

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D.
in Critical and Creative Writing**

In a message dated . . .

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Abstract

This dissertation was prompted by Barthes' ironic injunction that 'No "thesis" on the pleasure of the text is possible'. With characteristic playfulness, Barthes here outlines a counter thesis on the nature of writing, one outside the usual boundaries of hypothesis-argument-conclusion and that points to the difficulty of conveying the concept of a text of pleasure in formal academic discourse. The present thesis represents a response to this problem, with two columns of text juxtaposed on the pages of the four sections that follow the introduction. Both columns are part of the same process of critical-creative writing that informs the thesis but they are presented in different styles: formal critical commentary in the right-hand column and a critifiction in the style of an e-mail monologue on the left.

The title of the thesis, 'In a message dated ...', has particular reference to the fiction in the left-hand column that was developed from an e-mail exchange between the author ('A') and Raymond Federman ('M'), one of the theorists/writers who informs the ideas of this work. Each of the sections in columns approaches issues about the pleasure of the text, but from different standpoints: souvenirs, cyberspace, madness and abjection. These perspectives provide the triangulation necessary for the author to get closer to the central purpose of her thesis: an investigation into her own unorthodox style of writing, one which defies any convenient genre. By placing herself at the centre of the investigation, both as a writer and as a fictional character, a process of self-discovery takes place. What she discovers is the difficulty of connecting the pleasure of her dispersed and fragmented writing into a coherent whole. Maurice Blanchot has described this search for wholeness as a 'curious kind of crab's progress', that 'at the moment it is about to emerge makes the work pitch strangely'. Ultimately, all that can be established is that writing took place.

E-mail was chosen because it provided an economy of language and seemed to be the ideal medium to capture the spontaneity necessary to engage fully in the pleasure of writing. The context in which e-mail operates is universally understood; it can dispense with formal grammar, punctuation and spelling; fragments of unconnected text can exist with no further explanation. These features provided the freedom of the left-hand column of the thesis which was then put into a context and supported by the formal commentary on the right. To engage with a language of pleasure involved giving oneself over (in the e-mail fiction at least) to a seduction, a desire for the other's words. It also involved abandoning a previously written text, called *Souvenir*. This is attached as an appendix to the thesis as a physical reminder of the souvenir it represents.

The fifth and final section of the work, a third-person narrative called 'Paris', reflects back on a first and second meeting of the e-mail correspondents in Paris a year apart. It provides, however, neither a conclusion to the critique nor a climactic fictional ending. Instead, here the columns of the first four sections dissolve into a single body of text, free from the constraints of both the critical commentary and the e-mail discourse, now no longer necessary as the couple have met in actual time. It is an outcome of the thesis, but one that could not have been known in advance. It is a culmination but not a resolution of a problem or argument. In this it supports the kind of critique highlighted by Barthes in the opening sentence above, that the pleasure of the text is always a matter of potential, not of conclusions.

I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on the road, between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies, I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular, I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others. I have to speak. No one compels me to, there is no one, its an accident, a fact. [. . .] there is nothing, nothing to discover, nothing to recover, nothing can lessen what remains to say, I have an ocean to drink, so there is an ocean then.

(Samuel Beckett, 1997b: 316)

Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Introduction	2
Souvenir	28
From Cyberspace to the Epistolary Text	63
Voices of Madness	100
Abjection	135
Paris	162
Notes from e-mails	198
Bibliography	201
Appendix - <i>Souvenir</i>	

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Introduction

No 'thesis' on the pleasure of the text is possible. (Roland Barthes, 1989: 34)

Form and Voice

This dissertation grew out of a series of e-mail exchanges between myself and Raymond Federman, one of the theorists/writers whose work informs my thesis. The e-mail monologues in the left-hand column¹ of each page of the first four sections are at once a work of fiction and a critical commentary on fiction.² The e-mails represent an attempt to engage with a more authentic writing voice. Not authentic as in true to some genuine or original style, but rather true to the writing itself. E-mail allows a certain freedom and spontaneity, a possibility to give oneself to language without concern for the constraints of structure, grammar or spelling. What can result (unless imitation is sought) is an idiosyncratic voice, one Roland Barthes describes as 'the author's personal and secret mythology', their glory, their prison and their solitude. This, says Barthes, is the writer's 'thing' (1986: 11). To have included Federman's voice in the left-hand column would have set up a dialogue or a merging of two voices, creating a very different voice from the one I finally decided to use. The exclusion of Federman's e-mail voice also questions whether there is an actual listener at all. Although the presence of the other³ is felt, the absence of his voice presents a text that can be read either as a soliloquy or as an epistle.

I did not set out to construct my dissertation from e-mails. The e-mail exchange with Federman began spontaneously as an amorous discourse and a discourse on writing itself, one that questions the relationship between autobiography and fiction in cyberspace. The original e-mails always worked on several levels, ranging from chatty daily banalities to critical discourse on the writing process itself. In deciding which e-mails to work with for the

¹ The length of the left-hand columns relative to the right-hand columns was not pre-planned; each was as long as it needed to be within the overall word limit. In the first section the right-hand column is longer, providing white space on the left toward the end of the section. In the subsequent three sections the left-hand columns run on past the right as the fiction starts to exceed the critical commentary. Finally, in the fifth section, 'Paris', the columns dissolve into a single body of text, free from both the critical commentary and the e-mail discourse. The fiction, a (mainly) third-person narrative, is a culmination of the thesis in which the text 'Paris' attempts to liberate itself from the delineation both of the e-mail narrative (as the virtual couple meet) and the critical theory (that validated it).

² I have placed the bibliographic citations in the e-mails in endnotes to avoid interrupting the flow of words. In the right-hand column of commentary I have followed the usual Harvard-style practice.

³ The use of the term 'the other' in the text can be read as referring to the individual interlocutor, as a universal other, or its usage in philosophy as an aspect of the self. If it is not obvious from the context in which it is used, this is because more than one meaning may apply or I expect the reader to apply their own interpretation.

left-hand column of the thesis (and which to leave out) I was influenced by three factors: the word limit required by the University, those e-mails that best supported the critical element of the thesis,⁴ and those e-mails that helped to set up the fictional narrative of the relationship. Ultimately it was the decision to set up the two columns that started to inform these choices, with each column needing to complement the other. What I wished to avoid was a functional separation of the critical and the creative elements of the thesis, but instead to give a sense of their interplay.

Despite the exclusion of Federman's e-mail responses there are, nevertheless, several different voices discernible in the polyphonic e-mail fiction, one of which employs an immediacy that is instant and disposable, a social voice mimicking speech, even though it may not be read by the e-mail recipients until hours later. This particular voice becomes a deliberate parody of a gossiping voice, and also the kind of voice that can only come from intimacy. This voice also emphasises the absurdity of the mock flirtation itself. Chatty and playful, at times almost childlike, this voice deliberately contrasts with the more reflexive e-mails and also with the formal critique in the right-hand column, but it is no less inquiring for that. Blanchot sees the chattering, prattling voice as an intimate conversation which, in its very nullity, says more than speech that seeks to provide authority, answers, conclusions and closure (Blanchot, 1997: 122). He challenges the disparaging use of such terms to depreciate the voice of children and women as of no significance, truth or importance. In this context the chattering voice has the honesty to acknowledge that for the most part there is nothing left to say, no one to say it to, and no longer any subject behind the voice: it is simply a monologue to fill the empty void.

What, though, does it mean, as I have done, to put yourself into your work? 'A', the writer persona of the left hand-column, emerged instantaneously from 'Angela', a voice so much mine and yet so much not mine, a neurotic voice with an insatiable desire for the other's words. Federman, Wittig, Acker and others claim that as soon as writers put themselves into their work, they become fictional characters:

the fact of inserting one's name in one's fiction is only one way of subverting the factual and abolishing the boundary between reality and imagination—between truth and the lie. Another way, even more effective, is self-reflexiveness, which points to the truth of fictitiousness while denouncing the imposture of realism. (Federman, in McCaffery, 1998: 386)

⁴ These fall into two further categories: e-mails where I *tell* the interlocutor my views and ideas, and those where I *show* him through the writing voice itself whether I am illustrating schizophrenic language, self-reflexiveness, delinquency, etc.

The same applies when one inserts other real people into such a work of fiction. Beckett, for example, is frequently referred to throughout the e-mail text as Sam, the familiarity arising both from a mutual admiration of Beckett's work (Federman wrote the first doctoral thesis on Beckett) and from Federman's friendship with Beckett developed during the former's many visits to Paris. Meanwhile, Federman himself turns into and becomes 'M' (from Moinous, a Federman alias), the silent but responsive correspondent. In the final section 'Paris' the fiction takes place partly around this characterisation of 'A' and 'M', a role that developed throughout the text.

In two respects, however, the e-mail fiction differs from the original e-mails from which they were taken. First, for the most part e-mails are written horizontally on the screen and not in columns. Second, they have been edited for the purpose of presenting this Ph.D. thesis, both in terms of spelling (apart from deliberate playing on words and neologisms), and in terms of some of the symbols that emerged in the text. But, in addition, there was an immediate though unstated understanding that the e-mails were a reflection on writing itself. Almost imperceptibly they became their own thesis and at the same time a parody of my dead text, *Souvenir*.

Souvenir is an abandoned text containing many references for this Ph.D thesis. In turn, *Souvenir* was ignited by the image of Artemisia Gentileschi's painting of Judith beheading Holofernes. Both a copy of the painting and *Souvenir* are attached as an appendix to the main work, not because the text itself forms a part of the main thesis, but because *Souvenir* provides a reference point and a physical reminder of the souvenir it represents. *Souvenir* was a palimpsest rather than a starting point or progression for the current writing. Had it been possible, I would have placed it as a miniature book held inside a cut out centre of this volume, just as one places a memento inside a locket. There were obvious technical reasons why this would not have been practical but I wish the reader to consider the image nonetheless. Cixous captures the relationship between the thesis and *Souvenir* when she tells us that: 'When one breaks off a relationship one always keeps traces of attachment. It is never completely dislocated. What she detaches herself from is what is dead' (Cixous in Lispector, 1995: xvii -xviii). The appendix *Souvenir* and the section 'Souvenir' (in the main text) share the the same title precisely because 'Souvenir' is concerned with memories and mementos as traces in the writing process, and also as trigger points for new writing. *Souvenir* is an account of obsession in which Marianne tries and fails to either capture or escape the object of her desire. Talk of death and stabilising the desired thing remain elusive. When Marianne decapitates her lover, the bodiless head continues to demand Marianne's attentions. Death is at once given and not given, defying both a resting place and

a resolution of the text itself. Desire and disgust for the lover share a desire and disgust for the writing that was constantly slipping away. This is precisely how the dead fiction *Souvenir* worked. Like the head itself, *Souvenir* refuses to be abandoned but keeps resurfacing throughout this entire text, as though reminding the reader of its need to be mourned and remembered. For this reason it was both integral to the text and yet separate from it; not to include it would have bestowed it with mystical properties.

With the e-mails new writing possibilities emerged and *Souvenir* was left as no more than one version of the many that had preceded it:

And this 'book', is it always this Harlequin's costume of libidinal fragments, no sooner assimilated than it collapses into rags? (Lyotard, 1993: 261)

The disembodied head in *Souvenir* was metaphorically replaced by the disembodied head of my e-mail co-respondent—for in cyberspace there is no physical body to deal with; nor is there any overall plan or design to imitate. And yet, the physical absence of the other in e-mail *increased* the other's proximity, at the same time also heightening the self. Indeed, it was the perpetual absence of the other that fuelled the desire for writing and for receiving the other's words. Never knowing how the other would respond, or if the exchange would stop as abruptly as it had begun, not caring about the risks, directionless, destitute, I became subject to the writing as well as its author. As Lyotard says: 'energies pass through us and we have to suffer them' (1993: 256).

In deliberate contrast to the left-hand side, the right-hand column of each page follows more accepted conventions of scholarly discourse. It has a planned narrative and makes use of parenthetical citations in the main text. The right-hand column presents the critical theories and references that inform and underpin my ideas about writing. Although both the left and the right-hand columns deal essentially with the same ideas, each exists in its own separate universe of discourse, separated only by a narrow blank thread. The reason for presenting the main body of the text in two columns is a response to Barthes' injunction that there can be no thesis on the pleasure of the text. Why? Because pleasure is felt through the senses rather than through deductive reasoning. Paul Feyerabend amplifies this point when he insists that 'love becomes impossible for people who insist on "objectivity"' (1987: 263). He well understands the need to *feel* experience rather than have it scientifically *tested*. Lyotard arrives at the same conclusion but from a different direction when he says that 'discourse cannot satisfy theory's requirement' (Lyotard, 1993: 257). In terms of the present thesis, there was a need to allow for a more fluid relationship between the creative and the critical, and to create the conditions necessary for a reader to appreciate that relationship. The two

columns in this sense are both complementary and distinct: they exist as equals and as versions of each other.

A few writers, notably Nietzsche, Barthes, Cixous, Derrida, Deleuze and Lyotard himself, have managed to retain a poetic fluidity in their writing, even when philosophizing. The challenge for the poet-philosopher, as for the creative-critical writer, is to present a critique on writing that does not betray the sensuality of language. Hence, *Jouissance* provides the central focus of this study, the pleasure produced by the language itself regardless of any literary architecture that might contain it. The reader should feel the pleasure (or disgust) of the text in its language and rhythms. The left-hand column of this thesis had to address the senses rather than the intellect, talk to the body as well as the mind. I had to remain true to the bliss, the excess, and the disregard for rules and avoid the trap of losing the pleasure of the text in dry academic discourse. In an e-mail to Federman (the voice of the left-hand column) dated 6/1/03 10:44 pm I wrote:

with a delinquency of speech – a disregard of grammar – a type of dyslexia – a different way of approaching – all the time posing – questioning – a philosophical poetic language comprising of slip-ups – where interesting things might occur by accident – where what is not said is as important as what is said – where the repetitions and mistakes make the signifier vibrate and scream out – a different way of seeing – an undoing – a working without anaesthetic – exposing the nerves – working with speed before thought catches up and gags you – being prepared to be lost – wanting to be lost – needing to be lost – to trust in being lost and asking where am I now – ‘where now who now’ – the writer being a presence in the work – who is this I who speaks who writes – how many of me are there -- do I split – multiply --

In one respect, the right-hand column began as no more than orderly footnotes to support the e-mail critification on the left. In the original presentation, the right-hand column was, indeed, to be presented as extended footnotes. The columns were conceived simply as a way of avoiding any hierarchical reading of the two texts. Presented outside of a doctoral thesis the left-hand column would have stood on its own. And yet as the work unfolded, the two columns started to support each other physically as well as instructively. A symmetry was created in which each required the other's presence to reinforce its own integrity. But I was also interested in the way that the two columns set up a third discourse, a flirtation between the two interlocutors. On the left-hand column the reader is let in on the text as a voyeur of the intimacy between the virtual couple A and M, while in the right-hand column the writer stands back from the couple and talks ‘behind their backs’ to a universal reader. A tension is created between the reading of the two texts, but more significantly, an allure is set up as the reader's eye continually slips and is drawn horizontally across pathways between the two texts. The reader must make an active decision whether to

follow each column horizontally to the bottom of each text, or to jump across the texts, reading fragments from each.

Structure and Themes

This introduction, of course, employs the formal writing style of the right-hand column. Its purpose is to present to the reader the rationale for the stylistic and structural presentation of the work, and second, to announce the main themes covered by this dissertation and the ideas about writing that underpin it. *In a message dated...* is divided into five sections. The first section, 'Souvenir', opens with the impossibility of knowing what one is going to write in advance of writing. It continues with a discussion on the doubt and disappointment of the writer, and the inevitable failure of writing. In this respect it parallels the dead fiction of the same name (attached as an appendix). This section also examines the use of mementoes, trophies, and other miniaturised conceptual models as a way of approaching complex ideas. The second section, 'From Cyberspace to the Epistolary Text', discusses whether electronic text offers a new economy of writing, or a re-engagement with a lost writing voice that was closer to speech, a more sensual and spontaneous language. The third section, 'Voices of Madness', discusses theories of 'schizophrenic language' alongside reflections on how my former career in psychiatry has influenced my later career as a writer.

The fourth section, 'Abjection', looks at the influence that the abject has on my work. My writing contrasts images of the sacred and the defiled, setting up a relationship between desire and disgust. Decay, death and defilement, as Julia Kristeva describes it (1982: 2-3), are the primers of our culture. They are the other side of a border that defines who and what we are. The dead fiction, *Souvenir*, was inspired by an image (Holofernes with his throat being cut) that captures the crossing of this border, that precise moment between life and death that Cixous refers to as 'moments of coming onto being, in the space of the not yet and the already' (Cixous in Lispector, 1995: xi). One sees in Holofernes' eyes the realisation that he is passing through that border which Kristeva says defines who and what we are. As described in *Souvenir*, the painting presents the viewer with an ambiguous image: the head of Holofernes being removed from his shoulders and arms could be also viewed as though it were being birthed from between a woman's thighs, the assassins transformed into midwives. Such enigmatic juxtapositions are as much a feature of the writing as they were of the painting. Any sense of wholeness about the text is constantly disrupted by the *illusion* of a 'story' that defies resolution through a constant metamorphosis of the narrative. The opening deconstruction of Gentileschi's painting in *Souvenir* shifts to the desire for the

lover's head viewed inside the snowglobe. The fiction then shifts inside the snowglobe where it opens out from the miniature to the gigantic, digresses, and closes in again. The decapitation in *Souvenir* is at once both an act of desire and disgust, an oscillation between the two, a playing with those fragile borders that define the abject. Desire for the object of the other's head also raises questions about the author's desire and disgust for the writing. This is Blanchot's bliss of the instant that cannot be captured and is always passing away, the impossibility of making whole what is dispersion (Blanchot, 2003: 101).

The secondary narrative that runs through the entire e-mail fiction in the main body of the thesis parallels the dead fiction of *Souvenir*. Desire for writing and desire for the other's words intensifies and leads to a physical meeting of the virtual couple. In the fifth, end section, 'Paris', the columns dissolve and the writer steps back from both the theory and the e-mail exchange. The true impact of the columns on the reader may only now be felt as the writing reverts once again into a single body of text, and yet a text that multiplies and detours on itself. Gone is the equilibrium set up by the two columns. Also omitted are the themes that contextualize each of the four preceding sections. The voice is no longer addressing the individual interlocutor directly but is rather addressing a universal 'you' rather than being specific to M. The anticipation of the virtual couple's meeting is replaced by a reflection on that meeting (in fact, two meetings set a year apart). How do two spectral, fictional characters survive a physical encounter? In most relationships there is a gradual process of assimilation of the individual's physical, mental and ethical characteristics. Here the couple set eyes on each other for the first time, but with an intimate relationship and knowledge of the other already established. What are the consequences of the virtual couple meeting outside of the screen? What happens, for example, when the e-mail voice, supported by its prosthetic keyboard, is replaced by the unco-ordinated stutterings and mumblings of the human voice? Can the virtual relationship ever be re-established after such a meeting? Which relationship is the more fictional? And how do the characters reconcile playing different roles in different dramas?

Kafka well understood this paradox. He had a series of intimate relationships through letter writing, only able to see those he later approached in real life through the detour of his letters. As Blanchot says, he was 'as if repelled from all living relations' (Blanchot, 1997: 277). What prevented Kafka from carrying through his relationships in real life he describes as follows:

My true fear [...] [is] that you would feel for an animal condemned to muteness and eternal separation. [...] I would remain forever excluded from you [...] what bothered me [...] was, essentially, the fear of having to regard as real the one who writes letters to me. (Kafka,

in Blanchot, 1997: 277)

As if reflecting on my earlier question of who were the two who met in Paris, Blanchot poses a similar question in relationship to friendship: 'Who was the subject of this experience?' Blanchot says that we must give up trying to know those to whom we are linked by something essential; we must rather greet them in our estrangement, in the unknown, and 'reserve, even on the most familiar terms, an infinite distance [. . .] [that] brings us together in the difference and sometimes the silence of speech' (Blanchot, 1997: 291). The final pages of the last section, 'Paris', thus do not present any climactic conclusion. Rather the pages record an anticlimax, the sense of an experience that could not live up to the relationship created in virtual time. The excessiveness of speech and familiarity created in the e-mail exchange is now replaced with Blanchot's silence, the couple's estrangement, with the real meeting being at the same time both ordinary (because real life produces its own banality), and extraordinary (because with the screen removed it feels more heightened, more like a fiction, than the one written on e-mail, and this time without the controls that the keyboard allowed).

E-fiction

I began writing to Raymond Federman in November 2002, after being introduced to his work through photocopied sheets of an extract from his essay 'Surfiction' (in Kostelanetz (ed), 1994). In it Federman articulated everything I felt about my own writing process and where I positioned myself in terms of writing. In particular, Federman shared my loathing for the term 'experimental' when referring to writers who do not conform neatly to categorisations such as poetry or the novel, those writers who do not meet commercial expectations of sameness, where writing equals a linear narrative, with a clear beginning-middle-end, a good plot and characters.⁵

⁵ In referring to several of Federman's books throughout the e-mails, his own abbreviations for some of his works have been used: Tioli for *Take It Or Leave It*; Don for *Double or Nothing*; Smiles for *Smiles on Washington Square*. The main texts of Federman referred to in this thesis are *Critifiction* and *Surfiction*, in which Federman sets out his own philosophy on writing. *Take It Or Leave It* is a diatribe on life seen through the eyes of the young Franco-Jewish draftee into the 82nd Airborne (paratroop) Division. Tioli is a series of second-hand digressions dismantling the American dream while at the same time dismantling the conventional novel. Federman achieves this with typographic gymnastics, by cancelling out the story as it goes along, and by multiplying the voices in the text. In *Double or Nothing*, the fictional narrator shuts himself up in a room for a year with 365 boxes of noodles to write his book. The failure of the novel is the ironic sub-plot (obsessional self-reflexiveness taken to the extreme) against which the physical text itself, the words on every page, are played with and distorted to the absolute limits of typography to form symbols and complex patterns. Grammar either does not exist or is replaced with inventions of Federman's own, and on one page each letter of every word has to be read backwards from the bottom up and from right to left. *The Voice in the Closet* is a twenty page unpunctuated sentence in which Federman tells his experience of hiding in the closet of a Paris apartment from the Nazis. His mother had hastily thrust the thirteen-year old boy into the closet just before she, his father and his two sisters were rounded up and taken to Auschwitz, where they were killed. The boy who hid in the closet started his new life with no more than

When I first wrote to Federman I did not imagine that we would begin a daily pouring out of words to one another, a dialogue that would operate on many levels simultaneously, but, most significantly, play with the boundaries between life and fiction, a bleeding together of autobiography and fiction that has become one of the defining features of my writing. As Federman puts it:

If life and fiction are no longer distinguishable one from the other, nor complementary to one another, and if we agree that life is never linear, that in fact it is always discontinuous and chaotic because it is never experienced in a straight line or in an orderly fashion, then similarly linear, chronological, and sequential narration is no longer possible. (Federman, in Kostelanetz, 1994: 382)

As I noted above, the e-mails encouraged me to return to my original writing voice, a more spontaneous voice, one closer to speech, a voice I found extremely freeing. I wanted in my writing to kill linearity and order, to allow myself the play and rule-breaking that was so in keeping with my earlier bursts of fiction and the unstoppable excess of my voice. The e-mails themselves consist of chatty daily banalities, diatribal monologues and self-reflexive critiques of my own work. They further oscillate between nihilistic doubt and euphoric excitement. I have always experienced these excesses and extremes of emotion both as a visual artist and in my writing process. They propel my work forward. My e-mail relationship with Federman became intoxicating, running into millions of words.

E-mail, of course, is still a relatively new form of discourse, the effects of which are only just being processed and responded to. I discuss these repercussions, including the strong reactions that the e-mail persona produced in others, in more depth in the second section on electronic discourse. As I suggested above, I did not anticipate that the e-mail exchange would become its own fiction, out of which the personas of A (Angela) and M (Moinous/Federman) would emerge, and that their story would begin to play out a desire and seduction paralleling my earlier fiction of *Souvenir*. In a way the e-mail 'story' became the story *Souvenir* was not. *Souvenir* had become over-edited and suffered from too long a process in which I had responded to conflicting advice given as part of a University 'education'. As a result, all the life had been lost from the original, freer voice that had started *Souvenir*. The e-mail voice was now breathing and unstoppable, and the desire for the e-mails themselves became part of the fiction. My satisfaction comes from the other's words chugging from the printer each morning, and while the containment of those virtual words into a letter format (one more in common with traditional epistolary texts) feels necessary, in that containment and reading of the instant, of the present passing, the

a small package of his own warm shit wrapped in newspaper. Federman describes being 'born voiceless at a hole's edge' on this day 16th July 1942. To this experience he attributes his obsession for writing and his vitality for life.

captured meaning becomes desire lost. The satisfaction of receiving and ingesting the other's words also causes those same words, in the instant, to die, only for a new wave of desire to well up for what is lost, propelled by impatience for the next word, but always a fear that the next word may not come. Doubt and anticipation hold hands. The desire for writing and receiving paralleled the idea in *Souvenir* of a desire that can never be captured, satisfied or understood, a process in which the desire for words always fails, always slips away, lives and dies, fails and tries again. I keep returning, keep writing and it keeps me always wanting more. Both Beckett and Federman sum up this compulsion to write for writing's sake:

Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. [. . .] The body again. Where none. The place again. Where none. Try again. Fail again. Better again. Or better worse. Fail worse again. Still worse again. (Beckett, 1999c: 7)

it is the function of creative language to be left behind, to leave itself behind [. . .] The word is unnecessary once it is spoken, but it has to be spoken. Meaning does not pre-exist creation, and afterward it may be superfluous. (Federman, 1993: 55)

At its most acute, this impulsive, headlong drive for the new and the fresh is illustrated in the way that, for some artists, an individual art work becomes dead the moment it has been completed. It becomes its own being. Georges Bataille captures this elusive quality of an individual work of art when he tells us that the will to fix the instant in painting or writing can only evoke but never make substantial that which once appeared:

This gives rise to a mixture of unhappiness and exultation, of disgust and insolence; nothing seems more miserable and more dead than the stabilised thing, nothing is more desirable than what will soon disappear. But, as he feels what he loves escaping, the painter or writer trembles from the cold of extreme want; vain efforts are expended to create pathways permitting the endless reattainment of that which flees. (Bataille, 1985: 241)

Myself and my co-respondent became caught up in a discourse that was at the same time both fiction and criticism. We were the characters in our own mad critifiction, a fiction that could not conform to any rules or pre-determined plot because the characters were making up the story as they wrote it:

The text I am going to write, and which I am already in the process of writing, is not an attempt to formulate a coherent statement about imagination (thinking!) in literature, or more specifically about the creative process in literature. It is rather a montage/collage of thoughts, reflections, meditations, quotations, pieces of my own . . . discourses (critical, poetic, fictional). (Federman, 1993: 51)

As Federman describes it here, my side of our e-mail exchange is similarly presented as a montage of thoughts, reflections, quotations, critiques, poetics, fictional discourses. The e-mail has become a fiction but it is also my thesis. Fiction, criticism, philosophy, life: I do not

wish to make a distinction between any of these elements of my work—they are one and the same.

The first e-mail I sent to Federman (reprinted below) introduces the writer to the listener, and also introduces my overriding research question: how do I, as an individual writer, function in a world (the world of writing and publishing) in which I feel alien from the rules and conventions that govern it? In this first message, I have not yet entirely abandoned conventional grammar and punctuation, but I do acknowledge Federman's decree that all autobiography is fiction:

In a message dated 11/1/2002, 4.04 pm A@ntlworld.com wrote:

Dear Raymond, October is my most fertile time of the year. Both my children were conceived in October, born into the summer. I find you Raymond Federman in my most fertile month, who knows what the coming summer will bring. At last I have words from you.

So now I guess I have to tell you a little of myself. That I was born in Wales, in a small village they called a town. That at four or five I was sent to school. A smug 6 year old was the carrier of this news, telling me that I was indeed to be like everyone else, she got slapped by me as I ran home in disbelief. No it couldn't be true, but of course it was and so I spent my early education studying people's shoes; at playtime I stood against the wall feeling the contour of the stone, I could feel the slow grinding of the planet, I could see how ridiculous we all are. I quickly had to learn how to speak and write their language, how to play, how to pretend and lie, while they stood me on a chair for misspelling my words and disregarding their grammar.

But to go back a little. I was born nameless, yes nameless for three days because I refused to open my eyes — who can blame me — I knew even then that something wasn't right. You see my mother was to have named her baby Deborah, indeed she carried Deborah for nine months, pushed until she was numb to try and get her out. But the Jewess held on tight and pushed me out instead . . . "Go see if it's safe out there, tell me what it's like and if it's OK to come out." Instead my father named me Angela after a game show hostess. I became the messenger . . . he didn't know what he'd said, he didn't realise his real daughter was a Jew still hiding inside my mother — still waiting my instructions.

At eighteen I left the small mining town and went to London, to the madhouse to train and work as a psychiatric nurse. For ten years I worked with the mad whose language made more sense to me than anyone I'd ever met outside those gates. I felt a closeness to their speech, their babble, the gaps, the silences, their proximity with the ground.

Having burned myself out in the madhouse. I went to art college at the age of twenty six.

Moved into a different kind of madness. An American Jew came to teach us from New York. He whispered in my ear . . . "All great art is anarchy" . . . "The secret is there is no fucking secret." And something of the search made sense.

I married another Jew, Engelhart . . . His grandparents, like your family, also turned into lamp shades. We both slowly discovered we were cynics, that we loved the same books, that neither of us understood anything, that we both felt off-key, displaced.

When I became pregnant, I was no longer able to hoist up the heavy metal sheets I painted, rusted, waxed and scratched into. My children instead brought me language, words I thought I was not allowed access to, words I'd forgotten I knew. I wrote in a dream state while they slept. I wrote in semi-darkness. But when I read back my words I thought they were freaks. I hid them in my cupboards, under my clothes, I felt ashamed, until —

A friend came to visit from the States, she brought me a name, I wrote her initials on my hand . . . HC . . . Hélène Cixous. I found the book, I saw the Jew's face and recognised her immediately. Everything made sense. Everything I felt, she gave voice to. I read everything she wrote. I carried her words with me everywhere. When I doubted myself, I read more.

At thirty nine I took myself willingly back to school to write, I happily skipped there with my basketful of words. But men rubbed their heads saying . . . "Don't go down this path little girl . . . don't go down that road . . . Where's the story . . . where's the plot . . . where's the sense . . . I've asked my wife, and even she says a woman should not write about so many bodily fluids . . . it's not right, she's a woman, she should know . . . You'll get hurt they said, we are just trying to protect you from yourself . . . you could do this if only you'd listen . . . learn to write in a more communicative way . . . We don't know what else to tell you . . . You can write but you need to think about your readers, your poor stupid readers, the mass market. We don't understand why you won't listen . . . we don't know what else to tell you . . .

"Look", I said . . . "Look" . . . I laid my papers on the floor, everything I'd written. I moved the furniture out of the way . . . I scratched my knees on the carpet . . . on all fours I laid out my words, "It's like this," I said . . . "Look, there's all these words, all these fragments and I know there's a way to connect them, to make it work . . . I know there is . . . if I could just find the way . . . If I could . . . Look . . . it's like this I said . . . look."

But they only rubbed their heads harder . . . averted their eyes, rolled another cigarette . . . "Do you feel disturbed before, during, or after writing?" They said . . . "It's fiction" I said . . . "Look . . . it's all fiction."

Your time is up they said, I'm sorry . . . my train is due . . . you've had your ten minutes now run along and learn to be like us.

I left. I returned. I am stubborn.

as what appears written down.⁶

Like Beckett and Federman, Jeanne Hyvrard is another writer who feels comfortable inventing her own grammar and her own words. She makes no apology for either of these transgressions, claiming that the formal rules of French grammar present a constraint on her thinking. She claims that the manipulation of new concepts *requires* new terms (Fallaize, 1993: 112-113). Since language and its capacities for expression are intrinsic to Hyvrard's quest to create a vehicle for her fusional thought, it is necessary to force that language to exceed its grammatically and culturally imposed limits. What we are left with is chaos in its original form (Hyvrard, 1996: 2):

"They say ... that I am not learning grammar ... I'm bored ... A subject. A verb. What for? ... What do they want me to modify? I'm Bored. A verb. What for? There is only one verb. It means to live and to die. It exists only in the infinitive. A subject. A verb. An object. What for? ... She wants me to make the participle agree. It can't be done ... I'm bored. I'm bored to death. I'm absolutely dying. I'm dying from the red death. She's slicing up my sentences ... She decapitates my words ... She underlines my mistakes. She puts red everywhere. My life is bleeding in the margins. They want me to become like them." (Hyvrard, 1996: 52-53)

Discussing the work of Chantal Chawaf, another French contemporary writer who informs my work, Monique Nagem describes Chawaf's syntax as often disrupted, with conventional sentence structure fragmented (Nagem, in Chawaf 1992: 102-105). Chawaf derails the sentence, Nagem says, in a number of ways: by reversing the usual order of words, by beginning a sentence with verbs whose subject only surfaces a few lines later, or by assigning to nouns the function of verbs and vice versa. It is important to note that Chawaf claims never to pre-organise or calculate her work: 'it simply organises itself' (Nagem, in Chawaf 1992: 104). This is an important concept when considering the work of other writers like Hyvrard. To contrive at creating chaotic writing (as Stein does) would be to defeat the purpose of *écriture féminine*; it is the very spontaneity and lack of organisation and order that lies behind this form of writing:

I hated grammar at school. And one day, I decided to settle the score with this dictionary, this prison once and for all. I began by throwing the library's big dictionary out the window; then I went downstairs to pick up the remains ... I picked out the guts ... and I listed everything in order of hatred. (Chawaf, 1992: 17)

When I started writing, I was not aware of the later works of Bataille, Beckett, Bernhard and others, where they had abandoned punctuation altogether, or, like Céline, simply favoured ellipsis. Abandoning punctuation on my part was not an act of delinquency but something I

⁶ DeKoven, 1983: 93

felt necessary for my work, something sympathetic with the text I was creating, a text that was neither poetry nor prose, but rather a series of *bursts* (Barthes, 1995: 93) or *middles* (Deleuze, 2002: 21) from which the writing grows and overflows, requiring a different indication of breath.

Becoming

A central argument of my thesis hinges on the proposition that life is a series of unexpected accidents. How, then, can fiction that claims to represent life follow a pre-determined linear narrative? Such casual life events, through their collisions and multiplications, become something other—a doubling, when both return to become altered as a result of coming together—as in Deleuze’s wasp and the orchid (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002). Deleuze does not believe in scientific explanations for the origins of events. For Deleuze, ‘becoming’ is not a classificatory or genealogical tree. Neither does ‘becoming’ imitate or identify with something else. The effects of unplanned occurrences spreads out like a rhizome or map, with unpredictable consequences, often rejecting that which gave life to it in the first place. It has multiple entryways and exists on its own lines of flight. ‘Becoming’ is neither regressing or progressing, nor does it establish corresponding relationships. ‘Becoming’, as Deleuze says, is a verb with a consistency all its own:

The tree imposes the verb 'to be,' but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, 'and . . . and . . . and . . .' This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb 'to be.' Where are you going? Where are you coming from? Where are you heading for? These are totally useless questions [. . .] all imply a false conception of voyage and movement [. . .] proceeding from the middle, through the middle coming and going rather than starting and finishing. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002: 25)

I say I begin again, but my fiction has no real beginning. Maybe a middle ignited by an image, a sound, a single line, something that becomes, horizontal multiples spreading out into many unknown possibilities. When I write I have to risk taking that step, embarking on a process of not knowing, of *not understanding*, of being dumb and blind without a fixed home or destination. What if I were a snail that took my home with me? What then becomes of far? How far is far when you have no origins, no line of genealogy? You shift accordingly, in many directions, in virtual time and space where your words and time do not exist. They appear as holograms and are dead on arrival.

The development of electronic hypertext has had particular relevance to these notions of writing and will be discussed later, but the economy of language I discuss here in relation to my own writing is influenced by more than simply the new media of electronic text. It is a

language that existed prior to the invention of the printing press, and (in terms of its proximity to speech) prior to the invention of the alphabet—two developments that have reinforced the linearity of language in the West. In one respect I attempt in my writing to get closer to the natural rhythm of speech, a digressive and fragmented voice that lacks linearity and foresight, because in the e-mails, at least, it responds mainly to the moment. Barthes talks about a hunger for the word, a poetic, a discourse full of gaps and absences, without foresight or stability of intention (1986: 48). In another sense, my writing is unlike speech. Bataille describes his writing as a detour through which he *escapes* the world of discourse. He likens his work to entering ‘a kind of grave where the infinity of the possible was born from the death of a logical world. Logic on its death bed gave birth to mad riches’ (1991: 163). In this respect writing can be a way of leaving the social world of speech and entering into a world of the writer’s own. My e-mail fiction did require the social but only in a way that heightened the fiction. The thing that kept the writing moving along was desire, desire for the next word, the other’s words, the words I cannot know of in advance. Yet desire that is magnified and returned by a listener has the possibility also of merging into one voice, or of multiplying into a chaotic babble of voices. I use another (excluded) e-mail to discuss this:

In a message dated 5/6/03, 10.22 pm A@ntlworld.com wrote:

yes I hear us running together – nameless maybe – yes two voices that you can hear that exist that you can feel interrupt the direction at times – disrupt the meaning – makes the direction unpredictable uncomfortable at times – makes it flow and then suddenly feel awkward – so you are aware of a tangible two in the work – sometimes merging as one voice at other times discordant – like music in tune and then off key – that you cannot anticipate – but that running together obliterates the importance of trying to figure out or identify the two voices or when the changes in tempo in meaning incoherence will happen – it becomes impossible to try – as Deleuze says, ‘To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied.’⁷

In our absence – our words touch – hold hands – kiss – become blurred – parts of you always close by – timeless floating homeless words we scribe into an ear an eye a mouth a heart a breath close by – de-centered – moving in and out of focus – organs without hierarchy uncouple change size – inside the skin of the screen there is no space between us -

⁷ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2002: 3)

Écriture Feminine

To try and make some sense of this desire I have for writing, or, as Hélène Cixous puts it, the desire that writing has for me, I first turned to Cixous' fiction and her theory of *écriture féminine* to help understand my own writing voice. When I first took up writing as a student, I searched hard to find a 'legitimate' style that might fit the nature of my raw writing urges: my excessiveness, my reluctance to force my work into restrictive containers, my need to escape from the linear story line. *Écriture féminine* formed the main theoretical component of my Master's degree. I wrote two essays on the ideas behind this concept of writing, and while it is important here to acknowledge the part this has played in the development of my own ideas to date, my work is now informed by a much wider range of influences.

Écriture féminine emphasises the body rather than the head as the locus of the writing voice, in particular, the mother's body to which Cixous claims *écriture féminine* represents a return, or as Kathy Acker puts it more succinctly: 'In personal language, the head is ruled by the cunt' (Acker, 1997: 90). It is in the sounds and vibrations of the body that Cixous finds her own voice, a voice that, despite its narrative form, is more associated with the poetic than the novelistic, the poetry giving body (rhythms, rhymes and passages) to the writing. For the purist, Cixous' style lies between two impossibilities: neither novel nor poem, it yet made perfect sense to my own need to escape such categorisations and of putting the poetic body back into the narrative.

An important aspect of Cixous' poetry and philosophy is one that involves thinking and writing with speed. Depending on the urgency, she tells us, poetry can be 'winged, galloping, four wheeled, jet propelled' (Sellers, 1994: xxi). This is in complete contrast to the dry, symbolic language that I experienced in school and other places of learning. Here writing was expected to be heavily controlled, punctuated, boxed and contained to prevent it from digressing and spilling out. Clarity, plot and story line were the aim of such writing, killing any excess. At first, with relief, I fully embraced *écriture féminine*. Here was a language I could identify with, closer to speech, flashes of thought, a messy uncensored language. Why 'feminine'? Because its libido more closely resembles the clitoris, capable of multiple orgasms. Not just one climactic ejaculation to end a linear story but an endless excess of pleasure. Irigaray compares the language of *écriture féminine* to women's secretions: what is emitted is flowing, fluctuating and blurring (Irigaray, 1985: 112-113). A description of this fluidity that is woman is provided by Sadie Plant:

On learning the curves of her body, she discovered that it simply had too many and too fluid zones to count as one, or even as many ones: lips, palms, ears, hairs, fingers, thighs,

toes, soles, nipples, wrists, shoulders, nested regions even more dispersed and localised, larger and smaller without end. (Plant, 1998: 206)

In terms of my own work, the theory of *écriture féminine* began to feel restricted and censorial. In fact, I read so much theory around *écriture féminine* one summer that I stopped writing altogether, feeling frozen, as if I were not being a good enough feminist writer if I wrote this or that. During the 1960s and 70s many woman artists and writers were heavily influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis, deconstructing his theories in order to propose a new politic of feminism. While I can see that these theories may well have had an important place a generation ago, I feel that psychoanalysis provides grand narratives which always lead back to the story. The object of psychoanalysis is the transformation of fluid into solid (the phallus, symbolic order, the law, the institution, the rational, the vertical, genealogy, origins, dualities of gender, etc.), that which seals the triumph of rationality. In this respect *écriture féminine* troubled me. Much of the theoretical and psychoanalytic commentary that describes it as a way of writing seemed to contradict its very essence. When discussing *écriture féminine*, many of its proponents return to a feminist politic that is at odds with the fluidity and freedom of its fiction. I found myself departing from didactic readings of Lacan that underpin much of the fictional work of French feminist fiction. I agree with Irigaray, Plant, Deleuze and others who argue that psychoanalytic theory transforms the fluidity of language into something congealed, frozen and paralysing. Foucault echoes this view when he says that the language of psychiatry is a monologue of reason (Felman, 1985: 41). Perhaps Monique Wittig poses the obvious question when she asks: 'Who gave psychoanalysts their knowledge?' (1992: 23).

Cixous, Kristeva, and others, of course, were not disciples of Lacan. They used psychoanalytical theories rather as a springboard to reclaim pre-symbolic language as the untamed, wild and excessive voice that psychiatry was not. Psychiatry attempts to put madness back into logical corsets, to understand, find meaning, psychiatrists believing they can provide answers and cures. Pre-symbolic language defies psychiatry's attempts to analyse it. Using psychiatry's own jargon, pre-symbolic language retains the space of feminine libido and desire that exists prior to the Lacanian mirror stage (in which the child realises it is a separate entity from the mother, a point of loss replaced by the symbolic register). In *The Laugh of the Medusa* Cixous thus challenges women to create outside of the 'signification of the phallus': 'What's a desire originating from a lack, a pretty meagre desire' (Cixous, in Jennifer Blessing, 2002: 32). Instead of a negative imitation of male writing by women writers, Cixous argues for a recognition of, and mutual respect for, sexual difference, a sexual difference based on libido rather than anatomical difference. She claims that

through *écriture féminine* the binary logic of oppositions will be replaced with a more equal and bisexual economy of language, one in which men as well as women operate. Indeed, most of Cixous' major influences were men, including Joyce, Hoffman, Poe, Kafka and Genet. What Cixous promotes here is a bisexuality, an economy of language open to both men and women. But these terms (sexual difference; masculine and feminine; bisexuality) are themselves problematic and open to misinterpretation precisely because they hold their practitioners hostage to marginal interests. I do not want to be described as a woman writer, a Welsh writer, an experimental writer, because I find such categorization and starting points restricting and unhelpful.

Madness: order vs. disorder

Madness is a hyperbole of the self produced through an intoxication of language, it is the illusion of drunkenness which, in fact, masks an incapacity to be drunk, to 'be mad.' (Felman, 1985: 93)

Lyotard is critical of those who promote madness as a desired state. 'Acting the madman', he says, 'is the most despicable thing.' (1993: 260) Yet many writers and artists have sought to draw from madness as an important element of their work. Susan Sontag strikes a balance between portraying madness and being mad when she claims that the exemplary modern artist is a 'broker in madness' (Bataille, 1982: 92). True madness may place one beyond writing and beyond a reader, or can be self-destructive. I attempt, as Balzac puts it, to 'situate myself at the exact point where knowledge touches upon madness, and I can erect no safety rail' (in Felman, 1985: 117).

Shoshana Felman regards madness as an overflow. The history of madness, she says, is the story of surplus, of literary residue (Felman, 1985: 49). But the problem of playing with madness and of breaking free of known genres is that one may become labelled with that most dismissive of all terms of disparagement, *experimental writing*:

The kind of fiction I am interested in is that fiction which the leaders of the literary establishment (publishers, editors, agents, and reviewers alike) brush aside because it does not conform to their notions of what fiction should be; that fiction which supposedly has no value (commercial understood) for the common reader. And the easiest way for these people to brush aside that kind of fiction is to label it, quickly and bluntly, as experimental fiction. Everything that does not fall into the category of successful fiction (commercially that is), or what Jean-Paul Sartre once called 'nutritious literature,' everything that is found 'unreadable for our readers' (that is publishers and editors speaking—but who gave them the right to decide what is readable or valuable for their readers?) is immediately relegated to the domain of experimentation—a safe and useless place. [...] Fiction is called experimental out of despair. (Federman, in Kostelanetz, 1994: 379-80)

The choice for the writer seems to be whether to write for oneself or for commerce. To ignore the publisher's need for mimesis and the recognisable thing, to produce that which cannot be re-produced, is to be forever banished to the margins. Difference is feared and so must be neutralized and made safe if only by dismissing it as experimental. As Lyotard reminds us, 'whoever can enjoy other than by repetition is excluded from it' (1993: 251).⁸ Outside of the world of publishing these 'different' forms of fiction are simply operating in a different universe of discourse. To describe what one cannot understand, or recognise, as mad, is no more than a defence against being destabilized, scared and threatened by such work itself.

In our e-mail discourse, Federman and I talk about an other-worldliness. If my language is seen as alien (as, that is, a foreign language), then there must also be the possibility of translating it. And yet, with translation also comes the risk of misunderstanding. We take a risk every time we open our mouths:

The very essence of repression is defined by Freud as a 'failure of translation,' that is, precisely as the barrier which separates us from foreign language. If madness and literature are both ruled by the very thing that represses them, by the very thing that censors them in language, if they are both---each in its own way---proceeding from a 'failure of translation', the attempt to read them will necessitate a crossing of the border between languages [...]. To speak about madness is to speak about the difference between languages: to import into one language the strangeness of another; to unsettle the decisions language has prescribed to us so that, somewhere between languages, will emerge the freedom to speak. (Felman, 1985: 19)

Parodying Blake's aphorism, Felman proposes 'if others had not been mad, then we should be', to questions whether Nietzsche (who many have claimed denounced God because he wanted to be God) went mad in our place. 'But what is our place?' Felman asks, 'It can be neither in his madness nor out of it: no more inside insanity than outside of it' (1985: 11). But just as the madness silenced by society often finds a voice in literature (Blake and Artaud as examples), at the same time such literature is often marginalized and denied to us. In the act of liberating madness, of undoing the cultural codes that repress madness, the literary and publishing establishment---'the sole channel by which madness has been able throughout history to speak by its own name, or at least with relative freedom'---operates its own form of repression and censorship (Felman, 1985: 11-15). Others decide on our behalf what fits their lists and our tastes. Gertrude Stein (like Nietzsche, another writer labelled by some as mad) ended up publishing herself because the literary establishment told her to go back and learn how to write. Mad, experimental, avant-garde, postmodern - some disparaging reason must always be given as to why a writer would transgress the

⁸ By this Lyotard is arguing that 'democratic power' in theoretical discourse, discourse that is repeatable, imitated and universally recognised, is threatened by those who posit any form of discourse that does not conform to its rules, and therefore seeks to exclude or delegitimize it.

boundaries of literature's orthodoxies.

