engagement with *Little Dorrit* (1857), the author adopts a series of voices—including an imagined Oxford don and a fake reviewer from the *New York Times Book Review*—to comment on the fact that Arthur Clenham's mother's story is never told. It's a head fake in the story line, an "omitted person plot" (as his chapter title calls it) that could have been but wasn't. What Stewart's reading discloses is "the friction of its erasure" (44), the residue of a storyline that might have disrupted Dickens's melodramatic narrative closure, but was instead "left in the dust by the momentum of the requisite marriage plot" (39). Via that playful but unnerving set of half-ironic personas, Stewart takes measure of this (to him) ostentatious absence, arguing that the gap in Dickens's tale betrays "a certain psychic dissonance" (45) evident only retrospectively, in the textual traces its erasure has left behind.

A microscopically close reading of the sibilant sound carrying through "sinking" to "incendiary" and "friend" in a single line, for example, enables Stewart to show that the prose of the novel reveals what the motion of the plot obscures: it discloses "the widespread suppression" (sinking) "without which, for a Victorian writer like Dickens, social and financial amelioration cannot be achieved" (47). This is symptomatic reading with a vengeance, since it claims that the

novel's fully voiced or overriding logic (of teleological closure sealed with marriage) runs roughshod over the counternarratives that must be squelched to make this dream come true. But these untold or abandoned stories (like Mrs. Clenham's "searing tale of denied desire" [44] or the "sinking") leave "reciprocal remainder[s]" (55) that narratography is able to recover. Through the intervention of this method, the latent can be made manifest, and here reading works recuperatively, against the grain of the novel's plot. But Stewart reminds us that it's working *with* the grain, too, if more subtly, since the novel says the things it doesn't want to say as well, only sotto voce: "the false notes remain, jangling, reverberant. They remain, that is, for the reader to read—and this as a certain lingering discord that outlasts plot itself" (54).

So depth, in the end, really is a kind of surface, and what first seems hidden is perfectly visible to the eye sufficiently trained to see it. This curious reversibility of latent and manifest levels—or, as Paul de Man had it, "grammatical" and "rhetorical" ones¹⁰—proves troublesome for any hermeneutic enterprise, since the case must be made that the clue is there, just not *clearly* there. But there it is. This detective-story dilemma shadows de Manian deconstruction no less than the hermeneutic tradition from Marx and Freud to Jameson. Reversing

conspicuous erasures, filling in evident absences, Stewart's narratography works on Dickens in that latter, symptomatic mode, a fact that's nowhere more evident than when his vocabulary shifts toward the psychoanalytic. Narratography happens in "the transference recognitions of that analytic session called reading" (55); the slip-pages he notices in Dickens's plot are "subliminal, figured rather than denoted" (56). Citing Michael Riffaterre instead of Jameson, Stewart writes that Dickens's "subtexts" are "like the unconscious . . . revealed only in neurotic signs of symptoms of the otherwise functionally repressed" (56).

This means that, here, narratography reads for what's submerged, pulling the rich and strange up from below. As we "sample and decipher . . . underlying excess" and register "breached repressions" (33), the metaphors are of levels in space: prose "operates as if it were shadowed by a *linguistic unconscious* surfacing in kinetic symptoms" (128, original italics). Amidst the striated silence of prose's own buried intentions, the narratographer bears witness "to all that cannot be quite spelled out" (129) and (in certain instances at least) "works . . . to draw into the open what narrative writing half *secret*s (in both opposed senses): invited to educe what it elusively inscribes" (129, original italics). Opening (half-)secret boxes, bringing to the surface what had

been buried, making darkness visible, and deciphering secret codes: thus do the metaphors of reading mix and stack in Stewart's tool kit, revealing that he has not so much invented a new model of reading as combined old ones to dazzling effect.

Here at least, that is, Stewart's narratography could be said to re-mediate without quite acknowledging it a host of earlier modes, from psychoanalytic reading-for-the-repressed to New Critical appreciation of ambiguity and the deconstructive parsing of ambivalence. But like *any* prodigious reader—and he is one—the dangers Stewart faces are of "oversensitivity" (78), "paranoi[a]" (65), the paying of "hypersensitive attention" to the object at hand (65). It's fitting, then, that the literary-historical figure to whom Stewart seems most akin is Edgar Allan Poe. The subject of Stewart's second chapter, Poe appears as a kind of Nabokovian doppelgänger of the author himself, at once stand-in and reverse image—the Clare Quilty to Stewart's Humbert. Poe's tales of cryptography and detection like "Berenice" (1835), "William Wilson" (1839), and "The Imp of the Perverse" (1839) both invite and stage as a problematic Stewart's own method of hyperbolically close reading, where "overattentiveness pushed to obsession" is both possibly unhealthy and somehow unavoidable (70): the only way to be.