But the flaw in the guardians of literature's defence of grammatical and structural laws can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. If we are to believe the literary establishment's grand deception, then the pre-Socratics themselves must have been experimental writers, and not the true founders of our Western literary traditions. For the type of writing referred to these days as experimental was the prevailing mode in many classical texts—before, that is, Plato, Aristotle and their disciples sought to remove the chaos and orgiastic excess of Dionysus from writing in favour of Apollo's orderly logic and rules. In his *Poetics*, for instance, Aristotle lectures us on 'how plots should be constructed if the composition is to turn out well', using the *natural order* and from *first principles*:

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles [i.e. beginning, middle, end]. (Aristotle, 2001)

At that tragic point in history, fiction was turned from an art into a science. Fiction was also separated from philosophy, and philosophy was separated from life. Nietzsche was the first modern philosopher to reunite philosophy with fiction (autobiographical fiction in particular), claiming that, as history is in any case a grand fiction and science is based on lies and exaggerations, mythology and subjective experiences are as relevant to philosophy as are so-called facts. Foucault and many of the writers labelled postmodernist have also introduced autobiography and subjective experiences into their philosophy, questioning the positivism of Plato and rehabilitating the subjective and sensory discourse of the pre-Socratics and those (such as Menippus, Petronius, Lucian, Dante and Blake) who kept such traditions alive. Nietzsche was also inspired by the ancients, and, in turn, the lyricism of his own writing has been a major influence on contemporary writers and theorists like Cixous and Irigaray. But more than his poetics, what all these writers of *écriture féminine* take from Nietzsche and his legates is a rejection of writing that is spiritually and morally uplifting, that idealises, that marches triumphantly toward truth and beauty, that insulates humans from the bad, the sad, the disgusting, and all of the petty little obsessions that form the central realities of our daily lives; writing that reflects life as it is rather than what the guardians and protectors of culture tell us it should be:

As children of an anal culture, we all have a more or less disturbed relation to our own shit [. . .] The relationship that is drummed into people with regard to their own excretions provides the model for their behaviour with all sorts of refuse in their lives

[. . .] It hints at a consciousness of nature that assigns positive values to the animal side of human beings and does not allow any dissociation of what is low or embarrassing. Those who do not want to admit that they produce refuse [. . .] risk suffocating one day in their own shit. (Sloterdijk, 1988: 151)

It is not difficult to see how the idea of arriving at knowledge through sensory experience, so important to the Cynics, Epicureans, and Hedonists, was devalued by Plato and his devotees, and is still for the most part devalued today. Federman has devoted his career to undermining and ridiculing positivism. It is not that meaning pre-exists language, he says, but that language creates its own meaning as it goes along (Federman, in Kostelanetz (ed), 1994: 382). As it progresses, writing is merely the process that lets language do its tricks:

To create fiction is, in fact, a way to abolish reality, and especially to abolish the notion that reality is truth. [. . .] Thus, the primary purpose of fiction will be to unmask its own fictionality [. . .] fiction will no longer be regarded as a mirror of life, as a pseudorealistic document that informs us about life, nor will be judged on the basis of its social, moral, psychological, metaphysical, commercial value, but on the basis of what it is and what it does as an autonomous art form in its own right. (Federman, in Kostelanetz (ed), 1994: 380)

Its own body

In one significant respect, *In a message dated . . .* works like *Souvenir*. Both rely on the same interchange and disorder. Like *Souvenir's* snow globe, the body of the computer opens and I move into it. Inside the computer a new body is created, a body that is no more than language constantly in the process of making itself: flowing, secreting, hardening, shifting beginning again, taking off, making unexpected connections, an assemblage of desires always maintained. In both the e-mails and *Souvenir*, size and form shift. I can shrink to the size of a creature who can enter the blood stream or become no more than a gigantic ear, eye or mouth. I discuss in the section on cyberspace (section two) Deleuze's 'body without organs', probably best summed up by Carroll's Cheshire Cat, identifiable by its grin alone. In *Souvenir*, as in Beckett's *Unnamable*, the head becomes its own body. Hierarchies of the body are here no longer of any importance. The ancient Greeks believed that our thoughts and intellect were located not in our head but in our chest. Georges Bataille and artist Pierre Klossowski, through the loose society and journal *Acéphale*, sought to eradicate the authoritative position of the head and its obsession with the single origin of meaning. As with Acker's insistence that the primary influence of language is the vagina, so the headless god *Acéphale* is represented with a skull in place of the genitalia:

It is said that in the Middle Ages, monks contemplated skulls in order to see God or Truth. To see clearly is to perceive that one must die. The logos must realise that it is part of the body and that this body is limited. Subject, not to the mind, but to death. Here is the place

of sex.

In this Acéphale's right-hand, a heart sits in its own flames. This, not the head, is the top most part of the body.

This Acéphale's left hand holds a sword. The sword is the emblem of violence and power which are necessary, not for slaughter but for self-decapitation. The head must be cut off so that it, the Logos, the Platonic head, the ruler, can be set in his proper place.

Decapitation must occur so that the fleshy passions, the flaming heart, freed of prison fetters, can burn in joy, jouissance. (Acker, 1997: 90)

In *Souvenir*, the tension between the body (passion) and the head (logic and censorship) is posed by decapitation. The decapitated head in *Souvenir* symbolises the fight of the 'I' with her own head, trying to find her own language and her inability to capture the story. The story always fails her, disappoints her, slips away in a process of becoming lost, opening up, dissolving into chance and chaos. The whole text unfolds inside another souvenir, a snow globe which has to be shaken to make it live, has to be moved by the body. In the same way the e-mail takes part in the virtual, bodiless world of the machine, in space and in different time zones. And so the computer mimics the snow globe. Words are agitated, moved and thrown around, animated correspondence only able to exist so long as we both continue shaking, our mundane discourse keeping the fiction alive.

Both *Souvenir* and the e-mails work on this idea of the heightened detail of the mundane. The character or rather the subject is formed in terms of absences, of what is not told or revealed, the illusionary. The mundane detail gives nothing away. Plot and realism are replaced by the petty and repetitious inconsequentialities of daily life, reflecting something more real. As Laurence Sterne says, 'the nonsensical minutiae of everyday life, the little occurrences of life are what exhibit the truth of character' (Stewart 1993: 27). Sharing Artaud's views on the impossibility of thinking—for what is there to think—I write thinking there is nothing to write about except perhaps my doubt that somehow always propels my writing forward. And yet, it was the letters containing Artaud's ravings to his publisher, not his 'writing', that drew the publisher's attention:

I began in literature by writing books to say that I could not write anything at all. My thought when I had something to write was what was the most denied to me. [. . .] I have never written except to say that I had never done anything, could do nothing, and that doing something, I was actually doing nothing. My entire work was built on nothingness.

[. . .]

I can't manage to *think*. Do you understand this hollow, this intense and lasting nothingness. [. . .] I can neither go forward nor draw back. (Artaud, in Blanchot, 2003: 37-39)

My own fictions reflect this same preoccupation—the writer watching themselves as they write. I write not to make stories but because I have no choice but to write. As Blanchot puts it, 'one writes to save writing, to save one's life by writing' (Blanchot, 2003: 186). Making language is a continuous process of life and death, yet also a denial of death, as repetitions

and digressions are played out but never with the finality that death brings. So, too, in *Souvenir*, narrative closure cannot even be achieved by killing the object. The narrative continues through a series of micro narratives, digressions and repetitions until the author and the reader arrive at new beginnings.

In her book *On Longing*, Susan Stewart discusses how digression stands in tension with narrative closure. Narrative closure opens from the inside out, holds the reader in suspension, or annoyance. The possibility is presented as a fear of death, of never getting back, of remaining forever within the detour. But the digression also recaptures the tedium of the journey through 'the incessant and self multiplying detail of landscape, a detail which nearly erases the landmark by distracting the reader's attention' (Stewart, 1993: 30):

That the world of things can open itself to reveal a secret life—indeed, to reveal a set of actions and hence a narrativity and history outside the given field of perception—is a constant daydream that the miniature presents. This is the daydream of the microscope: the daydream of life inside life, of significance multiplied infinitely *within* significance. (Stewart, 1993: 54)

In *Souvenir*, the snow globe is the miniature of the narrative, located both within the writing and containing the writing; becomings and multiplications open up another world, a world of daydream that both captures and reflects the primary narrative. The head echoes the globe's shape as in turn it is also opened up and peered into—worlds within worlds, like Russian dolls opening inward and outward to infinity. In *Concupiscence*⁹ it is the basilica that acts like the snow globe, a world contained within the confines of the stone sphere representing at the same time the body of the Virgin Mary and the world in which the lost mothers are themselves trapped. With the e-mail fiction, the computer acts as a globe, a microscope revealing the mundane world of the other and the self. An ear to a shell, to the other's voice that draws us in and temporarily shuts out the rest of the world, or as Stewart puts it, 'the miniature is a world of arrested time; its stillness emphasises the activity that is

⁹ *Concupiscence* is the second of my dead fictions. It is a 22,000 word story and collection of secondary stories collected and written after *Souvenir*. In some ways it is closer to my e-mail fictions because of the multiple voices and the collage of secondary narratives interrupting the main story. Although a more resolved work, I decided not to include *Concupiscence* here because it is the ideas of *Souvenir*, rather than the form that carry its importance to this thesis. The central narrative of *Concupiscence* is based in and around the basilica of a small Spanish town; its main figure is the girl/woman Encarna. Encarna's *abuelita*, her grandmother, is the dead priest's sister and tends to the church, in particular the icons which include the three *Madres*, life-size effigies of the Virgin Mary. Since she was a small child Encarna had spent hours of each day in the church playing, observing the dramas of human life, and assisting her grandmother in her daily chores. When Encarna's grandmother dies, she is given the large church key to hang around her waist and assumes her grandmother's role. This is a tale of a young girl's sexual awakening into womanhood, told both through the central narrative and the re-telling of stories that make up Encarna's memories. Throughout the tale Encarna becomes obsessed with leaving behind the town forever, but also with freeing the three *Madres* from their stasis of death. The fiction concludes with Encarna lifting up *La Ascension's* heavy skirts and pushing herself up inside the wooden *Madre*. They become one, walk out of the basilica, down the road out of town never to be seen again, Encarna's story thus adding to the other surreal legends of the town that were recounted throughout this work.

outside its borders. And this effect is reciprocal, for once we attend the miniature world, the outside world stops and is lost to us' (Stewart, 1993: 67). Ultimately, the reader, like the author, has to decide for themselves if they are in the interior (the miniature) or in the public (the gigantic) or, the more likely scenario, that the text is constantly moving them between the two.

Paris

In 'Paris', the fifth and final section of the thesis, the columns dissolve into a single body of text. What was deferred by the presence of the columns and the continuation of the loquacious e-mail correspondence, now opens out into the first of two short fictions as the 'I' reflects back on a movement through time that finds A and M seated together in a Paris café. The second part of 'Paris' is a further meeting between A and M a year later. While 'Paris' represents the culmination of this thesis, it does not represent a climactic narrative ending. 'Paris' is rather a fiction inside a fiction, the promise of more fiction. Indeed, all of the fiction presented in this thesis, including the appendix, represents layers of fiction in which each work becomes a palimpsest of the work yet to be written.

And so the juxtaposition of 'Paris' and the appendix *Souvenir* (that follows it structurally in the thesis) is not a question of progression between these two works. They represent no more than different versions of the same ideas. In both works the reader is confronted with deferral of the desired thing. In 'Paris', although the promise of a meeting of the virtual couple in real time is *given*, the reader is shifted through a series of detours and circumvolutions that provide not answers but further questions. Who are A and M outside of cyberspace? How are they to communicate without their prosthetic keyboard? Is this encounter happening at all, yet to come, always postponed, already gone?

What started as a frenetic daily (and nightly) activity, an excess of language back and forth across cyberspace, ends with spent language in a Montparnasse cemetery, in a café and on a street bench. Voices that once screamed out their vitality to each other now digress and detour around a silence. What cannot be said, what cannot be given through any grand gestures or articulations between A and M, is presented to the reader through the banality of their surroundings: a bowl of eggs, a basket of bread, the rituals of the waiters, a statue in a park.

Despite this meeting of the virtual couple in Paris, a sense of loss is created. That loss both

of the e-mail voice and of the commentary that holds the thesis in place then gives way in 'Paris' to another sense of loss. The couple are disarmed, stripped of their voices and the characters that emerged on the computer screen are at the same time strangely protected and distanced by the presence and the hierarchies of each other's body. On meeting, the relationship, of course, continues to exist, but it has developed in the wrong order. People usually meet first and get to know each other later. When the virtual couple meet the reverse is the case: they know each other and then meet as strangers, yet strangers with an intimate knowledge of the other.

The scene in part two of 'Paris' where A anticipates the other's death and dreams of disposing of his body, has clear parallels with *Souvenir*, where as though trying to find a way out of the other's story, Marianne decapitates her lover and then attempts and fails to dispose of the bodiless head that continues to taunt her. A in 'Paris' and Marianne in *Souvenir* are both left with the desired other in a silence that is both infinite and empty, that continues to babble and say nothing, that says what cannot be spoken, that holds the two together and apart. As Giorgio Agamben (2002: 142-146) says, language both does and does not take place; it exists as an event, not in a content of meaning but 'through its possibility of not being there, its contingency.' Ultimately, the only communicable reality regarding Paris is not whether something did or did not take place, but that writing took place. The writing took place in a way that questions memory by making forgetting visible. Like Barthes' pleasure of the text, meaning is forever slipping away: 'it is ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds', and will always fall short of being captured by language (Barthes, 1989: 32-34). Paris is not a documentation of truth but a text that can only grasp the *uncertainty* of events and the desire for words to continue.

Souvenir

to be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world and the shrink from its desertion, art and craft, good housekeeping, living. [. . .] I know all that is required now, in order to bring this horrible matter to an acceptable conclusion, is to make of this submission, this admission, this fidelity to failure, a new occasion, a new term of relation, and the act of which unable to act, obliged to act, he makes, an expressive act, if only of itself . . .

(Samuel Beckett, 1999a: 125)

writing as a verbal activity. I write you. This is something active. The circulation of blood in the text, the vital theme of this text, is writing, all the questions of writing. This mystery has to be read at the level of: why I write, how I write, from where I write, to whom I write, with what I write, of what I write, about what, towards what. All the questions of writing are right here.

(Hélène Cixous, 1995: xv)

From: A@ntlworld.com

Date: november 2002 15:17:54 - 0500

To: M@aol.com

Subject: RE: Souvenir

If I knew what I was going to write before I wrote a book, I'd be bored.
(Kathy Acker, 1997: 120)

Oh I wish there were some words in the world that were not the words I always hear!
(Barthelme, 1966: 12)

Sshhh -- the book is refusing to be written the one I call the dead thing -- SSHhhh -- the book I set out to write is dead -- but I haven't told it -- I haven't told it I am being unfaithful here with you -- every morning my betrayal -- every morning my 5am infidelity -- yes words are everywhere in me -- and it doesn't even know -- that book -- it doesn't even know that I am here writing to you -- it doesn't even know that it is dead for me -- that I have set it in its box -- that I cannot look upon its still blue face without feeling some disgust -- where there was once so much love now just the overworking of mortician's hands -- the hair too carefully combed those lips the wrong shade clash with the orange of its cheeks the floured face the drop of the eyes the flies do their work well before we are ready until all I can hear is my mad laughter your mad laughter -- me still getting inside that poor corpse -- I admit it -- I admit -- yes some days I return to it -- I return to peep -- to smile into its already stiffening face -- into its too stately pose -- impenetrable smugness -- that dumb book -- still the stink -- the clacking mouth -- the smell of dissection -- pickled words -- as I come to see that this is not the story I began with -- as I come to see that the

The story is written but it is not what I set out to write. Could I have known in advance what I would write? The dead *Souvenir* (appendix 1) originated from a single image; there was no prior intention involved. The writing never proceeded from a fixed point and can never arrive at a neat climactic ending. Categorising the work, then, also becomes problematic, at least for those who insist on placing writing into known genres. *Souvenir* was never going to be a short piece of writing, neither could one call it a novel. The work represents something hidden, layered, almost secret, and this has attracted me to Deleuze's description of the novella. Deleuze describes the novella as having a posture towards secrecy. The novella, he says, represents a kind of inverse suspense of something that has already happened but is waiting to be discovered, even though that something may remain unknowable. What links the novella together is the secrecy represented by the form of the small book itself, containing only the middle of a tale, with the beginning having already taken place and the ending always held in suspense. Like a dream, one is given only the experience of part of a longer narrative, a souvenir of a tale that the reader has to complete for them self. The novella begs the question,

real story is the failure of the story -- I put stones in my shoes least I forget I am here --

And when I first read your words -- well before I wrote to you -- there was the failure of the story -- your words always erasing themselves as you write -- so that what you write is never written -- you get to the end of the book and the book is never there -- it hasn't even begun -- everything has happened has passed away but nothing has yet been spoken --

And do you see what has happened since this began -- since our first excess of words drew me away -- toward you - - toward our early morning infidelities that cause me to abandon everything -- do you see that the story I am acting out here with you has become the *Souvenir* -- do you see that now the *Souvenir* becomes just a small souvenir of itself -- nothing more than a trinket - - a small miniature held inside our body of words -- at our centre -- a head held inside a locket -- a pressed flower inside a book -- a sucking stone held on the tongue -- inside my writing to you there is a small mouth and when I open its lips it speaks all that has been told ahead of us -- a story drawn and erased until the holes left are what interests me -- the holes in the paper -- the rubbed away -- a palimpsest which is where the story began

with a snow globe

"Whatever could have happened for things to have come to this?" Going inside the novella is like entering a room and having the perception that something is already there, has already happened, even though it has not yet been done (Deleuze, 2002: 193-194).

Book or novella? To me these are meaningless categories and yet the debate around categorisation became integral to the Ph.D. thesis. Drawn to Deleuze's description of the novella as a place of secrecy, there were yet aspects of *Souvenir*, the e-mail exchange, and the fictional ending of *In a message dated...* that related to Barthes' description of the novel:

a double object, at once believable and false. It creates a content credible, yet flawed as an illusion [. . .] clothes an unreal fact in the garb first of truth then of a lie denounced as such. (Barthes, 1986: 32)

Whatever the category, and I can find resonances of my work in most of these descriptions, the real importance of *Souvenir* was the process of writing it. What lay buried away, hidden beneath the text, always held more interest for me than what ended up on the page. 'Palimpsest', the original working title of the piece, suggests the process of writing, failing, erasures, constant re-writing, and the final abandonment of the work as a dead book: a souvenir, a relic containing layer upon layer of forsaken ideas, erased forgotten text. Not until I collided with Raymond Federman was I to realise that the real story of *Souvenir* would be my e-mail exchange with him, followed by the

with a miniature world
inside a small souvenir
everything became possible

And there is no denying that the other
day I wrote -- I want your head when
you die -- tell L to gift wrap it -- yes we
were all wrapped up once -- tell Larry to
send your head express and then I will
take you for a walk on a small trolley
like Nerval took his fish out each day --

in a tank on a small trolley -- from there
we will feed pigeons in the square hear
the paddy paws of midnight browsing in
the dust

all the child droppings I'd collected
looking for you
in the skulls of sheep
in the grass
in the bite of the rabbit

the rabbit will never domesticate man
he was only looking for milk

all the grapes you will never carry to me

yes come get Larry to gift wrap you
I will take you for a walk
and we will free all the bears in the zoo

all the things we will never do like
shopping for books

the way it all is some days

translate me your corps

later realisation that the end product
would not be a book at all, but this Ph.D.
thesis.

To return to the question, 'Could I have
known in advance what I would write?'
One is then immediately faced with the
more fundamental question, of whether
meaning precedes words or words
precede meaning. Federman is clear on
this point: for him there can be no
meaning prior to words---we only exist
through language. For how can we
possibly know what we will write until
we start writing? He talks of 'pre-
remembering', a kind of involuntary
memory about something that has not yet
occurred (McCaffery, 2002: 333). *Souvenir*
represented just such a pre-remembering,
in many ways anticipating and
paralleling my e-mail exchanges with
Federman.

Like the decapitated head that refuses to
go away or die, so *Souvenir* refused to
find a resting place, until, that is, it
became centred inside another (almost)
parallel story, one that lives and breathes
from a re-enactment and reflection of the
dead text. The palimpsest created by the
constant layering of the work with new
ideas prompted me to re-consider all I
had obliterated. Souvenirs of erased
writing triggered involuntary memories
about events yet to take place. In the end,
Souvenir became a parody of itself,
although 'itself' cannot be identified, as
only fragments of the original text any
longer remain visible. But just as *Souvenir*

my own version

become my story

It began with the rush of language and sleepless nights -- with words all through me -- words fondling me -- pushing their hands between my legs but soon enough I wanted more -- only ever more -- and I am back to want to dreaming up -- yes that sentence knows how to come and find me -- lives in my ear -- knows where to find me calling

the secret is there is no secret

and which version of ourselves are we in love with

Soon you will be awake again soon again the marriage of morning and late afternoon

did I choose this book or did the book chose me

And every morning at 5.30am she found herself covering the dead book with the winding sheet and her eyes wandered in a different direction when she woke -- yes when she woke it was to you -- when she woke she wanted you -- when she woke she wrote to you without hesitation -- with her fingers on you -- with her fingers pushed inside darkness --

I can more and more see the parallels --

became the unconscious prototype (pre-remembering) for my dialogue with Federman, in turn Federman has replaced the disembodied voice in *Souvenir*, entering my consciousness and refusing to be silenced.

In her book, *On Longing*, Susan Stewart talks about the importance of the miniature and the souvenir as a metaphor for interiority. Mementos, trophies, and miniaturised conceptual models allow us to shrink the world, she says, in order to expand the personal. 'The souvenir seeks distance (the exotic in time and space), but it does so in order to transform and collapse distance into proximity to, or approximation with, the self' (Stewart, 1993: xii). The souvenir world of the miniature allows us to manipulate and idealise memory free from the contamination of past or present reality. Its diminutive aspect also helps us to link it to nostalgic versions of childhood and history (Stewart, 1993: 69):

Nostalgia is a sadness without an object, a sadness which creates a longing that of necessity is inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience. Rather it remains behind and before that experience. [. . .] its lack of fixity and closure: nostalgia is the desire for the desire. [. . .] Nostalgia is the repetition that mourns the inauthenticity of all repetitions and denies the repetition's capacity to form an identity [. . .] The inability of the sign to "capture" its signified, of narrative to be one with its object [. . .] (Stewart, 1993: 23)

Stewart talks about a childhood manufactured from material survivals (souvenirs), with no continuous identity between the objects and their referents.

she said -- like I was writing ahead of myself -- I was writing a book that wasn't ready to be understood -- wasn't ready to be seen by me until now -- I was reading myself -- I gave years to a book that I now see was only part of a different book -- the book inside the book the book around the book the book of another time another skin a voiceless book that would not stop talking and laughing out loud laughing from my belly -- asking the question -- in what capacity do I give myself to you --

All this my dear one -- perfect imaginings -- my own thoughts my own images on heat on a page a heart described as tragedy -- absurd

I open up the book it is a mistake or maybe the book is drawing me to it -- yes that happens -- I have to return to remember -- when often I write to forget -- do I write to forget maybe that's it -- the way your face your face I haven't even seen -- moments when I almost lose the sense of the voice -- your voice --

each morning each morning a letter torn open a parcel torn open a line a word we had not expected a loco motion -- we in language are always in mad motion

speeding

But then some days it is impossible not

Only memory constitutes their resemblance. But this does not have to be a memory linked directly to the souvenir itself, for memory can be equally summoned up by chance objects, sights and sounds, with no obvious connection to the signified. Both in *Molloy's* famous sucking stones, and in *The Unnamable*, Beckett evokes well the emotion that such inanimate found objects can call up inside the human soul. Beckett talks in *The Unnamable* of falling asleep with an object such as a stone or piece of wood clutched in his hand, and how when finding a new object he would discard the old one, only to later feel guilty for having abandoned it:

Perhaps I thought it pretty, or felt for it that foul feeling of pity I have so often felt in the presence of things, especially little portable things in wood and stone, and which made me wish to have them about me and keep them always, so that I stooped and picked them up and put them in my pocket, often with tears, for I wept up to a great age, never having really evolved in the fields of affection and passion, in spite of my experiences. (Beckett, 1997b: 248)

Nostalgia, then, also arises as the result of the perceived loss that the souvenirs represent, a loss of something that one never had in the first place, and one knows will never experience in the future---a truly abstract longing. Stewart likens this experience to the Victorians' obsession for capturing nature (sea shells, leaves, butterflies) under glass, the attempt to 'eternalise an environment by closing it off from the possibilities of lived experience.' The moment of death is denied by imposing the stasis of an eternal death (Stewart, 1993: 144-145). It

to think of Sylvia with her head in the
gas oven

waiting

just waiting

And when I began these pages to you -- words like the strongest of contradictions running through the body as it drags language here and there -- as I lose your equilibrium -- gravity and time becoming obsolete -- where is their destination with no compass -- my words to you have no idea where they will begin -- no -- do not talk to me of beginnings I have no idea where today just on and on and so on and so forth -- my words decide to speak -- *from* me -- isme --*isme isnotme* words are wilful and have their own ideas -- so I write to see -- and so you see now I was going to say was about to say --

there's just ifs and more and what is it you say -- *plots are for dead people* -- and so if the secret is there is no secret what is secret here -- what if I begin to share you -- us -- with others --

s l o w l y --

to share with others what I am writing to you -- saying -- what's so wrong here -- why can't I let others know that I am writing to you -- that I have left the other book so I can be with you -- no of course this was never my intention did I ever have an intension suffer an

was exactly this image (described in the opening of *Souvenir*) that so fascinated me in Artemisia Gentileschi's painting of Judith beheading Holofernes. While other artists had portrayed the scene after Holofernes' head had been separated from his body, in Gentileschi's portrayal (with the blood spurting from his open neck) she captures in Holofernes' eyes the exact moment of realisation that life is passing into death. Nostalgia, too, represents a position in which neither life nor death can be attained. The physical presence of the souvenir reinforces the impossibility of moving forwards or backwards; all that remains is a continuous presence. The state of limbo into which Marianne in *Souvenir* finds herself with her head, or Encarna in *Concupiscence* finds herself in, with her endless tending to the Virgin Mothers, thus became a metaphor for the writing process itself. The narrative circulates inside its own impossibility, branching off in endless directions but never being allowed to come to rest, to die, to be killed off in order that one can say, "I have finished that book and am beginning another." Rather, it is a continuous series of beginnings or middles (and, and, and, etc.); this is probably the most accurate description of my fiction. In the end one text is held inside another text just as the Victorians attempted to contain their souvenirs of the natural world in a bell jar.

Stewart describes the advantage of the self-contained representative model like

intention -- instead one day yes one day
 once upon a time -- someone passes by
 and you look carefully you recognise
 something in what they say and then
 you run with them -- with a stranger a
 stranger that you know nothing of --
 know better than your own child and
 you run until you are out of breath that
 day that day you say -- there's my own
 writing -- which I have to do alone --
 then there's my writing to you and now
 I've woken with words rushing to my
 fingers -- I have to keep going with this
 cos it's urgent

And this is nothing to do with the muse
 no I am not yours you are not mine no -
 - I even hate the word muse it looks
 ugly on the page -- you are not my
 muse -- the poor dumb useless muse --
 I am not yours -- no that is not it -- not
 in any way it -- yes let's kill the muse --
 let's cut her throat and set her free --
 let's give her a pen and let her write her
 own story -- let's send her to school and
 give her an education -- the poor dumb
 useless muse -- sleep in her eyes --
 wool wrapped -- if you touch her
 breasts you will find love they say -- yes
 -- I heard them say that -- and just look
 how she shines from over mauling -- no
 -- maybe it's more to do with *an ear to
 hear these words* and the piece you
 wrote about Beckett -- the thing Sam
 said . . .

In the fiction that led to Texts for
 Nothing *it was not a question of telling
 and writing, now it is a question of*

Swift's island of Lilliput. Such a model
 allows the miniature world to remain
 uncontaminated yet also maximises the
 possibilities of transcendent vision so
 long as its absolute boundaries are
 maintained (Stewart, 1993: 68). At the
 same time a tension is created between
 the inner and outer worlds, the private
 and the public space. I have discussed, in
 the section on cyberspace, this need I
 have for a container in order that I may
 freely transgress the borders of the
 grotesque, the abject, madness and death.
 In my dialogue with Federman, the
 fictional affair is safely contained inside
 the computer. Yet the tension between the
 private and public space is maintained by
 the possibility of a meeting outside the
 virtual world.

The container is a virtual concept that can
 change form to accommodate the limits of
 the imagination. As the need arises one
 container may be held inside another
 container. In *Souvenir*, the gigantic is
 contained inside the miniature: the
 beckoning and threatening moon-like face
 at the window. The house inside the
 snow globe also represents a further
 interior space. The womb-like basilica in
Concupiscence (see note 9 in Introduction)
 contains and represents the 'dead' figures
 of the Virgin Mary, at the same time the
 Holy Mothers contain the promise of life
 and escape (both their own and
 Encarna's) from the servitude into which
 they have been placed. *Concupiscence* ends
 with the image of Encarna pushing
 herself inside one of the Mothers and

telling and listening: 'So I am given to thinking with my breath and personally speaking, I hear it said, personally I have no more time to lose.'¹

yes I have no more time to lose --

yes I woke up this morning and had an urgency to write and almost didn't and almost did send this --

what salt

Ax

In a message dated 16th of November 2002 7:43:35 AM

a@ntlworld.com at a@ntlworld.com

writes:

Ok I got this shape you sent me

-- what is this -- what is this I think -- now you are sending me a star -- now you are sewing one on me -- look you -- I have asked you to play but if you do then don't send me stars and geometry

I started with geometry -- yes I started my very first writing with geometry -- the arcs and circumferences I could make -- because it was one of those things I didn't understand in school it was one of those things I wanted to understand but never did -- it was one of those glittering things they showed me in school and I used to think yes I'd like to know about that -- I'd like some

freeing them both from the basilica, the servility of their lives and from the narrative. As in the worlds of Lewis Carol's Alice and Swift's Gulliver, the miniature can be exchanged for the gigantic, where instead of a contained world one again becomes contained by the world. Using the snow globe metaphor for the computer screen, sometimes I am on the outside looking in on the miniature world inside, until it is I who has become miniature. Like the nurse's gigantic nipple in Brobdingnag, I become enveloped and smothered by the other who moments before seemed harmless and distant.

The ultimate container, the one that maintains our own physical integrity and separates the abject from the social, the private from the public, is that of our own bodies. The fragility of the body can be represented through a series of distortions, miniaturising either the 'I' or the other. This fragility is further reinforced by physical reminders of the delicate borders between life and death, love and loathing. The souvenirs of Marianne's passion come down in the end to bodily detritus: nails, teeth, hair, fragments of bone. In *Concupiscence*, Encarna hoards away the sweepings of the mothers' bodies. Stewart notes that the souvenirs in Lilliput are also collected items of the body's refuse: beard stumps,

of that please but they don't know how to get anything across they don't have any love in them for geometry -- they can't make you come in geometry they can't -- they are too afraid of the wetness of the angles of the juices of geometry so instead of going to the body of geometry instead of gently stroking you with geometry they give you dry geometry geometry that isn't caressed enough geometry that is sore and hard and that is dead yes dead already they bring me the corpse of geometry and I'm worried -- yes as a child I was worried inside saying to myself -- isn't this a dead book in my hands -- isn't this all dead stiff -- shouldn't someone give this stiff the kiss of life and open its lungs and thump on its chest and can't anyone else see that it's dead and I panicked inside and so I spanked and I couldn't see anyone else spanking or panicking so I thought it must only be me that can see that geometry is dead it must be me who can only see dead things and everyone else is copying this down is actually copying writing down the skin of the dead thing -- this is wrong this is disgraceful I say -- no I think -- as if -- [no -- I am giving up on as if] and that's how it went with me and so you are now sending me shapes -- talking of shapes and I say to myself oh what's up with him and I worry about the shapes even though

-- Yes -- shape your work -- people say -- yes of course -- shape your

nail parings, hair combings, corns. They do not diminish the body by their absence; they rather reinforce the body's capacity for excess and regeneration. They are evidence, says Stewart, of an experience lived within an estranged or dangerous intimacy (Stewart, 1993: 147). In my e-mail exchanges the close proximity and yet blindness to the other create exaggerations and distortions of the body and body parts. In cyberspace either of the correspondents can change gender, position in time and space, can become no more than a mouth or an ear, become another species of animal, a mythological creature, even an inanimate object such as a book, a plant or something to be eaten. Federman says to me, "there are so many pieces in your writing that deal with parts of the body-- I think in a way your writing is anatomical."

Stewart regards the body as the way we both perceive scale and conventions of symmetry and balance, and also our representation of the grotesque. The grotesque body can be affected both by the exaggeration of its internal elements and the display of orifices and gaps upon its exterior. There is something Beckettian about Gulliver's obsessions with his bodily functions in Lilliput. 'Eating, drinking, defecating, sleeping, and using his muscles becomes the sum total of his existence' (Stewart, 1993: 67). In *Malone Dies*, we find Malone lying in bed, unable to reach out other than with his stick. There is no explanation of how Malone

writing I hear that everyday -- yes think about the shape and the reader -- yes - - the poor dumb reader -- well I tell you I have been making shapes for years like a pastry chef and I have many little stainless steel cutters some with fluted edges and some sharp and some can cut up the best of text and I use my cutters well and I know how to twist them into those expanses of rolled out text and put a sprinkling of flour over to ease the pain of the cut to absorb the blood and my hands are gentle are smoothing and soothing and sometimes I hum to myself when I cut and I sing like a mother when I cut and I say there there there when I cut as I have the smile of a pastry chef and the cut of a boucher and they don't even feel it although sometimes it's hard for me sometimes I get attached to those words that I will have to kill but women especially know all about cutting and killing their young they have that all in their body in the x chromosome women are experts in cutting and shaping and reforming and milking all at the same time and I am still in the process of shaping my books the one I call the dead thing but that's already been almost killed from cutting that has been gagged from cutting and shaping that has lost all sense of its voice from the slice of the cutter on its throat -- but still I return to take another look -- yes another thing that women are good at compassion and I get told that all the time -- A you are compassionate -- and I know I'll have to love those books to

ends up in this situation, or why he is there, except that he is waiting or expecting to die. All Beckett's creatures find themselves in these situations: any old house, ditch, story, abode will do. In *Malone Dies*, as with all Beckett's creatures, there is an attendant coming and going with no other role than to attend to Malone's bodily needs and functions. As with Deleuze's description of the novella, the reader is simply confronted with the middle of a scene. One can go off in many directions or digressive pathways, but one also finds oneself unable to move forwards or backwards. The situation one finds oneself in says all there is to say about the scene being witnessed. It requires no prequel or sequel.

This was the image I was confronted with on first seeing Gentileschi's painting of Holofernes' death: finding oneself suddenly thrown into a secret moment, one of those pure events that changes the course of one's life forever. There will be an obvious temptation for some to read into Gentileschi's painting Freudian grand narratives (such as male castration by women or the mind/body split), but this is to totally misread the important significance of this work. It is the ambiguity of the work, not any narrative truths, that are important here. In that simple moment of stasis between life and death when Holofernes realises that he is about to cross the threshold of mortality, Gentileschi opens up endless possibilities of writing. One alternative reading of the

their end yes I owe them that -- you see they don't know I've left them for you or they would cry those 2 -- those 2 little books if they knew -- they would cry if they knew what madness I am writing here to you -- they'd get frightened of me what has happened they'd say -- what has happened to her -- what has happened to our mother -- she is scaring us -- and don't you get scared by me or that will be the end of this -- that will be our death -- and of course you can stop this anytime my writing has no obligations -- and now you see I am talking like a petulant child like -- and I say that all the time -- if you get lost in your words in front of others don't get scared don't take that pen off the page for a minute don't look -- don't get distracted don't think just keep it all going don't stop or you will then be truly lost -- the shaping can come later -- this is no time to be thinking about shapes I have shaping enough to make elsewhere -- this is about taking those shapes and grinding them pushing them through a mincer and seeing the ribbons of meat come out on the page -- this is about cutting open the throat of logic slitting its guts and plunging my hands into its offal -- this is about screaming out louse --

And of course this exchange is always outrageously self reflexive -- yes that is how I see them -- this neurotic voice always doubting questioning and reflecting back on itself -- isn't that how they have been throughout -- from day

painting would have Holofernes' bloody head being delivered from between the thighs of a woman rather than severed from between his arms and shoulders: the violence of that moment representing both a death and the birth of something new, the other actors in the scene now become midwives not murderers.

Just as death is often accompanied by life, so too is pleasure often linked with suffering. The violence and suffering of unforeseen events are often crucial and necessary for a new beginning to take place. Hélène Cixous points out that by constantly planning to control and make sense of our lives, we deprive ourselves of the real secrets of the universe because we no longer know how to let ourselves feel. 'We receive what happens to us with "received feelings" and do not profit from it in any way.' In our constant attempts to eliminate suffering from our lives, true happiness is often deferred:

We do not know how to suffer, this perhaps is the worst. It is our greatest loss. And we do not know how to enjoy. Suffering and joy have the same root. Knowing how to suffer is knowing how to have joy in suffering. Knowing how to enjoy is knowing how to have such intense joy that it almost becomes suffering. Good suffering. (Cixous, 1997: 12)

It is through unexpected and often painful unknown events throwing us off our comfortable and planned course that one rediscovers what one never had: 'a strange profit' (Cixous, 1997: 19). Such experiences Cixous describes as *entredueux*, moments such as that portrayed in Gentileschi's painting, when we are not entirely living and not entirely dead,

one --
 asking
 what is this I write you --
 why am I writing you --
 who is writing you
 this A and M -- that are something of
 Angela and Raymond but nothing of
 them -- a voice too much of a secret too
 much a familiarity

Proust says: *when I said Gilberte's name, I had the impression that I was holding her entire body naked in my mouth. . .*²

yes all the questions of writing of trying
 to find a name for this exchange this us
 -- them -- we -- our names masticated
 from my mouth to yours

our tongues caught sliding along on the
 pronouns --

The pondering I --

Writing begins with a yes -- yes --
 writing -- I have it -- returning -- great
 excitement quickly followed by the
 realisation that whatever way you go
 you have to suffer the consequences
 that particular choice will impose --

If I becomes she -- and she is still
 not free -- you will never be free -- even
 we are not free -- yes is that what
 drove Beckett on to go beyond the
 pronoun -- always on toward the other -
 - when B says I have to speak more of
 myself -- to ask to say who is this I who
 writes -- you me -- moi nous -- I -- we -

when we our not our self, when we
 witness our otherness. Such moments can
 be brought about, for instance, by the
 violent loss of someone who is a part of
 us, one's house burning down, a grave
 illness, even the option (if not the right)
 we have to take our own life: 'everything
 that makes the course of life interrupted.'
 Sometimes we are the authors of
entredueux, sometimes not. 'We respond
 straight ahead and think sideways . . . we
 "take decisions": in a stroke, we come
 down on one side---we cut out a part of
 our self' (Cixous, 1997: 9).

Yes, we cut out a part of our self, but that
 part is often the part that obscures who
 we truly are, the part we had learned in
 order to play a convincing social role.
 Avital Ronell talks about 'throwness', the
 experience of being thrown into a
 situation where one is powerless to be
 anything other than what one is (Ronell,
 1989: 58). To experience Avital's
 throwness, or Cixous' *entredueux*, is to
 experience a combination of
 powerlessness, vertigo and fascination.
 Like Heidegger's *Dasein*, one experiences
 a new sensation of being, often born from
 a violent encounter, a tearing out from
 one's everyday existence. The impact of
 these rare experiences for a writer is that
 the violence (a bereavement, an illness, a
 love affair, etc.) of being ripped from the
 familiar and the predictable, forces one to
 engage with a writing voice that is free of
 imitation or referents. My e-mail
 encounter with Federman produced just
 such a disturbance---that of being

meaning follows the word

And yes -- I never want this voice --
this voice between us to become --
tamed -- polite -- well behaved -- cured

Am I making sense -- she asks -- repeat
after me -- am I making sense --
followed by -- but why should she need
this confirmation -- what does that say
about her -- why can't she do this alone
-- but then all writers are nothing
without their reader so they keep telling
her -- and wouldn't those law/yers of
language hang you over this -- yes A
think about your reader -- make me
understand -- as if it is her job -- please
-- but the reader now who are they --
this idea of some collective reader in
one body in one mind -- as if it is
possible to reach all of them -- as if
there are no differences as if readers
are conjoined at one head all stretched
out from one eye wanting the same the
same mouth picks over the vegetables -
- the same mouth opens out the furred
tongue for the same food -- same
ectriture again same bouche same again
same moo again -- repeat again after
me -- yes repeat after me -- is it about
under - stand - ing -- translation --
what -- no -- about the failure of
language -- what -- about living in a
perpetual state of mis-understanding --
what? -- rather more about a lack of
communication --
ah --

suddenly thrown together with a stranger
that you have 'known' all your life, but
whom until that instant you could not
have known existed, and which creates a
new understanding of oneself:

In the friendship which I am talking about,
souls are mingled and confounded in so
universal blending that they efface the seam
which joins them together so that it cannot be
found. [. . .] it cannot be expressed except by
replying: 'Because it was him: because it was
me.' [. . .] We were seeking each other before
we set eyes on each other [. . .] which a made
a more violent assault on our emotions than
was reasonable [. . .] we discovered ourselves
to be so seized by each other, so known to
each other and so bound together [. . .] there is
no one particular consideration—nor two nor
three nor four nor a thousand of them—but
rather some inexplicable quintessence of them
all mixed up together which, having captured
my will, brought it to plunge into his and lose
itself [. . .] I say 'lose itself' in very truth; we
kept nothing back for ourselves: nothing was
his or mine. (Michel de Montaigne, 1991: 211-
212)

A reckless and uncensored voice emerged
from a place deep inside the body.
Fascination was matched by fear. In such
circumstances, one is drawn towards
death (Foucault's pure event) as I was to
Gentileschi's painting, unable to resist its
magnetic pull. My collision with
Federman threw me into a persona that
on the one hand was utterly compelling
and on the other overwhelmed me with
doubt and disbelief. Just as in *Souvenir*,
Marianne lives in fear that the head will
overwhelm her, devour her, erase her
completely, so in my e-mail fiction there
were times I was fearful that the fictional
'T' or 'A' would swallow up Angela. What
am I among my desires? No more than a
series of repetitions and slippages, a
constant calling up of death itself.

Pinter complaining that people all the time ask him -- *why don't you write something more communicative. Communication is too alarming* he says . . . *My writing has no obligation but to itself. We communicate very well in the silences in the gaps to show others the poverty in us.*³

Too alarming --

Yes

and what about the no o point -- yes her words fail fall mostly in to the waste land into the waste disposal into the ash can in the refuse in the incinerators -- just an abortion of words every day --

And sometimes we feel such deep shame and regret -- yes such deep shame and regret to be human -- but I see this is no time for calm or thought - - even though that shame is a little of what I'm feeling now here with you --

I want to keep the sentence between us unpunctuated
but for now I have to go attend my children and my chicken

much love
always Ax

**To M@aol.com from A@ntlworld.com
In a message dated: 7/11/03
5:45:07am**

Subject: An early response to Tioli / the pleasure of the text

In discussing the problem of the 'I' in fiction, it is important to mention that much abused term 'autobiographical-fiction', if only to dismiss it. I agree with those such as Federman and Cixous who claim that all fiction is autobiographical (coming as it does from the writer's thoughts), and all autobiography is fiction (as it can only ever be a version of reality, not reality itself). Presented as a kind of historical truth, the term autobiography is simply meaningless:

I dread nothing as much as autobiography. Autobiography does not exist. Yet so many people believe it exists. So here I solemnly declare: autobiography is only a literary genre. It is not a living genre. It is a jealous deceitful sort of thing—I detest it. When I say 'I', this I is never the subject of autobiography, my I is free. Is the subject of my madness, my alarms, my vertigo. (Cixous, in Hanrahan, 2000: 282)

And yet, returning to Cixous' concept of *entredeux*, to discover one's voice through a catastrophic event (such as Federman being the lone survivor in his family of the Holocaust), is to be forced to confront the 'I' in a way that demands a much deeper reading of the term autobiography. Federman's old man in *The Twofold Vibration*, awaiting deportation to a space colony accompanied through his narrative by his two friends (all three alter egos of Federman himself), questions but never resolves the elusive relationship between author, fictional narrator, and fictional

Moinous -- do you know that you are killing me -- you see how I drag myself from sleep -- away from the dead book -- the other book that still doesn't know that I am here with you -- that I commit adultery with you -- write you at 5am -- Ssshh -- it's a gruelling routine -- where are you -- I am disorientated by your recent travels -- but still I keep writing -- 15,000 words -- I am making lots of mistakes all over the page because it is still so very early -- and I told you one of us would die in all of this -- one of us will for sure -- me from the telling and you from the listening -- just think how many times I have pressed my finger to the keyboard to make all these marks to you -- just think how many flicks of the wrist -- and if I continue will it be me who shall die first of the telling -- but then I have no wish to be a Scheherezade for you -- no I have no wish to kill myself telling you yet another story -- and all this said -- you then wrote me from Heidelberg quite unexpectedly saying -- let's drive each other wild with orgasmic (sic) logos -- give me all -- I want more of you -- more of you all of you how much can you give -- and I found myself saying -- yes there is more -- yes -- there is much more -- much more to be found but then I found myself worrying -- worrying about what you called our ultimate fusion -- our words reaching their ultimate fusion but isn't the idea of an ultimate fusion of our words just a myth or a death for one or both of us --

characters. With all of Federman's fictions, the author is there yet not there. He writes himself in and out of his books according to his whims, or gets bored and kills off the character (sometimes the author). And (as in *The Twofold Vibration*) there are often a multiplicity of Federmans discoursing, even having heated arguments with one another. One is never quite sure whether to describe them as characters or co-authors. Roland Barthes has discussed this way that some writers appear in the text, not as the author, but as guest, inscribed like one of their characters. They may appear, leave, come back or not come back. The role of such writers is no longer privileged or paternal: 'his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work . . . the I which writes the text . . . is never more than a paper I' (Barthes, 1996: 161). It is Federman's aim, then, to abolish the distance between writing and reading, for the writer to meet up and play with the reader in the text. As Larry McCaffery suggests, 'Federman makes himself vulnerable by writing from the impossibility of telling the teller from the told.' As a result, the reader must forget how to read in order to learn how to read reading, and as McCaffery notes, 'While painful, such forgetfulness is necessary in order to free reading from habit' (McCaffery, 1998: 372).

In Beckett's case, the constant struggle between the 'I' and the 'Other' leads him to abandon the pronoun altogether: 'enough of this cursed first person, it is

I mean is an ultimate fusion of words even possible -- or isn't there just the pleasure of brief bursts mingling and parting and that is how it has always been between us -- words between us coming and going -- isn't that how it always will be between us -- and every time it's different -- and every time we return -- we keep returning to take another look -- left always to wander in the waste that is our unfulfilled language -- in the empty space -- in the geography and time delay that forever separates us -- that always keeps me ahead of you -- that keeps me always in your future you always in my past -- yes the thing you always say -- that Sam always says -- that *language is the thing that gets you to where you want to go and prevents you from getting there* --

And then in the midst of all this -- with all this unanswered -- with you away and I don't really know where you are and what the time is there -- where ever there is -- and your patterns are all different to what I'm used to -- in the midst of all this -- your book arrives -- your Tioli arrives and I am more than half way through and HC says that reading is like eating on the sly -- yes I am reading and eating you on the sly -- I am chattering in words to you on the sly -- I am awake at 5am -- [have you noticed yet that 5am is beginning to look like Sam] it is barely light -- it is raining hard here everyday it rains as I write you -- it rains like it's angry like

really too red a herring' (Beckett, 1997b: 345):

it's the fault of the pronouns, there is no pronoun for me, all the trouble comes from that, that, it's a kind of pronoun too, it isn't that either, I'm not that either [. . .] who is I, who cannot be I, of whom I can't speak . . . (Beckett, 1997b: 408)

It is only the ultimate *entredueux* of death itself that will provide the answer to the question of who one is, because the question then becomes in any case irrelevant, the rest of life being no more than a rehearsal for that final moment of truth. Death represents the ultimate point of personalisation, or as Foucault put it, the fulfilment of one's existence:

It is in death, that the individual becomes at one with himself, escaping from monotonous lives and their levelling effect; in the slow, half-subterranean, but already visible approach of death, the dull, common life at last becomes an individuality; a black border isolates it, and gives it the style of its truth. (Foucault, in Miller p. 20)

The dualities of fear and fascination, of disgust and desire, are frequent themes in writing and in art. They are an inseparable part of the same response. In, for example, films such as Almodover's *Matador*, ultimate desire is only fulfilled in death. So too in Cronenberg's movie *Crash*, death and desire are inter-linked to form ecstasy. Narrative and drama are replaced in *Crash* by a series of repetitions presented as pure desire that Kathy Acker describes as 'poetry'. In *Crash*, cinematographic images of wounds are transformed into 'never-been-seen genitalia', a fetishisation of violence (Acker, 1997: 173-174), a 'celebration of wounds' as Ballard describes it in the

an angry petulant child -- when for now
I would prefer snow -- I would prefer
the silence that comes with snow the
way snow likes to come silently to
surprise -- I come to you silently -- I
make it snow -- I can do anything here
in this fiction -- I can say -- make it
snow and voila! It snows --

It's 5 am I put on my blue beaded dress
-- the one I always wear for fiction for
love for you -- wear only that beaded
blue dress -- feel the snow between my
toes -- my prints slowly filling behind
me -- I am careful not to leave clues
when I steal away to find your ear and I
kiss it awake -- make it laugh out loud -
- open wide -- here we are again -- I
write years before -- ahead of us -- no
not even that -- a whisper -- listen
listen I must tell you --

Your book arrives yes Tioli arrives and I
read your words and taste marmalade -
- when I read your words I taste
marmalade -- yes -- mammalade tang
strip orange peel the words peel
oranges just saying its colour makes my
mouth juice up just saying it takes me
back to undressing the orange to
salivate the orange held in my mouth --
this lack of sleep and nothing to drink
for hours because I can't afford to take
my fingers off you this morning or I
might lose what I woke up to say -- to
say -- that inside your words inside the
mingling of those words among all those
pages I found I had missed the smell of
men did I tell you that -- that for many

original novel. But the sexualisation of
violence and disgust are mere foreplay
for death itself.

In *Souvenir* Marriane attempts to capture
and immortalise death, literally by
making a souvenir out of it, replaying
death over and over. But in her attempt to
capture death, to realise herself, Marriane
only experiences the disappointment and
annoyance that she cannot escape the
demands of the other. Here again is
Bataille's boredom of the stabilised thing
against the desire created for that which
one knows will soon disappear (Bataille,
1985: 241). Gentileschi's painting captures
the essence of desire fuelled by an
imminent loss, of the other always
slipping away, a translation of endless
possibilities. At the same time it
foregrounds the gap between the sign
and the signified, the impossibility of
language being able to describe certain
experiences: the unnameable that can
only be felt, never expressed in words.
What, however, this highlights in writing
is the difference between writing that
comes from the head and that which
comes from the body.

I was very much aware in writing this
thesis that the critique in the right hand
column would be dominated by the
head's logic while the left hand column
attempts to draw from the body's
sensuality. Yet such dichotomies are
unhelpful in trying to understand my
writing voice. In the same way it would
be too simplistic to describe the

years now it has been women's voices queuing at the back of my throat -- women's stories all through my work and I found I had missed the firmness of men their smells and their roaring -- that voice I heard in your words milking me with muscle and sperm -- my leaking memory -- and I had forgotten all about these hard thighs until I heard your voice -- your body spread open in there -- your words pressing me up and down -- your voice laughing out loud -- your voice smoking all the time -- all those lukies and lights all those galuise and you tell me they cut your beautiful hair --

That's the thing with Tioli on the surface it makes me angry sometimes -- yes sometimes it makes me want to turn my face away -- but I can always hear that fight in there that voice that feminine voice running with the guys -- yes the whole book is for the guys -- addressed to the guys seems to exclude me -- but no -- that unstoppable voice erupts -- is at odds -- immersed in all that's vulgar and empty about masculinity -- empty symbolic words yes -- desire teeters along its wire to the motion of jazz with the energy of jazz -- Tioli as an endless jazz solo -- isn't that what someone called it -- a voice that knows how to drink like a woman from the ebony bodies of men that knows the sounds and the smells and the taste and glut of men -- that knows how to say yes yes to all of the body laid open spread open across the unnumbered pages -- the voice s e c r e

relationship between the head and the body in *Souvenir* as a metaphor for the writer's struggle between the head's logic and the body's sensuality. The decapitated head becomes its own being, an object of desire and also of disgust. The body became irrelevant because the head became its own body, a complete entity of its own. Sometimes the head filled the whole page, at other times it was reduced to no more than a bodiless voice, or a discarded bundle in a corner of the room. And yet there is no didactic intent to these images. So what place do they have in an academic text? Returning to Barthes' observation that one cannot write a thesis on the pleasure of the text, one of the problems of engaging in a critical analysis of one's fiction is that in attempting to understand what you have just written, the creative process is shut down and paralysed. Cerebral dominance and detachment replace the sensuality of the language. Doubt and censorship rush in. One starts to read into the writing clichés and obvious metaphors that were never intended in the first place. This is the tension between the commentary and fiction juxtaposed on these pages.

Since I discarded *Souvenir* as a work that had given up on me, I became interested in how others had approached similar

ting -- and maybe in your book the penis is still erect -- yes maybe the words are still full of blood are hard and coming at you but they also babble and meander words run and roar through that book in a double tongue calling -- *I will be relentlessness* -- a bilingual fusion of voices yes two tongues rolled one around the other -- I hear it roar and then babble marmalade -- marmalade you say -- and I hear mammalade and hair -- yes those bastards cut your lovely hair -- the hair as immund -- the shaved soldiers turned into fighting machines so that difference is both denied and heightened -- the crudely shaven heads of the heretic -- the crudely shaved head of the Jew and the shaved whores displayed in the market place -- I hear the voice call out and maunder -- it digresses and meanders itself to breaking -- breaking out of those straight jackets of language -- the PC -- the censor -- the political -- the binary -- all trying to kill our spirits -- oppression with its plastic surgery grimace -- the voice instead breaking into mammalade and hair and water and the pink of the cunt and the hair of the cunt the sound of water of you breathing underwater backstroked streamlined finned scaled -- tasting of chlorine but mostly of salt -- waves of water leaking memory -- all the memory that has passed over and through us these past weeks -- all that weight of the sea between us -- all the weight of all that has gone before us of

themes. The Cartesian debate on the dualism of mind and body is parodied by Beckett in *Murphy*. Murphy describes being split in two, convinced that without having intercourse one with the other, his body and a mind could not have known that they had anything in common. Rather than attempt to reconcile this split through philosophical debate (as Descartes had done), Murphy remains ambiguously caught between the two (Federman, 1965: 75). In Beckett's later works, Federman claims, Beckett chooses to obliterate the body of all its demands in favour of affirmation of the mind. 'The ultimate goal of Beckett's entire literary production is to create a fictional being that can exist completely detached from the physical reality of the body . . .' (Federman, 1965: 76).

The disembodied head and voice, then, are frequent features of Beckett's later works: the head in the jar in *The Unnamable*, or rolling down the hill in *Texts for Nothing*, but also the fragmentation, disintegration and reintegration of the body: a head on two legs, head reduced to skull or mouth, mouth as anus, and so on:

all I say will be false and to begin with not said by me, here I'm a mere ventriloquist dummy, I feel nothing, he holds me in his arms and moves my lips with a string, with a fish-hook, no, no need of lips, all is dark, there is no one, what's the matter with my head, I must have left it in Ireland, in a saloon, it must be there still, lying on the bar [. . .] But who is me, blind and deaf and mute, because of whom I'm here, in this black silence helpless to move or accept this voice is mine . . . (Beckett, 1999b: 42)

all we write beneath -- between -- all
that I wrote ahead of us -- as I wrote in
my other dead fiction *Concupiscence* --

*In the night I hear a voice call when the
cock crows at the wrong time and brings
up the unexpected monotony of the
waves. I hear a voice fill my ears, lick
my lips. I understand the moan of
whales who can find no end. We who
wander between the dryness of land
only wanting to be immersed. I draw
pictures that are emerald green. I call
the sea Mother. It is no coincidence we
cry salt.*

And we are definitely three dimensional

--

and I hear myself laugh out loud
as I remember
rectitude
lost
I remember

[oh damn it I'll work with my left hand]

respondent

yes -- like someone changing to her left
index finger it rolls now it really rolls

rectitude

lost

enfeebled utterance like someone lost
again like someone lost it rolls like
something like a spanish double r rolled
off the french tongue rrrrrrrr

yes -- for now only french would do yes

Beckett's heads transcend the logic
normally associated with that part of the
body to become their own body. Rational
thought is exchanged for chaos. One can
only receive Beckett's language, and
those of similar texts, through the senses,
not through reasoning. The implication of
this is that to experience *jouissance*, the
pleasure of language for its own sake, one
must abandon oneself to the text, lose
oneself completely in the writing. As Julia
Kristeva concludes, the writer who will
not be censored and who embraces chaos,
does so for the sheer pleasure of the text.
She credits *jouissance* with sexual pleasure
even to the point of orgasm, of losing
control, even consciousness:

where language and all representation are lost
in a spasm or delirium. [. . .] A woman ---with
or without the trance---is the daily
demonstration of that more or less
catastrophic or delicious distillation of flesh
within the mind [. . .] That troubling
porousness of women [. . .] the vaginal body,
that dwelling place of the species, imposes on
woman an experience of the "interior" of
"internal reality", that does not allow itself to
be easily sacrificed by the prohibition
(language, images, thought, and so on).
(Kristeva, 2001: 16)

This is Roland Barthes' 'text of bliss'
(discussed in more detail in the section on
cyberspace). For it is something that
cannot be spoken *on*---only *in* (Barthes,
1989: 21-22). This brings us back to the
opening quotation of the introduction to
this thesis, and the reason I have
presented the main sections in two
columns. For to attempt to describe
jouissance will always fall short of
meaning. *Jouissance* is represented by a
live voice, one Kathy Acker refers to
when she says that the only language she

pages and weeks of that other mother
tongue pages or days of
incomprehension when I remember only

la bouche

la bouche licks the boucher's rouge
buerre ectriecture boucher parler la
bouche plein cousue -- de bouche a
oreille -- bouche-a-bouche --

No how impossible how inadequate
what verbal prostitution what feeble
recitation what jawing aching
duplication -- what an abracadabra
story what discursive oral vomit what
atrocious non discursive pleasure
delirium we are in a democratic cutter
utter confusion together -- my life
screwing pleasure bird my pleasure
delirium oiseau all tongues in buttermilk
in lard in pigs heads in the afterbirth of
a horse in semolina in porridge and
mashed potato in frothed egg whites in
egg yolks so carefully broken apart and
separated in the dung of language in
the sweet stink of language in a malady
of tongues milking the teats erect in
tongues linguistically twisting --
rattlesnaking erect like a semblance of
breath he repeats
like a semblance of breath
the significance of little who doesn't
know where they are going
who doesn't yet know how to speak
who has lost his rights
an outlaw
a bad lot
a thief a bum

is interested in is the language that cannot
be made up. This is the language of the
body. Like the orgasm, one comes upon it
(or it comes upon you) (Acker, 1997: 166):

Authentic speech is a speech that no longer
forces itself to imitate a preexistent given: it
is free to deform and invent, on condition that it
remain faithful to its own law. [. . .] The law of
authenticity forbids nothing, but it is never
satisfied. It does not demand that speech
reproduce a prior reality, but that it produce
its truth in a free and uninterrupted
development. (Rousseau, in Blanchot, 2003:
46)

We find exactly this quality of speech in
Beckett's voices. The origin of the voice is
irrelevant; it exists because one hears it.
Beckett talks about a voice that is not his,
but can only be his because there are no
others. Characters and plot are irrelevant
to this form of writing, for any attempt to
make narrative sense out of *jouissance* is
futile. Beckett's creatures form and
dissolve, change size and shape. The 'I' is
kaleidoscopic coming and going,
struggling to maintain (to question) its
identity. This is what moves the work
forward: a philosophical thesis on the
failure of language. As Federman insists,
writing creates its own meaning (or non-
meaning) as it goes along. It is only the
voice that is essential. All great fiction is
music, Federman says; it should be heard,
not seen. Some, like Beckett and Borges,
have turned this idea of 'the failure of
writing' into a deliberate strategy, the
self-reflexive announcement in the text of
its own failure. As Gregory Johns writes
of Beckett: 'Knowing the impossibility of
ever getting it right, of ever succeeding,
the narrator [Beckett] postulates the ideas
of 'failing better' (Johns, 1993: 64). And as

an adventurer
 a wanderer
 wandering we give up our name
 that name of the father he repeats --
 the voice repeats --
 and why do you let men name you

What impertinence
 what incomprehension
 that's us wandering to find
 yes -- 43 years of walking and
 wandering and calling and all the time I
 was speaking the wrong name and the
 wrong language and the only word I
 recognised in the alphabet was *no* --
 because I didn't know the sound of my
 own name my own voice in your tongue
 because I did not see you on the corner
 of the street
 on the street corner
 waiting on the corner of the street
 where you live --
 under the expanses of marmalade skies
 --
 with our fingers in the dead
 we picked flowers for the dead --
 flowers from the ground to the ground -
 -
 for the ground and sky accept all we
 offer --

And he doesn't even know -- having
 said all this -- no -- I didn't even know
 you knew me -- he doesn't even know
 me -- no -- we've never even met we
 two -- no never
 no not really ever
 he doesn't even know how I look --
 no -- has never sent a glance my way --

Blanchot puts it:

Failure is inevitable, but the byways of failure
 are revelatory, for these contradictions are the
 reality of the literary task. (Blanchot, 2003: 45)

Federman has made the strategy of
 announcing the failure of the text his
 imprint. In *Double or Nothing* the self-
 conscious dialogue with himself about
 the failure of the novel, *is* the novel. There
 is also the constant promise that the next
 version of the book will be better
 (McCaffery, 2002: 335). Federman's
 assertion that self-reflexive
 autobiographical fiction always speaks
 the truth about its own fraudulence
 (Federman, 1993: 102), is closely linked to
 this notion of the failed book. And yet
 failure, linked closely to self-doubt, also
 accounts for the creative force behind this
 kind of writing. As Henry James
 observed: 'We are working in darkness--
 we do what we can--we give what we
 have. Our doubt is our passion, and our
 passion, our task. The rest is the madness
 of art' (James, in Blanchot, 2003: 45). Just
 as Henry James and Antonin Artaud's
 letters about the failure of their books
became the book, so too perhaps will my e-
 mails about the failure of my own
 writing, my dead books, become the book
 that erases itself as it goes along.

It has already been suggested that
 pleasure and suffering have the same
 root. To link *jouissance* and failure (even

how is all that for trust and commitment
 --
 how's that for a discourse --
 for a discourse without a respondent is
 not to know how to speak --
 how's that for love --
 for a semblance of breath in mine --
 how's that for life giving anonymity --

it rolls here it really rolls between us --

does that come as a surprise to you
 after all we've said and done together --
 does it come as a surprise to say that
 we don't even know each other -- have
 never locked eyes on each other and to
 tell you the truth I would be scared to
 look on you just in case --
 just in case
 it may stop us intercouring so freely

Do you know who you are --
 do you know what is the o point of
 identity between us --
 we have a new form name we do not
 know how to repeat the o of absence or
 was it the abstinence of our origins our
 guins o r guns or gins with ice and lime
 a squeeze like perfume our voices get
 pissed together on the gins of our words
 on unknown orangegins with ice and a
 twist make it a double on the rocks

Many years ago -- yes -- once upon a
 time I'll tell you -- once in that once
 upon a time snow of souvenir I wrote --
 time is all lost on us -- we killed time as
 a construct -- we hung it years ago --
 shot the bastard -- cut off its face -- its

death) together is not contradictory:
 witness Cixous' pleasure in suffering or
 Foucault's ultimate pleasure in death.
 What is it, then, about this economy of
 writing, one that celebrates the abject and
 the chaotic state of human affairs, that so
 differs from that other form of writing
 that seeks to provide us with answers and
 comfortable truths about the world? For
 Barthes *écriture* represents the middle
 ground, a 'morality of form', between the
 object (language and style), and the
 function (writing, speech, etc): '*écriture* is
 the writer's zone of freedom' (Sontag on
 Barthes, 1986: xiii). I discuss in the
 introduction of this thesis, the concept of
écriture féminine, a feminine writing voice
 (employed by both men and women) that
 distinguishes itself by its chaos, its
 playfulness, and its preparedness to reject
 all formal conventions of writing and of
 grammar. *Écriture féminine* is linked to the
 theory of a *pre-symbolic language*, a
 concept closely associated with Jacques
 Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and
 Hélène Cixous. This concept describes a
 sensual language of communication
 thought to have been developed from our
 proximity to the mother's body, before
 being replaced by the logocentric
 language acquired from the Oedipal stage
 onward.

In attempting to better understand my
 own writing voice, it was these ideas I
 first turned to for an explanation of my
 own unorthodox writing style. Initially,
 however, I got caught up in trying to
 understand the early theoretical works of

oversized hands -- its interminable jab
 jab jab feigning my heart just see how
 violent how violet we can be you me
 killing time together --

And now I am just more than half an
 hour into you and I have forgotten my
 thirst and I have forgotten my
 unfaithfulness and I have forgotten
 yours -- forgotten that I made it snow -
 - that we can do anything here in this
 fiction -- that I had sneaked off through
 the snow this morning toward you --
 toward that *cold and passionate dawn* -
 - even the snow laughs as if it knew of
 our meeting the snow was thick and
 playful as if to laugh -- brief bursts --
 brief delirious moments -- taking off my
 blue beaded dress ----- you already
 unzipping me -- this is no longer a time
 for patience -- ----- words
 unzipping which is where we began --
 sliding down the zip ----- look
 back -- you'll find it there ----- the zip
 sliding ----- it was there in advance of
 us ----- unpeeling slowly ----- slower
 ----- in our slow rush ----- in a s l o
 w rush of oxymorons ----- in tongues
 again of words again from skin again
 from eyes from tangles of clean hair
 from teeth cracking together and no
 speech ----- shh -- no not now -----
 ----- shhh ----- now only low inaudible
 sounds ----- now only breaths
 exhaled the wrong way through
 stretched nostrils through over
 stretched nostrils mouths apart
 repetition apart forced blue veins raised
 apart through breaths together exhaled

these writers, works written at the time of
 the 1970s and 80s when feminist politics
 (relying as they did on Freudian and
 Lacanian grand narratives and universal
 truths) was the current philosophical
 discourse. In trying to make sense of the
 theory underpinning *écriture féminine*, I
 became aware that much of these early
 works directly conflicted with the
 theories they espoused, employing the
 very logocentrism and rationality that
 they claimed to reject. Even the term
 'feminine writing' itself is problematic,
 being loaded with the tired old
 symbolism of gender politics. I continue
 to rely heavily on translations of French
 texts (and I include Federman and Beckett
 when I talk about French writing, even
 though one adopted France and the other
 was exiled from France), much of which
 has now in any case moved on from
 psychoanalytical theories and gender
 politics. Much of the contemporary
 theory around *écriture féminine* is much
 more sympathetic to the fictional writing
 style it discusses. For my own thesis---a
 challenge I have many times wanted to
 abandon---the terms *feminist* and *feminine*
 actually have a dichotomous relationship,
 one in which feminism equals political
 dogmatism of the kind that feminine (as
 used by Cixous and others) is supposed
 to oppose:

Feminism is the operation by means of which
 woman wishes to resemble man, the dogmatic
 philosopher, reclaiming truth, science,
 objectivity, that is, the whole virile illusion,
 and the effects of castration, attached to it.
 Feminism wants castration---even that of
 woman. (Derrida, 1998: 57)

This is the ambiguity represented by

the wrong way through over stretched nostrils and open mouths pressed together bitten together torn apart together at the corners a show of pink a slice of nail tracing scars the length of cuts reddening the mixing of saliva with the taste of thick tart marmalade thick tart marmalade smeared everywhere yes everywhere mammalade especially in our mouth especially in our hair peeled fresh oranges especially rolled on the tongue especially squeezed especially bitten open especially freshly squeezed in the mouth licked from the neck from the nipple orange squeezed in my mouth in my hair thick tart mammalade mouth wetting mammalade on your thighs on your hips on our backs on our back stroke screaming comprehension c o m i n g together

In a message dated 28/9/2003 11:25:33 AM Pacific Standard Time, a@ntlworld.com writes: Re: even happier*****

Dearest -- how are you today -- did you have a good film time yesterday --

We are going out for lunch soon -- well taking the kids to the sea --

the film Adaptation was irritating yet stayed with me -- yes it collapsed into all it tried to avoid in the first half yes in the end it was a statement about hollywood pulp and how people want to be fed action murder love -- all that --

Gentileschi's painting: the easy interpretation of the castrating woman versus the more complex image of the moment of death as a departure, an image that offers alternative possibilities. One reading is based on a need for answers and rational explanations, the other on a more open and sensual reception of the work. Lucy Irigaray provides some helpful metaphors for distinguishing between these two approaches as applied to writing. These two economies of language, she says, can never speak to, or be understood by, the other. The one is fluid, fluctuating and blurring, the other is congealed frozen and paralysed by its own objectivity:

If only your ears were not so formless, so clogged with meaning(s), that they are closed to what does not in some way echo the already heard. [. . .] Solid mechanics and rationality have maintained a relationship of very long standing, one against which fluids have never stopped arguing. (Irigaray, 1985: 112-113)

Sense, order and coherence are the enemies of *écriture féminine*. Feminine writing should claim its own internal logic; there should be no need for external logic imposed either by complex theories, or through the structure, plot and storyline of the fiction itself. The feminine voice should be true only to itself. The digressive and relentless voices of Federman and Beckett are not remembered in terms of 'what happened in the book' but 'what happened to the reader'. Such writing is recalled in terms of an experience that can only be invoked during the process of reading, an experience that can be repeated in a

the experimental v the linear plot driven -- anyway it was worth watching for the Deleuzian moment when wasp finds its orchid -- yes that tiny clip moved me -- the way the creature's body orgasms on that flower and the other small scene where Meryl and her guy -- her wasp or her orchid -- hum as one over the phone -- form one vibrating note together -- if you haven't seen it [and it's so bad in that hollywood way at the end -- but I guess that's the whole point -- as it gives itself over to the story to the plot it had in the first half of the film wrestled against] -- watch it just for those two snippets -- once you find your flower nothing can keep you from it --

I woke up wanting to talk to you but not sure if I should -- I am wondering again what I am doing here pouring out all my this and that -- except I of course know and that is how we have been from day one almost -- so what -- I recognise my words I don't recognise my words -- yes it is and it isn't translatable in me --

and oh darling a mild depression you say -- those mild bastards are the worse kind like all day drizzle or salad without dressing or flat beer -- yes I much prefer a red hot spicy one that blows you way off the planet that is like a good hurricane or like chewing a whole bunch of wild garlic -- and then -----
-- well you know the rest --

Oh and just one thing -- just in case you feel like a small natter -- just a tinsy

slightly different way on each re-reading. An experience also, that one has been complicit in a crime, simply through the voyeuristic act of sharing in the writer's transgression. Are such writers, then, the delinquents of literature? Catherine Clément (2001: 53) describes the feminine writer as 'a troublemaker, truly situated on the margins of play'. There is a simple and painful pleasure involved in abandoning oneself to language, in ripping up the dictionary and the grammar book and indulging in the pure pleasure of language.

It is bursts of enthusiasm within the mind, trains of thoughts so rapid that an ellipsis makes them jump the track, the electricity of a furtive current of pleasure and, to return to that, a short circuit, which causes sparks [. . .] I am a hedonist in the matter of thought [. . .] I am ready to confess my lack of system of thought regarding the world. (Clément, 2001: 69)

In *Souvenir*, even the page becomes an unbearable restriction as Marianne fills the walls of her home with text. The page itself has become the last challenge for the delinquent writer, for once the writer leaves behind the page, what then? Hypertext is only a beginning, a multi-layered virtual space for language with no door but many windows, many points of entry. Text has also become an increasing feature of painting and installation, tearing down the barriers between art and writing.

In spite of having come to writing from an art background, I feel a commitment to the page, viewing the container and

winsy chat -- as last night I picked up your book *A to XXXX* as I do sometimes as I can't read that book in one go it has to be read here and there so I had 5 mins with it and there was this part -- pages 248-249 -- *One day I may tell a story* -- you were at Larry's home after a reading you had given and there were glasses and mess and used cigarettes all over the room it was 2 am and you and whoever were alone after all had left -- you began talking about Sam -- yes of Beckett in his later works having gone to the place of no story and then you went to the shelf and took down Sam's book -- *Texts for Nothing* -- and you opened the page where he said

*I have high hopes, a little story, with living creatures coming and going on a habitable earth crammed with the dead, a brief story, with night and day coming and going above, if they stretch that far, the words remain, and I've high hopes, I give you my word.*⁴

and you said that Beckett was sending back word from that place of cancellation, emptiness and chaos -- *HEY YOU GUYS OUT THERE, if you understand what I've been doing with my writing, where I've been heading, why I've had to go there, then DON'T FOLLOW ME!*⁵ -- sort of warning the rest of us who had to go on [after he couldn't go on] that we should not follow him into the lessness of his work -- just as Joyce had warned him not follow him into the fullness of his work -

restriction that the page presents as a personal challenge. In *Double or Nothing* Federman attempts to defy the page while staying just inside of that line that confirms him as a writer, anticipating the possibilities of the computer and of cyberspace on a manual typewriter. It was the delinquency and playfulness that I responded to in Federman's work, writing that was an invitation to tear up all the rule books and just play with language. The e-mail exchange that followed was a response to that challenge:

I heard the delinquent in me respond to the delinquent in you and say I'm here -- let's play and you said let's play and lets break rules regardless of where this takes us (from my e-mail exchange)

In my e-mail exchanges I have discovered more than the possibilities of cyberspace. I am confronted with a return to a new form of the epistolary text, one marked by libido and sexual exchange. That the fiction and reality of the e-mail correspondence often becomes blurred adds to the sense of delinquency and transgression. One is able to push the fiction towards real possibilities, possibilities that one may not contemplate outside of the fictional. And yet such writing does not depend on the invention of e-mail for its effect. Delinquency in writing can be traced back through a long tradition, with routes in carnival folklore. Before print was widely available or understood, carnival was the means through which laws and prohibitions were popularly challenged. During the public festivals of carnival, the

- and that did not mean of course that we had to go back to the old wives' tale -- but to our own tail -- and you went on to say that all fiction needs the story -- and I found that real depressing -- yes for me -- I thought -- I have little bits of story sometimes -- sometimes coming in and out of focus -- sometimes like a broken story that I try and pick up but it's maybe not all there -- but sometimes it feels there is no story -- I am just here with all these what -- desires to make words but what is the story -- where is my story where is my book the book always to come -- how to write about nothing -- nothing much happening nothing to say -- no memory -- and in that film *Adaptation* -- I told you of -- yes it was a fight between the no story and the story -- and the story won of course because that's Hollywood -- because that's what people want -- expect -- pay for and I understand there are interesting ways and all sorts of ways and possibilities of telling the story even by undoing the telling as you go -- yes you erase the story as you write it always I see that is how you write -- and then you can make up a story -- you imagine -- or you tell the story of not being able to tell the story -- but then what if I don't begin from a place of planning to fuck up the story -- well I mean if I don't have a story to fuck with -- what if memory escapes me and if I feel I have no history -- you know -- I have no suitcase full of tricks and tales - - and then I think ok I'll try telling something by untelling but no that's not

normal rules of society could be transgressed and replaced by the kind of freedom that one encounters today in the discourse of the e-mail. Positions such as good and evil, sanity and madness can be reversed (Mikhail Bakhtin, 1999: 122-126). Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* are examples of a continuous thread linking the transgressions of carnivalised folklore with a certain delinquency in writing today. A certain pleasure is experienced by those who challenge conventional orthodoxies, whether this is done to ridicule mannered society at large, or specifically to challenge the rules of diction and grammar.

But the delinquent writer always takes the risk that their work will be marginalised, perhaps never published. What they are not prepared to do is compromise. For they are convinced in their belief that their writing has its own legitimacy, even when it is criticised by others. But there *are* rules on which Federman and other writers who challenge orthodoxies will not compromise. They will not sacrifice their art for the sake of commercial success. Indeed, the delinquent side of Federman delights in deliberately sending his work to those he knows will reject it so that he can engage in mock outrage. Federman's irony is acknowledged by Kathy Acker when she describes a new kind of writing, one that exists only for the publishing world. So-called 'good

it either because what is there to tell to untell -- I just have things that touch me -- the intensities Deleuze speaks of or the impressions you mentioned in Proust's work -- Proust saying that the impression was everything to the writer -- however trivial -- however faint -- that the impression and nothing else can be brought to a state of pure perfection and joy -- yes -- or Woolf telling us it is a mistake to think that literature can be taken directly from life -- You must go out of life she says . . . You must go out of yourself, and concentrate on one single point the abstract insignificant that does not last that reveals nothing and then returns to the point it illuminates -- Blanchot's experience of the instant -- and so I wondered about what you had said here in relation to Sam -- here and there -- and when is a story a story -- so it troubled me what you said -- and I wanted to interject and say -- hang on Moinous -- I don't feel like that -- and neither did that sound like you -- so I will -- I will think about it more -- so answer me when you feel like it and we can see where we get -- and yes maybe the excess of Joyce and the lessness of Sam are one thing and now what -- what is left for us --

Until later -- love to you --xxxxA

**2nd December 2002 3:34:04 PM
a@ntlworld.com writes:**

Re: The snow is falling with a response to madness -- so now I will send you the photograph --

writing' equals writing that is publishable, that is to say 'big business' (Acker, 1997: 102). Federman's deliberate self-reflexiveness and rule breaking is the ultimate challenge for publishers. As Acker puts it, 'Those who deal in commerce do not want to, cannot afford to live in chaos. [. . .] especially moral chaos' (Acker, 1997: 88):

Whenever writers are considered marginal to a society, something is deeply wrong, wrong in that society and wrong between the relations of writing and society. (Acker, 1997: 103)

One could ask that if such writing (that which is inadequately described as experimental, avant-garde, postmodern, feminine, etc.) was not controversial, spontaneous, law breaking, constantly pushing against boundaries, what would be its purpose anyway? The pleasure of feminine writing is the pleasure of childhood innocence combined with adult hindsight and experience. To enter into conventional modes of signification would be to destroy its reason for being. In *Smiles on Washington Square*, Federman captures this feeling when he says, 'I can never grow up', my life is a 'joke in progress' (Federman, 1985: 60). Seriousness, he says, is a quality for those who have no other qualities. For Federman, writing emerges not out of a consciously conceived plan or structure worked out in advance, but out of the chaotic interactions of words, ideas, memories, and other random fragments of narrative. Like chaos theory, his books are written from the bottom up, the end product emerging from countless chance

thoughts and haphazard musings

Bonjour and talking of the bouche --
 have you had your breakfast -- what did
 you have -- I never eat breakfast

And NO I did not disappear for 12 hours
 -- that dumb ntl were doing repairs --
 yes maybe they are intentionally
 interfering in our relations -- but having
 said that -- I'm going away on Dec 18th
 so 16 days of silence for us -- maybe I
 will write you a letter instead -- won't
 that be quaint --

I have ordered 2 books for you from
 France so you can read in your mother-
 tongue and they are arriving with me
 soon -- which is all crazy as you *are* in
 France and the books are also in France
 but are now coming here from there
 and then from here I will send them on
 to the States so they will arrive by the
 time you get home and so on -- I will
 send them soon and will put in
 photographs as I said -- but isn't there
 a part of you that should like to always
 imagine me and to never see how I look
 -- in some ways I've liked that you are
 free from my image and have to make
 up your own pictures from my words --
 but I guess to want to see me is
 inevitable --

I am trying not to touch the batch of
 writing I have to send as sometimes
 when I think about it I want to cut it
 down edit it censor it -- eat it -- and en
 keeps making me promise not to touch
 it -- so I am trying not burn it all -- Blah

(McCaffery, 2002: 342).

Acker tells us that: 'The current war over
 censorship is actually a quarrel about the
 definition of human nature'. What is
 being censored, she says, are people's
 actions, dreams and fantasies (Acker,
 1997: 34). Social beings have always
 sought to replace chaos with order. Art,
 representing dream, sexuality, fantasy,
 madness, death, can be seen as a threat
 to an orderly cohesive society. The type of
 art and of writing that lives outside of the
 logos is repressed by society's laws and
 prohibitions (for instance censorship) to
 protect its integrity (Acker, 1997: 78-79).
 Donald Barthelme is one of those who
 laments the so-called guardians of
 culture's blind arrogance in not
 recognising counter-society's legitimacy:

I have no way of punishing you [. . .] for not
 listening [. . .] for having a closed heart. There
 is no punishment for that, in our society. Not
 yet. But to the point. You and I, [. . .] are not
 in the same universe of discourse. You may
 have not been aware of it previously, but the
 fact of the matter is, that we are not. We exist
 in different universes of discourse. [. . .] It
 may never have crossed your mind to think
 that other universes of discourse distinct from
 your own existed, with people in them,
 discoursing. (Barthelme, 1966: 50)

The term delinquency includes among its
 definitions transgression,
 mischievousness, heedlessness,
 lawbreaking and defiance. However, to
 suggest that the delinquent writer, the

-- does this out-pouring mean 3 days of silence --

So what are you doing today -- tonight - do you want a paper copy of the 29,000 words so you don't have to bother with printing it all off -- I can post it with the book and the photographs -- I can't believe I am even sending it in any form