Fully infected with this read-erly condition, Stewart is perhaps the ideal hermeneut of Poe's self-ironizing textual puzzles, since he, Stewart, is a man on whom nearly nothing is lost: no clue is invisible, no hint, however buried, is beyond him. Because of this uncanny cotraveling between author and subject—Poe writes like Stewart reads—the chapter on Poe's tales works like a fulcrum in the book, the moment when Stewart sees his own method reflected back as mania. Poe's stories ask, that is, what we can't help but wonder of Stewart: "What if being in the world (due to mental disorder, drugs, alcohol, wasting illness or, alternatively, sheer perceptual genius) amounts to a maniacal hypersensitivity to its surfaces as signs? . . . What if true reading were a kind of dis-ease?" (63, 64). The question recapitulates the key problem of interpretive method—are you reading too much into it?—and takes form in what Stewart refers to as Poe's abiding concern with paranoia. But this, we realize, is also Stewart's concern. And the capacity of Poe's prose to subject its readers, as Stewart says, to "oversensitivity training" (78) might well stand as the most welcome lesson of *Novel Violence* itself. For are we not being taught, page by page, to read with just Stewart's kind of hyperactive care?

The fascinating *mise-en-abyme* of the Poe chapter removes us from

temporal sequence and national tradition—Poe is American, isn't he?—but chapter 3 returns us to chronology, and to England. Here Stewart analyzes the "exchange economy" of Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, panning out from Poe's involuted exercises to take stock of the multiple layers of Anne's all-but-static plot—the slices of narratological distance that Stewart brilliantly reimagines as immaterial screens, less like frames than computer windows (93). Stewart's eye for form brings this otherwise inert novel to life, showing that like *Wuthering Heights* it's a nested story, one where discursive interactions among interested narrators constitute extradiegetic action that's disembodied but very real. But unlike Emily's novel, in which narrative mediations serve to blunt the story's violence, here the screens *are* the violence: it is the interested shaping of narratives that constitutes the novel's most dynamic plot. Here "the layers of transparency are also refractions" (97), and all these screens play out a complex system of transactional interchange in which "the laws of the marketplace rather than the parlor" turn social relations into a "discursive system of credit and recompense" (102).

Methods that suited Dickens and Poe won't work here, and discovering the content conveyed by all these scrimms of formal mediation requires yet more out of

narratography. That's because, in Anne Brontë, the design "isn't finally a matter of surface and depth, main platform and its inset or embedded second stage. Each level exists, though alternately, in the same plane, on the same conceptual playing field" (93). "[P]aper thin" rather than deep (92), *Tenant* gives us everything up front. And where *Little Dorrit* was only accidentally intelligent, leaving its social criticism submerged beneath smothering melodrama for the critic to unearth, *Tenant* is critical by design. What narratography finds of *Tenant* is a novel that plays on its own status as a novel, citing as though to detonate in advance the danger that its own plot might shift, generically, from a didactic novel of manners to "the most squalid of adulterous melodramas" (107). Brontë's novel refuses that turn, and not only avoids a (bad) shift toward the Dickensian but comments self-consciously on that very avoidance, thus incorporating the novel-processing reader into its own textual apparatus. Our own reading, that is, constitutes just one more in the series of readings already plotted in the novel: our spectatorship is implicated in the exchange economy Brontë diagrams. This is complicated reading, or metareading, and it places the text and its reader in a yet different relative arrangement than did the chapters on Dickens or Poe. No longer diagnosing one author's rhetorical

failures (in Dickens) or charting another's purposely self-defeating ironies (in Poe), narratography now takes measure of multiple mediating screens and identifies their designer, Brontë, as the genius behind the curtains.