I will miss you being nearer -- geographically that is -- now we have a lot more water to get through to reach each other or as you say we rise and rise -- and don't you catch yourself and say look at me writing to this A -- this stranger -- all these things and don't you just catch yourself and think how crazy is this -- how I love this
 ~~~A~~~

writer who defies censorship and prohibitions, does so as a defiant or political act, is to miss the real point of this kind of writing. Federman proceeds from the premise that as words fail to communicate anyway, language is there to be abused. Larry McCaffery describes Federman as 'a kind of textual machine capable of producing a stream of rich, often hilarious, and frequently revealing neologisms and absurd phrasings' (McCaffery, 2002: 325). Typos and other slip-ups are not just ignored by Federman in his writing, but rather they are often exaggerated to emphasise the absurdity of the fiction, the fiction in most of his writing being Federman's own life, not least, the process with which he engages to write. His epistolary monologues, according to McCaffery (2002: 328), rely on self-absorption, egotism and narcissism, one in which masturbation (one of the first taboos to be transgressed in childhood) plays a central metaphor. That one must have the courage of one's own narcissism to write is typical of Federman's many maxims about writing (Federman, in Gerdes, 2002: 328). Nothing is illegitimate for inclusion or exclusion (Federman refused to allow publishers to include page numbers in *Take It Or Leave It - TIOLI*), 'because fiction is as much what is said as what is not said, since what is said is not necessarily true, and since what is said can always be said another way' (Federman, in McCaffery, 1998: 334):

The shape and order of fiction will not result from an imitation of the shape and order of life, but rather from the formal



circumvolutions of language as it wells up from the unconscious [. . .] a kind of writing whose discourse will be interrogation, an endless interrogation of what it is doing while doing it, an endless denunciation of its fraudulence, of what it really is: an illusion (a fiction), just as life is an illusion (a fiction). (Federman, 1994: 382)

Federman delights in making chaos out of order, in creating deliberate incoherence, in replacing meaning with non-meaning. For in refusing to hand out to the reader neatly packaged truths and ready-made meanings to digest passively, Federman invites the reader to become an equal partner in the creative process, to invent their own meaning, to create their own fiction. This is what Barthes describes when he talks about the text as a social space, a space in which no language or subject is safe (Barthes, 1996: 164). The delinquent or criminal act here is not against the reader of the text, for as much as Federman plays with language this is never done in a way to insult or ridicule his reader. The transgression here is against those who would maintain the supremacy of the author and the passivity of the reader, those writers and books that take themselves seriously; that try to peddle fiction as a representation of reality, and themselves as the savant or philosopher.

By rendering language seemingly meaningless, expressionless, blank, as it were, RF [Federman] kicks that fear in a handful of dust into the face of the deluded sovereign author of original words and forces readers to learn how to invent language through the activities of the plagiarist. (McCaffery, 1998: 372)

In ridiculing himself, and life at large, Federman allows the reader to become

their own philosopher, because reading one of Federman's fictions is a philosophic act. In being presented with the chaos of Federman's writing, we are also forced to confront the chaos in our own lives. It is the instability, unpredictability and illusory nature of this type of fiction that makes it more genuine, more true-to-life than the type of storytelling that seeks to present an external reality. This is precisely because the writing of Federman, Beckett and others who have challenged literary orthodoxies, is free and uncommitted to the affairs of the outside world, representing only disassociated fragments of the writer them self. This splitting-off from the wider social world, the introspective and obsessive narrative of the self and of one's own existence, is the only world that the individual writer can truly inhabit. And as for the reader, the text can only ever touch a spark that ignites something in the reader's own individual world, to create some unique meaning for them. The delinquent writer (and Nietzsche was the first modern writer to openly embrace this role), does not challenge universal meaning to supplant it with a universal meaning of their own. Neither do they choose this mode of discourse simply as a deliberate act of provocation or defiance. This is to have misunderstood the nature of such writing. The writer who delights in chaos, who tramples on accepted codes of discourse, who is marginalised as avant-garde or experimental, such a writer is driven by a profoundly philosophic

purpose—an acknowledgement that there is no universal truth or discourse to share with the reader (who must respond according to their own experiences) other than the passions, obsessions, and anxieties of their own existence. This is the language of Deleuze's intensities, of Proust's impressions, of Blanchot's experience of the instant, of Woolf's abstract insignificant. Like Barthelme, what all these writers are in search of is a language that is not the language one always hears.

## From Cyberspace to the Epistolary Text

In love, conversations play almost a greater role than all the rest; love is the most conversant of all passions, and it lies mainly in the happiness of speaking. [. . .] To speak and to love are essentially linked.

(Robert Musil, in Blanchot, 2003: 143)

Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire. The emotion derives from a double contact: on the one hand, a whole activity of discourse discreetly, indirectly focuses upon a single signified, which is "I desire you," and releases, nourishes, ramifies it to the point of explosion (language experiences orgasm upon touching itself); on the other hand, I enwrap the other in my words, I caress, brush against, talk up this contact, I extend myself to make the commentary to which I submit the relation endure. [. . .] To speak amorously is to expend without an end in sight, without a crisis; it is to practice a relation without orgasm.

(Roland Barthes, 1990: 73)

**In a message dated 30/1/2003 8:34:03 AM Pacific Daylight Time, A@ntlworld.com writes:** Cyberspace -- The container -- Last Tango -- Territory v Deterritorialization --

*As physical space and cyberspace become further intertwined are there less and less boundaries and more and more connections?*<sup>1</sup>

As we set off each day toward the other -- taking that risk -- working without a sense of direction -- when we tightrope across the other's lines -- does there need to be something spoken between us -- an agreement -- a place of safety -- something negotiated between us -- how often should that negotiation take place -- which one of us decides if -- how -- when to stand back from the other from the fiction -- can we both agree -- what happens if we cannot -- do we always need to feel our own borders to begin from a place of safety in order to lose ourselves in the other's words -- to 'experiment' to 'find potential movements' 'deterritorialization', 'intensities' -- do we need 'to keep a small plot of land visible at all times.'<sup>2</sup>

In the boundaryless place we inhabit -- the place without rules -- do we still need to feel the floor -- have a sense of walls -- see an edge from the corner of our eye -- yes do we need to always keep something in sight -- somewhere to call my home -- something marked out as my territory --

Corresponding with another in cyberspace is fuelled by desire, the anticipated climax of receiving and devouring the other's words. But, as Deleuze reminds us, desire can never be reached because one is forever attaining it (Deleuze, 2002: 164). Deleuze's metaphor for the state we call desire is a 'body without organs', an undeveloped organism like the egg, always full of promise and endless possibilities, where the normal functions and hierarchies associated with the body no longer exist:

A BwO [body without organs] is walking on your head it is seeing through your skin breathing with your belly, love, experimentation, where psychoanalysis says "stop, find yourself again," We say instead "Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self." [. . .] sex organs sprout everywhere [. . .] rectums open, defecate and close [. . .] the entire organism changes colour and consistency in split second adjustments [. . .] they have fused [. . .] the exchange of hearts [. . .] everything is allowed, as long as it is not external to desire. (Deleuze, 2002: 153-156)

Freudian and Lacanian notions of desire stimulated by a lack are rejected by Deleuze, for the desire he speaks of lacks nothing. There is nothing to interpret or explain, only intensities that pass and circulate, offering endless possibilities of more desire, more eroticism: 'the slightest caress maybe as strong as an orgasm [. . .] all that counts is for the pleasure to be the flow of desire itself' (Deleuze, 2002: 156). Proust describes the capricious nature of these moments of pleasure in writing, writing that is not planned for, reasoned or thought out. Proust would only write 'when a past instant was suddenly brought to life again in a smell, in a sight that caused it to burst forth [. . .] palpitated the

like Deleuze's man on the moon with his small flag stuck into the dusty terrain -- or does the land shift with every new message with every new exchange each day we shift -- change -- re-form -- are taken into new places with the other's words with our response to those words -- we find ourselves in a place we could not have imagined could not have plotted when we first set off -- and who knows which word will set off today's movement -- one sentence one image one mistake one misreading carries us to a new place to yet another point of departure -- where am I now?

We peddle our excess -- we cross and work in a series of labyrinths always re-connecting re-forming a network of bridges and tunnels that open out -- tunnels that sometimes only narrow and appear as dead ends -- yes -- sometimes exits close on us as we find and lose ourselves repeatedly -- settle again -- each night I move inside for protection like Diogenes in his tub -- still needing something there to protect to mark out my borders -- and yes there may be times occasionally when I may say -- I am not feeling safe -- feeling no indicators is alarming -- no signs anywhere -- I need to get out of the fiction -- I'm so lost I need to stop a while -- let's be ourselves again -- let's find a place of safety -- *If need be I'll put my territory on my body, I'll territorialise my body: the house of the tortoise, the hermitage of a crab, but also tattoos that mark the body's territory.*<sup>3</sup>

imagination, and only when this joy gave me inspiration' (Proust, in Blanchot, 2003: 19-20). Even without the benefit of electronic text, Proust was able to remain faithful to 'pure impressions' and respond with instantaneous highlights. How much more heightened are these arbitrary flashes in an e-mail exchange, when one is able to respond at speed without having time to consider responses. 'Speed', Plant tells us, 'is the computer's secret weapon' (Plant, 1998: 155). Blanchot goes on to describe the intensity but also the ephemeral nature of desire in writing 'that does not last, reveals nothing, and returns to the void that it illumines. It is the experience of the instant' (Blanchot, 2003: 99); it is, he continues,

... 'matches unexpectedly struck in the dark,' they speak of nothing but themselves. They appear, they disappear, brilliant fragments that blot out with their saturated purity the space of transparency. [. . .] to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. (Blanchot, 2003: 100)

But in the chaos of writing desire--being captured by one intensity, then pulled to another--one enters into a rhythm. A chain reaction is sustained of transitional passages from one milieu to another (Deleuze, 2002: 313). Plant uses the metaphor of cigarette smoke to describe this random, ever-changing experience. It rises for a while as a smooth continuous strand until confusion takes over, 'a menagerie of mysterious wild motions [. . .] fluctuations upon fluctuations, whorls upon whorls [. . .] as elements of the substance in transition communicate with each other and effectively make a "decision" to change at the same time' (Plant, 1998: 165). The endless and

Yes when I move across your words -- set out to write you -- feeling my way across your language -- I move like a snail -- deliberate -- patient -- shifting constantly with my home on my back -- secreting silver threads -- moving across one another -- it is a silent language -- if I say I haven't even begun yet -- I haven't gone nearly far enough -- if my home moves with me then what happens to concepts of near and far -- when we exist only in our movement towards -- when in one exchange we cannot anticipate how small how long the distance we travel will be -- what will interrupt -- deviate -- make us retreat -- writing with speed and sometimes the speed at which we travel changes -- some days we meander -- turn on a circumference -- sometimes we move from snail to sidewinder our home is now our temporary skin our tongue feeling the way ahead -- protecting us -- we zig zag a trace -- a zig zag shifting and moving back on itself but always propelling itself forward -- we sidewind incapable of certainty -- *the zig the drive toward the partner the zag the drive toward the nest -- the two accented orientated differently*<sup>4</sup>

And of course I want you to anticipate my words -- I want you wet and eager and open if I am to open my legs on the page if I am to write without self consciousness and let my words do what it will -- I need to undress comfortably confidently with a love of my body -- all I need to know from you is that you still want to listen -- but that is a different thing to what I was speaking of and it is the container we

chaotic e-mail exchange between myself and the other involves its own fluctuations and whorls, building up, as Plant puts it, additional assemblages that result from the new systems connecting and collecting as the correspondences continue. But this is not a process of building up a body of work; it is an ever-forward-moving process in which past intensities are unceremoniously disposed of as new becomings are encountered: 'things that work', Plant says, 'do so because they are both living and dying, organising and disintegrating, growing and decaying, speeding up and slowing down'(Plant, 1998: 161):

Critical distance is not a meter, it's a kind of rhythm. But the rhythm, precisely, is caught up in becoming characters that are themselves more or less distant, more or less combinable [. . .] Between the two, at the boundaries, an oscillational constant is established: an active rhythm, a passively endured rhythm, and a witness rhythm, or else: [. . .] a complex rhythmic character forms through duets. (Deleuze, 2002: 320)

To enter cyberspace promises a freedom that is limited only by our imagination: 'the virtual world provides a space where the unspeakable can be spoken' (Linda Dement, in Plant, 1997: 192). We escape 'the meat' of our own bodies to become whatever we want inside the screen (Plant, 1997: 181). The security that was once face-to-face communication---the missionary position---has now been replaced by the 'touch of the unknown,' the 'alien touch,' as our fingertips stretch out across the void. Yet this was not technology's intention. 'He wants to see what is reaching towards him, and to be able to classify it . . . In the dark,

need to speak of -- this space we move inside that belongs to both of us -- the place between -- that we cannot be properly named -- we search around for the nearest word -- we negotiate inside our constantly shifting rhythm -- but for me it was said between us -- it was spoken of in its unnamings -- it was others who made me question -- others who worried for me --

*Caution is the art [. . .] if dismantling the organism there are times one courts death, in slipping away from significance and subjection one courts falsehood, illusion and hallucination and psychic death.*<sup>5</sup>

In this sense we take our line of flight from our last words -- my flag in the corner of my eye my home on my back -- we play over an ocean

*I possess only distances*<sup>6</sup> -- from there I approach

And I woke thinking of *Last Tango In Paris* -- about the apartment where the two accidentally collide -- the apartment for them becomes their container -- the agreed territory for Jeanne and Paul to take flight -- yes that space is a type of play pen -- their gymnasium -- where they become something different each time they come together within that boundary -- and inside that space is infinite -- nameless -- shifting -- Paul's own territory outside this container is the hotel where he lived with his wife -- where

the fear of the unexpected touch can mount to panic' (Elias Canetti, in Plant, 1998: 185). The promise of technology, far from classifying and controlling information, has instead given way to chaos.

Several sinister cases have pushed the possibilities of the internet in directions that could never have been anticipated. In 2001 a German computer analyst, Armin Meiwes, advertised on the internet for anyone interested in being eaten by him. From numerous replies he selected Bernd Juergen Brandes who was subsequently stabbed by his own agreement and eaten by Meiwes. The more recent case in Britain of a fourteen-year old boy who plotted his own murder on the internet, by posing as several different characters in a chat room until he succeeded in duping another boy to meet and stab him, takes internet fiction to entirely new limits. The boy created an elaborate fiction in which the potential murderer was convinced that he was being tested by the secret services for a role that would provide him with a job as a spy. He was led to believe that his victim was in any case dying of cancer. The author of the fiction survived the stabbing to become the first person in Britain to be charged with inciting their own murder (Guardian, 29th May 2004).

The more bizarre and abject use to which cyberspace can be put can only extend the possibilities of e-mail as a writing medium. It was the possibility of creating a different voice and also the freedom to reject formal structures in language that attracted me to



his dead wife now lies waiting to be buried and Jeanne's *real* life also lies outside the apartment -- yes her territory is her boyfriend -- her forthcoming marriage -- her mother's home -- until Paul ventures further each time -- finally ventures outside and crosses the borders -- he takes the risk of blurring one fiction with another -- of going beyond -- breaks down the notion of inside and out -- moves even further toward her -- while Jeanne tries to hang on to her crumbling duality -- there is the apartment -- there is my life --

*P- It's me again*

*J- it's over*

*P- yes it's over then it begins again*

*J- what begins again I don't understand anything anymore*

*P- well there's nothing to understand. We left the apartment and now we begin again with love and all the rest of it.<sup>7</sup>*

And then I was thinking about the way we safely got ourselves out of the fiction the other day -- to ask the question -- when you have formed two personas -- become many creatures how do you then escape those two -- those voices of our own fiction -- the two people who go walking with words -- who call themselves by other names -- how can we any longer know who is the real and who is the fiction -- does it matter -- you said we have got to know each other through words only -- yes of course -- that's all we are are our words -- meaning following language -- and yes also that we are married and have children and other responsibilities --

this medium of writing. In cyberspace, Sadie Plant tells us, 'narrative collapses into the cycles and circuits of non-linear text' (1998: 189). The impersonality of the computer screen also affords 'unprecedented levels of spontaneous affection, intimacy, and informality,' in contrast to traditional media that brings with it a 'welter of inhibitions, barriers, and obstacles' (Plant, 1998: 143). My e-mail exchange operates within this field of intimacy and desire—a perpetual state of longing—yet it is an intimacy, as Roland Barthes reminds us, in which the object is always absent: 'You have gone (which I lament), you are here (since I am addressing you)' (Barthes, 1990: 15).

Avital Ronell is also concerned with electronic communication. In her case, it is the telephone that becomes the umbilicus between correspondents in the discourse of desire. The phone, like the computer, holds together what it also separates, heightening desire both by maintaining and minimising the distance between those who would be desired. Like the telephone, the freedom of exchange I experience with e-mail brings me closer to speech than text on the page, a freedom to achieve a writing voice that has the quality of concrete, sensual thought. With both e-mail and the telephone, the senses are heightened by the proximity felt through the exchange, while at the same time physically distant from the other. The sensory deprivation of being so close to the other and yet oceans apart also stimulates the senses:

Whoever is fascinated doesn't see [. . .] Rather, it

yes -- that is it the tension between the two married responsible people and the two who go fucking with words -- but then it is only words we say -- yes and with some it is only friendship and in *Tango* it was only sex but all the time people innocently walk these lines and fall off the end -

touches him in an immediate proximity; it seizes and ceaselessly draws him close, even though it leaves him absolutely at a distance. (Ronell, 1989:23)

In *The Telephone Book*, Ronell describes the maternal chemistry between the mother and son who are stretched apart from each other. She describes the phone call connecting with the child who won't come home and asks the question, 'By what umbilical of calling will she have reached her son?' (1989: 27). The call, from afar into afar, reaches him who wants to be brought back. The mother makes the son into an 'addict of taking calls, he will no longer be able to abstain from wanting to hear [. . .] he must take the call and accept the hearing' (Ronell, 1989: 28). The withdrawal symptoms of the one answers the other's addiction: 'I became an answering machine. I picked up your call [. . .] Come here I want you' (Ronell, 1989: 228). This is Heidegger's Dasein, the presence that only exists when speaking and listening out for another in an endless exchange of giving and receiving: 'for Dasein cannot hear the other unless it is ready to speak, already calling upon the call. Or they are implied, one in the other, in a kind of infinite interlacing' (Ronell, 1989: 60-61). My writing voice is a virtual voice that exists only in the space between me and my listener. You (the one called up) are a ghost that I cannot possess outside of cyberspace; my desire for you makes a phantom of you: 'I want you suggests that desire is on the line' (Ronell, 1989: 228). That I cannot possess you makes me miss you, makes me desire you all the more. The caller and the called, Ronell tells us, do not

Souvenir began with a line a sentence scribbled innocently enough -- the sentence led to an image -- an image found a painter the painter had her story to tell the subject of the painting had a story to tell -- I entered the painting -- the insides took me to a birth a death a snow-globe -- inside the globe -- a house a landscape of snow -- another's voice calling two voices calling -- a head calling -- a question -- what if you ask me to cut off your head to witness your death what if I say I want to take you apart and see how you look beneath -- take my own self apart which is maybe what I have been doing with you -- how many different ways are there to express desire to you before we become our own cliché -- I write souvenir knowing it is a piece of

fiction -- but here I am moving towards you again so now what happens to I -- what happens to you -- when we present ourselves as fiction -- who is telling the story here -- which one of us will talk of the small moments of disgust felt toward myself toward you toward the creatures we have formed -- the inability of the creatures words to live up to our jouissance --

*completely fake [. . .] should we recognise ourselves as Cyborgs?*<sup>8</sup>

Why don't we make her up and then we can give her the right responses -- but now we have made her how do we switch her off --

*"There's one thing I don't understand about you, lady, [. . .] "How come you're so clever and yet you made this machine without a fucking off switch?"*<sup>9</sup>

Yes when we say -- shall we play -- we begin innocently enough -- we say OK that sounds fun off we go -- and to begin with it is fun but then we get ourselves confused in places -- too easily lost -- and so I say stoppppp or you say stoppppp and we do -- we manage to safely get ourselves out of the fiction -- but what if we didn't -- I might one day not -- you might one day not -- who can be completely sure of this -- what then -- what madness might spill into our lives -- our *real* lives -- but what does it mean any longer to say my *real* self -- my *real* life -- inside and outside the fiction -- my

constitute an oppositional or stable pair (Ronell, 1989: 230). But the familiarity with the other also makes them a secret, even a crime; to betray each other is to admit to something unspeakable. And when the voice or the e-mail is absent, the other is dead and a process of mourning begins. The work of mourning, Ronell continues, is symbolic of eating the dead, swallowing what is not there, and at the same time spewing out a part of yourself that contains the other: 'a vomitorium [. . .] a specific form of mourning sickness may well be guiding the missiles of technology' (Derrida, in Ronell, 1989: 341).

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On e-mail, more than on the phone, the disembodied voice (blind, deaf and dumb to the other) yet has the power to bring the body up so close it can devour us. An intimacy exists between the virtual other (particularly between virtual lovers) that it may not be possible to maintain in the real world. In the physical world the other can present a host of barriers that can inhibit the lover's discourse: a look, a movement, an interjection, which in turn can signal discomfort, disapproval or boredom. Slavoj Žižek proposes that, if and when we finally encounter our virtual partner in real life, their spectral quality would be exchanged for a reality that would force us to maintain a 'normal distance'. In short, 'we pass from the spectral Real to reality, from the

fictional other -- how many lives can we have in one body -- isn't all of our life now virtual -- is the earth now too small for all of us -- is it too much a spinning top -- do we have to leave the planet find that unnamable place we trust -- even though trust is such a shaky character --

Yes take *Last Tango* -- yes they exist for one another inside the apartment -- the apartment becomes their line of flight where they create their many personas -- the space of no names -- and so in the final scene when they leave the apartment -- Paul becomes disgusting to her -- yes at the point that he leaves the apartment -- abolishes the container -- crosses into her territory -- his face changes -- his voice -- she becomes disgusted by him -- he becomes needy and vulnerable in a way he has not been before -- he is standing before her -- he is following her back to a place she calls home -- they dance and snarl and lick around one another as she tries to return to her life -- to forget all they have been together -- to try and recall who she once was -- and is there a real still to be found -- where does it any longer exist -- is the real any longer their separate lives outside the apartment -- or was the real after all the space of the apartment and the language they pushed to its limit within that space -- has she left the fiction way ahead of him and he is still playing it out in her face -- reminding her of all the crazy fictitious things they were together --

*it is a question of keeping at a distance*

obscene ethereal *presence* of the Other to the Other who is simply an object of *representation*' (Zizek, 1997: 155).

What does Zizek mean by 'normal distance'? Would it be possible to follow virtual intimacy with any kind of *normal distance*? Would there not rather be a kind of sensory excess? Let's say the virtual couple meet. What would happen? The eye would probably cause the most concern. The gaze, whether glancing, up close, or staring, would be too acute, the most painful of all the senses to deal with. It was not anticipated that the gaze would hold them apart. The critical, seeing eye, what is it thinking and saying as it follows every movement, glancing away yet constantly returning? And what about the voice? Having only ever known a virtual voice, an endless babbling of words, they would now have to deal with the sound of the other's voice, punctuated by stammering and moments of muteness. Without a computer or keyboard how would they speak? Their fingers had done all the talking; it was the movement of fingers and body, not the mouth, that brought language into being, and so words would now sound awkward and lose their rhythm and flow, rush at the other too ferociously or laugh too loudly, the sound too painful to the ear. Each would also become conscious of their own voice as if listening to it for the first time coming from a tape recorder. A voice no longer integrated with the body, the virtual persona would become lost. How could anyone who had not communicated before in 'real life', in *the missionary position*, any

*the forces of chaos knocking at the door*<sup>10</sup>

Facing Jeanne in her family home -- Paul pushes his way inside -- picks up and dons her father's hat -- now asking for her real name -- her real love --

*This is the title shot baby we're going all the way. It's a little old, but full of memory now. How do you like your hero? Over easy or sunny side up? [ . . . ] Now I've found you. And I love you. I want to know your name.*<sup>11</sup>

Bang!

She shoots -- sinking her flag into the ground her gun into his head --

*Inside or out, the territory is linked to this intense centre which is like the unknown homeland, terrestrial source of all forces friendly and hostile, where everything is decided. The territory is a place of passage.*<sup>12</sup>

The Tango -- the dance of death -- the rite marked by rhythms and postures and abrupt pauses -- based on a duo beat -- one courts death

Maybe it is not that one real[ity] is better -- less threatening -- but one reality dominates at different speeds and times -- what did you say -- *Reality is a great place to visit but I wouldn't want to live there* -- each day making language transient -- virtual words form and collapse -- words move in all directions cross over and into and cancel themselves

longer communicate without their prosthesis (keyboard, screen, telephone, etc.)? Without the keyboard each would feel naked in the other's presence, all-too-human. Is this what Zizek meant by normal distance, the sharpness of colour of smell of sounds assailing them from all directions?

The proximity of the other on e-mail is acute: 'I feel you distant today, come closer'. A sensory antennae is developed for knowing whether the other is near or far. The need to reach out and touch is always present. But what when the couple meet in real life, what then becomes of normal distance? A sensory excess, an impulse to reach out and touch hair, lips, teeth, clothes, something real strangers would never do. And what then happens to the fiction they had created and the story they had previously occupied---does it suddenly disperse? Who are these two who now stand before the other? Strangers or spectral, shifting holograms of each other's imagination: how are they to continue their virtual drama in real life? Faced with each other's awkward lilting voices they are no longer able to pause, to put each other on hold or delete the things they are saying. They are unable to cut and paste the gestures just made, to stop and consider. There is no time, for time has again become real:

with VR [virtual reality] and technology, we are dealing with the loss of the surface which separates inside from outside. The loss jeopardises our most elementary perception of our 'own body' [. . .] the colonization of outer space thus reverts to the inside into endocolonization, the technological colonization of our body itself. On the other hand, outside is always inside: when we are directly immersed in VR, we lose contact with reality--- electro-waves bypass the interaction of external bodies

out --

When things begin to draw us too deeply into space when the digression threatens to wipe us out -- to wipe out all the signs -- signs that may have returned us to a place we called home -- to a place of safety -- do we wake ourselves up each dawn from the dream that has altered some part of us -- maybe come back to ourselves clutching a small clue -- I move in and out of language -- writing takes me where it will each day I return and cook the vegetables I sleep eat make beds -- I move toward you -- forgetting to ask who do I write to -- who is writing you --

**from angela - 29th February 2003 - 11.44 am**

re - 28/2/03 3:21 pm, [M@aol.com](mailto:M@aol.com) at [M@aol.com](mailto:M@aol.com) wrote: *let's discuss reading next time -- yes -- how we read -- I mean books -- shopping list everything and this also - I mean what we are presenting to each other everyday --*

Darling that's so funny you said that -- after En had said next you will be sending him your shopping lists -- well you see what you then wrote -- yes why not -- look --

*When undertaking the publication of Nietzsche's works [. . .] what if, within a work book filled with aphorisms, one finds a reference, the notation of a meeting or of an address, or a laundry list; is it a work or not? In response, Foucault replies*

and directly attack our senses: it is the eyeball that now englobes man's entire body. (Zizek, 1997: 134)

In my e-mail exchange the virtual couple are kept in a perpetual state of desire, only as happy as the last e-mail, and then desire begins again. Desire which cannot ejaculate holds out a perpetual promise of orgasm. The sound of the printer ejaculating before the words are seen heightens desire. Like Pavlov's sad dog, now it is the printer that stimulates salivation. One can never anticipate which word the other will send, what response will be triggered. In this way one can never plan, there is no linearity. As Kristeva says: 'Let us work toward meaning, but let us leave it [. . .] indefinite, always "to come", (Clément & Kristeva, 2001: 142). Just at the moment of anticipation, in the hurried, sometimes lingering process of reading, I kill the other. Their words die the instant they are taken by way of the eye, taken in, ingested, only to then want more. And in order to have more one then gives more, having no idea what will come next, how many words, what form or content. The writing lives through digression and through repetition, but a repetition that each time shifts us to a new place. Words are interjected with one another's changing form and meaning, so by the third or fourth version there are only a few recognisable things. But together the words form a new text, a completely different language, as Deleuze suggests, a kind of 'secrecy by transparency that is no longer anything but a pure line that scarcely leaves any trace of its own passage' (Deleuze 2002: 290).

[. . .] 'Why not?'<sup>13</sup>

Send me a photo of you in your new coat  
-- I have no photos of you--

Or put the kettle on I'll come for tea about  
4pm -- the truth is for the last few months  
I having been living in S.D just a few  
blocks away from your home and I wanted  
to get to know you first -- the rest is all  
fiction -- A xx

**In a message dated 2/2/2003  
2:34:38 AM Pacific Daylight Time,  
a@ntlworld.com writes:**

oh \_\_ where are you in here

-

-. .;:'l74

8\*

\*

\*

\*\*

\*v,

darling -----=====++++

a red

\ room --

ye=^^S \*haha yes all very

sexy=-==

but

I can't see you very well in here----where  
the hell are oyu

And yet there is a price to pay for daring to expose the self to the other, the need to constantly maintain the e-mail persona, the stage character, a self-consciousness that sometimes causes retreat. Clément discusses the danger of maintaining the persona that one adopts when writing. 'At this point,' Clément writes, 'I'll introduce depression, since, when a person is depressed, the "stage character" has collapsed' (Clément & Kristeva, 2001: 147). My own feeling is not that of depression but of doubt; doubt comes rushing in and I can no longer write. I become mute, I lose my persona: my character's voice. Doubt forces me out of my writing persona. Again, as Clément illustrates it: 'The wires are limp. The body is no longer straight but beaten down. Identity wavers, morality no longer holds sway [or rather the morality of the I who has previously spoken], the heart is empty, suffering is infinite' (Clément & Kristeva, 2001: 147). And yet this doubt is also indispensable to the writing. It is a useful retreat, as the prostration of doubt is a withdrawal that makes it possible also to stand back up. Clément compares this process of re-birth to an initiation. 'The "work of mourning" is one of its versions, and it belongs to life, not just to death.' But if the depression lasts too long and turns into melancholia, Clément continues, then 'the void of the sacred becomes lost in a chasm, and re-birth does not come about. [. . .] There is real danger only in excess, said the Greeks. That is the very definition of the tragic' (Clément & Kristeva, 2001: 147).

Many commentators, such as Deleuze

oops yes there u are

\

sh,p]z.

banged my knee=="\

ok ok

Moinous -- what are we going to do with all these words everyday they grow and spread between us and in 4 months we must be heading for half a million already and so on to what mutation of words yes what twins triplets four headed monsters are in wait for us -- who knows -- but then all these words just keep multiplying and and we don't stop or look back and should we stop -- I don't mean as in stop the process moving on -- no -- I mean as in if we keep on and on how will we ever be able to look back -- and do we need to look back -- but already I have had to stop printing things off well not as often as my rooms were filling with box files overflowing with our words and I am running out of places to keep us -- and although my work is being shaped from words here and there it is mainly my words to you that I re-work here and so what about our fusion of words your response to me -- and so on -- yes what about our words to one another what will happen to them -- to our fusion to our monstrous gluing effusion -- yes what will need caring for -- what shall we do -- words always escaping us always slipping by -- yes -- but then maybe that is the point -- our infinite chaos -- of what ever

(2002: 278), have linked the informal way of communicating in cyberspace to the feminine libido. Plant concurs with this view when she claims that women have always privileged roundabout, circuitous connections. She quotes Irigaray, who describes woman as putting 'the torch to fetish words, proper terms, well constructed forms' (Plant, 1998: 189). The feminine style does not privilege sight, Plant continues, everything returns to the tactile which is more important for erotic arousal. This reinforces Zizek's claim that cyberspace represents a return to concrete sensual thought, a state in which the symbolic is abolished and we are returned to a real that cannot be spoken (Zizek, 1997: 131). The absence of the body in the space behind the screen produces a proximity, a moving, shifting body---non-body---that can be free and outside of binary sexual identities. Hierarchies are abolished and the body is turned inside out---a fluid body, Deleuze's body without organs: licking myself with your eye peeping from my navel; a messy uncensored language that exposes all it is to be human; a libido that is all clitoris, capable of multiple orgasms; an excess of pleasure; many points of entry, many plateaus as Deleuze and Guattari repeat throughout their book (2001). We belong to the horizontal, away from verticality, from origin, let there be no erections between us (Irigaray, 1985: 213). Plant also provides a description of this fluid body: 'Not the clitoris or the vagina, but the clitoris and the vagina, and the lips and the vulva, and the mouth of the uterus, and the uterus itself, and the breasts [. . .]



form this will or will not take -- it is always the promise of more words growing -- of more exchange -- and I have so much to tell you about what I wrote yesterday but I am tired and have to go and I know we are both busy and if I write more today just think how many more words I alone am adding to the problem of scale here -- all over us too many words -- too many possible directions in which to take you -- yes I will not add more for now as we have to talk about this how can we go on like this what will become of us -- this avalanche of language that could fall and obliterate itself -- ourselves -- it is becoming impossible to remember anything I have said to you -- yes like your books cancelling out the story as it goes along -- I have no idea of time -- time has become an irrelevance -- what I said yesterday is already all forgotten -- we eat excrete and back for more -- we are disposable -- our words become throw aways -- fast food -- it is becoming harder to keep printing us off on to paper so finally only our computers will be capable of remembering everything that has been passed between us as they hold our words in their virtual state -- our words remain holograms dead on arrival -- yes -- maybe we only exist in our computer's head -- if it indeed has a head -- is a head -- back to the head -- a decapitated head rests -- lives on my writing desk -- not that again -- you see what I just said back to that -- so where is its memory -- no I don't even want to think about it -- your computer's and my computer's heads conjoined -- knowing

the multiplicity of genital erogenous zones' (Plant, 1998: 206). In just this way the voice(s) in cyberspace become fluid, change and mutate, like *Solaris*' 'thinking ocean' in Stanislaw Lem's book by the same name (Lem, 1970).

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Drawing on Heidegger and Nietzsche, Ronell questions whether cybernetics, now outside of human control, has not taken over from philosophy:

technology continues to rip and uproot man from the earth [. . .] man has already been uprooted from the earth. What's left are purely technical relations. Where man lives today is no longer an earth. Technology is no longer a tool [. . .] the earth seeing itself from the moon, ripped out of its socket, axially dislodged, bleeding [. . .] He is viewing from beyond himself, from the beyond which he shares with an earth that is no longer an earth, receiving an image of herself from beyond her, a transmission both from her and beyond herself. (Ronell, 1989: 39-41)

This experience of otherworldliness (or otherwordliness) is essential to any writer entering into the world of their fiction. Writing in cyberspace only amplifies such feelings; it is not the cause of it. And, of course, in my own case, writing to a real listener, I am able to take a companion with me into the fiction that is often also jointly constructed. In our e-mail fiction, Federman and myself create the myth that we are from another planet, some nameless existence that we called each other up from, a place where our writing voice is the lingua franca, and to which we may

and loving each other like we do -- talking to one another -- sleeping together in our absence -- and do they tattle over us -- do they say -- oh look what she said today -- do they think us foolish -- are they writing their own sub-text without us -- have they made us into their puppets -- acting out our lines in their daily space opera -- do they think they are us and that they are to one day meet -- leaving us behind in our separate homes --

And what if one of them breaks down loses everything explodes says enough of you -- if the other starts having hallucinations based on our words yes begins having word-sex with other words -- with other computers -- begins rearranging us mutating us misrepresenting us -- and so on --

Yes all I wanted to say will have to wait -- for now it will have to wait -- you see again -- again we are always postponed -- but I cannot keep on adding to this without thinking about what is adding up between us --

So "[ . . . ] how do we switch her off?"

She circles and sniffs the air she hears him shout sit and instead she barks loudly -- lifts her leg to a sentence -- pisses on the word foreplay

Yes it was raining -- it wasn't raining xxx  
much love A

someday return. So inside of the computer (like the surreal world of *Souvenir* safely contained inside its snow globe) madness and chaos can reign safely behind borders. I can, when I choose to, escape from the fiction back into the life of the writer who is no longer writing, take my eye away from peering at the other. But there is always the danger that on withdrawing from virtual reality, the writer's own non-fictional life can seem bland and lifeless in comparison. The energy generated by the exchange, by the journey in cyberspace, gives way to predictable routines and dull domestic chores. Unlike the fictional world where the writer is able to go where and when they will, in real time they become hostage once again to the needs of others. Not surprising, then, that the writer may wish to spend more time in the one reality than the other:

Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself [ . . . ] you have to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality. [ . . . ] have a small plot of new land at all times. (Deleuze, 2002: 160-161)

But when the borders of fiction no longer remain in place, when the writers start to live out their entire life in the writing, then the madness of the fictional world is unleashed on the writer. There will always be those sacrificed to art and to writing. Nietzsche, it has been claimed, went mad on our behalf (Felman, 1985: 11). Those feelings of alienation from the world that I am concerned with in my fiction became for Nietzsche and Artaud a daily reality, a reality described by Timothy Bewes as 'the lone and lofty perch of world-hating introspection' (1997: 171), and by Peter

from [A@ntl.com](mailto:A@ntl.com) - 16th march 2003 - 10.21am - subject: love letters

*I'm thinking of writing a story entitled "The Purloined Letter." By letter I mean the kind of letter people used to write to each other on stationery and which is now almost defunct. Who writes letters these days? I mean real epistolary fiction. We may be the last (you and I, whoever you may be to whom I wrote a letter yesterday, I know I did) ones on earth still communicating in this fashion, even if what we communicate often derails into incommunicability. Derailed? That's perfect. The derailed letter. Like the derailed train, which has also become a fossil. The train used to make places communicate. THE EXTINCTION OF THE LETTER---the letter as missive---letters as words being carried by the postal service [by train perhaps] --- letters in the word inside the envelope. And so on.<sup>14</sup>*

There is much in this dance this exchange with one another that sometimes feels closer to that now passé form of the letter -- its intimacy -- the confessional -- the digressions -- its closeness to speech -- our words to one another not open to the web -- this is not hypertext which opens the words up to multiple others -- entries -- pathways -- interjections -- yes but to one another only -- this is not a chat[te] room -- it was not our intention to search the other out -- to begin -- to seek out a virtual relationship -- we are not sharing this with others -- we are not writing to

Sloterdijk as 'inner emigration': a deliberate cutting oneself off from the fundamental values of the society in which one lives (1988: 119). And yet Nietzsche was well aware of the curse he brought down on himself by questioning the world's limits, 'as everyone knows who has clearly realized the terrible consequences of mere desire for migration and adventure. [. . .] the attraction of the new and rare as against the old and tedious' (Nietzsche, 1909: 25-26). What one can say of Nietzsche, is that he more than made up for his jaundiced view of the world with the poetry in which he denounced it.

And just as Ronell questions whether cybernetics has taken over from philosophy, so Nietzsche, the last real philosopher (because he was the first recent philosopher to create philosophy from his own life), may have announced the death of God, because he could not *be* God. Today, Ronell claims, through the use of technology, man has come much closer to the attainment of becoming God, a kind of prosthetic God: 'Made in his image and sound systems, man adorns himself with a mass of artificial supplement disguised as divinity' (Ronell, 1989: 88-89). Humans have certainly come closer in cyberspace to fleeing those earthly and bodily preoccupations that so frustrated Nietzsche. In the computer, there is no need for God because, like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, it is possible to become one's own god. It is not meaning I search for in cyberspace but anti-meaning: the pleasure and abandonment of Deleuze's body

one another in a virtual room full of virtual others together in real time -- when I write you are not on the other side of the screen ready at your keyboard -- no -- we are not together in real time chatting to each other -- when we write the other is asleep -- or absent -- like the letter sent on its way -- always to come -- we exist in the delay -- in the gap -- our virtual words held received finally printed off -- contained -- held on the page held in my hands -- we maintain our authorship --

And she finds herself still committed to the idea of the book

She still craves a border and edge -- craves the physicality of the page -- we claim we trace we make our cross -- although she sees that it is always in the virtual in the mess in the membranes of language that she feels most awake most sensually excited -- capable of moving off in any direction -- becoming lost in infinite layers of fiction -- doors open onto more doors -- new labyrinths made with each message -- but somehow the words on the screen create a kind of lace curtain that she cannot read for long -- she finds herself wanting to claw at the veil -- tear it open -- or is it that she worries that beneath the veil there is nothing or can there only ever be more veils beneath veils -- she could be hallucinating -- she is hearing voices that cannot be put back inside a body -- and so she prints -- forms a trace on the page -- marks her name -- carves their names in the tree -- she tries to prevent their disappearance -- her fear

without organs. In the e-mail exchange I am able to become at one with the other, running together, becoming something other, Beckett's *Unnameable*: 'it's entirely' as Beckett says, 'a matter of voices' (Beckett, 1997b: 327). Like the relentless voice of Zarathustra or Beckett's voice in the mud, the two voices in the e-mail exchange, sometimes separate, sometimes one, are constantly multiplying and interrupting any narrative flow, disrupting meaning and creating discomfort. Smoothly flowing then knocked off key, you are aware of a tangible two in the work but that also has a disruptive effect that you cannot anticipate. The running together obliterates the importance of trying to figure it out or identify the doubling of two voices, when changes in tempo or incoherence will happen. As Blanchot remarks, the effect is, 'therefore, in a single language always to make the double speech heard' (Blanchot, 1999: 5) but also to shift time:

Why does what is outside of time manage to contain pure time? [. . .] the then of the past and the here of the present, like two "nows" summon to superimpose themselves, by this conjunction of these two presents that abolish time [. . .] two instants, infinitely separated, come to encounter each other, joining together like two presences that, through the metamorphosis of desire, could identify each other, is to travel the entire extent of the reality of time, and by travelling it, to experience time as space and empty place, that is to say, free of the events that always ordinarily fill it. Pure time, without events, moving vacancy, agitated distance, interior space in the process of becoming, where the ecstasies of time spread out in fascinating simultaneity--what is all that then? It is the very time of narrative, the time that is not outside time, but that is experienced as actually outside, in space, that imaginary space where art finds and arranges its resources. (Blanchot, 2003: 13)

If I refer to hypertext, I am not concerned

that they will never properly exist by making a souvenir in paper -- a souvenir of what she is losing every day of what she loses with every message -- she makes a print of something she can never properly own -- has never been able to touch -- smell -- taste -- hear -- she presses them into the fibres of the paper -- it is the sound of the printer the smell of paper that always makes her salivate -- she takes their page of words to her mouth and inhales deeply --

*every time I go to a library I get a rush like sex or acid for the first few minutes when you're getting off*<sup>15</sup>

But then they merge -- their words begin separately enough -- a new message soon blurring with her response -- beginning separately enough but soon bleeding together -- intersecting into multiple lines taking off in so many directions that sometimes by the third or fourth version their words have altered beyond recognition -- they have digressed themselves into a completely new state -- they mutate -- they umlaut -- altering vowels sounds unrecognisable -- something they could never have anticipated -- this intercourse -- exchange -- commerce -- communion -- run between with words this wordsex -- an attempt to arouse with words -- inter between venir -- come -- come between come again come alter me with your words --

Email working with speed -- relies on

with the now common device in cyberspace that physically links one text to another. In my e-mail exchange there are similarly words and phrases that take on significant meaning, but rather than connect the reader to another readily prepared text, they take the writer off on a series of endless digressions. Neither is this a device that depends on electronic communication for its effect. Derrida in *Glas* and Federman in *Double or Nothing* are able, within the confines of the conventional book as container, to present a textual space that challenges the reader to find a path through it. Not a predetermined or linear path, but a path that can be followed through the detour and in many different directions. Hypertext was just a new economy of writing waiting to be exploited by those already writing in a non-linear way—it was not pioneered by the computer.

Using e-mail and corresponding in the virtual world of cyberspace should not, then, be interpreted as a rejection of the book as an essential medium for my work. 'Hypertext, says Ilana Snyder, 'redefines what constitutes the borders of a text, notions of "inside" and "outside" no longer apply, and ideas about textuality subsequently change' (Snyder, 1997: 51). Hypertext smashes the containers of the book so essential to the printing and publishing world. But why get rid of the book to challenge literary orthodoxies? Derrida, Barthes, Federman and others were pioneering hypertextuality prior to the advent of cybernetics. Text for them was something to be lost in, not to be

speed -- it is of course more immediate -- speed is critical -- setting off a chain reaction -- the letter also having a relationship with speed with speech -- they babble -- the sound the movement of water running over stones -- they murmur whisper jabber -- the speed of the hand moves the pen or now slips over the keyboard she loses her footing over words -- words move off the tongue in your direction -- they are formed from a series of digressions punctuated by interruptions by slip-ups and meandering -- and who knows what the other will respond to in what they receive -- they cannot anticipate which word which line will send them off soaring -- taking the other into a new direction -- into becoming lost -- taken somewhere unexpected -- always fleeing -- forgotten -- impermanent

Encounter -- both to meet and to struggle with -- confront with face -- but you are faceless your text instead becomes the missing face I read -- I translate your absent lips -- we encounter one another in the knowledge that nothing can be captured -- we are moved from there to here silently -- something takes place -- a letter -- a sign -- a delay -- a misreading shifts us and each day my attempt to contain is futile -- and each day -- despite the printed word in my hand I forget what you said -- what we have been -- where we have been -- there is only ever the word to come -- the next ejaculation of words -- the promise the anticipation or the fear of no word -- of possible death -- impotence -- annihilation from being held

consumed from the beginning through to the end. True, Snyder informs us, the computer calls into question the belief that the written text must take the form of a linear progression (Snyder, 1997: 45), but is it the book itself that prevents a different reading of the text, or the traditional mind set of the writer, reader and publisher?

When Barthes (1989: 14) differentiated 'the work' from 'the text', he was doing more than distinguishing between writing as volume and writing as virtual space: the attempt to express oneself within fixed boundaries versus the attempt to create open discursive networks. The excessive and digressive nature of my own writing, taking the reader into worlds that are alienating and unstable, does it require some container or border to prevent it spilling out of control? As a painter, I had to confront the same issues. The medium, rust, wax and smoke on steel, and the abstract imagery itself was intentionally both visually and materially unstable. Again, I contained the work by cutting and bending the steel into a conventional 'canvas' form (Angela Cutler, 1990: 53). In order to play with form and language in the way I do in my writing, a point of reference and safety both for writer and reader is required. I remain committed to the intimacy of the book, clutched as an object in the reader's hands, one that unlike the screen is held close to the body. The questions of who wrote this and who is this are also important for me. I do not feel ready to give up on the book; I maintain some control and authorship over the work.

in the gap in the silence awaiting your response --

*Proust; [ . . . ] waiting for Albertine's call. He waits maddened by the pause. Saturated with desire ----desired to tears, the way we say bored to tears. On hold, desire opens a space undestined, or globally aimed. Perhaps that is why she calls at night [ when he sleeps], when receptors are without covering. [ . . . ] "we exchange"<sup>16</sup>*

*We exchange again but there is little to hold onto -- once is never enough -- overnight the printed word fades into nothing -- stops nothing -- nothing gained --*

*Each day I send you my thoughts and each day they die and I forget all that I had said -- I live and I write to you like a person with amnesia and I stare over our letters our mail and wonder is that me -- is that how it was -- I no longer recognise the voice -- it has a neurosis and a rhythm all of its own as if it has run ahead without me --*

*At an altitude of 30,000 feet I write you across an empty transparent sea -- I fly towards you each day -- the printed letters I keep become little more than something to show that we once marked the spot -- once we wrote our names in the snow -- in the sand -- in ashes -- once we may have been here many times before many times to come --*

I am committed to the idea of a souvenir that the book represents; something that becomes dog-eared and gathers dust on a shelf is a testimony to the fact that *I have been here* and that *I have read you*. This is something which virtual text and the spoken word can never achieve outside of the printed word:

Speech leaves no mark in space; like gesture, it exists in its immediate context and can reappear only in another's voice, another's body, even if that other is the same speaker transformed by history. Thus, while speech gains authenticity, writing promises immortality, or at least the immortality of the material world in contrast to the mortality of the body. Our terror of an unmarked grave is a terror of a world without writing. [ . . . ] Writing gives us a device for inscribing space, for inscribing nature: the lover's name carved in bark, the slogans on the bridge, and the strangely uniform and idiosyncratic hand that has tattooed the subways. (Stewart, 1998: 31)

The problem here, as Blanchot notes, is one of fixity:

To link oneself to dispersion, to intermittency, to the fragmented brilliance of images, to the shimmering fascination of the instant, is a terrible movement---a terrible happiness, especially when finally it must give way to the book. Is there a way to gather together what is dispersed, to make continuous the discontinuous and to maintain the wandering in a nonetheless unified whole? (Blanchot, 2003: 101)

If one is looking for a form of writing that captures dispersion, e-mail provides an ideal medium. The context in which e-mail operates is universally understood. For here writing dispenses with formal grammar, punctuation and spelling, fragments of unconnected text are presented and polyphonic voices can exist with no further explanation.

Yet what interests me here is not only the

*And above all it's a love story -- you said -*  
*- what is -- Sam's book -- yes -- The Lost*  
*Ones -- yes I see that -- je te kiss*  
*tenderly xxxxxxx j t m alled them*  
*moments -- alled -- I am lost now -- but*  
*again they part -- it may be that I*  
*digressed into something else but what*  
*the hell -- we always managed to digress*  
*into each other eventually -- I adore your*  
*digressions you say -- come digress all*  
*over me -- I am here --*

Anyway -- this morning I began with  
 a digression into letters -- the epistolary -  
 - send me your news --

You could say we both began our writing  
 not to one another but when we first  
 began writing it began through letters --  
 as a child I frequently wrote twenty page  
 letters not realising that I was on the way  
 to writing -- in tioli -- well if that is true  
 and of course with you one is never to  
 know -- if the Frenchy you wrote of was  
 you -- was it you who got paid to write  
 love letters in the army to help out your  
 illiterate buddies -- or was that just a  
 fiction you created -- either way --

*Here life is sad without you, and I find*  
*myself absentmindedly carving your*  
*initials on all the tree trunks in the forest*  
*of my solitude! [. . .] I adore you*  
*passionately madly and desperately with*  
*my entire soul and body. Give your saintly*  
*mom a BIG kiss for me (but not your dad)*  
*and think of me ThINK OF ME dear love as*  
*much as you can. Your BIG and SAD*  
*carrot, J\*\*\* K\*\*\*\*\*<sup>17</sup>*

difference between 'the work' and 'the text',  
 but the distinction that Barthes goes on to  
 make between 'the text of pleasure' and  
 'the text of bliss'. The argument here is one  
 that exposes the English translation of the  
 word *jouissance* to be inadequate. For  
 Barthes, the text of pleasure 'contents, fills,  
 grants euphoria; the text that comes from  
 culture and does not break with it, is linked  
 to a *comfortable* practice of reading.' In  
 contrast, *jouissance* comes closer to the text  
 of bliss, 'the text that imposes a state of loss,  
 the text that discomforts (perhaps to the  
 point of a certain boredom), unsettles the  
 reader's historical, cultural, psychological  
 assumptions, the consistency of his tastes,  
 values, memories, brings to a crisis his  
 relation with language' (Barthes, 1989: 14).  
*Jouissance* is 'that moment when my body  
 pursues its own ideas---for my body does  
 not have the same ideas as I do' (Barthes,  
 1975: 17). While e-mail provides a useful  
 writing medium, I am not dependent on  
 cyberspace for the way I present my  
 writing to the reader. Its desire is  
 heightened by being caged on delivery. E-  
 mails are not open to the world-wide web,  
 and I feel the need to claw back the words  
 from the screen to form an object (the  
 book). I want to retain the page. The  
 paradox is that my use of e-mail, with all its  
 possibilities and becomings, allows me to  
 return to the lost tradition of the epistolary  
 text. Like old fashioned love letters, I have a  
 need for pages, to hide them away in  
 drawers and rediscover them later.



All those greetings and partings making me laugh out loud when I woke thinking of the things we'd said -- my choufleur -- my sticky fruit my geranium my sweet potato -- my dear one -- but I'll come back to that later --

She catches herself composing letters to you as she walks -- she is scribbling small letters to you in public -- yes it became important to her that others witnessed her as she wrote witnessed that she had something to hide so much to say -- that they saw her anguish that they worried over her outbursts of laughter -- yes somehow it became important to her that she was watched as she wrote with her arm wrapped across the paper -- so she wrote to you in public -- she wrote on the tram -- in the park -- in the cafe -- small letters that grew into many thousands of words -- she began living out her lines working like a writing machine -- laughing out loud in the streets at all she had begun to suggest -- my darling one -- when she hears her voice conscious that it directly addresses you just so -- you are somewhere out there -- I know you are -- she speaks -- are you writing by candle light -- yes her language has a little pomposity of its own -- becoming heightened -- espionage -- dark coffee -- too many small cigars -- the smell of smoke in her hair -- finding herself scribbling on thin sheets of paper transparent writing fills the fine blue veins -- working on a marble table in a cafe among strangers she experiences the kindest and the cruelest of lines -- finding

Though associated with the New Testament, the tradition of the epistle (letters written to a fictional other) has a much older tradition going back to ancient Greek literature (see Malherbe, 1997 and Rosenmeyer, 2001). My e-mails to Federman, and my edited fictions, share these same ancient traditions: parody; fictional dialogues; diatribes (litigious monologues); and soliloquy (conducting a dialogue with oneself). The freedom of e-mail is a return to these classical modes of writing. One might even question to what extent e-mail represents a deliberate rehabilitation of the letter, abandoned to some extent for the immediacy of the telephone call. And yet the phone call is too instant, a dialogue with no thinking time, whereas e-mail brings back the possibility of the monologue, soliloquy, even the tradition of diary writing. It leaves a different trace that the phone does not. As Kathy Acker reminds us, when people use e-mail they discover that they can write anything, even to a stranger, and on the most personal of matters. We need to get away from the business of the literary industry, she says. 'We need to step away from all the business. We need to step to the personal. [. . .] To write [. . .] is to write to a stranger, to a friend. As we go forward, say on the Net, perhaps we are also going back [to the ancients]' (Acker, 1997: 103-104). The personal exchange of text between two correspondents, or even letters written to a fictional other, allows one to engage in the personal in a way that it is harder to replicate when writing for an anonymous readership. The exchange itself adds its

herself making small gestures -- whirlpools of ink swirling declarations -- she scratches out impatiently so you may witness her frustration -- witness her misspelling -- her impatience -- her inability to articulate -- see how flawed she can be -- how tedious -- how repetitive -- her circling hand cramps and aches from writing too quickly -- ahead of herself -- she becomes *démodé* -- almost breathless as she finds herself now moving back in time -- this time as she writes she is in her room -- she is wearing a bodice tightly corseting her chest -- it is hard to breath -- she moves slowly inside a large petticoated frock -- skirts rustle over titanium skin -- her hair infested with small mice -- I like to make myself into a still life when ever I can she said -- as she walks to her writing table her skirts sweep the floor -- as she later lies down on her sofa to read you she positions herself -- cushions her head -- lifts her skirts -- your words hidden inside the garter around her thigh -- yes maybe we belong to a different era when we set off to say my dear one my darling my oiseau my bouche my love . . . how I've . . .

Last night on the radio a young eager voice was reading from the love letters of Frida Kahlo -- her swoon of language -- letters for her Diego and some to an earlier lover simple affirmations spun from candifloss they say everything they say nothing but nonetheless as I listen in I feel I am being let in on something furtive -- I can hear the couple whispering to one another in the dark -- I eavesdrop -- my

own meaning:

when I talk to my friend, when I write to her, I am writing to someone whose otherness I accept. It is the difference between me and my friend that allows meaning; meaning begins in this difference. (Acker, 1997: 104)

And so it is with my e-mails to Federman, the significance found in the pleasure of waiting and receiving, all the time listening out for more news, ready to seize the next word. The meaning *is* the exchange. It is to be found in the very silences, the ellipses, between the e-mails. The text itself is written to the one who you know will receive and respond. But this meaning is also universal because it has the potential to touch meaning for countless other readers. For the general reader of the epistolary text, there is the possibility of becoming the 'you' to whom the text is written, or to become a voyeuristic reader who is being let in on an exchange. For the writer of the epistolary text, however, there is the certain knowledge that one person at least will read their words, as Federman notes:

My new life here is interesting because it seems that I am against everybody, somehow my position, I mean intellectual, is either twisted, or else they are so backward in this academic Hell that we don't understand each other. I grow, not old, but I grow. I really wish I could see you soon. By the way what are you doing? I am so involved here telling you about me, that I almost forget that I am writing to you, and yet you are the purpose of this letter, the epistolary form is the most convenient form of literature, one picks up somebody, one person and shares his thoughts for that person, and only that one person, you get the difficulty with writing is the audience, the public, in the letter it's easy because you know the friend you are writing will read the whole thing, for perhaps somewhere in the back, at the end of the letter the writer will sneak a little about the receiver, and this is why you go on reading this crap. (Federman, in McCaffery, 2002: 315)

glass tight to the wall -- gladly pressing my eye to the keyhole -- my open ear held to her sweet mouth -- *I kiss you all over your face thousands of little kisses and I adore you* -- she says -- *please find it in your heart to love me a little -- your darling friducha -- my adored -- my Alex I saw you -- I have loved you -- what do you say ----you more than anyone know how I have been*<sup>18</sup>

And if the two co-responding -- held apart -- decide to meet -- does the act of meeting plunder all that the letter has sought to shelter -- is the potency of the secret compromised -- *rumour ad infinitum in either direction* [Beckett] -- my epistle -- my testament -- I dispense my words to you -- I send you my word intimacy folded only to be unfolded -- the disguise wrapped by me to be unwrapped by you -- what is so carefully licked in place by my tongue -- the tongue -- so sensitive to taste to speech to the kiss that is denied -- the hidden tongue sealing all I have placed here all I have to show you is held in place with a lick of saliva -- to deliver myself to you my final gesture is to salivate to insert myself into the mouth of the post box -- you in turn receive me the way of the mouth the hand eager fingers in turn tearing me open -- violate the seal after deciding where to read me -- when to read me -- if to read me inside or out -- today maybe I'll take a walk and read you in the park maybe on the train -- in motion -- I carry you around until the time is right -- I re-read when I get a minute -- between people

In Chris Kraus's book *I Love Dick*, Kraus, fixated by her first meeting with her husband's colleague Dick, commences writing him intimate letters. Even though Kraus gives the impression it is happening because she uses real names, the reader cannot be sure whether the affair is real or fictitious. Although initially the letters (to a man she only met once but is obsessed with) remain unsent, later he is let in on her obsession and experiences a mixture of annoyance and fascination. In Kraus's book the epistolary text is cited by Habermas as the 'genre of the bourgeois' (Kraus, 1997: 110). And in a letter to Dick, Kraus states:

My personal goal here--apart from anything else that might happen--is to express myself as clearly and honestly as I can. So in that sense love is just like writing: living in such a heightened state that accuracy and awareness are vital. (Kraus, 1997: 128)

Kraus was fully aware of the risk that her feelings might be ridiculed or rejected. 'I think I am *understanding* risk for the first time: being fully prepared to lose and accept the consequences if you gamble' (1997: 128). Kraus is drawn to Dick because she can see how he can 'help me take my life apart' (1997: 138). Every time she tries to write the truth, she says, it changes and more happens: 'Information constantly expands' (1997: 153). And yet for Kraus, the letters were the most real thing she had ever done (1997: 173). She became addicted to letter writing like a drug. 'To experience intensity is not to know how it will end' (1997: 249).

Kraus's manifesto is that *Every Letter Is A Love Letter*. But for the last word on the

noise chores I stop to read you -- next time I'll read your words under the sheets with a flashlight -- the key to the treasure is the key you said -- the sound of the envelope torn open slowly carefully crudely hurriedly with a knife cutting open the edge -- unfolding you -- opening you out -- something both transparent and personal is promised -- something coming -- something is on its way -- something to be found out --

I read the epistolary text like a thief riffling through someone else's drawer -- I read them -- their words -- looking for something that no one else knows -- maybe not even the author's themselves -- I read you -- we are being read -- the two who write are being read -- the reader now knowing more -- the reader maybe seeing more than the two writing can see of themselves -- yes always a promise of something that often turns out to be nothing -- there is no secret after all -- it instead is an encounter that never stops going towards but never really arrives -- it is nothing we haven't heard before -- it is an echo from the past -- comforting in its banality -- always hidden in false clues fake furs and broken promises -- interruptions digressions -- arrows that point here and there but go no where -- a maze of secret passages -- the edges of daybreak -- the cry of insomnia -- boredom -- always in the process of being transcoded -- in translation -- always in a state of trans . . . the transatlantic that keeps them apart is the space where they write -- but there

epistolary text as fiction, the blurring between the co-respondent and a fictional character, I return to Federman who once wrote to his old friend George Tashima:

Well as I speak to them about you, I wonder if I'm describing you the way, the way I think I remember you [. . .] and then I decide that I really only know you through the letters we have written to each other during those long year [sic], and now when I speak of you I think I speak of a george [sic] that I'm beginning to make up in my mind perhaps not so good as the real one, but one which will serve to start a scene, swell a progress, an easy tool no doubt, one which will some day become a great xxxx character in one of my unwritten novels. (Federman, in McCaffery, 2002: 299)

And so, in the process of printing off the e-mails, I end up with an epistolary work. Although I communicate with the other in the virtual world, it is important for me to feel the text on the paper in my hands, the physicality of the paper, the object, the borders put back in place. It is only then that my words can be taken out of the hallucinatory and fixed on the page where I have proof of their existence. I can hide them in the cupboard beneath my clothes until my rooms overflow with the traces of speech. Yet hidden, they are also there to be found, not deleted: they are no longer holograms.

is also something extremely dull at work in their exchange -- they live in the mundane in the tiresome attention to detail -- the epistolary secret hidden in the trunk of banal excess -- in a stream of foreplay -- nothing is at work except the day to day babble -- talking aloud -- a dripping tap -- breakfast menus -- shopping lists -- monotonous monologues -- she did -- he said -- I went -- no one's listening to the other anymore -- can't they see they are talking to themselves -- the grinding mundane details of their little lives -- is anyone still listening -- but read on anyway -- just in case -- in case something happens at the end -- in case something is hidden in the maze of sentences -- in case you find something -- in case she makes an unexpected slip of the tongue -- in case he betrays something -- yes maybe skip here and there -- but always forced back to begin again -- to re-read again -- both intrigued and frustrated with their codes -- they push you away -- pull you in again -- and admit it -- sometimes you want to be them -- you want to be the one writing -- the one being written to -- to be addressed so lovingly -- to be wanted so much -- to be told everything -- you want to be the ear to her mouth -- I want you to say those things to me -- sometimes you are sitting so close in the middle of them sometimes favouring one over the other -- agreeing with one over the other -- becoming jealous of the other -- sharing a cigarette -- having lunch with one of them -- and sometimes they sicken you -- you don't even like them -- either

of them -- you stop listening you refuse to hear -- you shout in their faces I don't care to hear anymore -- but they are not listening they don't see you -- so you burn their letters -- you take your ear from the door -- you turn away -- when once you were working like a detective -- picking up clues beginning to recognise names dates people -- thinking ahead of them -- wanting to point out things they have missed -- wanting to find some reference of yourself in there somewhere -- maybe they will remember me -- maybe they will remember to mention the one that has the patience to read them -- maybe I will appear -- will be let in -- after all you are reading both of them -- only you know what they are really saying -- they are so naive -- so wrong -- they are too coy too dull too deceitful too flamboyant -- they think they are saying this but only you as reader know what it is they really imply -- what they are really doing -- what they really meant to say -- what they failed to see -- only you can read between their lines -- yes that can be satisfying to know ahead of them to see ahead in the dark -- but they are not listening to anyone -- only always to one another --

*"matches unexpectedly struck in the dark," they speak of nothing but themselves.<sup>19</sup>*

*Even the love letter, that innocently perverse attempt to subdue or revive a game, is too much engulfed in the immediate fire and speaks only of "me" and "you" or even "we" resulting from the*

*alchemy of identifications, but not of what is really at stake between. Not of this state of crisis, collapse, madness capable of sweeping away all the dams of reason, as it is capable, like the dynamics of a living organism in full growth, of transforming an error into a renewal---remodelling, remaking reviving a body, a mentality, a life.*<sup>20</sup>

Reading signs of love -- yes reading those little variations of *I love yous* littered through the letters -- throughout the epistolary text -- Kraus' manifesto that -- *Every letter is a love letter*<sup>21</sup>-- the repetition of letters -- I'll write to you each day each week -- I promise -- I am here -- I have to go -- I am on my way to you -- wait for me -- dates unfold -- times given -- weather reports -- I am stuck in a blizzard -- the damn flight is late -- I stopped to tell you -- an endless cycle of greeting and parting -- comings and goings -- dear one I'm back -- *I love you* becoming a hum a hypnosis --

[Germaine Greer's short film ] -- A woman walks along a path repeatedly calls out -- *Do you love me* -- and with each question she falls to the ground -- gets up begins again asks the question again falls again - - your own question your own doubt turns you into a hysteric -- into a cycle of collapse and return -- as from the floor you inhale deeply on the smelling salts he impregnates into the letter -- he smokes it through with ammonium carbonate and perfume -- I love you as a restorative -- and yes *I love you is a demand* Barthes

says -- *is a type of blackmail*<sup>22</sup> -- well I wrote you of that before -- but there is something in this most clichéd string of words that is fascinating me -- I re-cycle - - it is the iteration I seek -- shall I enumerate -- once is never enough -- parroting -- I love to you -- Irigaray forms a hand out of *to* -- a hand that opens out *to you* a hand that can also be pulled back or push you away -- preventing me from disappearing inside the other's demand -- a transfer rather than a claim -- I love *to you* [Irigaray] -- but how do we say it without the parenthesis without the stutter the sub-text how do we let it stand on its own and how many ways are there to tell you -- how to sign off -- what evidence do I leave you with -- how to prove to you -- and what do you leave me with -- I am watchful -- I count kisses --

The writer Charles Bukowski -- by coincidence -- begins an exchange with the artist Sheri Martinelli -- protégé of Anais Nin -- and so called lover of Ezra Pound -- Charles and Sheri never meet -- they write for a concentrated period of a year and less intensely for many years after that -- he signs off with his kisses -- he writes -- *Sheri, my vury good one; Shed I love you, Charles Bukowski; still love buk; sheeeeeeeerrriiiiieeee, I loooooooooove you, B; love to you my princess; don't let them hang you baby, love Buk; lfff, buk; love as truly as I can make it; lub, Buk,* and she responds -- *love shed; youse mamma mah ma, sheri; love love love sheri; luv shed; love S;*



*Your loving Health carrot The Princess Ra*  
*Set. La Mart. Love, love, love, Sheri ...*  
*cosmic scrub girl*<sup>23</sup> -- well and on and on -  
 - from fascination to boredom to disgust I  
 peek in at their letters -- a little hole in  
 their life -- they make me into a voyeur --  
 they draw me in and other times they  
 repel me -- the arrogance of their lives in  
 my face -- their mundane thoughts their  
 droning details their ramblings of nothing  
 -- thousands of xxxx's my darling -- I  
 close the book -- and what of us -- well  
 maybe us too -- maybe we too oscillate  
 between desire and disgust -- depending  
 on my mood on how I approach on what I  
 find -- *I love you is a demand*<sup>24</sup> -- and  
 what of us --

a x for you -- KIF KIF -- Love to you my  
 one -- I will read you over and think of  
 you -- xxxxxxxxx my love -- i wanted you  
 to have these little words when you wake  
 up my darling -- we are allowed to xxxxx  
 each time we part -- we are allowed to  
 xxxxx each time we greet -- **ton**  
**moinous xxxxx** miss you terribly --  
 xxxxxxxxxx still I kiss you where you  
 need it most -- where are you -- you I  
 love -- lxxxxxoxxxxxvxxxxxe you -- and  
 more -- and on -- always your Axx

**From:** <[A@ntlworld.com](mailto:A@ntlworld.com)>

**To:** <[M@aol.com](mailto:M@aol.com)>

**Date:** Sunday, March 17, 2003 9:42  
 am

**Subject: Re:** Frida Kahlo and the  
 impossibility of talking about love

So I mis-read you -- I read you I mis-read you -- it's all the same but sometimes you don't say the simplest of things 00 and so on --

And what you said -- *after all the vegetables thrown at me in endearment* -- yes by me -- *here I am a termometre* -- what the hell do you mean a termometre -  
-

Anyway away with all that for now -- I wanted to respond to the comment about Diego and no I have not seen the film they made of Frida's life story because I am worried that it will irritate the hell out of me -- but how can you call him an asshole based on someone else's interpretation -- not that I am setting out to defend him -- from what I read about him he was no angel -- but my question is how can we know about those two -- how can we look in on them and know them in the way I already mentioned with the epistolary text -- how can we know those two --

Well people have of course tried and in Frida's case she has been claimed by a whole range of women -- the lipstick lesbians -- the very nice young middle class feminists -- the mystics -- art dealers -- biographers -- experts and of course celebrities such as Madonna buying up her work -- yes all turned Frida into an icon -- her work now in danger of becoming chocolate box -- turned into head scarves and biscuit tins and coffee mugs -- and don't they all want to be her don't they all want to wear her flamboyant

mexican dresses -- have their eyebrows meet in the middle and wounds all through their bodies -- don't they too want to take to their beds and be adorned in flowers -- even have her small moustache when normally they would be rushing out to get electrolysis --

Yes she is a female Jesus Christ with her crown of thorns and her torso punctured her plaster corset nailing her to their cross -- our lady with her stigmata with her heart peeled open for all to see to whisper our confessions over to light candles under her hymen torn open by the tram by the steel fist the arm of the holy ghost of fate and so does Diego becomes the demon -- demonised by her followers -- the women who adorn her want to fuck her and claim her for themselves -- no one gave a damn about her work when she was alive and now they buy it for millions -- same old story -- the older friends who knew her -- had of course different versions -- there is no truth to be found -- maybe we all romanticise her --

Yes it was after this that she found her way into my piece of writing on ashes -- and then into the piece on letters I just sent you when in the past I had felt unable to speak of her -- well once when I wrote about Artemisia Gentileschi's painting -- Judith beheading Holofernes -- I made a comparison between that image [and how the beheading looked like a kind of grisly birth] -- and Frida's painting -- *My Birth* -- where Frida's bloodied head is depicted pushed from her mother's open thighs -- the mother lies open on the bed with a cloth over her head so she is

possibly dead -- indeed blind -- beheaded  
 -- and looking down over the scene a  
 small portrait of a mother's head hangs  
 from the wall --

Finally I took the section out as I felt  
 it impossible to speak of Frida as she has  
 in many ways become such a cliché -- yes  
 and so when she re-appeared in *Ashes* I  
 was not sure about keeping her there --  
 but at the moment she stays -- but to get  
 to the point -- neither am I sure of this  
 demonising of Diego -- for how do we  
 know -- how can we know -- they both  
 had affairs -- Frida with both men and  
 women -- and many may say who can  
 blame her -- but I also see that her and  
 Diego never stopped being pulled back  
 together --

Diego. *beginning*

Diego. *construtor*

Diego. *my baby*

Diego. *my boyfriend*

Diego. *painter*

Diego. *my lover*

Diego. "*my husband*" [look how  
 she captures him here with  
 speech marks]

Diego. *my friend*

Diego. my mother

Diego. me

Diego, universe

Diversity in *unity*<sup>25</sup>

*Why do I call him My Diego? He never was  
 nor ever will be mine. He belongs to  
 himself.*

*"No one will ever know how I love*



Diego.<sup>26</sup>

And that is it Moinous -- how can we ever know -- what arrogance to think we know more than she -- she who always writes of him with the openness of a child so it is sometimes difficult to read these words without feeling uncomfortable -- and yes as you suggested -- does she indeed smile at those carefully chosen words -- of course -- does she know what she does to us with the acuteness of those words -- that she of course is adding to the mythology of the couple -- this fiction of love --

And how are people to speak like this anymore -- do we still want to -- what women are able to say those things any more about men -- *my beginning -- my baby* -- your response that Barthelme in the 80's had told your class at Buffalo -- *We are going through a period when one cannot say I love you -- one can maybe only say it ironically* -- and that is exactly what I was referring to in the letters -- the passé love letter -- and what you wrote of in your book *Smiles on Washington Square -- a love story that would extricate fiction from the enslaving irony by demolishing the whole system of love and inventing love in absentia* --

Moinous who these days could write such a list as Frida did to a man without being ridiculed or rescued -- well -- I say he / she -- but across the difficulty of the gendered pronouns -- how do we any longer speak of love --

*To try to write love is to confront the muck of language: that region of hysteria where language is both too much and too little, excessive [. . .] and impoverished<sup>27</sup>*

*Proffering I-love-you is on the side of expenditure [. . .] where language itself [. . .] recognizes that it is without backing, without guarantee, working with a net.<sup>28</sup>*

She speaks -- she reaches out to an/other and we all think we know what she is really saying -- she can only be speaking of what she lacks -- yes is it always a question of lack -- of need -- of thirst -- of boredom -- of blindness -- of pity -- of exploitation -- of failing -- of her romantic agony -- or of her not realising -- well in Frida's case -- that she was a better painter -- a better human being -- is that it --

And of course she was both influenced and maybe saw herself as over-shadowed by Diego but you could say the times they lived in were different -- well in some ways but in others not so -- no his work was seen as fitting inside an accepted political movement while her's always stemmed from the personal -- from self obsession -- self examination -- from the body -- and so was largely ignored --

Jeanette Winterson on Kathy Acker's fiction -----

*When women include themselves as a character in their own work, the work is read as autobiography. When men do it---*

*let's say Milan Kundera or Paul Auster---it is read as metafiction. Women can only write from their own experience. Men are imaginative. Women write testimony and confessional. Men write the big picture . . . ---or so we are told [. . .] those who criticize her [Acker's] writing as a kind of bathetic splurge don't know how to read it.<sup>29</sup>*

*She was never a woman writer she was a writer who was a woman. [. . .] She would not deny her body, indeed she treated it like a fetish item, adorning, tattooing, and piercing it, [. . .] " 'I want love --- I'll make the world into love [. . .] formed sickness into a knightly tool.'<sup>30</sup>*

And so in this way Frida did the same -- and women are of course still fighting to carve out a space for the personal to be universally accepted but all that aside -- the question I began with was -- how could she love such an asshole such a frog -- but here is a woman who insists her love but she is denied as if she is a blind child in need of word/ly protection -- feminist insights turning her into Diego's victim -- a victim of men and now a victim of women who come rescue her on their white chargers when maybe no one was asking to be rescued and is one type of rescue better than another -- do those who now claim her have a greater insight than her -- some sort of super-seeing she did not -- who are we to judge -- by judging him on her behalf -- how patronising -- the way we peer in and interpret the stories of others -- well

maybe I am in danger of the same --  
 maybe it is impossible to escape analysis -  
 - but --

Yes and each time a story is written a  
 film is made a little more is claimed -- the  
 story a little more manipulated and  
 distorted and presented as truth -- but  
 who are they who can read between the  
 lines of dead lovers -- like the women on  
 their knees erasing Ted Hugh's name from  
 Sylvia's headstone -- Plath's daughter  
 accusing the media of turning her mother  
 into their suicide doll -- but that's another  
 story -- well not so different --

And I guess many have their own  
 agenda for turning Frida into a queen --  
 but who will ever know them and why she  
 was always pulled back to him --

Others even claimed their ashes -- kept  
 them apart against their request -- his  
 deemed too important to be separated  
 from Mexico's most famous men -- her's  
 kept in a jar [. . .] *a pre-columbian jar* [. . .]  
*a rotund headless female*<sup>31</sup>

*The language of love is impossible,  
 inadequate, immediately allusive when  
 one would like to make it straightforward;  
 it is a flight of metaphors ----it is  
 literature.*<sup>32</sup>

*As to their words of love, I believe them.  
 If silence is not always my answer, they  
 know that I am just as touched by as I am  
 distant from the ambiguity they present  
 me with. They know I find them both true  
 and absurd. "I love you, neither do I."*<sup>33</sup>



## Voices of Madness

The confusion is not my intention [. . .] It is all around us and our only chance is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess. It is not a mess you can make sense of.

(Samuel Beckett, in Federman, 1965: 9)

**FROM: A@ntlworld.com - 9th  
february 2003 - 6.43pm Re: what  
decision?**

oh yes yes -- a lovely mail -- but as for meeting you in Paris -- wouldn't that just be too damn crazy but of course I want to see you and be with you some day -- when -- I have no idea -- but this request was a little unexpected -- isn't this all fiction and isn't e coming to paris and yes en would happily be there or not but wouldn't in reality our first meeting have to be with the spouses and as en loves shopping let's send them off while we do what we do best with words -- but no -- it is too overwhelming to even contemplate right now \\ isn't this the weirdest thing to know someone so intimately and not to be with them -- tell me how you first met George as you write to him daily and have known each other -- what is it -- 28 years -- and 2,000 letters he wrote and the 2,001 you wrote back -- plus all the now daily emails -- and of course you write in the same sam way in the pell-mell-babel of words -- but of course this is also different and there is no denying the jouissance -- but how amazing that after your initial correspondence with G -- and then at your meeting you discover you have the same shoe size and birth date and of course the shared shadow -- so tell me more of your first meeting with George - - and then depending on how I feel when I hear that story I will decide about Paris --

*Outlaw* and *mad* are the names for those who refuse to go by the rules and conventions, as well as for those who refuse to or cannot speak the common language. (Wittig, 1992: 40)

When I use the term madness in the context of writing, I use it to mean creating a world that is alien to the received rules and conventions of society: that predictable, orderly and logical world that we are led to believe equals civilised humanity. But this definition of madness could be equally applied to those whom society describes as mad. For they, too, operate in a universe that is unfamiliar and alien to those who live by and understand society's accepted codes, even if, unlike the writer, they are not in this position out of choice. Over a twenty-year period as a mental health professional, I had to develop skills in communication based precisely on *not* working within these commonly understood codes of signification: I had to develop the ability to transcend symbolic language. But was my writing influenced by my experiences of madness, or was I drawn to work with the mentally ill in the first place because of some predisposed pull towards insanity? Both are probably the case. I did feel an empathy with the language of psychosis, and a strange kinship with the mad and the marginalised. Walking through the asylum gates held a strange nostalgia. The language quickly made sense to me, the language with its signs translating itself through voices and gestures of abjection. The abject (to which I have devoted a separate section) has always held this same allure and was to later find its way into my work.

**Date: Friday, 1st february 2003  
11:40:39 -0500  
To: [m@aol.com](mailto:m@aol.com)  
Subject: the coincidence of madness  
FROM: [A@ntlworld.com](mailto:A@ntlworld.com)**

And this week Moinous has indeed been a week of coincidences that in turn completely changed the tone of the writing I was planning to send you on madness -- well in that I wanted to tell you of my response to your book *Voice in The Closet* and how listening to the recording of that text triggered off a memory of the experience I had working as a psychiatric nurse -- one response triggering off another and so on in turn until the writing unfolded in a completely different way -- and all that made me consider the effect coincidence has played in bringing not just this piece of writing into being but maybe all my writing into being -- yes the digression that carries the work along and the part coincidence has now played in enabling me to now speak about madness -- the question of how to speak of things that are often unspeakable -- to find the right language to convey what is unavowable -- which is what you did with your book *Closet* -- but I will go back to that later --

yes so the series of coincidences began when C wrote these words to me -- she writes

Neologisms, flights of ideas, and apparently unconnected fragments of thought are common features of conditions such as schizophrenia. There is an established tradition in writing that shares many of these same features. Modern examples of this can be seen in the work of Joyce, Stein, Beckett and Chantal Chawaf, for instance. Reading Beckett, one is struck by his empathy with the voice of the mad and the marginalised: logic organised by apparently unconnected associations; isolated and exiled voices that have become lost in time and space; multiple 'I's and the slippage of pronouns; corporeal delusions including missing, changing or rotting body parts; the obsessional and constantly shifting voice of alienation and introspection. These are Beckett's voices, his creatures, occupying as they do the most despised strata of society: his 'troop of lunatics' (Beckett, 1994: 310). Down-and-outs; prostitutes; the homeless; estranged people exiled to live in the margins of society who find themselves in pots, up to their necks in mud, in search of a place in any old abode or any old tale. All of those normally denied a voice find one in Beckett's writing:

And yet sometimes it seems to me I am there, among the incriminated scenes, tottering under the attributes particular to the lords of creation, dumb with howling to be put out of my misery, and all around me the spinach blue rustling with satisfaction. Yes, more than once I almost took myself for the other, all but suffered after his fashion, the space of an instant. Then they uncorked the champagne. One of us at last! Green with anguish! A real little terrestrial! Chocking in the chlorophyll! Hugging the slaughter house walls! Paltry priests of the irrepressible ephemeral, how they must hate me. Come, my lambkin, join in my gambols, it's soon over, you'll see, just time to frolic with a lambkinette, that's jam. Love, there's a carrot never fails, I always

*in fact if you wanted to get back to me you could just give me a list of seven words, accompanied by 1 sentence that contained the word resurrection.*

and as I was reading her fizzle of words -- well before her request that my reply should contain a line that ends with resurrection -- I had been planning -- deciding if to send her the quotation from Cixous -- the quotation I found yesterday that contained just the word she would ask me for -- yes as I continued to read her words -- the very thing I had planned to send her she was about to request --

*But he wasn't the lunatic, not at the moment. At night, eyes wide open in the dark, lying in his boat, he wondered who at daybreak, would come to shore. Awaiting, with a dead man's impotence, his resurrection.*<sup>1</sup>

And of course this was a coincidence because of the word given at the end but also in terms of what I had been thinking about when I by chance or by coincidence found the quotation in the first place -- in that my words on this subject of madness -- of lunacy -- had been feeling too straight jacketed [sic] -- well having worked in psychiatric hospitals for many years I was trying to re-call the impact digressive psychotic language had on me -- to find a language that would convey this -- to convey the stories of that time -- yes

had to thread some old bodkin. And that's the kind of jakes in which I sometimes dreamt I dwelt, and even let down my trousers. (Beckett, 1997b: 318)

The claim that Beckett worked as a male nurse in a mental institution is disputed. Some, like Knowlson, one of Beckett's biographers, maintain that this story has become confused with Beckett's character Murphy who worked as a male nurse: 'There he yields to a happiness he has never known, discovering in the inmates "the race of people he had long since despaired of finding" ' (Seaver, 1976: 22). Beckett did make frequent visits to the Bethlem Royal Hospital in London during the 1930s where he studied many aspects of the mad and the asylum. *Murphy* was said to have been influenced by these visits to Bethlem, and Beckett was himself receiving psychotherapy at the time (Knowlson, 1996: 208-209). What is clear from Beckett's writing is that he had an unusual empathy with the voice of madness, an understanding represented not only by his 'creatures', but in the form of his language and sentence construction. Beckett turns to Joyce's 'Anna Livia Plurabelle' to give an example of where form and content in language become indistinguishable, a language Beckett describes as drunk. 'The very words', he says, 'are tilted and effervescent':

To stirr up love's young fizz I tilt with this bridle's cup champagne, dimming douce from her peepair of hide-seeks tight squeezed on my snowybreasted and while my pearlies in their sparkling wisdom are nipling her bubblets I swear (and let you swear) by the bumper round of my poor old snaggletooth's solidbowl I ne'er will prove I'm untrue to (theare!) you liking so long as my hole looks. Down. (James Joyce, in Beckett, 2001: 27)

when I opened the book and saw those lines I had been feeling the impossibility of writing the piece on madness -- feeling impotent -- thinking of the word lunatic and there it was before me -- all contained in that one quotation -- I was then lead back to what I had found in Kraus' book -- Schizophrenia revealing content like patterns of association reaching past language's signifying chain into the realm of pure coincidence -- you have to understand the patterns<sup>2</sup>

And that is what began to happen -- in my failed attempt to write about madness I now find myself caught up in a series of coincidences that in turn becomes the piece of writing -- to understand the connections that lead me back into writing -- by understand I mean understand by instinct -- to feel my way through -- through a mapping of language that gives the babble of words the kind of sound I was after -- when I risk to keep going -- to continue -- to patiently look for -- be open too -- to gather whatever small amounts you have -- to read the small clues left in the snow -- in the meandering text -- *an orgy of coincidence*<sup>3</sup> it is in these coincidences that I find the right language the right aggregate of words -- these past days -- and yes also these past years maybe --

A week of coincidence moves everything along -- gets the writing onto the page - the impressions you wrote of in that

Like Joyce's drunken voice, so too does the schizophrenic voice represent both form and content as one entity, the thing that gives the voice its special characteristic--a voice that is not *about* something; *it is that something itself*. As Beckett notes, when the sense is sleep, the words go to sleep. When the sense is dancing, the words dance (Beckett, 2001: 27).

Chris Kraus and Jean Hyvrard are two of many contemporary writers who draw from the subject of madness while at the same using the play of madness in their writing voice. Kraus talks about schizophrenics having a gift for locking into other people's minds, a 'touching gift,' or 'whispering gift.' Schizophrenics are the most generous of scholars, she says, because they are emotionally *right there*. Discussing Guattari's work, Kraus talks about the schizophrenic as having lightening access to you; internalising the links between you and making them part of their own subjective system (Kraus, 1997: 240). In Jeanne Hyvrard's *Mother Death*, as in Beckett's *Murphy*, the setting for the writing is the madhouse itself. But it is the endless digressive and obsessional voice (more important than any incidental narrative) that carries the writing along. The narrator is the deviant female mental patient who has rejected patriarchal society, 'their' rules and 'their' language. And in spite of all of the doctors' technical and scientific expertise mobilised at 'curing' her, making her conform, she rejects their diagnosis. Leaving aside the now tired feminist dichotomies about the dominant male and the repressed woman, the doctors and the hospital can be seen as a metaphor for the more general

small passage from Proust -- impressions that lead into and through to writing -- to a different kind of truth -  
- to find a way in -- to say the unsayable -- as in Deleuze in his writing on Proust --

*we must first experience the violent effect of a sign, and the mind must be "forced" to seek the sign's meaning.*<sup>4</sup>

Deleuzian becomings -- for once the wasp finds its orchid nothing will stand in its way -- but to find -- do you have to actively seek -- no -- I am not seeking I am rather open to anything -- to a sound -- an intensity -- the detail of stitching -- yes in the Proust film we saw together and apart -- he pays the waiter to find out the detail of the stitching on the woman's cuff -- why does one thing strike me and not another -- go further -  
- deeper -- each time you move off -- throw yourself in to the sentence -- into the water into the centre of the flower -- and and and --

I digress --

Last night I see that I am made of gold and red flowers -- each flower has a nipple at its centre -- shall I show you -- here bring me a mirror hold it up -- see each small nipple at the centre -- the red corona -- the gold aureola -- shall I begin to suckle at the breast you ask -- no -- that would be too obvious -- instead begin with the gold flower the nipple that opens on my cheek -- or

appropriation of language as a means of social control:

They seize me in the pincers of their grammar. They crunch my head in the nutcracker of their vocabulary. They crush me under the jackhammers of their logic. I don't understand anything anymore. I'm going to die. (Hyvrard, 1988: 113)

Psychiatrists reinforce their ability to control and marginalise the insane by interpreting madness as a deviation from a medical construct of what it is to be normal. Unlike some of those who were influenced by his work such as Félix Guattari, the theoretical models of Lacan and other *anti*-psychiatrists share the same dogmatic truth claims as the orthodoxies they seek to challenge. Lacan classifies schizophrenia as a language disorder, a breakdown of the relationship between signifiers. He claimed that sentences move in time, while the schizophrenic lives in a perpetual present. The schizophrenic experience, he says, is one of isolation and disconnection as material signifiers fail to link up in any coherent sequence. The void created by the loss of any temporal continuity is filled with obsessiveness and repetitive incantations that cancel out any sense of meaning, or are given meanings of gross distortions (Jameson, 1985:118-120). Kraus, while acknowledging Lacan's theories, offers a different interpretation of the possibilities of schizophrenic language:

Schizophrenics reach past language's 'signifying chain', into the realm of pure coincidence. Time spreads out in all directions. To experience time this way is to be permanently stoned on a drug that combines the visual effects of LSD with heroin's omnipotence, lucidity. Like in Borges' world, where one moment can unfold into a universe. [. . .] Since schizophrenics are at home in multiple realities, contradictions don't apply to them. Like cubist chemists, they break things

maybe my finger -- offer him the red  
flower that writes -- that presses letters  
into words -- milk its centre --

I dream of my body made of vegetation  
find deleuze and his madness of flowers  
--

*the madness of the Flowers whose  
fragmented theme punctuates the  
encounter [. . .] pathos is a vegetal  
realm consisting of cellular elements  
that communicate only indirectly, only  
marginally, so that no totalisation, no  
unification, can unite this world of  
ultimate fragments. It is a schizoid  
universe [. . .] the world of sex.<sup>5</sup>*

And so to return --

Shall I open the book of coincidence by  
coincidence --

I am thinking more about what I had  
begun -- about the connections that  
were making themselves known -- I  
wondered -- what if I have written the  
wrong version -- got it all wrong --  
misread the patterns -- read too much  
into everything -- made the wrong  
interpretation -- yes maybe so -- maybe  
after all I found and connected was just  
an accident -- not at all something  
waiting to happen -- because I stop  
writing and instantly doubt sticks its  
tongue down my throat and I try not to  
gag in response -- instead I go to my  
book shelf -- I go back to the words I  
trust and for what seems to be no

down and rearrange the elements. [. . .] speech  
explodes. He rants, he sings in hieroglyphics. [. . .]  
you have to understand the patterns. [. . .]  
Without the map of language you're not  
anywhere. (Kraus, 1997: 229-242)

If we ignore the diagnostic label that Lacan  
places on schizophrenic language, and look  
instead at the significance of his theories for  
an alternative writing voice, then Beckett and  
Joyce's writing begin to make 'sense'. In  
discussing Lacan's work, Jameson concludes  
that the breakdown in the relationship  
between signifiers that one expects in  
standard writing heightens and intensifies  
our experience of the present (Jameson, 1985:  
118-120). What we experience as a result is  
not linear movement through the text but a  
floating present free of material signifiers, a  
different reality of time in which arbitrary  
connections are made, moving from one  
reality to another without the reader ever  
realising how they got there. It is the aim,  
then, of schizophrenic writing, to distort  
reality, to rupture meaning, to fragment  
thought, to disorientate time, and replace  
narrative with startling and electrifying  
images. That many find such writing  
impenetrable and uncomfortable, even  
disturbing to read, is probably why so many  
of these writers who have transgressed  
conventional forms of language structure and  
grammar have been dismissed as mad  
themselves. True, some like Artaud and  
Nietzsche eventually did go mad, but many  
others such as Joyce, Stein and Beckett did  
not. What we do know about the writings of  
all of these pioneers of language was that,  
after initially being dismissed as the work of  
charlatans, their work has now entered the  
canons of literary tradition.

particular reason I pick up a book by Henry James and after a few moments of skimming here and there -- in doing so I am then drawn to a book of Gertrude Stein -- her essays and lectures -- a book I have not picked up for many years -- a book that has yellowed from nicotine and dust -- I again open Stein's book at random and what do I see -- the name -- Henry James -- yes -- and below his name a passage Stein wrote on Coincidence -- I approach the shelves thinking -- pondering on the role of coincidence in my work -- I was struggling with it -- and by the way of James I am lead back to Stein who again gives me James and takes me back to Coincidence -- I zig zag -- I sidewind a pattern which takes me back to the beginning -- begin again -- takes me back to what you had said your words again echoed and found in Stein --

*What is the difference between an accident and coincidence. An accident is a thing that happens. A coincidence is when a thing is going to happen and does. [. . .] remember how to say a coincidence may occur at any day. A coincidence is having done so. [. . .] it was going to be written [. . .] And this makes it be what there is of excitement. [. . .] I found by doing so that when the words were next to each other they did not have a different sense but a different intensity.<sup>6</sup>*

Yes a different sound was needed -- I

For Julia Kristeva, to describe the literature of Joyce or Beckett in terms of madness is too simplistic. What Kristeva describes is a 'socialised madness' that combines both madness and logic to form a Dionysian state of delirium (Kristeva, 1984: 82). The madness in literature for Kristeva, unlike the pure semiotic or pathos of music, is not devoid of meaning or signification; it is rather that the signified has its own internal logic, leaving it open to individual interpretation. Not only each reader, but also each *reading* produces different images and emotions that are not necessarily repeatable. The semiotic precedes meaning and each reading produces a new becoming. No real memory of the text is possible, requiring a re-reading to bring the text back into being again. The reader is left with what Kristeva describes as the 'chora', a 'non expressive totality', the violence of *jouissance* flowing and erupting the reading. The trace instead shifts something in the reader, something that cannot be grasped or named or even put into words. This trace demands a re-reading, a return, a recall. It is to experience rather than 'understand' what is read. Kristeva does not, then, put greater value on the semiotic or the symbolic, for both are necessary for this kind of literature to succeed. It becomes a finished work that it is unlikely someone in a state of psychosis would capture or undertake. But for the writer who experiences feelings of futility in the act of writing, and whose ideas are beyond containment, 'socialised madness' is the only way to proceed, as is a language that speaks of its impotence, of the realisation that there is nothing to say. Discussing Beckett's work, Federman puts it this way:



look at the words I am trying to write and they don't have the right sound -- *Think of your ears as eyes* Stein says<sup>7</sup> and yes there's the clue -- the thing waiting to be read -- to be seen through the sound -- it is the different sense that leads me away from sense -- to a non-sense -- *All this seems simple but it takes a great deal of coincidence to make it plain.*<sup>8</sup> Without hesitation I read the coincidence I am getting excited by it and in turn I open up to it I face it full on -- I kiss it with happiness and I am plunged back into writing -- and I see that this is how I wanted it to sound -- what I had to get to -- *you make a diagram or a discovery, which is to discover by coincidence. [ . . . ] You make a discovery, it is a coincidence, of course yes a coincidence, not accent but an access, yes a coincidence which tells you yes.*

[THAT TELLS YOU YES ]

I read on

*And after that, yes after that, a great deal that has perplexed you about sound in connection with sense is suddenly clear.*<sup>9</sup>

Stein holds a tuning fork to her work --

Yes Moinous -- this piece now constructed of nothing of nothing but the sounds humming with coincidence -- a vibration soothes the ear -- becomes everything -- and then it seems

*I am working with impotence, ignorance. [ . . . ] Beckett, by choice, was attempting to formulate nothingness into words, to state what cannot be stated, meaningless [ . . . ] fictional absurdity [ . . . ] a state of lunacy . . .* (Federman, 1965: 6, 15 & 17)

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I do not suggest, then, that madness is a virtue. As an illness, madness can bring extreme pain through its alienation from the world, shutting down creativity and any desire to write. Within the excess and limitlessness of madness also speaks control, incarceration and separation. This is how society manages difference. Society, through the commerce of publishing, also imposes limits on how writing should look. Writing that upsets societies norms and rules (even the abject has to fit accepted and prescribed genres like gothic horror, crime, even pornography) will be banished to the margins as *avant garde* or experimental. And yet to what extent can the unorthodox writer ever completely defy categorization and escape or transgress imposed genres? Do they rather have to work in an uneasy alliance with them. The simple act of saying 'I want to write a book' implies for the unorthodox writer a compliance and willingness to work within limits. The challenge is that the work outside of the book has to find its way inside. I think here of Deleuze's reference to such writing as 'an assemblage that makes thought itself nomadic' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2002: 24). Any attempt to gag the writer who insists on their right to difference only further fuels their need to offend the taboos put in their way. Blanchot describes this defiant spirit in

suddenly clear what needs to be done to progress -- how the story is there waiting -- a thing that will happen written from nothing -- there is no longer hesitation -- you instead say yes -- to that scream that mad laughter running beside the constant doubt I fear -- fear carrying inside it a kind of stubborn courage -- in the coincidence I find an excitement that wipes out fear -- if only for a while -- if only for a moment I am thrown back into the work --

back into your words to me in my words to you -- we read we find we say yes -- of course -- words find themselves moving from one thing to the next -- from one to the other -- the page finds itself filled -- from one image to another until there is something emerging that works like a virus spreading out opening into a body -- our symbiosis you called it -- interaction -- living together -- a symbiosis that spreads reforms itself -- that word ending in *sumbios* -- companion -- that crosses the page in a new form -- crosses an ocean between us -- I find a form that can walk on water -- that can dive deep --

You write like a deep sea diver like a scuba diver -- C writes to me -- you live by diving into water each day and diving is your life -- you dive and you come back and show us what you have found down there each day -- and some days you have good dives and other days not so good but each day you continue to swim under water -- but in order to dive

relation to de Sade's imprisonment:

From this buried solitude [. . .] grew the irrepressible necessity of writing, a terrifying force of speech that would never be calmed. Everything must be said [. . .] an external speaking—eternally clear and eternally empty. (Blanchot, 1993: 220)

Being filled with the desire to transgress the orthodoxies of language can, like true madness, be to suffer the torment as well as the euphoria of living beyond the security of Nietzsche's 'human herd'. And yet like the mad, society also bestows on the artist and the writer special privileges. They are expected to transgress the normal frontiers of realisation, but only within the rules set out for them. The writer then, is licensed to explore the outer reaches of consciousness, to play with the boundaries of human morality, to in turn expose the limits of language, to question logic and lucidity. Sontag maintains that the writer goes somewhere that others do not, knows something that others don't know (Sontag, in Bataille, 1982: 116). And yet as Sontag further suggests, this role is not one that is always welcome.

His [the artist] job is inventing trophies of his experience [. . .] His principal means of fascinating is to advance one step further in the dialectic of outrage. He seeks to make his work repulsive, obscure, inaccessible; in short, to give what is, or seems to be, not wanted [. . .] The exemplary modern artist is a broker in madness. (Sontag, in Bataille, 1982: 92)

Is it a question of *seeking* the repulsive and the obscure, of giving people what they do not want? Is it not rather writing in a way that, through its excess, vitality, and often banality, challenges not only the limits placed on language by the guardians of literature, but exposes the limits of language itself. In order to expose oneself to these limits, one must go beyond the known and the familiar,

to write to go where you must go -- you need your oxygen -- you need to have your oxygen supplied -- or you die --

So I write in doubt -- I continue to write you -- backwards -- around -- on -- in the movement toward the other I write even when writing fails me or rather I fail it -- I write -- I am dying from madness -- from doubt -- from mad laughter -- from the absurdity of language -- I write in a swoon -- in a delirium -- yes -- and what an outcome that would be -- to find words slipping into a frenzy of madness -- is the empress dressed or naked -- they do not know -- do I know -- so if I forget to hesitate before I speak -- to say I am not the lunatic -- when someone unknowing requests the word resurrection unknowing that the word is already written and on its way before she had finished asking --

And I have worked on the inside -- I have surrounded myself with madness with the language of madness -- I have worked in the house of madness for many years --

and yes doesn't anyone who speaks differently who is riddled with difference locked away -- censored -- regulated -- scare -- but how -- if you are black or have a circumcised cock do you make yourself white and blonde -- how do I make my words white and blonde when they are the colour of 3am insomnia --

beyond the constructs and sanctions that may shut writing down. Sontag is one of those who argues against the writer creating 'proper distance' from the object of their obsessions. The author should succumb (in their writing at least) to the demonic forces of human consciousness; those taboos and desires that impel humans toward 'the voluptuous yearning for the extinction of one's consciousness, for death itself' (Sontag, in Bataille, 1982: 103). Whatever the genre---pornography, science fiction, horror---those artists and writers who attempt to produce work that expands consciousness, rather than shutting it down with soporific blandness, are 'aiming at disorientation, at psychic dislocation' (Sontag, in Bataille, 1982: 94):

It doesn't seem inaccurate to say most people in this society who aren't actively mad are, at best, reformed potential lunatics. [. . .] If so many are on the verge of murder, dehumanisation, sexual deformity and despair, and were we to act on that thought, then censorship much more radical than the indignant foes of pornography ever envisage seems in order. (Sontag, in Bataille, 1982:117)

Sontag affirms that mainstream society views serious art as suspect and dangerous, the response is to try to censor and control it. When Sontag tells us that, unlike the artist, most people attempt to outwit their feelings and maintain a receptiveness to pleasure, at the same time keeping horror at a distance, she would seem to be privileging the artist too far. Whatever artists and writers attempt to achieve through their work, they share the same frailties as the rest of humanity and ultimately cannot escape being human. When Sontag claims that Bataille represents the artist's view that it is through horror and disgust pleasure is excited (Sontag, in Bataille, 1982: 105-107), again, this is not a

Ahtilla the artist and filmmaker says -- *what's not immediately understandable is forbidden*<sup>10</sup> -- yes -- or locked away -- and still the words keep coming at you - - unpunctuated -- an endless stream an unstoppable scream -- with no breath -- how can I give air to my words when it is me who each day dives without air -- who writes holding her breath -- words throw me into a dark ocean -- my lungs bruised from the effort of inflation -- for to exhale now to pause to inhale salt water now would be the end of this sentence -- or is it from the stomach from the diaphragm I breath -- have I gills -- but hold on there is more -- more to come --

And C writes to me and says -- the things we give -- put out there in words maybe are the very things people want to turn away from -- sexuality -- well -- a feminine libido and madness -- maybe even death and madness -- for I am not the lunatic -- but who wants to be reminded of such madness -- instead they might say -- I don't want to see this -- they might instead say forget madness -- they might instead say give us another sound -- let's turn away from madness -- let's instead rescue Virginia from the river let's sew up her pockets - - let's hide her stones -- they say -- let's take away Sylvia's cooker and buy her a microwave -- where is all this going you may ask -- indeed -- let's see --

And then another thing occurs to me --

view unique to artists. Writers and artists do no more than remind the reading/viewing public of their own human frailty and proximity to madness and abjection.

André Gide argues that it is sanity, not madness, that involves a denial of humanity because adulthood involves actively repressing the drives of infancy and childhood, urges that tempt us in later life to break through the barriers of censorship (in Walker, 1990:25-6). Nietzsche also recognised the dangers of growing up when he said, 'There is something the child sees that he [the adult] does not see; something the child hears that he does not hear; and this something is the most important thing of all (Nietzsche, 1909: 40). Maybe Nietzsche succeeded to some extent in defying the sanity of adulthood when he posed the rhetorical question 'Why am I so clever?' in his final work *Ecce Homo*, just prior to his own descent into total madness (Nietzsche, 1992: 21). For in spite of the myths about Nietzsche, one could conclude that his statement was ironic and his madness was the later, separate and unfortunate coincidence of a dementing illness.

What Nietzsche and others present to us in their writing is a unique vision of the world. Not vision in any religious or spiritual sense, for those writers whose work I feel close to reject universal transcendent truths. When, in their writing, these writers cross the boundaries of what others would perceive as sanity, they are fully aware that they are not mad, they simply show us a world that is nothing other than chaotic. What interests me

When Stein says -- *it is not clarity that is desirable but force* -- if language has a *vitality enough of knowing enough* someone somewhere will come to understand<sup>11</sup> yes a vitality that others will feel and so this vitality then touches someone -- I come to understand your words your books your Voice In The Closet let's say -- not by the logic or sense of the order of the words but by the sound it creates -- the vitality of the sound the conviction of the voice -- maybe the voice of doubt of anger the voice muttering to itself -- laughing out loud in your books in your Tioli in Don -- in Closet in the involuntary poetry of that relentless unpunctuated Voice -- in its pattern of language -- each time I approach that text it's different -- each time the sound the hum of it affects me differently -- it is a different experience each time -- never the same reading -- but the sound is the thing that carries me along -- the vitality of the voice is where I find meaning --

continue --

first I tell you -- I'll change direction a little here to your Voice In The Closet --

Yes --

I am listening to the recording of your Voice In The Closet -- I put on the headphones -- I am cleaning the house - - it's a Friday evening -- we are expecting friends for the weekend -- the