But the method's not yet exhausted, and *Novel Violence's* most gripping chapter engages with George Eliot's massively complex *The Mill on the Floss* (1859–60). Parting ways with any number of content-based readings of this Victorian favorite, Stewart focuses on its retrospective formal structure. *The Mill's* initial narrator is an unnamed man who, sitting in an armchair, dreams he is standing on a bridge. But this Wordsworthian architecture fades (almost) imperceptibly until the narrative voice becomes the one familiar from Eliot's later novels: ironic, knowing, disembodied (131). The novel's backward-looking structure thus catches up with itself in a forward motion that, in this paradigmatic tale of growing up, mirrors Maggie's own transition from childhood innocence to (fallen) adulthood. For Stewart, this doubled evolution, content and form together, unfolds according to what de Man calls the *rhetoric of temporality*, whereby figurative "distance" between signifier and signified becomes a drama of temporal disclosure: a synchronic spatial disjunction (as in a linguistic sign) is narrated, over time, as a diachronic process of splitting. Stewart

grafts de Man's arguments with Georg Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* (1974) to claim that the form of Eliot's novel serves to index the split between the ideal and real inherent in a lapsed modernity. In Maggie's tale, the "contradiction" between ideal and real "is spatialized as . . . a temporal gap" (140): it's something she's got to learn. This ingenious and sensitive reading—Stewart is breathtaking in accounting for the novel's river imagery—turns Maggie's bildungsroman into a parable of modernity's estrangement from prelapsarian givenness.

For Stewart, *The Mill* is "the most Hegelian thing, let alone the most Lukácsian thing, that the philosophic Eliot ever wrote" (164). But while she was composing *The Mill*, Eliot consorted often with architects of liberal historicism J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer, author of "Progress, Its Law and Its Cause" (1857): no doubt *those* theories of modernity have something to do with Maggie's fall into the river of history, too. Its choice of interlocutors commits Stewart's reading to a long-duration historical view, a claim about modernity that is perforce blind to the novel's more direct intellectual links. Concerned with something called history but strangely dehistoricizing, narratography now emerges as an improved Lukácsian novel theory, chronicling modernization and its traumas at the level of both plot and sentence.

The final chapter, on Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) builds on this reading of Eliot but marks another methodological turn, this time toward genre criticism. For Stewart, Hardy's story of exploitation and sacrifice focuses its critique of modernization on the physical body of Tess herself. Her virtue canceled and her body transformed into an object of our gaze, Tess's "true lapse is the primal fall into plot" (199); namely, the plot of the modernization narrative itself. As the very embodiment of the novel form's split between ideal and real, "Tess's body must bear the brunt of fiction's own both sensuous and disillusioned form" (206). In an argument that recapitulates the Lukácsian architecture already tested on Maggie Tulliver, Stewart shows that "Tess personifies the formal irony of the novelists own bitter prose poetry" (207); she's killed, in other words, by the design of the novel form itself, and her "vanishing point," like Maggie's (215), comes when her physical body is sacrificed to the rupture in experience constitutive of the novel as such.

This echo of Stewart's earlier work in *Death Sentences* perhaps calls for a brief mention of the concept meant to distinguish his newest argument from those earlier readings. Despite assurances that "[h]uman violence and linguistic deviance are never equated in what follows" (25), *Novel Violence* exploits the mobility of its title term

in ways familiar to readers of conceptual prose since the late 1970s.¹¹ But Stewart does not mention key theorists of *epistemic violence* like Gayatri Spivak, Jacques Derrida, or Emmanuel Levinas, turning instead to Roman Jakobson to imagine violence not as physical harm but linguistic rupture, “a breached expectation of both syntax and psychic affect” (18). For Stewart, this cognitive breakage, played out at the level of the sign, is opposed to yet another kind of (nonphysical) violence, the shaping force of form itself. These two violences finally array against what we might call the real kind, such that “the violence of language, its drastic swerve from referential stability, is dispatched to formalize (and at times defuse) that more focused violence rendered *in* language by the histrionic agonies that multiply across Victorian plots” (22).

As these multiple registers play out, one feels that a term for somatic injury has been transformed into a lit-crit shifter, to unite discrete realms of experience—ontological, material—by rhetorical fiat. However that may be, it’s clear in these last chapters that narratology steps forth as an all-powerful tool: alert to “every level of textual processing” (184), it now attends also to the directive force of genre, since *Tess*, at least, is nothing so much as “a reading of other texts” (184) in which its main character “has the thoughts of others without

knowing it” (187). Our job, Stewart suggests, is to read *Tess* reading those other texts. In this way does Hardy’s story, like Poe’s, constitute a kind of “autonarratology” (193) or “parable of reading” (185). It trains us to read better.