most about this debate, is not so much the binary opposition between sanity and madness but the *similarity* between certain literature and the psychotic voice. The voice I refer to is one that disrupts linearity, order and progress of sentences. This language reveals the surplus of language left behind; voices of excess; multiplication of voices; fragments of stories coming and going; a constant detouring that never arrives. Such writing does not privilege the story, meaning, hierarchy, or origin, but through its freedom questions the very separation between madness and sanity. And yet the whole madness industry itself and its obsession with fixing the boundaries between sanity and madness through its hospitals, drugs, therapies and rules of compliance, reinforces the delinquency and transgressive behaviour of the writer who feels a proximity to the language of madness.

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As I discuss in the section on cyberspace, Barthes emphasises the difference between 'the text of pleasure', which, he says, is linked to a *comfortable* practice of reading, and 'the text of bliss' that imposes a state of loss, unsettling and discomforting the reader's assumptions. It should be noted here that when I refer elsewhere in this thesis to 'the pleasure of the text' I am indicating the state Barthes attributes to 'bliss' rather than the aesthetic pleasure of passive consumption. Discussing the work of Clarice Lispector, Cixous would seem to agree with Barthes. She maintains that reading such work can be difficult if one approaches it on a level of logic. One has to obey the text itself; reading

house smells of polish -- smells good -- the food is prepared -- the rooms are full of fresh flowers -- and I am listening to that voice so defiantly alive -- that is telling me how it escaped death having looked into the mouth of death this voice is more alive than ever -- and in that madness and from the madness of the situation -- the story of the 13 year old boy hurriedly shoved and hidden away in the closet on the 3rd floor landing of their apartment by his mother -- the morning of the great round up of the Jews from Paris -- yes and you are shoved into a closet by your mother while the Nazi's take her your father and two sisters away to be killed at Auschwitz -- out of the unspeakable madness of that situation in July 1942 came that voice -- in the madness we find our resurrection -- I was re-born naked out of the closet you say in that July morning I was again given life -- yes we find our first unexpected breath in the most unlikely of places that carries us for a whole book -- we find our oxygen -- we take a deep breath that sustains us enough to write a whole book -- a book that is a scream that is music that is unstoppable relentless mad laughter running between the lines --

and in that book that Voice in the Closet -- in that small endless stream of words in that one unpunctuated sentence in those repeated squares of text that small book that lasts for just twenty pages -- I also find the small gesture -- the wrapped up piece of shit that

in a circle, obeying a breathing rhythm, 'one is always carried off, delayed, seduced, and forbidden. As soon as prohibition comes from the outside, it is all over' (Cixous, in Lispector, 1995: xxiii & xii). And she continues:

Is the text [of bliss] readable? One may have to find other modes, other ways of approaching it: one can sing it. One is in another world. The text does not keep, hold back, and one cannot retain it. [. . .] It is not linear [. . .] as there is no story, one can start anywhere, in the middle, at the end. There is no exterior border. But there are a good many interior borders [. . .] They have to do with the infinite line of separation between moments, epiphanies. [. . .] Here there are no codes. Yet Clarice [Lispector] is not mad [. . .] The text follows movements of the body and enunciation [. . .] Rather than a narrative order there is an organic order. (Cixous, in Lispector, 1995: ix-x)

So how am I to make myself understood if the reader seeks only aesthetic pleasure from my text? Like the madman drinking water believing it to be wine, I am intoxicated with my own meaning. Why, then, do others want to claim me as sober? Kathy Acker understands well that to communicate through writing is to impart a *vision* of the world, not to offer rational explanations about it. At the same time Acker throws down the challenge that *jouissance* does not equal nonsense---as the writing of Beckett, Stein and other visionary writers is often dismissed:

Moreover, the excitement of writing for me, is a journey into strangeness: to write down what one thinks one knows is to destroy the possibility for joy. I'm not arguing that writing is wedded to nonsense and not to communication; obviously to use language is to enter the world; rather I am hoping that communication need not be reduced to expression. (Acker, 1997: viii)

Federman reinforces Acker's view when he argues that what is important is not one's life experiences, nor reality at all; it is the artist's particular vision of things, the way such

becomes a language of its own -- and I wanted to talk to you about the connections that made for me -- the involuntary memory it evoked that I had quite forgotten --

but first I read the re-telling of your words by the Old Man in *The Twofold Vibration* --

the boy -- hidden away from his killers in the closet has to go to the toilet but cannot yet leave his hiding place so he forced to shit his fear into a newspaper -

*he unfolded a newspaper and crouching like an animal, like a sphinx, he defecated his fear holding his penis away from his legs not to wet himself, then he wrapped it up in a neat package, smelling the warmth on his hands afterwards, and when finally it was dark outside, and the trains were rolling away to the East, he climbed the ladder near the door of his closet up to the skylight and placed his filthy package on the roof, [. . .] for the birds I suppose, or to disintegrate in the wind and become, years later, a symbol of his strange rebirth.*<sup>12</sup>

Yes and in response to this parcel -- the imaginative quality of this parcel of shit -- I recalled Roudinesco's book on Lacan and what I found interesting in her book was also the small wrapped up parcel of shit -- do you know that book? You could smell the stink of vinegar when

experiences are told or presented (in McCaffery, 2002: 327). Foucault realised that the meaning of madness was not to try and explain madness, for meaning always destroys rather than illuminates truth. If there is any meaning in madness, it is one that is ceaselessly transforming itself and offering itself to be misapprehended (Felman, 1985, p. 54). Madness subverts and plays with the rules of language. Rules that have been developed to ensure that meaning is owned by the author and never by the reader. Foucault regarded madness as the surplus, the overflow, the literary residue left over after philosophy had been extracted from it (Felman, 1985: p. 54). In this sense, madness in literature has the possibility of liberating philosophy. Nietzsche was one of the few modern philosophers prepared to use the madness of fiction to recover philosophy from the straitjacket of science. Significantly, Nietzsche influenced a whole new breed of philosophers such as Barthes, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard and Ronell, who communicate in striking images rather than dry, didactic text. Like their ancient Greek forerunners, these writers have reintroduced the poetic and the fictional back into philosophy, a writing in which form is as meaningful as content.

In her work *Writing and Madness* (1985: 49), Shoshana Felman tells us that unlike the logos of the printed word, madness does not hold a position of mastery and sovereign affirmation. What it presents to us is vertigo, a loss of meaning: 'the non-mastery of its own fiction . . . a blindness to meaning.' Conversely, madness, inside of thought, can

you read the opening lines -- from the gossip about Lacan -- the tattle about him and Sylvia Bataille to the stories of his family who were vinegar merchants - - yes sometimes you read a book -- of course forgetting most of it -- but one part stands out -- one small snippet from thousands of pages finds a place inside you -- and out of the book what was retained was the opening story of the vinegar and tucked away in thousands of words -- was Blanche -- hidden away in the psychiatric hospital where Lacan worked -- Blanche admitted into his care with her delusions -- Blanche wrapping up her shit -- keeping it in a little purse or container or something -- all prettied up with beads -- well that's how I recall her -- I'll go find the section -- hang on -- it reads like an extraordinary piece of prose -- yes and in many ways the language of madness of the case studies he wrote up read like many surrealist texts -- as it goes on to say -- at the time Lacan wrote and worked in the hospitals he was also mixing with surrealist artists and writers many of who were against the incarceration of the mentally ill into asylums -- regarding their language as *sublime involuntary poetry -- madness close to truth, reason to unreason, [. . .] coherence to delirium.*<sup>13</sup>

*She [Blanche] sees herself as a four-headed monster with green eyes. What made her realise this is that her blood is scented. In high temperatures her skin*

only be evoked through fiction. The pathos of madness and the logos of philosophy can co-exist, become re-united in that brand of fictional philosophy practised by the ancients and recovered by a small group of writers in recent times. Each in their own unique way, Nietzsche, Artaud, Foucault and Beckett, has presented through their writing, their own personal philosophy on life. Not in a way intended to be pedantic or represent any truths, merely in a way that captures their way of seeing of the world. In this way madness in writing will never represent a school, genre or coherent movement; rather, it represents individualistic voices in which the writer often feels isolated and alienated from any idea of a larger writing community. Indeed, most writing communities today are grouped around the large commercial presses. In this way, authors who do not conform to a 'recognised' category of writing are damned to obscurity or dismissed as experimental writers.

Foucault was aware of this difficulty when he said that madness is still excluded as a legitimate form of discourse: 'bound now by the chains of its objectification, still forbidden the possibility of appearing in its own right, still prevented from speaking for itself, in a language of its own' (Felman, 1985: 40). So it is that those who allow the unfettered madness of their writing voice loose on the page, run the risk of being dismissed as mad. Of course, they could claim a Cartesian defence: I who am thinking (or writing) cannot be mad. But then I would challenge Descartes' notion that thought is by definition the accomplishment of reason, that truth and



goes hard and turns into metal, then she is covered with pearls and sprouts pieces of jewellery. Her genitals are quite unique: she has a pistil like a flower. Her brain is four times as powerful as other people's brains, and her ovaries are tougher. She's the only woman in the world who doesn't need to wash [. . .] The patient admits to some very strange habits. She makes broth with her menstrual blood: 'I drink some every day; it's very nourishing.' She arrived at the hospital with two hermetically sealed bottles: one contained urine and the other stools, and both were wrapped in weirdly embroidered cloths.<sup>14</sup>

Weirdly embroidered cloths -- what an image that made in me --  
 what stitching -- what material -- what choice --

In the same way -- it was the small package of shit that struck me in your work -- that I was not expecting -- that took me back to Blanche -- to the days I worked as a nurse -- a different situation of course to Blanche's but then in the same way a poetic gesture a poetic language -- an essence is found in the wrapping and repetition of that gesture in your work -- the abject speaks what is unspeakable -- *too absurd and obscene to be told*<sup>15</sup> -- speaks the madness of that day in July -  
 - the gesture of wrapping articulates everything that cannot be understood or spoken by the boy -- both Blanche and

philosophy are located only in non-madness, and that the mad are non-beings. I prefer Felman's description of the language of madness, when she suggests that it proceeds from a 'failure of translation', and that any attempt to read it necessitates a crossing of the border between languages.

---

The narrow space between the left and the right-hand columns on this page attempt to provide a literal border between languages, a border the reader can choose to ignore and read across. Both are dealing with the same thesis and yet the writing in left column is fragmented and digressive to try and *show* the reader by example what I have described on the right. I would not describe the left hand column as a 'work of madness'; that would be to dismiss it in the same way that describing a work as *experimental* dismisses it. I am not proposing here that one mode of language is right and the other wrong, but rather to show the tensions between showing and telling. Nietzsche, Cixous and others believe that by promoting such binary oppositions, putting greater value on one side *or* the other, we perpetuate the dogmatic, patriarchal and moralistic view that has dominated humankind since the time of Plato. As already discussed above in relation to Kristeva's discussion on the semiotic and the symbolic, the problem is that of reuniting madness with logic and not of giving greater value to one or the other: we need both to function completely. Maybe it is the tension *between* that creates the work. The difficulty

your Closet taking me back to a forgotten memory of a woman I nursed in London -- a Jewish woman who had also escaped Auschwitz but in different circumstances -- ending up in a small hospital room where she also wrapped up her stools -- hiding the small parcels in her room -- she hoarded everything her body produced so that the stink became unbearable and we would then have the job of finding the bundles and clearing them out -- but she would scream and cry and hang onto those valuable little parcels -- yes -- I had quite forgotten Esther --

AXX

**on 1/2/03 10: 00pm,  
A@ntlworld.com at A@ntlworld.com  
wrote:**

I'm sending you a piece I wrote about the asylum which opened out from something that the artist Richter said -- but first I want to share two images of that time -- I am not sure why and in some ways they seem unconnected floating on the page -- but what came to me after I wrote to you earlier were the 2 images of the asylum food and the railway line --

Yes the asylum had been once self sufficient -- one of those very grand Victorian palaces built on great parklands on the edges of London --

lies in the fact that today the symbolic remains a dominant force in fiction.

Foucault reminds us that throughout history, in spite of the political and social prohibitions that repressed it, the voice of madness has constantly survived through literary texts. Yet if the madness silenced by society has been given a voice by literature (Blake, de Sade, Nietzsche's Zarathustra, Artaud, Beckett), there are those who also suggest that literature itself is becoming obsolete:

at the very moment some claim to be 'liberating' madness—or, at the very least, to be undoing the cultural codes responsible for its repression—they are in fact denying and repressing literature, the sole channel by which madness has been able throughout history to speak by its own name, or at least with relative freedom. (Felman, 1985: 15)

As I have discussed in the section on cyberspace, literature may well have been the sole channel for the voice of madness throughout history, but the electronic age has brought other channels, even more accessible than books, and these directly into the home. Voices and images of madness now have other outlets, and in spite of fears that TV, video and the world wide web would kill off the printed page, there is little evidence that this is happening. The danger, of course, is that like everything else in our consumer-driven age, the voice of madness, like other forms of critique (satirical comedy, the polemic, art and theatre), will lose its power to communicate in a way that affects how people view the world, as their commercial value is realised and exploited. What does seem undeniable for the artist and writer is that we are currently living in an age of mediocrity, where the bland and the clichéd predominate and the turnover of cultural

now turned into luxury apartments with fluted curtains and four wheel drives parked outside -- asylum now replaced with so called care in the community --

When first built -- the hospital had its own railway line and station and farms where everyone was put to work -- where everyone was given work planting and growing all the farm produce which was then of course picked and cooked along with the animals they kept -- all cooked in the big industrial kitchens which always turned whatever goodness into the most unappetising sludge -- the vats of food did not change and arriving there one autumnal afternoon I was served -- along with everyone else -- a plate of stuffed hearts -- grey -- never properly prepared with little tubes still sprouting from them -- going nowhere - - and as I would come to know the relentless ritual of institutionalised eating was always tinged with the threat of the cockroach -- the roaches people sometimes found in their rice pudding -- in their beans -- under the rabbit's leg -- the place was over run with them -- they lived under the huge warm ovens on the wards brought out in force during the long dark shifts on night duty --

The railway line and trains still ran through the grounds but when I found my way there they had taken away the station -- the trains [even though they were supposed to move slowly through the hospital's land] would move through very fast and people often went to the track to commit suicide -- if someone

fashion is so rapid that *avant-garde* no longer has any meaning. The paradox of the *avant-garde* is that it can do no more than bear witness to a reinforcement of its own legitimacy. Perhaps this is the black hole of meaning that postmodernism (now itself a meaningless cliché) warned us of.

Expressions of madness or deliberate acts of deviancy increasingly appear like the only antidote to the insipid sanity that threatens to smother us. The Victorian sane built elaborate palaces in which to incarcerate deviants from the faultless society they were manufacturing. Today, those writers who feel they have no genre for their work to inhabit, need to find their own asylum from the banality of the modern world. The response for those not satisfied with the predictable and the mediocre has been to seek an alternative world of discourse. A discourse in which rules are not imposed onto the work but rather come out of the writing, writing that speaks of the fraudulence and the limits of fiction. This thesis is a contribution to that project.

went missing you had to check the lines first and sometimes body parts were collected in black bags -- yes both patients and staff used the line for suicide -- one particular nurse -- who had been involved in some disciplinary or other and was suspended from work - - spent the day shopping -- bought her three kids new clothes -- filled the freezer with food -- cooked a big pot of food for her family -- then went to the line and killed herself -- days later they found a dog carrying the remains of her arm in his teeth identified only by her rings --

If I go mad one day just kill me sweetly but don't ever send me into the hands of psychiatry --

As for the piece I sent you below it made perfect sense to me -- is that worrying -- yes -- but the writing led me to a young man I worked with -- well he was about 17 -- I'll call him Vinny -- not that I can any longer remember his real name -- he was brought to hospital for an incident of violence -- locked into the ward and not allowed out -- given all sorts of labels by the dumb psychiatrist but when I worked a month of nights he used to talk to me and we'd play chess - - his violent behaviour a result of a childhood made up of a drawn out incestuous relationship with his mother and his sister --

And I realised when I wrote this to you that I had spent over ten years in those

large bins as they were called -- listening to many such stories -- but it was a period of my life that I had written little about -- and then back to the question of how to write of things that are not easy spoken of -- Anyway before you read this -- you think you have troubles -- en spent an hour this morning looking for his watch and it was on his wrist --

well here's the piece I wrote

It is better to begin -- Richter said -- than not to begin at all -- to sit looking at the blank canvases lined against your wall saying come come come on come on today I think therefore I am not mad -- I underlined that with pencil hb ordinary lead nothing too heavy -- I think therefore I am not mad he wrote - - no not Richter someone else -- Descartes maybe -- anyway -- I disagree I said -- how can you say that - - I underlined -- madness is a false concept -- an empty metaphor -- what then is this madness they say -- a lyrical explosion -- nothing but an absence of production -- never reaching the completion of meaning [ah that's me then] writing offers itself to be understood [yes and did I tell you that after the second bottle of wine she drew pictures on my arms -- yes we made charcoal out of corks by burning them with a lighter -- you should try this at home] madness -- to be misunderstood

beyond control -- more pencil -- through  
the very act of writing my questions are  
at work always -- always meandering  
always shifting always escaping  
somewhere at the point of silence . . .  
In our absence we are spoken -- he said  
-- no not Richter forget Richter --  
someone else -- that made me realise  
made me wonder if the language I covet  
is madness -- does speaking it here now  
to you save my own words from my  
electro-convulsive breaks in memory --  
yes sometimes I fear I will forget how to  
walk -- talk -- basic things -- it's just my  
memory behaving like a wolf I said --  
another slip -- but sometimes my words  
just don't take off in the kind of way I  
would wish as if they are sometimes too  
ridden -- too bitten down -- too broken  
in

but no matter -- no matter how much  
lather I make on your skin part of me is  
too flea ridden -- or is it like they say  
that the fleas avoid the smell of  
hallucinations -- the crazed blood or is it  
that I'm just too sane in my walk -- in  
my teeth --

While inside I shaved the dead --  
watched people fall into walls -- eat  
their own excrement -- take their lives  
in many days over many dinners --  
dancing on top of the grand piano yes  
giving birth through the mouth on the  
pink scratchy industrial carpets Jesus  
loves you mamma +++ each one of us  
is a potential saviour -- Queen Elizabeth  
or St Joan always a popular delusional  
second among the women --

I sat in the linen cupboard all night  
and read cheap fiction -- sat inside the  
cooker all burners on blue in the dawn  
trying to get my hands warm so I could  
chase her some more along empty  
corridors and wash her face of words of  
fatigue of language poured out of her  
twenty-four hours at a time -- they said  
inject her to stop the adjectives over  
dressing her nouns -- her babble of bees  
her fingers inside her honey -- try some  
she'd say but no sister said screen her  
off until she is full and sick of her name  
of her taste for words for her  
mispronunciations --

And then it was time for us to roll up  
her nylons into colours match as best we  
could the odd sizes -- how many times  
did I press her oversized feet into tight  
beige stockings making a mark around  
her thighs -- how many times did she  
offer me her breasts sore and heavy so I  
could rub ointment into the folds --  
gauze her for just another easy night --

You see one page already Richter was  
right I am marking up well --

And maybe writing is a kind of self  
harm -- taking the glass to make her  
words interlace down to the bone --  
words healing in silver like delivery  
marks that were only readable by touch  
and I touched her often to see what she  
had seen even though I wanted nothing  
else but to feel her stroke my ears with  
stories but I guess I was a kind of  
masochist for her truth hanging from the  
window from the bedpost -- while O

painted his bicycle red and expected me to believe he didn't know what he had begun but I believed him when he said - - only the interlocutors know the way out of me -- at the top of my head there is a small door but no handle -- but I didn't take the trouble to write in those days I should have kept a notebook in my breast pocket in my stocking tops in my stethoscope I should have listened in for ten years instead I watched everyday the bank clerk the abandoned wife the abattoirs of the mind the rich bitches the psychotic alphabets warning of the lilacs that were growing inside their obsolete suitcases -- the nun who tried to hang herself out of habit said -- I am sick of my sisters face all over the news all her bullet holes tired of praying over the bodies of the sick over the dried up sex of the unforgiven whores -- so I left her to her bible to tattoo her favourite psalms onto her thighs and instead I pulled the 3rd tablet from S's mouth -- tucked the sheets tight to his neck tie and I played chess instead

I played chess with Vinny instead in my new glasses I had just discovered vision when he showed me his best moves -- I let his hand touch my queen -- he said take care of her it's the only way to win -- and his mother he'd said had taken him like a queen to her bed and caressed him and his sister and in turn showed him how she made them and in turn shaved them clean showed him and his sister in turn how to caress one another in their father's absence -- his



mother was a rich bored drunk his father was gambling in Monte Carlo -- sent postcards -- until each week a new palm tree decorated Vinny's bedroom -- picture side up -- in the bedroom where there was little else to do all through the night but fondle and sleep exhausted with a type of misshapen pleasure -- and he talked all through the night -- told me of his mother's smell until I called out check mate three times and I think he let me win to prove to me I could and in the end we could barely see each others faces in the oversized darkness of the room under the sleeping others under the drapes which fell from the walls garrulous flowers sending him messages until the six a.m. tea urn until the greasy over easy eggs drizzled in lard becoming just another clue --

When he found his way out of there -- he left me a manila envelope stuffed with my favourite brand of cigarettes and on a unused prescription for 300 mg of Phenobarbitone -- he wrote -- I love you at night with food -- his whole life told in one month in the non sequential darkness from eleven P.M. to six A.M. every night -- it made me want to get to work on time so I could hear the rest backwards -- waiting four weeks to know where he'd started from -- I hope he missed the next part -- I hope he fled the smell of death and fish -- same thing -- smoked mackerel for supper -- any cheese nurse . . . and the Jews force fed bacon for breakfast

You see four pages already but not many laughs ---

So what did we smile about -- the day Y left her teeth on top of the buttered scone -- And does anyone know the way to Mill Hill -- No she wouldn't look at you in the fog -- Mr Royston always announcing his entrances in the third person showed me many times how to inject an orange with tranquillisers even ate it for me rind pips juice and all --

And years of working with madness made me a jealous thief even though I say if you are ever worried about me don't send me to those long evenings to those insipid milky drinks and ill fitting clothes with the labels on the outside dry clean only -- boil wash -- 40 degrees -- spin dry -- handle with care -- no pressing -- don't let them mix up my soup with my name and feed it back to me with my main memories taken to a place of safety -- don't let them stir the early morning moth into the grey porridge they have collectively ejaculated to make warm don't let me skate across the windows and break my wrists on a weekend pass -- just keep me hidden and give me clean linen twice a week -- yes that will do fine -- but yes I was jealous of his sentences of all those forgotten years of words ten years of forgotten pure speech instead I am given the coded categorisations inboxed inbreed all sorted and taken care of

words -- instead I am given the dickey bows -- the bows and bows of language grand gestures the over faced articulations of the vertical privileged but he

He always worked from the floor downwards -- sent his words into the muck -- he belonged to the grass and the underbelly to the snow to the horizontal to the place of the foot the knees the thighs the bum -- the smell of buried afterbirth and used sperm the blood in his eyes from lack of sleep the family size tea bags he'd roll into smokes as language inhabited him -- refused to leave him alone from the bed springs from the radio transmitters from the clock tower from the biscuit tin from the squeak of the hamster wheel --

**-----Original Message-----**

**From:** [A@ntlworld.com](mailto:A@ntlworld.com) [mailto:[M@aol.com](mailto:M@aol.com)]

**Sent:** Tue 10/2/2003 6:24 AM

**To:** Federman, Raymond

**Subject:** Fwd: THIS IS A REALLY CUTE!

Yes ok ok -- so you say in all the years since you and George exchanged those FC2 professional letters -- G was in Buffalo twice and you were in Peoria 3 times -- in other words in 28 years of friendship G and you were face to face only five times -- so yes of course that gives me -- as you say -- an idea of how many times you and I will be face to

face -- so yes maybe you are right and I shouldn't miss our first chance -- but --

but Moinous my darling are we joking about this --- is this just another part of our fiction -- who can any longer tell if the other is just moving the story along -- how am I to know -- if I say yes -- does that mean I will go or just write about it as if I will -- yes just listen to us -- Paris in March -- the Sofitel lobby - - dinner at the Coupole -- we are beginning to sound like something from an Audrey Hepburn movie -- I can hardly believe I am even considering this madness -- and of course I would have to come with en and not for the reasons you think -- well listen -- enough for now -- I am only thinking about it -- that's all I can say -- and I never know with you what is real and what isn't -- but we would have to find somewhere cheap as we couldn't afford to stay in the Sofitel toilets let alone the rooms -- Oh I cannot believe I am even writing this today -- one minute you are a single photocopied sheet of words in October and now this -- to share such intimacy in words and then after you have told that person all -- to then have to meet them -- what bullshit that you are not nervous -- of course it will be crazy -- what if I throw up over you like the character in South Park does every time he sees his love Wendy Testaburger -- what if we don't get on -- what if I have nothing to say to you -- what if I find you distasteful -- despicable -- nothing like I imagine --

what if we cannot exist outside our virtual personas --

So anyway -- change the subject mon ange -- I haven't time to write much and I have a ton of work and so do you -- so I am going to be brief today -- yes our words were close again yesterday and I enjoyed the story of George -- but I don't play golf or wear golf shoes and I have no language for or interest in the under or over par or the two birdies on the back nine --

Ok I am going -- yes this almost the shortest ever message -- all this meeting talk -- all those things we have said -- no I am not going to mention it again and from now on I write only nice polite things with no obscenities -- fully punctuated and with the proper use of grammar [if I can remember how]

Ax

**In a message dated 3/11/2002 2:34:38 AM Pacific Daylight Time, [angela@ntlworld.com](mailto:angela@ntlworld.com) writes:** Already a coincidence of birds --

Federman dear -- No -- I'll call you Moinous as Moinous puts a picture of a bird into my head and I said I'd tell you about birds today -- Moineau or eaux . . . sparrow or half-wit --

Regarding the French question or my lack of French -- my French teacher was a bear -- Ma Bear -- another becoming -

- becoming animal an animal who failed to teach me French -- matted in lice ridden fur -- when she stood on her hind legs I would pretend I'd lost my voice to get out of reciting my verbs -- in those days I was frightened of the bear of the verb of the rules -- Oiseau and Boucher are the only words I remember which sums up my two obsessions in my writing: flight and death

For me it has been a week of birds and so it is no coincidence that you sent word to me this very week -- I had recently been writing to tell you about my brief meeting with HC -- how at first I thought her initials were like hoof prints -- like the horse -- do you see how everything begins to make non-sense but that only led me in the wrong direction --

I had been writing about HC about when we'd [so briefly] met -- how she'd looked like a delicate bird -- black winged not sure if to fly off -- I had to approach her gently for only a short moment -- I had to hold out my flat hand with seed -- or was it worms --

She also visits me out of time -- she sings me the words of the boucher -- gives me the courage to write the bloody words I'm not allowed all my life -- decapitation gristle sticky meats I freely inhale the stench of decay and admit I have willingly kissed the dead full on -- put my tongue down the throat of the cat -- she lets me do all this -- this little bird --

On Tuesday I am on the bus going to work -- I'm on the bus trying to fight off my virus and insomnia caused by the bugs and worry about how to begin this writing to you -- thinking of the Oiseau of HC and of you [not knowing then that you too are a bird] -- not having translated your name -- not knowing that I had to be in a state of exhaustion -- of *good suffering* before I properly see how these connections are making themselves known --

Now seeing the prints you made with your name MMFMFFFFFFMMMMFFF bird tracks left -- what I had written ahead of us --

*There was a moment as he left the house when he hesitated, a voice returned him briefly inside where he scattered the blue gingham cloth, cracking it in the air, sprinkling bread crumbs on the floor just in case I was hungry, just in case I'd arrive while he was gone. When I found the crumbs they were hardening and turning green. I licked them up.*

Yes -- I had written this only last week when you leave me clues like bread crumbs scattered on the page and I only see them now that they are hardening and turning green and I lick them up -- I only understand things by taste by way of the mouth by the cut of the boucher's tongue --

I am on the bus on my way to work --

trying to think what to do with the group  
I am to teach this Tuesday morning -- I  
don't want to think I want to dream  
more I want to press my face close to  
the glass window -- when a small bird  
smacks into the window and shatters --  
blood is smeared across my mouth --  
Birds!

Yes that's it --

Birds have found their way into my  
work from the first awkward sentence -  
- I don't remember inviting them in but  
I know I understand who they are --  
we'll write about birds this Tuesday  
morning -- I'll tell them my obsession --  
how birds have found their way into my  
work always -- we'll look up the  
meanings of the stork -- the owl -- the  
darling sparrow -- the grotesque  
peacock -- but that's another story --

When I arrive at work before the group  
starts I grab a coffee my head stuffed  
with feathers when D comes in -- comes  
close to my face and tells me -- I can't  
write today I can't keep myself to the  
ground enough I keep thinking about  
the birds -- the birds -- the birds they  
keep lifting me up and you know I have  
to be close to the ground to write -- you  
know that about me -- I have to be on  
the ground --

What do you mean the birds -- that's  
what we were going to write about  
today --

It's like the lyric he says -- hear it --  
hear it -- it's the song repeating in my



head in my ear the birds repeating  
repeating when I talk to the birds when  
I talk to the birds

That night I see you had written -- *I  
opened the cage and hid my heart in a  
yellow feather* -- Moinous I hear your  
name is a chicken plucker is a plume  
and already there are so many  
connections -- yes -- all this making  
complete non-sense and I see now that  
the two writers I love most are both  
birds -- birds whose words incite me to  
lick le boucher --

**In a message dated 10/2/2003,  
2:34:38 PM Pacific Daylight Time,  
[a@ntlworld.com](mailto:a@ntlworld.com) writes: Re: Gide  
used to call that la main de dieu**

Darling where do I begin -- thank you  
for the poem the boot -- isn't that so  
strange -- yes more coincidence or  
dance -- as last night before I read this  
poem you sent and saw its shape I had  
a small snippet of a dream of a creature  
with one foot -- just the same shape as  
your boot of words -- yes -- I was sitting  
in the front room and the dog [which we  
don't have] kept pissing on the rug and  
I was trying to write to you and couldn't  
get the words out and so I began  
instead telling you that on the tv I could  
see that a man had been changed into a  
small spoon with one leg and foot -- he  
was made of transparent plastic but the  
features of his face were still visible on  
the head of the spoon -- he was kept in

a box and was hopping around on his one foot and kept falling over and every so often a hand would reach inside the small door in the box and reposition him so he was standing again -- he was told he would be left like this as an experiment and he was given a mirror which was placed on the wall -- the mirror allowed him to see himself as 3 dimensional again instead of the flatness he had been turned into and so he spent his day hopping to the mirror staring at himself -- getting tired -- falling over and being picked up by a mysterious hand -- sound familiar --

in my absence today [my teaching began again this morning] En has booked us a flight to Paris ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh -- yes -- can you believe this -- some hotel for three nights -- isn't this all too surreal and is this the end of our story well in its current form -- won't it inevitably change our words -- finish us off -- joking aside -- that does worry me -- how will this affect our words -- how will we come back to this -- what will it do to move our words from the virtual into the actual -- the face -- the eye -- the sound of words -- working without my keyboard -- maybe we'll have to bring our machines with us -- for how will we speak without them --

It was a good deal -- British Airways -- they only had three seats left on the flight and the Hotel is called Renoir and is in Rue Montparnasse wherever the

hell that is -- so there it is -- we fly into Paris at quarter to six on the Friday evening and leave at four thirty on the following Monday -- and yes I was dithering about too much which is why en went ahead and did it -- I am too undecided -- and I think that meeting you alone without e would have not really been proper -- to use that old fashioned expression -- well you know all that -- have you told e yet --

so that is it really -- what are you doing to me Moinous -- I still haven't taken it all in -- although beneath the humbug some part of me inside is happy I will soon get to squeeze your nose --

## Abjection

Those who fear art are trying to make the stink—chaos and death, the spheres of the violent—invisible; trying to banish all that seems ugly and mad.

(Kathy Acker, 1977: 36)

Love for B. makes me laugh at her death and her pain (I don't laugh at any other death) and the purity of my love undress her down to the shit.

(Georges Bataille, 1991: 52)

**In a message dated - 1st of March 2003 - 6:57:30 AM a@ntlworld.com writes:**

Our e-mails crossed -- what do you mean extraction -- isn't that from yesterday are you not just confused again -- No -- not so much a question of content but of speech of a sound I am unfamiliar dealing with -- where are you now --

yes -- 21 days until we meet -- that sounds a real figure now -- a figure that will soon dwindle -- yes that will soon pass by -- tell me are you nervous -- en says you must be -- somewhat -- and no I do not have a thick accent -- it's all mixed up from years of moving so you will of course understand me -- and I hope I you -- but if not we will have to enjoy the failing and misunderstanding - - so for now you must get to your farm and I promise that from Monday we both get to work and will be very brief - - really we both have so much to do --

And tell me -- have you washed the windows well and finished off the floors -- what did the cleaner do -- what indiscretions in the federman's carpets what craziness with your hoover -- and did you fire them with a smile or are you the strong serious type when you sack people -- tell me while I lick the bleach from your thumbs xx A

**3/3/2003 9:54: 29 AM Pacific Standard Time. a@ntlworld.com**

*Souvenir* is a tale of abjection, a playing around with the fragile borders between lust and loathing (of the self and the other), but it is also an abject tale. A dead tale, a literary corpse, conceived in passion, and then unceremoniously discarded along with the other refuse of my life. In Julia Kristeva's seminal text on abjection, *Powers of Horror*, the corpse represents the fundamental pollution in both Christian and Hebrew texts. A body without a soul is a non-body, a disquieting matter 'to be excluded from God's territory as it is from his speech' (Kristeva, 1982: 109). Not to be displayed, the corpse is immediately buried for putrefaction. Like excrement and other bodily waste, the corpse is viewed as no more than a transitional matter. But the abject is a movable feast. The borders between passion and disgust are constantly being breached. When sexually is aroused, all of us are able to suspend the disgust normally associated with the fluids and functions of the human body, are even able (if only to the point of orgasm) to derive heightened stimulation by them. And in cultures where cannibalism was a cultural norm, ritually ingesting the bodies of the dead was attributed positive values. So when Kristeva maintains that we are defined by the things that disgust us, she is not talking in terms of fixed values and absolute truths. Even so, some aspects of abjection are fixed; we must expel the waste of our own bodies in order to live. Our world exists on one side of the border that separates the living 'I' from the ultimate waste of our own corpse. Decay and

**writes:**

*Yes an ear to hear these words -- where we walk the desire of perpetual absence -- [let's] resume at the point where I let myself be cowed --*

*If the voice can no longer incarnate itself into another body, another character, another self, into fictitious beingness, how can it exist? It exists because it is heard, an ear that hears these words. Isn't that what Deleuze said when writing about Beckett -- paraphrasing him -- or was it Sam's words?*

But for a moment to get back to the arrangements for meeting

Our hotel is Renoir 39 Rue Du Montparnasse 33(0) 143217250

but as you have never heard my voice -  
-

thanks to the incoherence of the story yes wrap yourself up in the wonders of fur --

Your book hasn't arrived yet -- your laugh that laughs at the laugh --

I still need a phone number 00 maybe you sent it but I can't find it among the mess of words -- these days --

**15th March 03 4: 34: 45 PM**  
**A@ntlworld.com writes:** keep up and do not delete anything we only delete when we agree to delete

defilement mark out the limits of our own mortality:

On the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me. There, abject and abjection are my safeguards. The primers of my culture. [. . .] If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. (Kristeva, 1982: 2-3)

Leviticus sought to keep firmly in place the border between the inside and the outside of our bodies, and also between the living and the dead (Kristeva, 1982: 101-102). Woman, who had been associated with life in pagan cultures, was now blamed for death. The New Testament formulated and promoted the concepts surrounding 'original sin', laying the blame squarely on women's insides. As Nietzsche warned in his ironic statement in *The Antichrist*: 'One had better put on gloves before reading the New Testament. The presence of so much filth makes it very advisable' (Nietzsche 1999: 66). For the sins of Eve, woman is condemned to the pangs of childbirth and the curse of menstruation. And yet, in case man still finds himself drawn to her charms, St John Chrysostom provides some additional words of deterrence:

The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than the phlegm, blood, bile, rheum, and the fluid of digested food [. . .] If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is merely a whitened sepulchre. (Warner, 2000: 58)

In contrast to this sanctimonious, religious view of the human body, one of the last taboos in art has now been broken---the display of human corpses in the gallery

OOps -- I read the other message before this one -- so maybe it's all in the wrong order -- Friday -- I told you before -- you do not concentrate -- FRIDAY -- we will leave for Paris on Friday -- so you see how we will have to soon pack -- and soon pack everything in -- and when do we visit Sam -- and how will all this affect our words -- ah yes it's all a question of nerfs but I have to rush for now my [polish] sausages are burning -- speak soon -- Ax

**In a message dated 4/2/2003 1:14:42 PM Pacific Daylight Time, A@ntlworld.com writes:** cannibalism - the body -- maybe even a recipe book -- yes a 100 ways to eat you

And regarding *Souvenir* and the painting of Judith Beheading Holofernes of course it was not that the painting or my later obsession with that image of a decapitated head was as simple as one reading -- is it disgust is it doubt that in the end makes me take the sword and cut off my head -- that makes me witness what is inside -- a head that continues to re-form where I least expect it -- years later I gaze at the bloody head in all its solidity -- majestic -- eyes sealed -- nose clotted -- ice lips later whispering its fragility -- like the head of the story -- I peer in at the head -- Quinn's<sup>1</sup> frozen head suspended in ice I am at any moment subject to death -- at any moment the plug can be pulled -- the sustaining electricity if cut

space. And whatever scientific claims or huge door receipts the anatomist/artist Gunther von Hagens makes for displaying his plastinated, flayed corpses and body parts, the viewing public are as fascinated by the aesthetic splendour of our insides, as they are by our anatomical reality. 'We should not fear what lies beneath the skin', von Hagens says, 'we should revel in its magnificence' (Channel 4, *The Anatomists*, 26/3/2002). Von Hagens is not the first to get aroused by the inside of the human body, an emotion traditionally reserved for exterior beauty:

Open the so-called body and spread out all its surfaces; not only the skin with each of its folds, wrinkles, scars, with its great velvet planes, and contiguous to that, the scalp and its mane of hair, the tender pubic fur, nipples, nails, hard transparent skin under the heel, the light frills of the eyelids, set with lashes--but open and spread, expose the labia majora, so also the labia minora with their blue network bathed in mucus, dilate the diaphragm of the anal sphincter, longitudinally cut and flatten out the black conduit of the rectum, then the colon, then the caecum, now a ribbon with its surface all striated and polluted with shit; as though your dressmakers scissors were opening the leg of an old pair of trousers . . . (Lyotard, 1993: 1)

*Souvenir* and *Concupiscence* also challenge Levitical and Christian notions of death and decay, defying the barriers between the sacred and the defiled, between inside and outside, between living and dead. The reader can never be sure where these borders lie. And, like Marianne's lover's head, the dead books continue chattering to me from their filing cabinet grave. In *Souvenir* Marianne attempts to prevent the death of her passion by decapitating the head of the lover at passion's climax---killing in order to preserve life. In

will dissolve form -- returns us back to shit to liquid blood to fluid -- an ear dissolving a crying right eye a brain uncoupled -- Mary Shelly living in my outhouse with her monster --

*The cut did not appear as suffering but as part of an intense concentration. We had confronted our own violence.*

*And a silence.*

*Let me say that this intensity was maybe the subject of her work.<sup>2</sup>*

And yes -- maybe this story this souvenir has now become ours maybe I will in the end take your head when we meet -- who can know -- maybe the story will re-enact itself --

J and me discussed just that only yesterday -- as I sliced up the lamb for lunch -- prepared it for the pot -- yes en's sister and I prepared lunch and discussed the possibilities of one fiction replacing another and to what end will this tale between us be taken --

Yes as I sliced up the lamb -- a thigh a shoulder a neck -- as I sweated the onion added the herbs -- the table dressed with flowers and candles -- you know my need for ritual -- we found ourselves discussing the possibilities of our forthcoming meeting [mine and yours that is] *Souvenir* as a cannibalist tale -- and all the possibilities of obsession -- of love -- turned into or

*Concupiscence*, the death, loss of a mother figure, urges Encarna to give life to the Holy Mothers. The wooden effigy of the symbolic mother becomes torn flesh as Encarna pushes herself inside by the way she was first born into the world. Marianne may have attempted to immortalise her love, but the inevitable cycles of birth and death, life and decay, are unstoppable both in the tale and in the writing itself. And yet in the end, the books give themselves up to boredom and disgust; they must be killed off in order that I may continue to experience the pleasure of writing; the boredom and disgust of the contained objects---the books. The process of containment always kills something of the writing. *Souvenir's* tale, echoes the dilemma of this writing process, questions desire itself, how to secure what is always escaping, slipping away. The relationship we have with the text parallels the relationship Marianne has with the other's body.

We can never truly escape the ambiguous relationship we have with our own and the other's body, the paramount fear being death itself. In *Souvenir*, death is presented as the ultimate sensual experience, both for the killed and the killer. Marianne attempts to capture her passion for the other, fix the moment, by preserving his decapitated head (the locus of her affection). The head in turn becomes its own body, constantly defying Marianne's attempts to hold onto the moment of pure pleasure: at the point of orgasm pleasure dies and the process of desire has to begin again. There have



taken to its limits through cannibalism - well the Russian Chikatilo began it -- all those tales of people turned into sausages -- the Russian cannibal Chikatilo for example -- in the court room sitting like a twitching deranged bird looking as if he is still out there in the woods now sitting there in his cage -- yes they constructed a cage for the court room to keep him separate from the distraught mothers -- mothers who had lost their children to his body -- what had once belonged to their bodies had now been ingested and passed through this small man -- fifty-five people in all -- children young women and men -- despite a pantomime of madness they declared him to be sane before they condemned him to death<sup>3</sup> --

But serial killers aside -- there are now an increasing amount of people not only involved in relations on e-mail but advertising themselves on line to be eaten or wanting to eat an/other -- yes -- a man puts an ad in on-line saying he wanted to kill someone and then eat them -- another man amazingly writes back and says -- OK let's do it -- and so they meet -- discuss and plan it all and then when the moment arrives they spend the evening together -- the one who is to die cuts off his penis (although it may have been the one who is not to die -- well that might have made it more interesting) the penis is then cooked and they eat it together before the one kills the other -- the room prepared with candles -- they get a little intoxicated with margaritas --

always existed cultures and philosophies that celebrated death as a positive climax to life. It was the accepted Cynic practice (those abject philosophers whose lifestyle involved living on the edge of society and courting indecency, defilement and death) to commit suicide in old age (Dudley, 1937: 180). Michel Foucault provides a more recent philosophy towards dying; he saw death as the supreme human experience, to be prepared for carefully and be savoured. We should organise death, he said, 'bit by bit, decorate it, arrange the details, find the ingredients, imagine it, choose it, get advice on it, shape it into a work without spectators, one which exists only for oneself, just for that shortest little moment of life.' For Foucault, to die is to experience the 'formless form of an absolutely simple pleasure,' a 'limitless pleasure whose patient preparation, with neither rest nor predetermination, will illuminate the entirety of your life' (Foucault, in Miller, 2000: 55).

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The symbolism of the headless god Acéphale may seem the reverse metaphor of the bodiless head in *Souvenir*, yet in terms of the writing there is much in Kathy Acker's treatise *Bodies of Work* to support my own analysis. Acéphale's centre is the colon, a labyrinth in which the self becomes lost and subject to chance, fortune or chaos. Our lives are no more than a journey

margaritas and sleeping pills for the one to die -- yes margaritas I like the name the salt around the rim of the cold glass an olive stuffed with anchoa a little fromage on the side maybe -- a cigarette a bath a foot massage a laugh a story or two before the penis is shared roasted or barbecued or is your preference with mash and gravy -- with a pint or with a nice rioja -- the table laid with 10 candles a candelabra reflected in the window made it look like a promenade let's say like Christmas eve but for sure like romance -- the body then frozen to be eaten at leisure -- human bones discovered in his trash can --

And how many dishes did he make of him before they found the small skull abandoned dug into the garden like a bulb waiting for winter to pass for the sun the turn him into a daff -- you smell of daffs he said -- on the journey home they were in close proximity for the first time and he said -- you smell of daffodils -- it's a deterrent he said -- whoever ate a daffodil --

And then I recalled as a child being at my uncle's home -- the adults laughing and talking too loudly in the nearby kitchen me easing myself away wandering the rooms of the house amusing myself in the unfamiliarity of the place -- flicking the TV channels until I found something that demanded my eye -- a man being eaten -- yes being made into a soup -- some lost tribe of somewhere eating their elder

through a labyrinth from which there is no escape except our ultimate death and decay. In the case of cannibalism the body goes by the way of all the other refuse in our lives: 'A colon's end is shit. Not transcendence, but waste. Beyond meaning. For the head is no longer the head [as Marianne will discover]; we live, perceive, and speak, in our bodies and through our bodies' (Acker, 1977: 91). Acker's labyrinth is really the labyrinth of language, language she wants to begin to find, for the sake of love: 'because Dionysus, more powerful than my lover, wanted me, fucked me, then slew me' (Acker, 1977: 91).

The artistic experience in both writing and the visual arts is, Kristeva maintains, 'rooted in the abject it utters and by the same token purifies.' She describes the abject as a 'violence of mourning for an "object" that has always already been lost.' Abjection is the alchemy artists use to transgress repression and taboos, and to transform the process of sanctifying dead things into the start of new life and new significance (Kristeva, 1982: 15-17). Artistic endeavour will do more than survive the collapse of old religions and philosophies; it is Art's ability to challenge outmoded dogmas that give it its very purpose.

Kristeva identifies three categories of abomination presented in the Judaic and Christian concern with separating the pure and sacred from the defiled: food taboos; corporeal alternation and its climax--death; and the feminine body and incest (Kristeva, 1982: 93). Pre-symbolic language

after cremation -- the corpse dismembered the bones collected ground into a powder mixed with a little barley -- fed to the family a circle of eager lips -- and they all looked so happy so intoxicated with him and I felt very moved by this -- yes people often say oh I could eat you up and there they were doing just that -- yes in that film it seemed like a very loving act -- but of course in the case of Chikatilo his face his absence had a different impact and I see that in his case he took everything away from those women who lost their children from their bodies to his --

Yes -- yes of course I re-read Sam's Texts For Nothing -- words pulled from here and there . . .

*An instant and then they close again, to look inside the head [my love you know me and the head my obsession now turned to you to yours -- you will give it to me -- send me your head and I will take it for walks like Nerval took his fish] to try and see inside [perfect] to look for me there, to look for someone there, in the silence of quite a different justice, [. . .] [oh] To breathe is all that is required, [. . .] I catheterise myself, unaided, with trembling hands [as she ventures further inside his urethra] bent double in the public piss house, under the cover of my cloak, people take me for a dirty old man. He'd nourish me, he had a friend a pork butcher, he'd ram the ghost back down my gullet with*

(pre the symbolism of Aristotle, Leviticus and St Paul) is a form of writing that trespasses those taboos in language that have turned woman's body into an abomination. Kristeva suggests that,

it would be a matter of separating oneself from the phantasmic power of the mother, that archaic Mother Goddess who actually haunted the imagination of a nation at war with the surrounding polytheism. [. . .] a separation between feminine and masculine as foundation for the organisation that is "clean and proper," "individual" and, one thing leading to another, signifiable, legislatable, subject to law and morality. (Kristeva, 1982: 99-101)

*Écriture feminine* returns to this place of abomination (childbirth, menses, death, putrefaction), using it as a visual (and visceral) language, a starting point. *Écriture Feminine* represents a return to the mother's body from which Leviticus represented the image of birth as 'a violent act of expulsion through which the nascent body tears itself away from the matter of maternal insides' (Kristeva, 1982: 99-101). The Levitical child is to start its life cleansed (and circumcised) from the impurity and violence of the woman's body, a body associated with decay:

The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic. In order to confirm that it should endure no gash other than that of circumcision, equivalent to sexual separation and/or separation from the mother. Any other mark would be the sign of belonging to the impure, the non-separate, the non-symbolic, the non-holy. (Kristeva, 1982: 102)

Like many of my sources (male and female), I hold to the view that prevailing literary trends and pre-occupations with categorisation, those dictated by commercial presses and market forces, are

*black pudding.*<sup>4</sup>

Is she to make him into puddings all colours all the colours the flavours with sweet prunes yes she will lay him over the stones -- she may even cook him soon over the graves in Montparnasse where she is staying -- maybe where they are to meet -- those two -- no coincidence she will end up meeting him next to the cemetery between the cemetery and the Gare Tour and she said forget the Eiffel Tower I only want to wander the graves with you and so she suggests that's where they meet or is it now he who suggested that they picnic there on the graves with a few stones -- his hands always in her -- in her mouth as they find the names of the dead Dada yes he is a Tzara man the feel of their legs open over the motion of the rocking horse and so on and so she has to go -- again she leaves him with a last words from Sam -- *I confuse them words and tears, my words are my tears, my eyes my mouth. [. . .] inside an imaginary head*<sup>5</sup>xxxx

**12th of March 03 11:27:34 PM**  
**A@ntlworld.com writes: Subject: A**  
 and M as pronouns

oh forgot -- we should get to our hotel by 7pm -- I still need a phone number or name and where shall I meet you -- what if we get there and miss the other -- Ok got to goooooo -- *kisses where you need them most your own sucky Moll xx*

led by the logical and the symbolic. Such pre-occupations often lead us back to the dominant discourse, the linear, upholding ideas of truth, God and sameness. In contrast, so called 'experimental texts' or works such as *écriture feminine*, maybe seen by those in commerce as delinquent, nonsensical, indulgent, unwanted and unmarketable, and are therefore given marginal status. I have already linked *écriture feminine* to the fluidity of the feminine libido. Austrian artist Herman Nitsch drew from the Futurist sentiment, 'you must paint, as drunkards sing and vomit sounds, noises and smells', in the creation of his visceral work: ritual animal slaughter, disembowelling and pouring buckets of blood and entrails over nude actors. Nitsch's work represents the brutal and abject side of human nature (O'Dell, 1998: 6). In Nitsch's work we witness a return to the ancient religious rituals that so fascinated Bataille:

The Mithraic cult of the sun led to a very widespread religious practice: people stripped in a kind of pit that was covered in a wooden scaffold, on which a priest slashed the throat of a bull; thus they were suddenly doused with hot blood, to the accompaniment of the bull's boisterous struggle and bellowing--a simple way of reaping the moral benefits of the blinding sun. Of course the bull himself is also an image of the sun, but only with his throat slit. (Bataille, 1985: 57)

In Nitsch's work, animal carcasses substitute for human bodies. It is his duty, Nitsch says, to present the truth and subvert modern religious pietism to reclaim our visceral gore. Christian taboos and prohibitions, for example plugging the body's orifices following death, reinforce the barrier between our inner and outer

from [A@ntlworld.com](mailto:A@ntlworld.com) - 18th  
 december 2002 - 6.18am - Subject:  
 milk and bodily fluids -

dear one -- are you awake -- I am  
 disorientated at the moment because  
 you are away -- I know you wrote from  
 Germany but when do you get to Paris -  
 - now there are two sets of e-mails  
 waiting -- have I said this before and oh  
 doesn't that sound all so bourgeois --  
 and that reminds me that I read the  
 other day that Habermass said -- well  
 something like -- *the epistolary genre  
 marked out the first bourgeois novel*<sup>6</sup> --  
 and I know this is e-mail but it also has  
 the feel of letters well in that no one  
 else receives these words but you -- we  
 maintain authorship but we can talk  
 about that another time 00 -- I have no  
 time to go into that now -- no these e-  
 mails are not open to the web or what  
 ever it is they call it these days -- yes  
 the other day I also read somewhere --  
*there are no more boundaries only  
 connections* -- not that I agree  
 necessarily but here I am connecting  
 with you 00 --- well in that there are the  
 small messages we send daily or while  
 we can while you are away and there is  
 this big message of 15,000 words and  
 still growing by the day -- yes and this I  
 will send you when you return home --  
 it is also a strange feeling that we are  
 now for a while at least in the same  
 time zone and so when I write you are  
 awake -- anyway --

to completely change the subject again

worlds, and also between the human world  
 and the abject world of other animals.  
 Nitsch uses Christian symbolism as an  
 ironic statement to negate religious  
 obsession with the unclean and the  
 disgusting. In contrast to the Christian  
 custom of sealing the body, the Ancient  
 Greeks allowed the 'living vital sap' to  
 leave the body unhindered, so celebrating  
 the exchange between life and death. Like  
 Nitsch, Joseph Beuys also used symbolism  
 (such as sculptures made from animal fat)  
 to challenge early Christian practices of  
 defying death (Duncan,1995: 85). As a  
 recent television programme noted:

Many modern artists take us into the territory  
 that disgusts us. They look behind the scenes of  
 our sanitised, packaged lives and face us with  
 the bloody, dirty, smelly reality. For them,  
 rubbish, sex, ageing flesh, slaughter, birth and  
 death are art. (Channel 4, *Anatomy of Disgust*,  
 29/8/2000)

The abject (shit and bodily fluids as art  
 medium; the use of the artist's own body as  
 a canvas; the artist's private life as the  
 subject) became a dominant theme during  
 the second half of the last century. The so-  
 called YBAs (young British artists)  
 benefited from an acceleration of abject art  
 as a saleable commodity, not to mention the  
 success of the artist as celebrity. The image  
 of artist Mark Quinn's head sculpted from  
 his own frozen blood (Saatchi Gallery,  
 2003) brought the image of Marianne's  
 lover's head to life. In *Souvenir* Marianne  
 lifts the frozen head from the winter earth  
 where she has repeatedly attempted to  
 bury it. Decay is also featured prominently  
 in much contemporary art. For example,  
 Damien Hurst, in the installation of a  
 putrefying cow's head in a large glass case,

-- yes to get back to the quotation of fluids and milk and taboo -- of all I sent you yesterday from Gina Pane's work - 0-0- my usual digressions --

*the rejection of milk mixed with blood or its absorption through the wounded mouth [. . .] Le Lait, Chaud (warm milk), Transfert (Transfer) causes a sentiment of unease in the viewer, [. . .] nutrition reminiscent of childhood [. . .] simultaneously suggestive of death.*<sup>7</sup>

yes in relation to all I began yesterday bodily fluids as taboo -- as disgust -- I wanted to continue where I finished off in telling you about emma -- and how she got mad as hell one day --

Yes rather -- how she came to my defence one day -- well just a few years back we were together in rather an oversized room in some writing class or other when the teacherman pretending to be a writerman said -- I've asked my wife about these words -- my partner to be correct -- I showed them to my woman and she said there are just too many fluids in A's writing -- there are just too many fluids for one woman -- and he said all this through his wet mouth his lips were shaky -- yes Moinous -- his lips were moving with woman's words working him like the ventriloquist dummy as that's how he sounded -- and when he had finished about the fluids and the disgust he felt - - all the disgust he felt for women's effluvia flowing through my words he

accelerates the cycles between life and death (Saatchi Gallery, 2003). As the flies hatch from maggots in the carcass, they fly toward an Insectocutor and are instantly fried. In Sam Taylor-Wood's *Still Life* (Hayward Gallery, 2002), a video projection of a classically framed perfect bowl of fruit, slowly transforms over a duration of three and a half minutes through liquefaction into dust, before reforming again.

Many of these abject art images are able to generate paradoxical feelings of both disgust and desire simultaneously. Quinn's new-born baby's head (Liverpool Tate, 2002) is frozen from its own liquidised placenta. The placenta is normally discarded at birth as extraneous, even associated with the disgusting aspects of childbirth. And yet animals, and some women, eat the placenta because it contains essential nutrients that accelerate the womb's contraction back to a healthy state. Gazing closely at Quinn's placenta baby head behind its sanitised and refrigerated glass container, one sees its frosted surface resembling a raspberry ice, evoking the desire to lick.

—

Examples of self-reflexive art such as Tracy Emin's installation of a tent, in which she has embroidered the names of all the men she claims to have slept with, raises a particular problem for those artists and writers who introduce the personal into their work. This problem becomes acute,

just wouldn't look me in the red eye yet continued speaking through this woman's voice speaking like the women had demonised his body and he spoke of my words with her voice deep in his body her words coming from his mouth --

And do you know I was exhausted by his her voice coming at me through him I don't like too much horror in a man and then I was silent for moment but only because I was brewing up like a good thick coffee pot on the stove and I was smelling real appetising and delicious and hot and making my own mouth water with anticipation and I wanted to milk his man's woman's mouth -- yes -- I wanted to cream it thick and three sugar his mouth with my hot colostrum yellow milk that's what was brewing -- syrupy coffee and my own hot milk -- my new milk my most special first milk -- see how generous I can be -- I wanted to give him my very concentrated milk full of goodness and antibodies -- and I did not want to stop there -- for her in him I wanted to give my blood to save her from death in his body -- I can give a good transfusion -- a bag full of blood just for her in him -- the darkest blood I could find in me thick and rich almost blue in its redness -- and I wanted to fill him [them] more

you see what he didn't know -- what he didn't see or realise -- that while he spoke in the tangled tongues of women -- too afraid to claim his disgust for

especially for women, when they discuss intimate details of their life, particularly the abject side of their life. The charge is frequently made that the work indulges in the therapeutic and the confessional. But Emin surely has the last laugh, not because her work has given her celebrity status and vulgar amounts of money, but because she has created a myth. It is irrelevant whether she really slept with these people or not; this is a work of fiction in which Emin creates from the personal, the universal-- we are all implicated in her work. These issues cannot be ignored in relation to my own work. Are my e-mails to Federman real or not? The reaction of certain people to my e-mail fictions ranges from amusement, to intrigue (I want to be let in on this), to embarrassment (is she engaging in some sordid cyber affair?). Well, am I? Are the e-mails fictional? Does the Federman I write to really exist? Is it possible in e-mail for the author to truthfully answer this question? Is it not rather that this question brings the work into being---the process of oscillation between the question and answer that is always slipping away: who am I writing too, who is writing you, never arriving? Such questions propel the work forward and constantly back on itself, the pages are filled with this uncertainty. Language creating its own meaning as it goes along. The exchange *is* the work, the uncertainty *is* the work. The moment Angela or Federman (A and M) appear in the e-mail they become no more than fictional characters, the universal I and you. It is not the job of the writer to present facts or original truths

himself his loathing of women's flesh and milk and blood -- I thought of St Paul and all those biblical abominations that started all this loathing of women in men as if we are immund unclean like the unbled pig and the broken hoof and the carrion -- all those Levitical abominations -- I'll go find the book and write it down for you --

*this chapter confirms this view -- that any secretion or discharge, anything that leaks out of the feminine or masculine body defiles (Kristeva) -- If she gives birth to a daughter, the girl "shall be unclean for two weeks, as in her separation". To purify herself, the mother must provide a burnt offering and a sin offering. Thus, on her part, there is impurity, defilement, blood, and purifying sacrifice. On the other hand, if she gives birth to a male, "the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised". Circumcision would thus separate one from maternal, feminine impurity and defilement . . .*<sup>8</sup>

And then I thought about the thing I mentioned the other day to you -- it led me back to the question of Jew as immund -- the Jew as unclean -- the Yid as gentle non-violent -- as a feminine fluid voice castrated by the war by not being able to take care of their families or to save them -- in turn becoming masculine violent -- well all that Dworkin wrote about the Holocaust<sup>9</sup> -- and the relationship between these two voices in your Tioli -- the hard edged

(the myth that is autobiography) but to make the story convincing. As Federman and myself constantly remind each other, this story's becoming so good I'm almost beginning to believe it! 'Become your own myth', as Chris Kraus tells us (Kraus, 220):

Autobiographies and self-portraits are always distortions of reality because they are created on the basis of a memory or image [. . .] Self-reflexive autobiographical fiction always speaks the truth about its own fraudulence, or rather denounces the lie of reality in order to assert the truth of fiction. (Federman, 1993: 91 and 102)

Joseph Beuys is one of those artists who succeeded in turning his whole career into a myth. The fact and fiction about his life became inseparable. As a radio operator in the *Luftwaffe*, his plane was shot down over the Crimea. In a coma for twenty days, Beuys claims that he was rescued by a tribe of Tartars who wrapped him in sheep's fat and felt to keep him warm. For years Beuys perpetuated the myth (or truth, for we cannot know) that his survival at the hands of the Tartars was responsible for the recurring themes of fat and felt in his work. Beuys' work added a new, previously uncredited significance to the materials he worked with, adding to them the further weight of this narrative. The authenticity of Beuys' story is irrelevant, for it was part of the mythology surrounding Beuys and part of Beuys' mythology about himself that gave the work its seduction (Kuspit, 1995: 30-31). As in Hannah Wilke's videotape, *Intercourse* (1977), the audience are left to eavesdrop on and decipher a series of intimate phone messages from friends, lovers, and family. Wilke then undresses to reveal her body inscribed with the names



masculine voice of the paratroopers the war machines the book written for the guys -- in contrast to the gentle fluid relentless voice that meanders and carries the text along -- the story passed down and along in uncertainty ...

but that aside ...

to return to what I set off to tell you --

Do you know he never had the woman's silken guts to ever even say the word sperm during our whole conversation about my words -- [the teacherman pretending to talk through a woman -- remember where we were ] -- no not once no not even once in that dirty blue conversation did he ever find the courage to say sperm even though he was thinking sperm -- even though he was ready for sperm getting ready on me for that moment of come with his talk of my fluids -- not even one tiny seed not one micro scopic dancing sperm no he was impotent in those days and he didn't know didn't have the courage to say --

instead that teacherman hiding in a woman's voice -- said no -- NO -- enough fluids -- write something else instead -- yes write something else for me -- *for me* -- and I was boiling up but not quite ready yet -- quiet in that space I left in that gap in my language when Emma -- without me at first seeing -- without me realising -- while I had almost forgotten she was beside me

of those who have left the messages, then carefully erases all the names from her skin.

Returning to the issues posed by Emin's tent: 'If women have failed to make "universal" art because we're trapped within the "personal",' Wilke says, 'why not universalize the "personal" and make it the subject of our art?' (Wilke, in Kraus, 1997: 217) Wilke questioned the role of the personal in art, right up to and including her own death when she produced a series of photographs of her body; abject and dying from cancer. Emin, Wilke, Gina Pane, Sam Taylor-Wood and others, have all made themselves the subject and object of their work. They have created myths of their own lives, and in so doing have wiped away those arbitrary and capricious truths that separate fact from fiction. So, here, for example:

I am reminded of looking at a photograph of Sam Taylor-Wood. [. . .] The pose is confident and self-assured; the eyes meet ours; a hand rests against a slim hip and grips a cable release [. . .] the clothes are simple, sharp [. . .] She is also holding a hare in her hand, which adds to the simple punning of the title, *Self Portrait in a Single Breasted Suit with Hare*, referring to the terrible effects following her treatment for [breast] cancer. (Millar, 2002: no page number)

A recurring theme in my work is to juxtapose the abject with the sacred. Like Taylor-Wood and Bueys' hare, Nitsch and Hurst's animal crucifixions, and Pane's self-harm with thorns, I use such images in my writing to confront those societal taboos that prohibit us from speaking (even thinking) of the abject extremes most of us only encounter in our dreams and nightmares. All of us, no matter how pious,

-- she just raised herself before him -- raised herself before him on to the desk pulled up her shirt -- yes just opened herself up fully right there before us all she filled him good and proper with a warm glut of her own young milk -- right in his mouth -- right in his mouth - - full on and he nearly choked on her milk [when he'd only just gotten used to refusing mine] he nearly choked on what she put in his mouth -- and the more he continued defying her and spoke the more she / I leaked until we made an orgy of milk you see that's the effect all this censorship and her love has on me -- it makes me let down everywhere -- wet milky words gluey honey dipped blood stained sweet so much

write me of what you have seen out there --

and yes -- on the Saturday of the weekend we meet I cannot think of anything nicer than putting a pebble onto Sam -- sucked first of course -- I will bring a special one for my special one -- bring the grave plan -- you know it is not so easy to locate him among all those overdressed beds --

What do you do with the talc?

**18th of March 03 8:45:23 AM**  
**a@ntlworld.com writes:**

**Subject: Maps plans and metros**

have a fascination with the abject, an interest heightened by the fact that something is considered sinful in the first place. Bataille maintains that taboos are put in place precisely to be broken: the invitation to achieve perfection also being the invitation to sin. In the case of Rasputin, for example, his own sins were an essential mark of his holiness. As Kristeva puts it, the fall *is* the work of God (Kristeva, 1982: 4).

But real abject evil cannot always be adequately represented; it is often beyond representation, a point Slavoj Zizek makes when he says that 'what art demonstrates, is the Idea's *failure* to signify itself directly.' The real cannot be signified; like the Holocaust, it is always a failure in that it can never be fully shared (Zizek, 1997: 216).

And as Susan Stewart tells us in *Crimes of Writing*:

The real is a trauma that cannot be spoken, there are no images no symbolic order for it. [. . .] when a narrative seeks to represent the trauma, it is forced to intensify the stakes of narrative convention, to continue to seek new formal means of representing pain, accident, disruption. (Stewart, 1994: 280-281)

The fact that certain events are unspeakable, however, does not prevent artists and writers from attempting to find new ways to represent them. Jenny Holzer's work *Lustmort* is written on the skin of a woman who has been raped. It articulates the experience from the perspectives of the perpetrator, the victim, and the witness. In Taylor-Wood's *Hysteria*, made after she was diagnosed with breast cancer, a silent video is witnessed with the soundless image of Taylor-Wood's head lurching between screaming, laughing and

The map expert says that Rue Du Montparnasse crosses Boulevard Montparnasse in the middle it has a metro station at each end of it -- the Rue Notre Dame des Champs at the North end and Edgar Quinet at the South cemetery end -- although to get to your hotel we get the metro from Montparnasse Bienvenue Station to St Sulpice only 2 stops -- got that -- too much info' for a Sunday morning if you ask me -- yes we have travelled everywhere this morning without getting out of bed -- after 3 nights we will be experts of the Parisian Streets -- well you of course are so I won't tell my granny how to suck snails --

I wish I could bring you a souvenir --

OK

Almost finished packing

**Date:** Thu, 14 Nov 2002 14:40:39 - 0500

**To :** [m@aol.com](mailto:m@aol.com) **FROM :** [A@ntlworld.com](mailto:A@ntlworld.com) **Subject:** Tioli and the masturbatory gesture

I am going to listen to Tioli<sup>10</sup> again to hear more carefully and try and work out what I am trying to say here -- it is the first time I have had a chance to listen all the way through to the end -- yes I put on headphones to listen to the audio you sent so your words were close

crying. With body mutilation also, artists (as well as those who engage in self-harm outside of art) are often looking for a language outside of the formal conventions of linear narrative, the attempt to express the unnameable and the unspeakable. Abjection attempting to make visible what cannot be seen or said, an oscillation 'between'. In the same way, children, before being introduced to the symbolic world of adult meaning, exist in this 'in-between' place where things are not signified.

Clément is being sardonic when she tells us that 'It is not normal to swallow the spittle of the sick, to refuse to wash your hair, to use excrement as a plaything. It is not normal to regress. [. . .] To take flight is child's play. But when you become an adult, you don't play anymore. You no longer have the right. Come on don't be a child!' (Clément and Kristeva, 2001:133) But there have always been those who refuse to grow up and, instead, have embraced the abject as a virtue, even a form of high rhetoric (for example, Diogenes pissing, passing wind, masturbating and defecating in public; Hipparchia, the Cynic wife of Crates licking clean the purulent sores of the sick). Here we witness Clément's 'power of the sacred', that which she says 'transforms mud into gold and pus into nectar' (Clément and Kristeva, 2001: 121). It is this very aspect of Federman's writing that drew me to his work for he is entirely comfortable playing with his 'wordshit'. And although overflowing at times in a carnival of sperm and the masculine banter

inside my head -- and then I write this all very fast -- and I want this writing to be very immediate so I can see later what connections I make very spontaneously -- and it occurred to me as I listen that your voice begins to break down more and more so that in the end it is almost turning in on itself - - almost turning in on itself and rumbling to itself -- and as I listen I write I am turning in on myself as when I first began to write -- when I first began to write my children slept one either side of me -- and how I realise because of the time difference between us that I always write when you sleep -- and you write when I sleep -- of course I have said this many times I wrote that down as I listened and how I first began writing while my children slept -- curled tight either side of my body -- and I wrote in time with their breathing and I wrote in time with their breath and I wrote with their sweaty skin next to mine and I wrote inside their fitful dreams inside their curled fists and flickering eyes -- and then as I wrote I heard in my ears your voice -- *guys slept clinging to each other -- all fell to the floor -- go to sleep like babies -- like angels and we all had beautiful dreams in our heads we all had blue dreams like waves --*

Yes all throughout that section -- where Frenchy plays sax in front of Charlie Parker -- *Remembering Charlie Parker or how to get it out of your system --* the voice at first seem to ejaculate --

of men, his voice is entirely feminine in its relentlessness and digression:

Incredible the mass labour of the fat ugly masturbators of the 82nd Airborne Division! Wow have I seen gallons and gallons of sperm spilled, wasted in the nights of North Carolina, and tons and tons of sheets stained, yellowed by the juice of those guys of the 82nd! Kilos and kilos! Piles and piles! Truckloads and truckloads of sheets full of vicious and doubtful traces and circles [ . . . ] Ah! What feasts of masturbation! What monstrous machinery of erections rushing in motion, in rhythm, all at the same staccato jerky beat! [ . . . ] What frenzy of beat-up flesh and torn muscles! Juicy and hideous mass shrivelling of greedy stiff pricks in madness. What a fiesta. (Federman, 1997: no page numbers)

yes -- the voice ejaculates and then finally it is spent it turns in on itself as if it no longer cares if anyone is listening as if it has stopped addressing its reader -- the voice has forgotten there ever was anyone listening out for it but still it won't stop and still it is relentless -- muttering to itself -- a hypnotic hum -- like the voice of psychosis of the years I spent as a nurse on my first ward -- I was eighteen -- thirty men pacing and muttering -- well a few were mute but everyone paced -- pounded interrupted bursts of language silent litanies to no one in particular and I'd been wondering how to find a way into this piece into talking to you about this section -- about the possible censorship you may have experienced -- I mean from the man you wrote of drinking the dish of sperm -- well in response to this -- I can see how one might turn away from that gesture and not see it as loving -- and yes I see in all the possible reactions of disgust to the piece that there is a lot of tenderness in that gesture -- the fickle and delicate borders of our intimacy which allows us to lose our disgust -- to momentarily take inside us what we would in different situations so strongly reject of the other --

*And as soon as a guy felt he was coming he would rush towards the middle of the room where a large porcelain dish had been placed on the floor on a little piece of square carpet (an oriental, he specified) to unload freely so that our sperms would mix*

*without any prejudice suddenly one of the guys (a mad cat, high as you've never seen) let out a wild cry while slapping his chest a la Tarzan picked up the plate and drank the whole mixture (the whole soup in other words) to the last drop without even stopping to take a breath of air.*

*That's friendship for you, that's real love, I said to myself. Everybody applauded in the midst of wild cries of appreciation. A friend like that is hard to find, I told myself. And he did appreciate in a very personal way he did appreciate our encouragements. You could see the way he was wiping his mouth afterwards in his eyes too and also in the way he threw his shoulders back as he tiptoed back to his corner. But after this glorious, symbolic, magnificent gesture I felt somewhat guilty to be quite frank because it occurred to me that I should have been the first to think of such a gesture.<sup>11</sup>*

-- and the voice continues on -- on until it is almost talking to itself -- the voice curled up entwined among the bodies of other men all sleeping together exhausted and spent a voice that dreams -- *blue dreams like waves* -- and then I heard the voices of the men I worked with on my very first ward when I was given my key -- a key as big as my palm -- a key that locked us all in together dangling from my hip -- men's relentless voices pacing all day muttering all day without end -- even

muttering in their sleep -- voices and men ejaculating day and night -- in time with the out-of-tune piano -- in time with limbs jerking inside crumpled suits inside bursts of laughter and anger lost like *frenchy* roaring like *frenchy* rumbling to himself like *frenchy* muttering squeaking howling whispering to himself -- voices relieving themselves turning in on themselves the sounds of ejaculation in the bathroom in the day-room under the sheets -- [like all you began with in the section *The Masturbatory Gesture* the labour of the masturbators of the 82nd Airborne Division] *Ah! What feasts of masturbation! What monstrous machinery of erections rushing in motion, in rhythm, all at the same staccato jerky beat! [ . . . ] What frenzy of beat-up flesh and torn muscles! Juicy and hideous mass shrivelling of greedy stiff pricks in madness. What a fiesta.*<sup>12</sup>

-- the digressive song the out-of-tune piano -- music off key -- like the endless meandering note of sax -- what did someone say that Tioli is one endless jazz solo -- Kraus in her book<sup>13</sup> describing Geza Roheim's comments that schizophrenia is a '*magical psychosis*'. *A search for proof. An orgy of coincidences* -- Yes -- an orgy of coincidences isn't that what these words between us have become -- this surplus energy that I experience in your writing in your words in my ears in my words before me in the cacophony of voices ejaculating language curled one into the

other like those thirty men pacing the corridors muttering from the floor from their beds receiving voices from the radio from the TV from the toilet cisterns from the washing machines --

Oh and en asked me yesterday -- very casually -- are there things you would not ask M -- and I said yes of course -- things that are to do with other people in his life -- things that effect others in his life -- things I maybe sense he doesn't want to talk about when I ask something -- yes sometimes he ignores things I ask -- well occasionally -- or maybe he forgets -- who knows -- but that's ok -- well -- yes maybe we should of course have our limits -- and don't feel you have to tell me anything just because I ask -- and as for me and you determining how our relationship is different -- that sounds like a cop-out -- but I guess you have to tell me the story first -- yes tell me that story of D some day if and when we ever meet and I will tell you how our relationship is different --

much love for now Axx

**<mail to: [M@aol.com](mailto:M@aol.com)> 12/3/03  
3.24.09pm Subject: virtuo real**

well to be brief -- the situation we find ourselves in is impossible in many ways we have no home only this screen and this keyboard is nothing more than a makeshift raft and in other ways we are exiles -- and this puts such a great pressure on us when we meet -- there



is never any truth to be found and we all create our own versions of things our own fictions depending on where we are standing at a particular moment of writing -- and who knows how our fictions will differ -- I think our friendship is all there but somehow all in the wrong order so when we meet maybe we have to go back to zero but with all the knowledge of the other held inside us but we have to of course deal with all the initial awkwardness everyone feels when they don't know one another all that misunderstanding you have to get through -- maybe you cannot miss out a piece of the chain -- when it comes to relations -- maybe the body cannot be missed out -- maybe it has to be present from the start -- we shall see -- but either way the body I'm sure must have its day -- the body -- the place of both chaos and protection is not so lightly ignored -- yes maybe it will be the body that will have its say -- or not -- when the virtual two meet -- anyway -- soon we will know -- still we continue for how long I have no idea -- it is not always easy to continue and not always easy to not --

A

**In a message dated: 17/3/03 :  
10:34:19 PM [a@ntlworld.com](mailto:a@ntlworld.com)  
writes:**

**Subject:** Re: I wouldn't let a lovely girl like you walk home alone

As if home is a hotel in Paris -- and what would you suggest if I were a

lovely boy or a woman -- yes and have you ever considered the dangers of letting an old man like you walk the parisian streets alone --

you make me laugh I haven't been escorted home since I was 18 -- so instead maybe it is me who should escort you home after we meet -- yes I see the dilemma and of course you could toss a coin to decide who will meet who at whose hotel but tossing coins is not as straight forward as you might think -- for instance why should you be the one to flip -- virtually speaking that requires a great deal of trust on my part don't you think -- when from here I cannot see a damn thing of your coin or your hand or the outcome - - and then just to complicate things even further -- as you said just the other day -- you always do the opposite of what the coin tells you -- so you get heads and you take tails but how am I ever to know if you are fixing the flip to begin with to get the desired outcome -- so if you write I win [as you cannot shout a virtual flip] I come to you and you escort me home [if that is your desired outcome] and do you then always do the opposite as you said just the other day 00 of what a coin tells you -- you get heads you do tails -- and is it then I who will have to escort you home and from where -- because where the hell are we now -- here or there -- your hotel or mine -- but then to escort home of course we have to be at the others -- yes me at yours or you at mine -- do

you see --

And then what if you escort me home and I get worried for your safety and want to then escort you back and so on -- then we may indeed be up all night tooing and froing the same route [unless we agree to vary the routes for the sake of interest and keeping ourselves awake -- yes -- how many possible routes from A's to M's from M's to A's hotel]

but to go back a little -- yes -- how will I know -- I mean at what point will you reveal that you may be doing the opposite of the flip -- the decision to change heads to tails -- or will you only reveal this change to yourself so that I end up waiting for you to come to me not knowing that I am now supposed to be coming to you -- so after much waiting I will worry and come looking for you at yours -- yes -- and then you may simultaneously worry and suddenly feel a little guilty that I will not realise your change of decision and so you will come looking for me at mine to at last declare your change of mind -- do you see how potentially confusing and impossible it all is --

And yes we may end up crossing that is -- if we take the same route but that seems very unlikely when you think of all the possible routes from one hotel to another of all the possible short cuts and streets that could be taken in Paris -- for you to get to my hotel and for me

to get to your's -- yes we may cross somewhere in the middle -- me going to your's you coming to mine 00 if we take the same route that is -- if we are both walking the same route in the opposite direction it is of course possible that we may meet somewhere in the middle -- but if we take different routes [more likely] then we both get to the other's hotel and find we are both again in the wrong place and in which direction are we then to proceed -- we could meet in the middle and so only have to walk half way back alone but then as we would also of course have to get to the middle this would rather defeat the object -- assuming of course we knew where the middle was --

And maybe you should have not confessed to me just the other day this way you have of reversing the decision of a coin or maybe all that was fiction and only indeed artistic licence and maybe in real life situations like Paris [and let's not get into what is real and what isn't] you would never dream of doing the opposite of what a coin tells you -- but how can I any longer know --

And I have to tell you just to confuse and complicate things even more -- I always have tails -- yes no matter what -- I always have to have tails -- before the flip I mean I always call out tails -- so if it is heads I of course lose -- [and we haven't yet established what to lose means in this situation and may never] -- that said -- my decision to always go

for tails is no fiction -- I have to have tails -- so that means you are stuck with heads unless of course you do the opposite but then as we cannot both have the same -- do you see -- where now --

And then there's the best of 3 -- and what about the potential crack in the floorboards the lost coins the coin that falls from your hand face up -- do we count that as a decision -- or start again -- no -- it is not in anyway a straight forward solution -- and now you know this about me and I know this about you -- I mean your tendency to do the opposite and my tendency to have tails -- then how are we to reach a satisfactory agreement about who goes where and who escorts who home -- or should we meet somewhere neutral --

forget it -- A

**19th of March 03 6:05:33 AM**  
**a@ntlworld.com writes: Subject: the eiffel**

Of course -- and I'm sure your packing is beautifully anal and immaculate -- I have no idea how or when you will read this but I was in the need to write even though you are in Too-lose --

Yes the clichéd eiffel some night -- I will polish every light bulb on the way up and if I don't get that shudder in the loins when I get to the top I will ask for my money back --

And which airport do you fly into -- and  
all these plans and what if we don't  
even like the other -- what do we do  
with our bodies with the awkward gait  
the flesh the eye -- the need to eat and  
pee -- how to recognise the other  
without carnations and with bad  
eyesight -- indoors or outdoors -- corner  
of the St -- in a bathroom -- and what if  
I forget who I am -- go mute -- what if  
you are an impostor -- I want more  
weeks -- sometime too soon -- ah what  
romantic agony -- look at these  
ridiculous lines and questions -- just  
listen to us --  
be safe on your travels -- tomorrow  
then

**Mail to: Federman Raymond**

**Date: 20th of March 03 - 2:28:23 PM**

**a@ntlworld.com writes:** You are  
where ?

yes yes -- OK OK --

then meet me at the corner of Rue  
Bonaparte and St Sulpice 7.30

and don't be late -- I'll be lying on the  
ground

## Paris

attest that two were destined *to cross right by one another*. I use these words, evoking the crossing or crossroads [. . .] the point at the centre of which two trajectories come in affect, in fact, to transverse one another, or one the other, thus assuring us that the meeting indeed took place [. . .] the “crossing right by one another” of two at once finite and “perpetual” arrivals, perpetually finite, having come from who knows where and from a distance that remains unascrivable by anyone. [. . .] I hesitate to say at the instant but at the point of crossing of such a “crossing right by one another,” or, better, at the point when this crossing is so imminent that one never knows whether it is taking place, whether it will have taken place or not, and no one will ever know this, the trace itself, which was already there, imprints onto the two vestiges the form of an ellipsis, a way of being silent from which two movements take up or pursue one another “to death.”

(Jacques Derrida, 2001: 98-99)

Three boiled eggs on the table she noticed -- was it three times -- three times she wanted to tell you to ask you about the eggs the dish of eggs -- and then in the café while they moved through rooms and speech as she walked as they left the café she saw the egg -- and maybe what was unnameable between them was now caught in a soft boiled light in that dish of eggs all they could not express or hold on to -- yes maybe all that they found together over breakfast that morning before they left again was held in that small glass dish of eggs -- held in the pink brown colour the colour of their patience -- the patience she felt from the egg -- yes the act of waiting they had endured for months all the waiting they had endured and would soon return to like patience like the egg was never far away --

Not friends you'd said -- something other than before -- not lovers -- no -- don't call us friends -- nothing will do -- and now the eggs she saw in the dish blurred together ran together two forming one other -- a third egg -- no need of words -- and what love she felt in that dish of eggs -- fully present your body had the same solidity and the contradiction of something both held and formless that morning as they like the eggs just waited -- they were patient with the other that morning -- just listening out -- just waiting -- being --

Be careful C had said once -- writing of eggs -- they have such a way of returning women back to a form of essentialism that can be restricting or clichéd -- but the thing that she had noticed those days they were together -- that had moved her most those mornings over tea and red juice you'd asked her to sip -- were the dish of eggs -- she had wanted to touch them as she heard you speak -- she wanted to go over to the glass bowl and take all three eggs in turn in her hand -- but she doubted they were real -- she was being shown something she was not to touch she had to believe without touch -- she wanted to see the hen that had laid them she wanted to see the dung she had laid them into -- the sounds she was capable of as they were squeezed from her body -- sitting now -- the eggs long forgotten from the feather from the scratching of corn --



now for that moment looking almost sacrosanct in the early spring light -- the croissants the jugs of coffee -- and while they were in motion through the terrace through the dark panelled interior later when descending the stairs like the cubist Picasso no it was Duchamp's nude descending a staircase -- no matter -- she saw herself open out descending the stairs again towards you towards the eggs placed now almost exactly at the centre of the table --

This time she spoke -- spoke thinking that she was not making any sound almost didn't hear herself and then heard herself say -- look -- look at the eggs -- yes as she spoke she thought she believed that you would not hear -- maybe not -- no not that you would not hear but that you would choose not to hear -- you had this way of selecting out what she said of not answering sometimes of not picking up on things she'd say so when she'd said look at the eggs when she'd said that -- her voice almost foolish -- look at the eggs --

look at the egg -- she heard herself say -- doubting she had spoken or made herself heard -- instead she saw you turn to her slightly to the left your left ear moved toward the sound she doubted and then too quickly moved away again in motion again a few words scattered over the left shoulder -- yes yes they leave them out -- the eggs -- sometimes I peel one for breakfast -- have one with a little salt --

And then the moment was gone the eggs gone the descent of the stairs all they had said -- gone -- the way she had spoken half believing she was not making any sound -- gone -- the way you responded your face turned away from her the softness of that moment had all the possibilities of the yolk hidden at the centre beneath the pink brown shell -- what was not seen -- and she wanted to stop you there -- she wanted to find your hand and say stop -- she wanted to turn to stop to say -- let me take an egg -- let's go back inside -- let me give you an egg -- let's go back and look at them together without words -- as they kept moving forward as they keep moving towards leaving towards leaving the café towards parting again -- she wanted to say stop -- just then -- just then to say -- No -- I want to go back inside -- inside to the table inside the dark room I want to feel to give you the coolness of the egg -- I want to take one to see if it is real -- to close my fingers over it lick it put my ear to it put one into each of our pockets to carry it as we walk rediscover what we have ignored since a child -- I came all this way to see an egg for the first time to want to take one for a souvenir -- a French egg -- a French hard boiled egg --

And later that morning when they'd picnicked at the graveyard when they'd put pebbles onto Sam she'd wished maybe then that she could have taken the egg like a sucking stone from her pocket -- found in you a little salt -- opened the egg cracking it carefully on the marble bed -- fed you right there right there among the dates and names the wilted rose the inscriptions of angels the sound of gravel beneath their feet --

She writes always winters but from this winter a spring appears --

In the café -- let's go back -- yes let's go back inside the café where I'll leave them where they'll abandon the eggs in Paris -- let's go back a while -- in the café you said --

No --

In the café you said -- I like French bread -- in the café they went they walked -- no a dance you said

In the café they go towards safety towards hot water the waters about to break -- waiters with white cloths over their arms everyone prepared attentive -- the table prepared with salt sugar cubes in a bowl everything to sustain them the eggs and then the bread always -- always the bread --

They advance to safety out of a winter into spring so soon -- so strong the sun rearranged itself especially well that morning -- she -- A is sitting to the left of the sun opposite but slightly to the left of you -- that is slightly to the left of M -- off centre soon to catch up -- pouring hot water -- the body always ahead of her -- attempting to make her first sound form a first breath -- centred now she had no recollection of how she looks how she looks at you she has to imagine you can see her that she is talking that you can see she is talking she hears her mouth find sound she does not recognise as if - - as if -- inside she has shut her eyes taken by impulse the first piece of bread dug deep inside the warm soft yeast the warm wadding rolled into small balls -- she watches herself do this -- take more bread to her mouth -- yes -- and she should not be self conscious about this act repeated for millions of years this breaking of bread by those who had passed this way many times before her rehearsing this simple scene this simple gesture this act of fingering the bread of playing with the bread as if she were alone this type of speech as if she were alone this type of mess you make only when alone --

bread hot water on the tea bag infusing the yellow tea -- we need to have things to do with our fingers between speech as we exhale words we need to take something back inside us as we give -- as part of us moves outside to give to reach the other -- toward - - we need to take something back inside us with each word expelled to take something back -- hot water -- bread -- smoke -- something smeared with butter something that cold something that won't melt that won't sustain cubes of meaning refusing to melt sus-staining her fingers the bread that movement from hand to mouth like a fruit-machine filling her mouth with little circles of bread she flattens -- her arm to mouth from the mouth she keeps producing bells apples cherries -- looking for the winning plums -- keep talking -- yes keep her going -- go on -- breathe -- there sitting opposite you -- not able to see she fingers the hot water wanting to dip in her finger to test the temperature --

To dance you'd said -- no we didn't walk we danced we got there to the café by dancing to my left -- right -- in front of -- behind the shoes -- I'd forgotten I love to dance in secret over petticoats with a number on my back -- I used to sneak downstairs as a child -- forgive this digression -- [don't ever apologise] -- in my bedroom in my garden she dances between trees -- fox trots -- tell me something then go on make something up -- invent something --

OK -- remember this she said remember this here have this thought --

As a child -- I am five maybe six years old -- my grandfather is wearing his new suit pulled from plastic -- I stand on his new shoes -- let's dance he'd said -- I'll teach you how to move -- standing on his new shoes I kept slipping off so he'd put something around the ends -- elastic some kind of string -- on the tips of his shoes -- and I'd slot my toes beneath the string my toes over his shoe tips -- maybe I am making this up -- this part I'm sure is a lie but I'll continue with the feel of his hands this way of leading us this way that -- that moment of abandon making me laugh -- dancing always making me laugh -- fall over -- no maybe on her own something more graceful to stand on points later to want the look of the tense leg muscle the calf in spasm to tear the muscle -- anything to keep me up on one leg -- no -- I think to dance I want more noise less of a story more passion a flamenco maybe a hammering heart maybe a change of heart beat an arrogant pose my black hair scraped back oiled tight in an oversized comb -- teeth digging into a plaited horse tail -- thorns in my tongue a foreign tongue a guitar broken into a wail like birth --

A digression into dancing --

*When we walk we dance* -- you said -- we dance to the safety of the café

-- I have no stones no memory stones no syntax left -- I feel I feel is all I keep -- repeat yourself you said -- it's ok -- what did you say -- once and for all

*all fiction is a digression. It always deviates from its true purpose. All reading is done haphazardly.*

*Once the story is launched it must go on, it must follow its course however crooked it may be and even at the risk of crumbling along the way. And even if it takes the wrong direction. All together with visible anger foaming at the mouth like beasts . . .*

In the café in a strip of light you ask her if it is ok -- is what ok -- she shifts from the light because what she wants is darkness the darkness of the room the coolness of the room just before the hot waters -- they bring you -- the waiters bring them -- pots of hot water she cannot remember now if she is about to repeat herself she cannot remember the words for hot water so she asks -- expects you to use your tongue for her -- what --

I wanted to write a book -- it grew inside me for five months -- October is my most fertile month -- remember I told you that way back way back when but where were you when men paced the streets waiting for the first signs of life from her cunt I said -- I'm a poor detective I cannot find the clues I left out for myself the hard breadcrumbs I scattered 45,000 words ago I feel impotent -- lame --

As the waiter is about to approach them in the café -- as the waiter is about to prepare her for speech -- she again cries out but does not recognise her voice -- she wants to tell you -- wait -- listen -- I look at you and I don't see you I look harder you are beyond the capacity of my eye I try and catch something of myself something I can at least recognise of what I am putting together I try and catch myself in this other I try and sneak up on myself to catch myself out while you sit there opposite your right fist curled under your chin -- what solitary confinement we are happy to take our time over hearing things from the inside out as the book I find myself writing by accident forms itself off the page --

Darling come back

do you hear --

do you hear me --

do you recognise me -- is that me --

The waiters carry boiled waters and wear tight aprons accentuating their bellies -- white starched napkins perfectly placed over their arms -- we are ready madame darling to slap you into words to make you take your very first breath to listen out for your very first sounds --

The waiters carry boiled water -- napkins over their arms -- ready to slap her into life -- name her tag her -- listen out for the sounds of her first breath -- on the table -- salt -- sugar cubes -- hot water infusing the yellow tea -- the yellow star unpicked in the dark - - red juice a small bowl of eggs -- the table prepared with all they needed to sustain them for a few hours -- the waiter attentive when needed -- they speak of the time they are left alone -- waiting to be centred -- she -- A that is -- slightly off centre to begin avoiding the strip of sun-light again when they speak they close their eyes inside -- her voice does not recognise itself it doubts is maybe an impostor's voice someone sounding like her but not quite managing the nuances -- you don't seem to notice maybe the voice is fooling both of them that continues well enough well ahead of her the voice keeps escaping her closed mouth through the cracks in the face -- maybe -- maybe the eyes the nose opening two ways two possibilities inside and out even the lines of a music score could not be so well filled with variations of escape with risk her teeth might chatter if it was winter as she had intended if her voice were to move a little more toward you -- count the beats -- your tense your tenses are all wrong they keep shifting us you me the tenses all wrong again -- yes -- she might have said our tenses are all wrong -- do you hear -- instead she notices this but is too polite to say -- you see as yet as always nothing happens she has brought us back to the café and nothing happens -- she's stalling -- maybe you have spoken -- of course you said you love French bread and the waiter hearing this of course rushes forward with a basket of bread -- wishing up moments is one of their specialities along with thin slices of duck small lines of grease -- they watch each other take it in turns to remove the fat -- but now the mention of meat has changed the room the situation the mention of meat the introduction of a butcher means they must have left the café and gone to a restaurant but that was later that was

days later surely -- wait -- I wanted them in waiting I want them back together again in the café -- get back to the café -- why couldn't she have made that a longer scene -- why can't that be the final scene -- the café -- maybe the unnameable is called the café -- what was that -- after all you need to think laterally as well as literally -- does it in any way matter where they end up -- Shh --

Instead A notices a woman in her late thirties -- the woman enters the café -- yes they are back in the café -- the final scene is on time -- the woman enters on time -- she is trained well at entrances she may have climbed through the window to the right of A for all she knows -- she -- the woman positions herself -- sits beside A at a table to their right -- unashamed in full sunlight the woman carries with her an oversized bag from which she produces a small bird cage -- empty -- waiting -- a tiny whittled stick inside -- she empties out from the bag -- a packet of dried figs -- bird seed -- two small cheeses wrapped but the smell is a give away -- A wants to push her fingers in the cheese -- open the cage -- take the seed from her hand and find a small tamed bird for her -- the woman is distracting -- her long dark hair shines her long legs under the table are open as if in response to the sun on her face -- did I tell you this before -- she may have been A's first French teacher -- the woman allows herself a small coffee a pastry and then she plays with an egg -- no -- I don't want her to eat the egg -- what A was denied -- yes I take away the egg -- I call the waiter I deny her the egg --

So -- this story now only works like the pattern of sun that expands then escapes West - - the singing of the toilet attendant to the left of them -- her exuberance for cleaning other peoples' waste is making A feel she is glad you have your back to the stair case to the upstairs entrance -- only she can see the other woman opposite -- yes one blonde opposite -- she was there from the beginning -- table 14 -- she is taking out a compact and cleans her teeth with her fingers she has been waiting forty-two years for their entrance forty-two years to make this one simple gesture before A -- behind M's back a finger slipped over wet teeth --  
cut --

I try not to plan their conversations the waiter says --

A once locked herself in a room where people were pretending to be chickens -- she tells you -- yes -- showing me the crack of the ass from where we all emerged all this meandering it's her memory behaving like a wolf her eyes too grey for her body and it

does her no good to look for clues laid down years earlier -- I don't ever remember finding you this way A said -- and when A returns home it will be no coincidence that she will remember the bread -- a cat would know better how to tell milk from cheese from a firework tied to its tail -- she forgetting everything her mother had taught her about kissing strangers taking sweets from your fingers the smell of fox tails the chase the hunt her presenting herself like a rabbit hole and you already up to your elbows in her --

Darling --

your voice too familiar --

Darling are you with me -- back in the café --

Yes -- now your voice has a resonance she recognises in her breasts the way her body used to let down milk for her child but not here not now she will not give you the generosity of the breast she instead checks through each jacket button to ensure she is hidden --

I had written about you before -- she said -- in winter -- in that story -- that other story I wrote ahead of us in that time when we lived in a perpetual winter -- you brought death like a whore to seduce me in that story that preceded us -- you fucked her when you thought I was busy -- between the slaughtered cows you lifted her skirts and I heard you speak my name to her by mistake or maybe not -- in the pond I had you beneath ice -- yes -- it was called the story of the pond -- I apprehended you in a dream in the dream we began on a balcony -- I wore an expensive gown I swept up snow as I walked I crunched as I walked I watched you walk into the pond I called after you -- don't worry you said -- barely turning your head -- it's time for me to leave -- it's ok -- and as you began your descent beneath the water you threw up a thousand silver words they settled over the surface of the lake -- [no a pond I said -- Ok -- let's make it a lake] I scooped up the words in my dress skirts -- waited until the lake had froze over -- your head just beneath the surface where you saw me skate across your sleep -- this section of the day is the hardest to live through I try to say nice things to you --

Being here being taken back to the café -- where they are sitting just sitting across the table from one another waiting for nothing in particular is reminding me of the dream you know that dream by Marquez -- his -- *eyes of a blue dog* -- your lapping blue tongue

hidden -- your tongue was dry -- smooth as if you had siphoned away the spit -- taken out your tongue in preparation -- put it into a cloth and maybe talced it -- you like talc -- maybe even the waiters had done this for you maybe even rolled your tongue in seasoned flour ready for her to deep fry --

Unlike me she was often unprepared -- as if I knew the story ahead of her at times yes sometimes I was writing ahead of her -- this scene I'd already constructed when A thought it was hers -- but I hadn't let her see that I was writing without her knowing -- not yet -- wait -- she had not dried her tongue she had not time to wet her lips -- her mouth had forgotten the underpass the secret password the turn of the head was not clear --

Am I boring you she wanted to ask -- but one rule of fiction is you never ask that question it can subvert the whole narrative -- stop that -- this is just exactly what I said might happen -- the story taking its own course and I am just trying to keep up --

They had once apart -- lay in bed at 5.30am executing perfect lines to one another -- A always working backwards in time but not this time this time I am just stuck in her narrative trying not to censor or interrupt too much letting her lead me in directions I had not anticipated I was expecting secretions of the mouth at her point of approach but maybe it was mimicry on her part -- maybe she did what she thought was expected maybe as she approached M -- yes maybe her approach toward him was not at all an act of abandon on her part rather an act of conciliation -- too much humility is not needed A was told on Saturday last -- learn to say fuck it -- just say fuck it and abandon yourself the way of the tongue --

We are lost now all of us her him we you I -- have I forgotten anyone --

say that I'm fucked completely lost with you again -- until --

I thought I heard someone say someone begin to speak to say -- yes speak up -- what was that what was that about the café --

They are still there waiting for me -- you see I have abandoned them twice at least -- who -- the one writing -- the one trying to keep up with this -- with them -- yes I have abandoned them twice already and left M and A just sitting there waiting just sitting



around in the café waiting for some decent lines -- they haven't even finished their bread yet --

OK -- go back -- go back --

I like French bread M says -- she likes the way you eat with such enthusiasm she ate side saddle at first -- know you act well sometimes -- but today there is the café today still the rubblings of the fingertips on the tip of the bread stick -- fingers waiting for a story to come -- for one of them to remember something invent something -- for godsake say something important there must be something -- something they have forgotten how to say --

Instead in desperation while they are waiting for something -- for something to say -- for something to happen for the story to continue -- she -- A -- tells M maybe one story and one dream -- not her first dream but a second-hand dream that occurs to her while they wait over breakfast wait together in the café -- a dream she tells you as you pour her more tea a dream that holds her inside the belly of a horse --

You read your work as if you are inside a Trojan horse -- the woman in the dream had told A -- yes -- I was sitting on the bed -- A said -- I was sitting on a bed-spread that was pink and the woman with me was smoking slightly ahead of me --

Yes A and V were sitting on a bed taking a break between reading to one another -- V lit a cigarette -- A watched her smoke and she wanted one also -- A decided to light her own cigarette -- V was standing beside the bed -- A was sitting on the enormous double bed covered in a pink bed-spread -- getting ash on the perfect pink bed-spread -- I kept smudging it and making the stain worse -- A said -- V didn't notice --

The trouble with you V said -- is that you read your work as if you are inside a Trojan horse -- why do you do that give up on that --

Yes I completely understand A said -- I had to dream that sentence to get up and write down that very sentence to write the message down immediately -- yes that's how it went -- like the afternoon had put A to sleep -- 4pm had drugged her -- the sounds of the children playing the lull of the TV the electronic bleeps -- A fell asleep in the next room -- books half read work half complete she was kid napped by 4pm -- 4pm took her

to another bed -- he -- 4pm -- gave A a packet of cigarettes -- V already had a pack -- he introduced V to A -- they already knew one another but acknowledged the coincidence of turning up in the same dream at 4pm by 4pm -- yes an unlikely time to meet an unlikely figure to meet they agreed -- they were in a room where people were reading out their fiction and the bed was to the side -- the fictional bed -- then V gave A the line about the horse --

You write as if you are inside a Trojan Horse -- no read as if -- no matter --

Talking to you here from inside this horse from inside this dream what is there to tell you should I tell you that A dressed up in fake furs for breakfast -- that one afternoon at 4pm a horse was given to her as language and what did she find in its belly in its long black erection the way it had of holding its hind to the north wind the turn of the eyeball the sweet green shit -- CCCCCC -- the prints left over the breakfast cloth the gentle sound of its whinneyyy what is there to tell you what about the flaring nostrils maybe about the mute swallowed tongue -- to get impregnated without shame the horse in their story was chewing on a sugar cube taken from my lips -- language goes full term many times in her that morning this morning as I try to tell you everything -- something -- a story a dream any old swishing tail -- language goes full term and no delivery the weight of it just hanging there the belly almost dragging on the floor the way words sometimes come out still-born --

And she used to wonder to picture their meeting -- of course she did many times -- no -- forget that -- it's nothing like -- the subject -- rather -- the subject instead was -- A used to wonder about the idea that you can never say I am dead -- yes -- I realise she keeps changing the subject -- she's nervous what do you expect -- yes -- I used to think about twins -- she said -- about twins -- leaving the dream aside -- pouring more tea -- moving on -- a sugar cube -- I used to wonder about conjoined twins -- you know -- one forced to watch the other die knowing they would soon follow maybe that's as close as one can get to witnessing your own death maybe that's as close as you can get to saying I'm dead look at me both here and there dead and alive in one body at different times -- do you see --

Do you realise that on the day they meet in Paris -- on the news that morning this morning -- Iraqi soldiers described as a bunch of criminals are shown tearing the wolf apart -- this is the media doing what it does best -- twenty or so men hold up the

dismembered wolf and parade it over their heads -- drag it to the floor pull out its hot guts and organs and begin to eat it in handfuls -- handfuls of wolf the head still intact looking on as his body is opened into a rug they wrap around themselves -- someone trying to split the gaping jaws fails and fails again -- the eyes still intact and as watchful as before -- nothing detracts from that eye even being eaten he is patiently turning him inside out --

Watch them visit the dead in life -- your running right eye your crying eye that begins the day they meet -- if the right side of the body holds all their past memory all their past hurts then it is Paris that makes you cry on your right side her on your left this way and that a war brings them together -- America and Britain invade Iraq the day they meet -- just the day before -- telling a new story which holds the first inside -- one war one story held inside another -- one war held inside another -- the war the city that had once exiled you where they now return where she tastes the salt of your running right eye where the middle of a sentence springs out of inarticulation out of the lies they call memory --

when she tells you --

As a child I had no fear of heights I had only curiosity I never asked myself where I was going what time it was what direction I was facing if it was too hot or cold was it safe where now -- I was prepared for anything -- the language of the dead now pressed beneath A's thigh -- the graveyard where they walk [later -- that was later] where you will push her heels into the gravel -- the tree secretions -- there are always quiet movements a slow hum a hiss somewhere to be heard --

don't feel sea sick

I will not give you the impression I know how to swim

It's as if the language is held in my throat and I regurgitate it up for them when I read -

-

hang on

wait

wait

fuckfish she said --  
go over your egg spoons  
your eggbread  
my precision --  
layers of cool skin twisted fighting over your left hand the breast the thigh jumps over  
the table feed you cold goose port wine mashed potato  
too nervous  
smoke  
too nervous  
she did not blink  
a child's rhyme coming back to her  
what's the time  
a clue leading me back to October  
what's the time  
think  
I am thinking  
it's time  
you showed me your legs  
your eggbread  
they cut  
the belly nerve  
there  
you were impossible  
impossible  
eat  
eat  
take this  
this is where the widows come eat  
makeup running melting inside their blue hair  
under the table their blue slack thighs pressed together  
under the table  
let me look at you  
let me look at you in the looking glass  
lick my spoon  
caramelised

the right eye cries alone for 3 days

the cabbage placed on the grave of someone young someone they didn't remember knowing

baby hugs

a pebble with a hand engraved placed at the centre -- centred at Sam's feet his feet tangled with his wife Suzanna who died ahead of him -- keeping his side of the bed warm

were you blonde once

that photograph meant so much to me

the photograph you gave me in the café

when I heard about it I wanted it immediately M said --

A's right leg raised -- in the photograph that is -- her bare toes just peeping behind her left calf her hair messed up in the sunlight from the expanse of window just behind her -  
- she was writing for the first time -- writing -- I'm not here -- soon I will leave -- she writes on the back of the photograph -- long gone -- lick my spoon

lick it now

hot water the yellow tea

here let me read your hand --

It remains a confusing period that covered five months -- November 02 to March 03 and then they are left sitting in the café --

A is ordering more tea --

Yes -- let's go back to the café -- A is ordering more tea -- but that's later isn't it -- that comes later doesn't it --

Shh -- continue --

You are being a little more attentive than usual --

that's ok -- continue --

You are quieter than usual -- still they are happily upstairs if you care to go look and find them I assure you they will be sitting there in the café on the far table on the right -- top of the narrow winding staircase but I'll tell you about that later -- wait -- I promise I