At the end of these five chapters, narratology stands as a capacious and flexible method, indeed, since it encompasses symptomatic close reading (Dickens), mediation analysis (Brontë), Marxist-Hegelian novel theory (Eliot), and a fantastically alert and self-reflexive genre criticism (Hardy). At points, Stewart seems to realize the elasticity of his new method, referring to it as a container of so many others: “Now psychoanalytic, now generic and historical, [in narratology] broader methodologies collide—merge and rework each other—across the medial . . . workings of text, including their workings upon us” (57). Despite the evident anxiety about defining narratology—an attempt appears on nearly every page—what finally resolves in the reader’s mind is that these accountings for tension, paradox, and tiny units of meaning, while still keeping in sight the big pictures of plot and genre, might finally add up to something we’d probably do best to call good reading.

No doubt, Stewart is a nimble practitioner of this method—one of our best—and shows on page after page an almost magical ability to make miniscule details deliver

large thematic payloads. At one point, in a brief discussion of *Heart of Darkness* (1899) (84–86), he shows how Joseph Conrad's prose melds the tactile and the metaphysical to join warring ontological modes: the text describes "sprints"—particular kinds of spars, running diagonally across a sail—but means "spirits." Or rather, it means both, but can say only one while uncannily echoing the other. Materialist and idealist value systems, Conrad's twin poles no less than Stewart's, collapse into one enigmatic double signifier, the sprit that is also a spirit, the physical detail of sailing that folds silently, almost imperceptibly (hinging on just an "i"), into something inef-fable. Stewart here shows us prose aimed at two goals at once, wavering ironically so as to typify what he goes on to call "the condition of all literary experience" (87).¹²

I wrote "wow" in my margin, but had trouble seeing how this beautiful reading differed from what a New Critic or Derridean, if we could find one, might do with the same passage. Like those predecessor modes, narratology's key metaphors are kinetic. As a form of hyperawareness or (as in Poe) actual paranoia, narratology finds its images in tension and vacillation, "unrest" (229). Without "relax[ing]" (8), Stewart's tensed, intensive reading wants tightness, tensivity, density, and all its alliterative alternatives, "pulse and tone" (10) and throng and drag, all to create (for example)

"a suitably tensed reading of Dickens" (33). It must be difficult to read this way. It is difficult to read him reading this way, since Stewart's ec-statically polysyllabic prose, always Latinate, warps and wefts through multiple-clauses-at-once-without-breathing: in ways both bracing and strange, the prose feels like a time capsule from another era of theoretical writing.

The curious undatability of its execution is related, I think, to what we would have to call the idiosyncrasy of the book's critical archive. Rather than engaging recent works that have opened Victorian studies to dynamic theoretical metacritique—we might mention Andrew Miller's *Burdens of Perfection* (2008), Elaine Freedgood's *The Ideas in Things* (2006), or Nancy Armstrong's *How Novels Think* (2005)—Stewart quibbles with keywords volumes on Victorian literature (17). To be sure, *Novel Violence* predates some of those bigger interventions but ignores the rest, preferring to launch its polemics against old and famous men: he takes on narratology in its most canonical versions—Tzvetan Todorov and Roland Barthes—and what he calls historicism as such (Bakhtin and mechanically applied Foucault are the targets here). The book's main living interlocutors, D. A. Miller and Peter Brooks, also appear in dust jacket blurbs, sharing space with Lukács and Jakobson, both of whose major

statements on the novel do receive fascinating updates. Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's rarely discussed *Forms of Violence* also earns a welcome revival.

Reopening the dossier on those older touchstones is a major strength of the book, but the odd windlessness of its critical scene is also a missed opportunity, since it would have been instructive to hear Stewart engage those methods, like Moretti's, that seek to abandon the very techniques of intimate apprehension—can I say appreciation?—Stewart marshals so formidably here. Instead, this caprice of critical context, along with Stewart's strongly marked prose, can leave the readers feeling as though they're eavesdropping on a mind in dialogue with itself. Its bravura nonengagement with current work is all the more curious since in 2004 Stewart appeared in print alongside Nicholas Dames, Leah Price, and Stephen Arata discussing—guess what—reading¹³ In *Novel Violence*, Stewart says that “Victorian audiences read for the conjuring work of . . . language, phrase by phrase, sometimes syllable by syllable” (1). But this offhand historical claim—did Victorians *really* read that way?—is belied by the rest of the book, which is concerned not with how Victorians read, in the past tense, but with how Garrett Stewart reads now.

This is, in fact, its signal pleasure. And if *Novel Violence*'s two key concepts—violence and

narratography—finally fail to take lasting shape, we should take hints from Stewart's own method to read this apparent failure recuperatively rather than suspiciously.¹⁴ We should note, I mean, that it's in the local detail, the line-by-line brilliance of those fine-grained analyses, that the book repays the close scrutiny it demands. In fact, it's the texture of Stewart's individual readings, more than his overt statements of method, that makes *Novel Violence* such an unannounced metacritical bombshell. The most compelling thing about Stewart's book may be that while it never once engages recent controversies over the institutional future of literary studies, it arrives as a kind of silent polemic in what we could call the reading wars. As enriching are its local observations, *Novel Violence* is most impressive, perhaps, when read against its grain, as a spirited intervention into current disciplinary debates that exposes “just reading,” graph making, and word counting as so many thin-blooded substitutes for the Real Thing. By negotiating a dynamic peace between literary method and media studies, Stewart has made a great, crazy case for how reading might survive, or even emerge regnant, in our brave new hypermediated world.

Nathan K. Hensley is an assistant professor of English at Georgetown University. His work has appeared in The Politics of Gender in Anthony Trollope's Novels

(Ashgate, 2009) and Victorian Studies; another piece is forthcoming in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*.

NOTES

1. Franco Moretti, "Network Theory, Plot Analysis," *New Left Review* 68 (2011): 80–102, quotation on 80.
2. "Ngram" is what Google has branded the charts made by searching its archive of digitized books. Google's Ngram generator is at <http://ngrams.google-labs.com/>, accessed 15 May 2011; see also <http://culturomics.org>, accessed 3 June 2011. The *New York Times* Humanities 2.0 series is available at <http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/tag/humanities-2-0/>, accessed 25 May 2011. The essays published under this head could be taken as emblematic of the pitfalls that attend seeing literature as data. Over the course of the nineteenth century, we're told, "[a] decline in references to 'God,' 'Christian,' and 'universal' confirms the conventional view that the 19th century was a time of rising secularism and skepticism" (Patricia Cohen, "Analyzing Literature by Words and Numbers," *New York Times*, 3 December 2010, accessed 25 May 2011, www.nytimes.com/2010/12/04/books/04victorian.html).
3. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 1–21.
4. *Ibid.*, 9–12.
5. Cited in *ibid.*, 8.
6. Jane Gallop, "Close Reading in 2009," *ADE Bulletin* 149 (2010): 15–19, quotation on 16. See also Jane Gallop, "The Historicization of Literary Studies and the Fate of Close Reading," *Profession*, 2007, 181–86.
7. In the chapter "English's Market Retreat," Christopher Newfield argues that by setting up these alternatives between going *with* neoliberal administrative shifts or opting out of them with principled nonparticipation, literary studies (as led by the Modern Language Association) contributed to its own marginalization; this false choice forced literary studies away from thinking tactically about its role in the future (technocratic) university (*Unmaking the Public University: The Forty-Year Assault on the Middle Class* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008], 142–58).
8. Best and Marcus, "Surface Reading," 3–6.
9. *Ibid.*, 3.
10. Paul de Man opens *Allegories of Reading* by staging this dilemma of surface and depth, referring to "two entirely coherent but entirely incompatible readings that can be made to hinge on one line" of Yeats's "Among School Children" (12), one "grammatical" or obviously literal and the other "rhetorical" or figural (thus *deeper*), staging the undoing of that first. But for de Man, crucially, we cannot "make a valid decision as to which of the readings can be given priority over the other," since "none can exist in the other's absence" (*Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979], 12).
11. The phrase is Gayatri Spivak's, but the statements that helped authorize the mobility between ontological and somatic applications of the term *violence*—and to institutionalize it in literary studies—came from the figure whose work she helped introduce to the academy (see Jacques Derrida, "Violence and Metaphysics," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978], 79–153; and Derrida, "The Violence of the Letter," in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak [Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976], 101–40).
12. Cannon Schmitt has also recently drawn on Joseph Conrad to intervene

into debates about reading methodologies, using just this opening sequence in *Heart of Darkness* to engage with Best and Marcus's call for a new literalism ("Tidal Conrad (Literally)," unpublished seminar paper, North American Victorian Studies Association [NAVSA], 2010).

13. For essays by Nicholas Dames, Stephen Arata, and Garrett Stewart, with Leah Price's response, see the section "Read-

er's Block: A Response," in *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (2004): 231–42.

14. Eve Sedgwick's slightly different dyad, also uncited by Stewart, opposes "paranoid" and "reparative" reading practices, arguing for the ethical superiority of the latter. For a recent investigation of these, see Heather Love, "Truth and Consequences: On Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," *Criticism* 52, no. 2 (2010): 235–41.