will tell you about that later -- wait for me -- A is on the right you are on the left almost opposite almost facing her but for now I almost found an inkling of a story -- A drinks tea in the café the tea gives them something to do to show they can do all that is required of waiting they can do all that is clichéd all that is expected -- this has been played out for years -- lovers meet -- talk -- are silent -- they smoke and drink sometimes coffee but in this story A prefers tea -- the hot water has been sent for -- has been carried and presented in white ceramic jugs -- she likes that kind of detail the steam not concealed by a lid -- she delights in the rise of steam -- permission to stay longer the temperature of the water guarantees at least another twenty minutes to half an hour of story with talking and pouring and infusing and sipping looking at things they will not properly recall -- saying things that later they will not properly recall -- later everything will be turned into another kind of fiction --

everything has changed

nothing has changed

the sudden rush of talc

the hands centred --

Sam telling us -- *we don't travel for the fun of it, as far as I know; we're foolish but not that foolish* -- but it's not that you finish a story you say -- you just get tired of it you just get so tired of it of the telling of it of the making up of it of all the possible versions mis-directions endless digressions you just in the end lose interest in it you just become disgusted --

but hang on -- wait -- wait --

I want to digress again --

just give me a minute before we finish --

just one minute -- just one small minute --

A and M are in Paris [yes -- and this definitely comes later] they have left the café but will return there again tomorrow but for now they walk for two hours well over two hours crossing over the bridge -- Le Ponts des Arts -- to the Louvre which is facing them -- the small stalls are opening on the river bank opposite the gallery and the pavement artists have already set themselves up on stools and have their paintings displayed along the railings and on small stands -- the second hand book dealers are unlocking their metal book cases and M is distracted looking for first editions when A sees a snow globe but hesitates -- hesitates knowing that if she speaks of the globe buys the globe -- then she is back to the beginning of *Souvenir* -- back to where she began --

let me . . .

tracks in the snow leading back to the grave  
 to Sam's grave -- [that's later -- that's much later]  
 to the sucking stones  
 and who could argue it is in her nature to hate stones  
 the belly cut open  
 the stones placed inside  
 sewn in place  
 the pebble you pushed into her mouth  
 her thigh pressed into the gravel  
 I did what I could  
 I did what I needed to do to keep everything in motion  
 but now there must be other things to write about --

So shall we go back -- go back to the café -- they are waiting for me they are waiting for my return -- A and M that is -- look they won't speak until I write -- return -- they sit there disused -- mute -- silently awaiting the ink the ear that will listen out for their sentences for what they have left to tell which is nothing really -- banalities hot water and babblings -- yes -- fruit juice the colour of love -- oh such clichés -- yes of course the waiters about to burst waters into clichés -- a love story made up of simple clichés simple moments -- there are only a few stories to go around everything has of course been told before -- this time in the café is as digressive as a moment can get -- you don't need to explain that now she wants to speak with you but fears that she has delayed everything for too long -- and what about the story -- didn't I say earlier that A has one dream and one story for M -- yes -- before we continue as we are stuck here in this café maybe there's time for one more digression -- but then I never did get to the bottom of -- when is a story a story --

A and M are stuck in the café -- happy enough -- they seem ok -- shall we leave them there I wanted to ask there is so much I wanted to ask I wanted to speak with you -- A wearing her scarf like a baby comforter with an antique brooch -- I bet you're not writing today M said to A -- look at you all draped in black looking the part of a writer I bet you are not writing just pretending to -- just standing looking at yourself in the mirror --

to this end a story began with bread in a café --

so -- what happened to them --

they met --

they got forgotten --

so now what --

we just leave them there --

sitting there --

that's where they belong--

in the café -- obvious enough --

there are only rare moments worth documenting enough to remember that nothing happened but everything took place or nothing took place and everything happened -- they ended up in the place they decided to call home --

yes embellish a little more --

you said we have created a love story from that place --

embellish a little more --

ok -- maybe the café was built for them -- is that going too far --

I can't say that is -- just continue --

ok -- maybe the café was built for them -- only for them -- maybe the others were just props -- the locals the tourists the employed -- all the people who had occupied that place before them were all grown to be on the peripheries of their story to provide a backdrop -- attention to detail fussing false declarations decorations of a history the song of the toilet attendant flown from another land --



hahahahaha -- are you smiling darling --

my love I'm rolling on the floor --

and so what happened to them --

they are still sitting there of course -- maybe you are peeling her an egg -- ordering more hot water embellishing more -- maybe the sun has now moved across the room and is softer and their voices have moved into the familiar form -- is that too tidied up --

darling -- no ribbons -- you get to an ending and just leave it -- don't fuss so --

I don't know how to write this without --

just keep going but hurry --

ok -- keep well -- they are ordering more tea --

MORE tea --

well how can this be said without tea without putting my hands over her throat without suffocating in sentimentality --

try again --

ok -- they are ordering more tea --

be kind for a while --

can you see how I have completely lost track of the pronoun --

what a mess they make darling --

I like the sound of darling --

I like the taste of bread --

wait with me

wait

**French., lit. 'to return', 'coming back', pres.part. (used as n.) of  
*revenir*.**

This time I could again begin at any point but it is the young man who begins this -- the young man who works quietly in the background as M fixes his scarf -- the young man is polishing the lacquered walls of the hotel lobby with such great affection and he pleases A -- he is working with such love for the wood for the job at hand -- for the pittance he must get he is working with such love and tenderness for the wood -- then he pauses from cleaning and offers A a small coffee -- the young polishing man -- and she accepts -- touched at his gesture and that the room smells of good strong polish as she watches M enter the lobby and wrap a scarf around his neck --

where are they --

Paris --

day 4 of 4

It's a year on since they both first met [A and M that is] just the year before almost to the day they had met in this very same city -- and now you are standing before her again talking without looking at her or noticing that the room smells of polish -- speaking without looking at her -- placing a scarf around your neck -- was it a scarf -- must have been -- and you have no intention of looking at her or the young man while you talk -- in the same way A has no intention of this becoming her story but it does -- here it is already being written as you wrap around your scarf -- the coffee she's just finished still warm in her mouth --

I am writing you as I watch you -- do you realise that every gesture is a potential sentence there is no where else to put the tongue but onto the page already ahead of myself -- it is not easy to keep myself in the moment when I am already done with Paris already done with watching you and I am already home already writing what I see before me -- I cannot write to you today hear me -- yes -- today wait -- wait for me -- hear me -- wait I said -- don't go -- give me time to gather another sentence -- maybe it's not your fault I think too much in fiction I have made myself a fiction from you that I cannot leave I have made myself a fiction out of your fiction -- help me out here -- I'm

sure I will find a way out a route out write it out that's it -- write you out today write everything out despite all I said -- no one will understand this except you especially not you -- things only said for a brief moment as they move as they leave the polished room and move outside to sit together on a bench waiting again being brief again sitting on a bench beside the Lilas --

Where are they --

They are on a bench next to the Lilas in Paris --

got that --

they spent part of 4 days together -- got your bearings -- and it is the last day already - - and they -- you and A -- [no matter which pronoun] are sitting on a bench -- [the last moments are always the hardest to pass] sitting on a bench in the sun next to La Closerie des Lilas end of Boulevard du Montparnasse where the photograph of you and Sam was once taken -- the one where you are both wearing your turtle necks -- ah yes - - and now you or rather M is discussing in great detail the statue before them -- and I have already forgotten his name -- you see I knew I would forget -- forget everything you said -- and I knew I would forget the name of the statue that is -- you see how my mind is so selectively drawn to the colour instead -- green from weathering -- the breaches they discussed the firm thighs ah what legs apart the legs the boots the uniforms were sexy in those days -- they really knew how to dress their men for battle in those days -- ah -- I would remember that and not his name -- yes -- to stand on a plinth with my legs open with my thighs tensed just so -- my left arm held in the air -- ready -- ready for anything -- and how to keep on such a hat up there is no easy feat even for a statue -- what a coat-tail caught in the breeze --

A and M are sitting on a bench in the sun when you tell her that during the war the Nazis removed all the statues in Paris -- all the national monuments were put into storage -- hidden away -- you tell her this but you cannot remember where they stored them -- it is a pleasant enough image although fleeting -- a city full of empty plinths an un-remembered place full of war torn statues just waiting for things to pass by just patiently waiting always tensed in position waiting for time history and people to pass over -- the statues were saved unaltered and returned to their homes but your people of course were not --

And what would those two have discussed that morning if they had walked straight on instead of taking a right turn instead of taking the bus to Montrouge what do they deny

themselves by taking this other route -- maybe nothing maybe after all there is nothing to be said -- as they could have instead taken the walk through the gardens where Cioran would come once a day -- he'd lived -- you said -- in the maid's quarters of his building an apartment with steps too difficult to manoeuvre so once a day he'd leave and once a day he'd make the difficult climb back to his rooms and he'd never come down again -- and what would they have said if they had decided to take that walk right there in those same gardens straight on instead of right --

Instead they are on a bus on the way to Montrouge -- remember this café you say -- L'Orleans is that it -- you see I have already forgotten -- the café on the corner the café where your mother sent you before the war -- where she sent you -- go find your father and bring him home -- where your father hides still at the back of the café in smoke filled rooms -- handling yellowed cards winning and maybe loosing a little more -- all the words we carry in us that won't realise themselves --

I'm asleep by 10pm I'm exhausted from seeing you -- I sleep until 7am when I leave Paris again post Paris again -- are you still with me -- this time I came to Paris for 4 days -- got that -- I don't sleep for 4 nights -- I come home exhausted and I sleep for 9 hours without waking and the simplicity of everything coming back is the colour of the walls is the snow the cases full of clothes the loss of translation -- words blurring -- the realisation that it is only through writing that I can speak to you -- I should go away somewhere and write up 4 days of silence -- study the cavorting snow even your accent was not as I recall -- no -- only too many greetings or partings -- I know I know you is that it but when people ask over the coming days -- well girl how was it then speak up tell us how Paris was -- what will she tell them -- that established -- the refusal to eat the eggs -- ah -- that'll do then -- then tell them about that --

What the hell is she talking about --

You know the eggs she wrote of -- way back a year back -- the eggs that once held everything together -- asking a few dumb questions changes nothing -- she's smoking too much while she writes this down and of course I tell you when it comes to the eggs she refused to eat anything this time -- no -- so instead you ate two eggs that is -- back in Paris -- day 2 of 4 this time -- you ate one for her one for you -- of course you did -- asking a few dumb questions is surely missing the point -- show me there was nothing to show me tell me there was nothing to tell me -- only walking to be walked only arms

to be held -- you see again -- I hate to repeat myself -- but listen -- nothing happened -  
- no -- or happens come to that --

What --

no -- nothing damn well happens --

she -- rather -- A -- rather they fly to Paris to meet for the second time -- a year on they  
try and meet again and so on --

but where's the story and in many ways this is not meant defensively -- but I heard  
someone say I'm sure I heard someone say -- hey -- where's the action and the  
movement -- tell us something damn it make something up -- give us a punch line --  
you can't go all that way -- I mean how many hundreds of miles have we travelled and  
how many millions of words have I put up with this shit -- I mean how many pages have  
I committed to already and nothing happens -- that's it --

OK --

A is walking with someone who is already dead -- does that liven it up a little -- no -- ok  
-- then I'll instead explain that you -- M -- has a special word for someone who is  
already dead -- no for someone who has escaped death -- and I admit -- yes I have  
forgotten that also -- ah -- no -- wait -- it's a revenant -- yes a ghost you say is  
someone who acts as if they're alive -- pretends they are alive but are dead and a  
revenant is someone who is dead and makes it back -- got that -- so she will ask you  
again not as a ghost but as someone who is meant to be dead is therefore kind of dead  
but is back for now -- for now you return and so walk the earth on A's arm at this  
precise moment as a revenant -- yes -- and yes she again has forgotten the question the  
thing the something she was meant to ask maybe it's the confusion I mean the  
definitions getting her all mixed up the time the time tricks making her forgetful -- yes  
because time is always fucked with in this city when they meet no more than here --  
here in Paris where the dead are on every street corner -- me I can see them all -- if you  
believe me or not I have no care -- I feel them everywhere especially on A's arm -- and  
the city operates in 2 maybe 3 zones a past present and future all collide all meet in this  
city in this city times all converge -- no spread it out to the streets have you missed the  
point there was nothing I repeat nothing to show me --

Maybe I'll go home and die -- [that's rather dramatic ] just lie down and die -- you said this twice no three times -- when she knew you had been dead for over 60 years -- in this city with its time tricks -- all mourning all morning each morning when she walks to meet you for the very last time each time each moment was always their very last moment their very last time --

When she dreamt that you'd died -- [again you know me -- my obsession with death] -- and she had no place to leave the body -- [I apologise for sounding rather morbid here but this was the mood she was in -- she kept trying to cheer up to change the scene to arrange a place to dispose of the body ] -- it was a heavy body not easy to transport especially as she was on foot and she had on new shoes and her feet were a little bruised swollen and hot so she spent hours like this carrying your body this way and that around the streets that were not really her own and nowhere to leave the body -- this was a dream remember so anything could happen -- but all that happened is that no one would take it from her -- the body -- so instead she refused to eat -- as if she felt appeased -- is that it -- no -- she was trying TO appease -- so she ate no breakfast -- this seems contradictory but she refused herself food like a defiant child but also to calm to soothe herself -- nothing will pass in or out of my lips until you --

write me your dreams -- I give you none -- I will not tell you that A [or was it me] -- had two dreams while she was in Paris -- 1/ you died and she was responsible for carrying your body -- she walked from undertaker to undertaker and no one would let her release the body -- she even asked a few kind looking people in the street she couldn't speak French but she was desperate by then worn through with the walking and the dragging and the stiffness of you -- 2/ A is lying on a floor -- this one's so spontaneous -- she's lying on a floor and the carpet beneath her is a good quality rug and she inhales and then forgets -- forgets to exhale -- right there on that plush patterned carpet just like that -- she forgets to exhale or rather how to exhale ah the breath has to go in and also out it's a two way process it relies on both for survival remember that -- the breath that we take so much for granted like walking -- ha -- we rely on so much in built repetition do you hear we rely on things going on without us and then -- nothing -- she has minutes to remember or she is a dead fish -- exhale exhale exhale damn it --

OK -- dream over --

I am home again -- try and keep up -- I am back from Paris and I open the book that is waiting for me -- Derrida -- *The Work of Mourning* -- mourning and friendship -- I open the book at random -- the book of mourning with the stones the stones so carefully so precisely and tenderly laid on the cover as the stones I laid on the grave in Montparnasse -- but I will get to that in a moment -- for now I am already home and I open the book --

*One friend must always go before the other; one friend must always die first. There is no friendship without the possibility that one friend will die before the other, perhaps right before the other's eyes. For even when friends die together, or rather, at the same time, their friendship will have been structured from the very beginning by the possibility that one of the two would see the other die, and so, surviving, would be left to bury, to commemorate, and to mourn.*<sup>1</sup>

And she visited Sam alone -- this time A is going to the grave alone -- to the Montparnasse cemetery made from 3 farms -- I read that somewhere -- originally called Le Cimetière du Sud -- and I tell you this as if it matters but then you say -- what did he say about me -- that is for me to know I say -- but I tell you how it went -- yes -- I'll tell how it went as you asked -- I'll tell you that the second time it was not could not have been the same --

I mean it is a year since they'd been together -- a year to the day when you had first taken A to that place to place a stone on Sam's grave and there's that old cliché whining at you -- never go back never return to the opening scene or it will spoil everything -- maybe -- maybe the paths this time are wider and his bed -- Sam's marble bed is off the central path the widest path -- this time lying perfectly still this time finding the right aggregate of words only given to the wrong person -- but this time the paths are wider and A is drawn not only to his stone but to the neighbouring white flowers -- the white flowers are her favourites and the cabbage of course nursed on the centre of the grave - - when I die leave a cabbage for me too -- she said -- don't forget now and maybe an onion an artichoke or two -- make it something with a big heart a firm heart a right old harvest festival -- train tickets scattered the smell of lavender -- small messages -- come home soon darling I'll be waiting -- ribbons torn in the breeze -- people should never go back let that be a lesson for her they'll say -- keep well out of it instead look it up on the map check the grave plan central aisle take it back central aisle -- Sam's good



ear pressed into Suzanne -- maybe there is gravel -- there was none -- maybe last time there was home in the gravel when this time I swear you are making it all up -- yes last time there was something underfoot for sure --

but wait

Of course A's first stone had gone her last year's stone the one with the hand -- a year to the day -- last time she had placed a stone onto the grave -- a stone with a hand engraved on the front and this time a small brown polished stone with orange spots -- she thought he'd like the spots -- how ridiculous how contagious -- colours smells sounds the sky ready for a storm all different the second time around -- it's not her fault that she is left a while a short while alone to talk to the man to talk quietly to the man maybe even if it is the wrong man beneath the stone -- mistakes happen but by now she is ready to talk to anyone to the large rectangle slab of marble a tasteful simple bed six foot under -- is that another cliché -- who knows if the measurements are accurate -- I mean I wondered can I only ever write about death and only ever talk to the dead I spend a whole life time writing about death so what will I do when my own time passes suddenly come to life -- ah what poultry -- anyway --

The small paper aeroplane was also gone -- the one you'd mentioned you'd seen on his grave -- it had flown away no doubt to somewhere with more prospects with more air and what of A's last stone I mean she had no expectation that she would find it still lying where she'd placed it I mean a lot can and does happen in a year -- look at us and still the same mouth picks over the vegetables my right rib hurting all week as if as if it had been newly plucked for reasons of reproduction -- I said nothing -- regret everything --

I mean going to the grave alone should not have been the same could not have been the same -- she forgot Sam lay in the widest path the central path of course he did -- her last year's stone gone as expected and of course she wondered who took it -- man woman kid -- licking dog -- a line of ants -- it was not a small stone -- the odd stray goat -- Gaston the faithful grave keeper -- after all a year's worth of stones weigh heavy on a sleeping man -- and did they in any way feel such a thief -- the stone taker that is -- or did they take it with panache -- handle it in daylight pocket it in daylight in their mouth even -- too obvious -- and how many stones have been circulated from his grave bed circulating to every corner and him just lying there laughing all this time a darling

man a brown stone this time -- have it darling here between your name and death date --

Day 2 --

A is at the Montparnasse cemetery and she places the brown stone on Sam's bed and there are two more at his feet colourful enough stones but not in any way stones for sucking on -- no -- too awkward a shape too much a mouthful catching on the teeth clacking the gums all pushed out what distortions to the cheeks what soreness to the tongue such stones -- what were they thinking of -- whereas her's is perfect for sucking -- just a good size -- you know she tried it out you know she did for sure the stone in her mouth just like he'd said -- who doesn't know this -- who hasn't tried this -- no need of choking on coarse lumps no need of bulges to either side of the mouth you could hold this little brown one there for sure and no one would suspect a thing nor that your tongue swilled it over the wetness the coldness never lost even when held tight on that dark muscle --

And then she places the little wet one between his name and his death date -- cleans out his name his letters with the edge of her finger nail -- the capital B filled with grime - - Gaston getting a little sloppy for sure -- and she tells him as she so carefully cleans out his name -- the B more muck-filled than all -- that you of course had sent your love -- that said -- she wonders how far is he really down in the ground beneath the marble bed -- how far are you down my dear one -- as if he can hear as if he can just tell her -- let her in on the thing of whether indeed 6 ft down meant indeed only that with all these regulations and today's tools there is still a chance they could have miscalculated as if it matters --

And then the real business of talking to him begins -- you know all bone silken and such a perfect length of him around her mouth and on her lips and what is said between them cannot be told but time passes easily enough and her talk more like a prayer in the end -- not that she'd ever believed in anything but yes -- her own prayer over him stopping her a little as these are impossible lines these are impossible rhythms and she laughs as she realises she has found such a song over him when she listens to herself all the clatter of her tune over him yes she laughs at what he might think of such carrying on over him -- when a passer-by a woman in a dark raincoat and a head scarf -- I can see her now -- worn down wretch wandering with her already wilted blooms -- eyes A as if

she is queer -- as if she is not on her way for more of the same except A is sure that this woman knows her dead straight on -- that she has met them in person many times in many ways -- ah the nonsense of a grown woman of grown women whispering to the dead -- of A finding herself muttering that she'd never even met him -- Sam that is -- no -- not in the flesh as it were only here in the bone -- forgive me A said -- yes -- forgive my insolence my forwardness my moving upon you today but I was ready to talk you know to ask -- yes -- her well over the bed that had long immersed him -- her well into her litany quite forgetting herself when she suddenly winces with the realization that they had not ever been formally introduced -- I didn't even know him she said to herself or maybe you -- yes maybe A addressed him directly using the familiar form -- I didn't even know you and well look at me here over you muttering as if we had grown up in the same road in this city where we somehow both found ourselves -- I think I hope that we could have been a little comfortable together you know -- I'd like to think we could have spoken as easily above the ground -- you all cleaned up hair combed black suited and upright again --

The tea will keep you warm --

that was the only warm thing S said during the whole sorry encounter -- no not Sam -- the other one -- yes -- leaving the grave aside for a moment -- moving on for a moment

I know you tried -- I know this time you tried a little here and there -- announcing me -- you see this woman -- you said out loud -- we have been writing one another for almost 2 years now -- ah -- I don't bother to correct you as the tea is poured as you make your announcement washed down with the infused herbs and the awkward silence -- after all what's six months between old friends what's six months between six million words or are you confusing our current limit with the dead Jews --

This is the scene where she is back on your arm and this should not be confused with Cicely from the film -- no -- it's not that scene -- no -- this is the scene where A is back on M's arm -- clear now --

Some day you'll write a book about this you said -- as if she wanted such a task as if she wanted to hear such a thing -- they walking too quickly again because time was always against them -- some day you will -- but if that's your expectation then take it back -- I have a poor memory a port wine memory I have enough troubles with my own

memories -- but she can see that you do not believe her and so instead you tell her everything -- well everything that can be told in a morning --

Remember Café L'Orlean then -- with an s damn it -- surely you can remember that much -- surely you can make up your mind to remember the café where my mother -- your mother -- whose mother mine or yours -- yes -- where our mother -- let's say where our mother -- sent me to the café -- yes before the war -- here it is -- remember the café where she sent me to find our father -- he is still there I swear -- your father is still there playing cards in the back room -- and look -- A almost makes a right turn to go find him herself -- to call out father -- to put out his cigarette to say darling come now it's time for dinner --

Then there's the school -- ok -- then remember this -- if you remember nothing else remember that this is the school where M suffered every day -- the school -- the only school where the boy went each day before -- you know before the war -- and remember that the school was always closed on Thursdays open on Saturdays instead -- this is what M tells A -- that the school in Montrouge where you went as a boy -- before -- well before -- was closed on Thursdays so that would be the day when you'd visited your aunts -- right there -- see that -- over there -- we'd visit my tante Rachel -- our many aunts -- and there's the shop where our mother bought me the éclair -- for my birthday -- it's still here the same shop right here look -- look at it -- look at all of it -- all this before well before -- before the war --

And it is snowing again --

here as I write

I'm home remember

I'm home now writing this down like I said I would --

but before that

wait

go back

or rather --

stay where they were -- there is more to tell

They are in Montrouge -- they have taken the bus to the street where you lived where you lived as a boy where the boy now returns as a man returns to now show A everything in the short time they have left and there is a strong scent of sherbet a lemon smell a child's smell -- only the bare pollarded trees caught the sun -- the day already well unfolded -- there is no going back by the time they arrive in the street where you'd lived there is no going back they are already so well into the morning that there is no returning even if she'd wanted to go another way even if I wanted to make another version -- the birds so unaware they did not give a damn about the two figures returning to the green metallic gates of your old home -- the boy's home -- barbed wire crudely woven the broken shutters mottled paint -- Olga locked up somewhere inside the house you'd once shared -- Olga who stayed to look after the building -- isn't she your cousin -- isn't that what you're saying -- that Olga's been waiting in that same home for 60 years since you all left in your different ways -- 60 years of waiting in a building they may knock down -- not knowing not knowing your story is becoming mine -- where does one end and another begin --

Am I your scribe is that it -- a memory scribe -- not mine -- all of it -- none of it -- becoming mine -- I can't get myself out of your story when I was watching for your death when I knew one of us would witness the passing of the other this time and maybe I had my eye too firmly on you and it was me who passed away who slipped away unnoticed that last morning -- I mean what can be left of me when I cannot any longer get myself out of your story when you continue to fill me with your memories as if they were now mine as if your life was now mine for safe keeping for the telling -- here take eat this is my body broken for you -- do this in remembrance of me --

And the street has the smell of sherbet -- the street in Montrouge -- a living scent of sherbet something has exhaled the odour of lemons when A has only just in fact declared three times that the city has no smell -- a city with no smell is not to know how to speak -- and then the sharpness of sherbet a smell that gives suck as they walk in their black garb a touch of lemon grass hitting her through the knobbles of the plane trees -- young trees -- those trees you could not have climbed as a boy -- a touch of saliva filling the mouth -- the house where you'd once lived has no bell no knocker the

dusty tailor's shop left of the gate like the small mausoleums they had once wandered --  
 LEON TAILLEUR carved in grey stone -- wasn't Leon your uncle -- isn't that what you say  
 -- yes she's sure that's what you say as A peers inside see the remnants of a black  
 frayed curtain a small shuttered window filters light on the right hand side -- maybe his  
 eyes -- Leon's eyes are looking at her in the half light -- Leon are you there darling --  
 Olga somewhere locked inside the house -- Olga maybe already dead -- no -- maybe  
 she'll come to the window maybe they'll all come to the window maybe they are all there  
 including you in your little boy's shorts -- all crowded at the window -- give suck -- suck  
 on the lemon trees -- time stops at the end of the street -- time all fucked with -- 3  
 zones of time meet at a single point at the end of the street and she is cut into 3 parts --  
 time fucks her in three holes right there in the street -- you behind her beside her ahead  
 of her and in her mouth you have already come and gone -- the child's toy in the 3rd or  
 was it the 2nd floor window that's next to the kitchen -- the one room apartment where  
 you'd lived -- but the boy is gone -- I forgot -- he is the only one who is missing -- he's  
 gone to the café he's all mixed up he is running to the café he thinks he should be  
 collecting his father dragging the cards from his father's hands I no longer know how to  
 get myself out of your story -- Olga come to the window let down your hair -- in which  
 room is she lying -- why is no one calling someone why aren't they breaking down the  
 gates or climbing the walls to find her --

Do you dream of anything darling -- tell me -- what sweet dreams did you have before -  
 - you know -- before all this -- before the war -- before they came for you -- missed you  
 --

I never asked to write this

I never asked for any of this

I never asked for your memories to become mine

but now there is no going back --

But to go back

yes to get back

I wanted to tell you

things should not be repeated can not be repeated

obvious enough

I'm here in Paris darling and the one I came to see is not here -- imagine not ever really here -- or rather is here in 3 parts -- no supplements just in 3 parts -- the past present and future are all standing in unison with me at the corner of the street where you lived the three of you [boy man cadaver] all fucking me with memories at the gate -- my nose ears mouth all filled -- but instead or was that yesterday -- day 3 -- everything working in reverse order -- yes -- instead

A goes to the market of the fleas --

day 3 --

day 3 -- in your absence she sits in other people's chairs -- handles the jewellery the spoons the cups the scissors of the dead -- she fingers the camisa of Natalie [digression -- Camisa from the French Kamisar n. a member of the French Protestant insurgents who rebelled against the persecution that followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. . . she fingers the kamisar her here you in Nantes -- yes -- I'm sure that's what you said ] -- and in your absence she almost buys Natalie's white starched camisa -- she will wear it to bed she needs to feel where she has been -- needs something against her skin -- yes she almost buys the camisa with Natalie inscribed on the breast -- help me decide Natalie -- I wonder who you are what you once did in this camisa what labour what tiredness what lovemaking -- who lifted it over your head my love -- tell me what to do - - in your absence A fingers Natalie's undergarments the stiff linen undergarments and I already love you Natalie and I have only just traced your embroidered name --

The Eiffel Tower is of course somewhere in the distance as all of this takes place -- how can you be in Paris and forget the Eiffel watching over them -- but what an abrupt interruption what a violent shift to steel and bolts and 4 legs spread apart when A had dreamt it had only 3 legs -- that one was missing -- but that's another story -- so she stands in its very centre --

day 1 -- A stands at the very centre of the tower on the ground looking up -- the centre that is even marked for accuracy as if she couldn't figure it out herself -- and she peers inside its hole and wants only to be taken up inside -- and she has to admit the view is splendid and she only just realises that the Eiffel is a capital A -- no -- a lie -- I mean it is of course an A -- her name right there at the centre of the city but she realises this as she climbs into the guts of her name -- the splendid view momentarily hidden from as she is pressed into the car that takes her inside and up -- her body pressing too tightly into strangers all of us --

day 1 -- what watchful eyes looked out over Paris and said nothing this day she is taken up gazing up and out suspecting little suspecting nothing only the view the splendid view the promise of a city taking her in all directions --

She trusts nothing --

chips a nail --

Then later -- yes after the tower -- no -- no before the tower -- she goes for dinner -- yes -- now it is Thursday -- the tower was Friday -- are you with me -- no -- it's the tower day 1 -- the evening before -- the evening A arrives -- or is that wrong and was it day 3 when she goes for dinner -- when an Algerian Jew showing A his photographs over grilled lamb -- a photograph taken in a mountain village -- high up lady so high up -- in the picture he is wearing a cream cloak his hood framing his smiling unshaven face and he is holding a large snowball -- he misses home that much he misses Algeria that much that much she is getting from his pidgin English and her lack of French he misses home so badly -- American tarts on the TV as he is talking as he is filling up her small wine glass with village snow -- loud American tarts broccoli cunts cheese breasts in a thin pastry crust -- lick my thighs now -- do it now -- ah the snow ain't what it used to be lady --

And she is here and not there you there and not here -- the TV calling out see no evil hear no evil speak no evil -- come back soon -- if we could just -- you know -- have some fun in Paris lady -- if we could just you know -- fromage and café au lait -- if we could just voilà -- if we could just take another route  
if we just could  
voilà



speak no evil  
 if we just could  
 come home soon  
 come home soon darling  
 I'll be waiting  
 if we could just get so greedy for each other  
 dressing up for breakfast  
 I'll be waiting  
 don't be late

And then she hesitates she hesitates she is home again after 4 days and I am writing their story where nothing happens where the two who write who meet are not

shh Paris

shhhhhh

this is how it comes out --

which version do they deny themselves as they choose too quickly to do this instead of that to go right and take the bus instead of walking straight on -- what would have been said on that other route -- maybe nothing maybe there is nothing to say after all -- yes all again remains unspoken language held in the body for 4 days --

OK -- so you get to a type of ending for want of a better bah -- you get to a type of ending when you wanted more of a plot a story -- when you wanted something some incy wincy thing to hang onto just once -- even you -- just once something good and clear some sense of development some dialogue some lies that sound like truth -- a good neat ending would have done it --

no

instead here you are holding language inside your body for 4 days and now look at the effect of all that heave ho is now having -- please come on say something -- something must have happened there must be something you forgot to say -- last time it was the same but last time you left them in the café for three days you left those two with a dish

of three eggs that was something that has to be something -- yes I agree not perfect but it was something to hold onto but this time bah this time nothing happens especially in a grave especially in a grave yard especially in no ordinary cemetery --

I have nothing else to tell -- still I have been telling you everything that is the difference that has always been the difference -- maybe all that's left to say is --

I am drinking my token cup of coffee -- just came back from the market -- bought 9 pairs of socks -- flowers -- small blue ones [I forget the name] 6 white tulips -- 4 pears -  
- 2 gold cushions -- later people will come for lunch -- we will eat beef in a sauce casserole with wine maybe potatoes in milk maybe onion -- I will approach my cooking having no idea of where I will arrive with nothing more than a vague notion of beef then depending on my mood I'll proceed --

but for now

there is just the tree outside the window and the snow and I see image after image and there is nothing left to say just the words continuing

## Notes from e-mails

### Souvenir

1. Federman on Beckett from an email dated 7th November 2002
2. Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 37)
3. BBC 2, *Arena*, October 26th 2002
4. Beckett (1999bp: 35)
5. Federman in McCafferey (1998: 249)

### From Cyberspace to the Epistolary Text

1. Mitchell (2003: 19)
2. Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 161)
3. Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 320)
4. Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 317)
5. Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 160-161)
6. Deleuze and Guattari (2002: 319-20)
7. Thompson (1998: 49)
8. Kraus (1997: 185)
9. Plant (1998: 98)
10. Deluze and Guattari (2002: 320)
11. Thompson (1998: 51)
12. Deluze and Guattari (2002: 321)
13. Felman (1985: 64)
14. Federman (in McCaffery (ed), 1998: 121)
15. Kraus (1997: 229)
16. Ronell (1989: 357)
17. Federman (1997: this book has no page numbers)
18. Thompson (1998: collage of quotations from throughout book)
19. Blanchot (2003: 99)
20. Kristeva (1987:3-4)

21. Kraus (1997: 115)
22. Barthes (1977: 112)
23. Moore (ed) (2001: collage of quotations from various letters)
24. Barthes (1997: 112)
25. Herrera (1989: 379)
26. Herrera (1989: 377)
27. Barthes (1990: 99)
28. Barthes (1990: 154)
29. Scholder & Cooper (2002: ii-iii)
30. Scholder & Cooper (2002: ix)
31. Herrera (1989: 438-439)
32. Kristeva (1987: 1)
33. Kristeva (1987: 2)

#### **email notes - Madness section**

1. Cixous (1998: 14)
2. Kraus (1997: pp. 229 & 234)
3. Kraus (1997: pp. 234)
4. Deleuze (2000: 23)
5. Deleuze (2000: 174-175)
6. Stein (1971: 291 & 302)
7. Stein (1971: 301)
8. Stein (1971: 297)
9. Stein (1971: 306)
10. Ahtila (2002: 78)
11. Stein (1971: 300)
12. Federman (1993: 96-97)
13. Lacan (in Roudinesco, 1999: 24-25)

14. Lacan (in Roudinesco, 1999: 25-26)
15. Bucher (in Federman , 2001: this book has no page numbers)

### **email notes - Abject section**

1. Reference to Mark Quinn's sculptures (see right hand column)
2. Blistène (2002: 20) discussing the work of artist Gina Pane
3. Tannahill (1996: 76)
4. Beckett (1999b: 18-26)
5. Beckett (1999b: 40-41)
6. Kraus (1997: 110)
7. Tronche (2002: 67) discussing the work of artist Gina Pane
8. Kristeva (1987: 99)
9. Dworkin (2000)
10. Federman (1997: this book has no page numbers)
11. Federman (1997: this book has no page numbers)
12. Federman (1997: this book has no page numbers)
13. Kraus (1997)

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1. Brault (in Derrida, 2001: 1)

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appendix

# Souvenir

(a dead fiction)

Angela Morgan Cutler



Artemesia Gentileschi, Judith Decapitating Holofernes, ca. 1611-12, Naples, Museo de Capodimonte

## Souvenir

*There's a failed executioner in each of us*

Emile Cioran

**I**n my hands the oversized flowers too saturated in blue already wilt or did I lose count of the streets was I lost in the streets -- or was it then that I removed my shoes held my shoes in my hand the heated pavements only causing me to run ahead of the teased dogs -- dogs whining children barking the smell of cooking changing my direction making me remember the scent of washing replacing one street for another with cologne -- cologne now replacing car fumes the stench of traffic bearing left -- a city circling me with its din with its coffee fumes and cigarette smoke a trace of urine splashing a wall -- does it matter if I tell you I found myself in this gallery by accident -- what difference does it make if it was coincidence or accident that outside the sky and the gutters were stuffed with birds that in the streets a couple have argued themselves into silence that the sellers have long opened their stalls around the edges of the gallery walls -- have long placed their souvenirs on small metal benches -- that I spot a snow globe I will later return to -- needing a rush of ice finding winter inside the

most unexpected of summer days -- was it then I held my shoes in my hand the pavements causing me to run to hold my skirts about my knees my dress already damp between my breasts cloth sticking to my back and belly -- the innocence of the day -- what difference did it make -- what did the day know -- what could the stubborn sun know of its persistence over me that it caused me to shelter inside the darkened rooms doors within doors -- needing the coldness -- a run of steps my feet startled by marble floors -- coolness passing the way of the legs the eyes my footprints already fading behind me a needed rush of air to my neck high ceilings echo -- a stretch of columns pulling me further inside only to reach what I had not yet seen only another room opening on to one more -- another here through there to get to where I held my shoes to get to what would we say if we were to speak out -- of what would we speak for fear of the voice before these images these images no more caught than we are before them framed by the limits by the awkwardness of our bodies one standing before the other before bodies open whispering along walls -- shh -- continue the way of a room of Carravagio's his light wasting flesh decaying fruit a plate held -- light blistering skin -- wrists bound -- wounds offered to a finger a head-dress of apples a boy's pout ready for a kiss -- the small Lanfranco Magdalen then pulled to the sky carried up by three angels one beneath her like a saddle -- her used breasts and belly sag replaced by Artemisia's St Cecilia by orange fabric oranges squeezed to my mouth into the head of Goliath abandoned at David's feet -- David peering into this head he has stilled -- the smoothness of a bench -- I was not to know -- there

was the painting there was my feet wanting to be startled there was marble -- that was inside -- before the painting -- I was standing before it -- cold air pleasing myself on a loss of detail echoes opening into high ceilings -- exaggerated proportions -- a whole calculation mocking me -- was I to know -- no -- not standing not to begin -- I am stretched out on a marble slab letting the cold enter me by the way of the back the buttock the thighs the back of the knee the heel the neck -- a moment -- another's face -- the neck -- the throat of my day is cut --

On white linen sheets a figure exhausted pooled in blood is pushing out a head pushing a head toward mine -- a tangle of male limbs arms and shoulders becoming an open neck becoming cunt -- arms becoming thighs pushing out a head -- a mouth speaking the beginning's of life -- a head caught in a moment unfinished undecided but as I struggle to the left corner of the painting I cannot see the edge of the body opening I cannot make out the body that birth's up this head -- whose legs are spread open -- a tangle of limbs over him made from thick flexed arms two women concentrating fully bearing down delivering a head on to the bed -- women's hands wet hands that could have been my mother's and grandmother's steamed from labour from washing that is too hot -- yes -- he enters me to the right side of the room by lips pulled open by my eye pulled open to the right -- inside a beard a mouth is opening -- I should avert my eyes but only find myself back there again back on myself on you again on me again his tongue again teeth sweat the swelling of lips furrowed brow hot skin and in my shame I do not turn but look harder move close across the

floor toward you to that small open mouth -- a tongue dilating a face turned upside down before me held between life and death -- a man calling to me but the sound has been ripped from him --

And moving closer to read the wall plaque I wonder if this is a murder I witness -- this *Judith Beheading Holofernes* as something in cloth again catches my eye -- folds of blue fabric envelop arms -- arms that are solid and purposeful not seductive orange quenching my thirst but determined arms and hands -- hands I recognise until beneath these same hands his mouth again sucks in my breath -- inhales me -- I want to turn away turn to take another look -- I turn -- avert my eyes again -- only to move back there again -- no -- thinking was not what I want -- I want all of that mouth but then too aware of others around me watching me squat before this bloody painting I straighten - - my eyes taking in Artemisia's brush strokes around his lips still as wet as she first made them --

Taking a step back towards the people that surrounded me I try to recognise something of myself in one of them -- I try to look posed relaxed just thinking -- trying to accommodate Artemisia somewhere in the air in the paint fumes in the darkness liver and hearts sliced open on a block of bone in this head in Artemisia somewhere in the air in the paint fumes in every thread of gold ruffled cotton in lace in blooded brush strokes crude washes of flesh clammy between us until I am unsure if I will be able to leave or return to the sunlight outside -- my feet sticking to icy marble of the gallery floor -- men guarding each



entrance responsibility stiffening their bodies boredom lining their faces as right there in front of them his mouth begins to make an imperceptible sound shy cries whimpering something difficult to properly locate from the blood around his lips from the sheets soaked something is making itself heard as I squat before the painting -- close again -- others may think I have a faint heart -- may mistake these sounds my actions my impulse to scribble down words for an insect scratching or cleaning itself no more than shell and feelers but isn't that what I'd seen others do in this place of paint -- get close to the floor to the marks to sit and stare to feel yourself pulled to the ground to scratch out a few words a few lines -- yes -- I feel the urgency to write like I'd seen others do squatting with their sketch books -- scribbling notes on the floor at the public's feet at the foot of Holofernes' bed -- to the floor kneeling before the face of Judith -- yes here my tracks are permissible -- at this moment I could resign myself to spending my week with all its rituals beneath this painting to see what we produce together -- Judith Holofernes Abra Artemisia and me -- as I imagine it is me who is lying out on the bed -- who is killing and birthing at once -- my body only knowing how to dilate working by instinct hidden in sheets headless cut off by the canvas by the painter killed or delivered -- which -- I don't even know how things will proceed -- then I lose us all -- move too close -- the sheets' seams tear -- eyes run his smeared face blowing out his mouth like a vulva pulled open in his bearded face - - he forms a kiss -- torn like pig flesh his body slashed and stamped until I reposition myself trying to reform a plumage of feathers a crude shard capping Abra's fist -- the

green hue of claws twisted around gold clinging to the sword -- I find the sword -- the sword is keen focused above his head a mirror reflecting a small face peering out at me -- Artemisia returning in a tiny cameo concealed in the blade -- or is it my own reflection caught in her sword - - caught in the act of looking -- is it myself who witnesses my own indecision over his head -- Artemisia again stealing away the sword -- yes the metal sword I was so realistically offered in Judith's right hand -- that is so precisely cleaving open Holofernes' throat is then dissolved beneath his head as if Artemisia scrubbed away her act -- yes -- the violence she began above his head is left incomplete -- the sword scrubbed away in an unfinished gesture becoming only a promise of death -- and surely she knew this -- was aware that she could not go through with his death even in paint -- the narrative the steel blade she created with such elaboration with such skill over his head now becomes nothing more than an opening a question -- death undecided death passing away -- death nothing more than a faint grubby stain running down the sheet --

I am for a moment left alone in the gallery left with Artemisia who is absent but everywhere playful and a little mischievous -- she brings me to her camp -- brings me night time inside day -- Holofernes' killed or delivered through Judith -- which -- she doesn't say -- I slide back from the painting until the marks of paint of human intervention became lost until the geometry of the composition draws me away from the dank bundle of his fractured head to the mass of Judith's body over him --

composed but not calm after the event -- no -- Judith is not looking down or out at me shyly nor dressed and clean nor dry and discrete -- the trophy of Holofernes' head does not dangle unsoiled beside her hip so you have to search the dark edges of the painting to find him -- nor is he to the side of Judith's knee nor beneath her foot nor is his face insignificant dried and clean hanging from some part of her like an unwanted cut of meat nor is he framed by a serene landscape -- his sword almost half the height of her body erect and triumphant beside her cleaned of blood following the deed -- no -- Artemisia brings me close -- makes me an accomplice -- Holofernes' eyes struggling to claim mine from his bed where I squat where I witness Judith neither beginning nor finishing -- he could still struggle free with his arms taking her with him -- his wet twisted head still searching me out as he struggles to live -- stretching nearer as if asking me to step in and stop what has already begun but my notions only move his death forward -- take me back to his birth -- his final moments are his first as she moves right into the gristle and bone of him -- weighing down on him with such determination -- Holofernes' straining to look into Judith's eyes anyone's eyes but she denies him -- he searching again for contact comprehension mercy complicity at the last moment instead she pushes him on -- her arms are a give away -- those arms that had carried milk in great pails -- chopped wood -- sliced into the throats of goats many times -- used the same widow's arms to cradle her dead husband washed his body with those hands --

Rearranging myself -- I scatter the torn out pages of the story around me -- sections of the tale -- the thin paper

I tear from my book -- I write all the versions I can each time a slightly different fiction --

Throwing off her widow's garb Judith prepares herself -- finest oils pooling the warmest of waters her maid washes her clean -- swilling the ashes from her dry mouth and hair she washes away the smell of mourning from her dormant flesh -- Abra knows every inch of Judith's ample body held out with the innocence of a child to its mother's hands -- she binds her waist accentuates her hips pushes out her breasts -- cloaks her in folds of cloth -- arms inferring spoils -- she braids and threads Judith's hair -- envelops her feet and wrists in silver and gems -- thick rings squeezed onto every finger and toe -- she is complete -- Abra stands back and admires her work -- a still moment of dread passes through both women as they face the other -

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They prepare a bag of food for the days ahead -- fig cakes pure bread roasted grain oil and a skin of wine -- feeding the horses they talk to them making slow gestures until they trust the feel of the womens' legs moving around their backs -- freshly oiled thighs grip the animals' flanks -- Judith rides out towards the City of Bethulia Abra beside her -- hooves dig into soil bringing them closer marking out moments of irregular beats in an pattern of horse and human forms mixing as both women visualise the deed -- the deed wells over -- the image repeating until they imagine his cries his peoples' cries their peoples' cries visualising themselves already returning with their bloody trophy -- Judith approaching -- her belly heavy with movements with the enormity of her act almost afraid to

touch him to know where to begin to find the strength to  
bloody her hands Holofernes' head pulled to her breast --  
she cuts the cord --

Did she lull him to passivity with her body -- she tells us  
she had no need to rise naked dressing to kill him with his  
own sword his seed still warm in her still spilling from their  
mingle -- and what of Abra -- did they discuss the horrors  
on the way -- act out the possibilities on the journey --  
Judith taking Abra's neck to her thigh twisting it -- not far  
enough to begin -- only the handfuls of hair pulled out --  
the neck opened on the grit on the floor -- over the tree  
branch -- the pushing of arms the accidental scratches to  
the mouth -- cloth torn -- laughter -- piss soaking into soil -  
- the head pulled back more exact each day -- until -- Abra  
sees his neck move with ease -- sees the veins work over  
days as he speaks -- as she had expected -- the sounds of  
their laughter forming one scream -- the sound of garrulous  
speech cutting the air with the stink of his wine his tongue  
lolling close to her lips parting thighs the shimmy of the  
dress lifted to the knee the undoing of pins -- of cloth -- the  
fur of the beard wet around the mouth -- alcohol stinging  
cuts -- staining sheets -- flushing skin -- the tease of hands  
covering eyes -- a tangle of hair eased through fingers --  
soft words -- shhhhhhh -- rocking -- Sssshhhhh -- a breast  
offered to a damp cheek --ssssshhhhhhh -- a lullaby --

the moment

his throat -- his painful breath his head pushed away from  
the strong shape of his body throwing shadows beside

Abra's hands-- at no point can she stop relax hesitate -- only loose strands of their hair stray toward each other -- their arms become one shifting body one full weight one flexed muscle ignoring his pleas his eyes his groans -- two women muffle their own urge to call out to scream out as his throat opens into their face wet blood filling their hands his neck fully dilated -- Judith cutting the last feeling the weight of him surprising for the first time the contortion of his body slackening the contracting wave of strength required to complete the act subsiding into shaking muscle -- his body plugged with the mound of their discarded skirts too quickly saturate and puddle as she cleans him wraps him in cloth records the time whispers his name places him in her food basket tearing down his canopy she wraps him cradled to her hip --

Leaving the gallery I walk home too quickly returning to the streets feeling the weight of his head in my arm in my quickened footsteps in screaming voices startling the dogs in lace sheets blowing dry over me in the sun's violation in the caged bird song in my fingers tangled in his wet bloody hair --

**W**hen I was small I would stretch myself out in the grass and open my legs to the sun -- I would let it put me to sleep knowing it would seep into my body and flood me with its time -- translating stories in me filling me with all it had seen but I had not imagined snow could spread from the sun -- no I had not imagined I'd find us inside a souvenir inside a small snow globe I bought upon leaving the gallery -- Artemisia's head still carried in my hands -- the bundle of your head in my arms -- inside a rush of ice I found us by accident -- yes -- I found us inside a miniature world -- found our likeness suspended in liquid as I paused to get a breath to unwrap the gift -- as I paused in the sun needing the feel of snow -- the need of coldness against my eye -- in that pause in that moment peering in I saw we were burdened with flakes -- I saw we were smiling at the bloodshot sky -- it was then that the details of our plastic clothes caught my eye moved me I would say yes -- inside that miniature world we almost touched but never quite made it -- my face looking as though it had been badly painted causing me a slight squint I could sense the tremor in the hand of my maker so only my right eye met yours -- my other eye drawn permanently to the sky -- I saw that I was forced to consider two positions at once -- your head and a perpetual winter -- my breath steamed up the glass obliterating the scene -- realising my control I shook the globe as violently as I could making it snow harder locking us more firmly into winter -- pushing back my nose to imagine our fate --

**A**nd was it you who first said take my head -- take it -- or was it me who first asked who came home and put my hands to your throat who saw you walk through the snow push your head to the glass your head illuminated behind glass like a lantern --

I see dusty words on the wall of our home too blurred too misshapen to read -- I see I am sitting outside with a small wrapped bundle on my lap I can almost hear you purr -- I see the black and white outline of my cat devour a single magpie and I cannot tell them apart -- I see you draw around an unfinished snowman its eyes blind dumb free --

Each day I sleep and wake nothing remarkable there but then there was nothing remarkable at first -- no to begin if I can begin I can say there was no grand story to unfold just always the promise of death -- yes that's what I said -- I began with the head you see after the gallery I carried it home -- I saw the painting -- the head -- and I carried it home -- it was dangling from my fingers I carried it home - - maybe even stole it home in a small bundle -- transferred the head to the snow -- saw us in the small snow globe I'd bought myself -- or was it you who saw us first -- shutting out what I was preparing to greet --

And is death a grand fiction to keep us in place -- to keep me from the two long windows that reach to the sky -- from the two long windows open to the sky from the bedroom where I write -- where I write you -- where you talk to me from the scratch of pine on glass from trees that spill and twist outside enticing me to the fall -- here is my choice --



do I see myself jump as you appear do I read you from the feel of ice beneath my fingers -- your head had the smell of weeds and soil your face sprouting from frozen earth too flushed too full of lips and eyes lines and stubble too human -- did I recognise your gestures -- my erratic movements toward you -- the cat sliding against the snow flattening herself out as if she is too open and hurting running her hindquarters along the ground over small stones -- your head lit up above the ground inside the ice -- I hear myself laugh with the shame of finding you again -- moving close digging -- I sniff lick scratch put my ear to your mouth -- hearing what is normally hidden hearing the fleeting calls of all who know me pleading caution as I too quickly lengthen the muscle of my tongue for your familiar taste --

Shutting out what I am preparing to greet I can taste a sticky kiss --

After this I make it snow harder I peer in harder watch us sealed inside our miniature world -- I steal myself away -- I wake and I hear you say come it's time -- I am ready to listen -- or instead is it me who wakes before you -- listening out for the sounds of you and although I you like the natural stink of my words to greet you I wear my blue grey dress the one I wear for fiction for love for you -- I wear my dress over my bare body -- I like the feel of snow beneath my feet I like the look of my prints filling in behind me I like to walk carefully not to leave any clues when I steal away to find you -- to find your ear and kiss it awake -- listen -- I lay over the pond of ice to look for you --

scratched you out of the frozen water -- sometimes earth --  
listen -- I clawed at ice to get to you I have fractured the  
glass to free you I am taking you home -- I have wrapped  
my body next to yours -- rolled us together in fat and cloth  
-- blown my breath into your nose and mouth to revive you  
and still I put my ear to your heart and I cannot hear --  
and I say hurry you must wake -- listen to me -- I must tell  
you --

last night I went to sleep with your head in my hands your  
broach of words pushed through my skin and I can't afford  
to take my fingers off you for a minute I have missed your  
smell the smell of hair tangled around finger and I know  
how to drink from your body -- now taste this just taste this  
-- your right hand your thumb pressing my lips together --  
a flat stone pushed onto my tongue closing my eyes with a  
pebble my hands to yours as you take us deep inside the  
pocket of your coat producing the taste for your head in my  
mouth taste this you say pushing my hair from my face I  
want us burdened with snow you in motion toward me  
feeling the first cut of snow on my feet you wearing your  
great coat a weave of blue and yellow fleck the material  
stiffened with the cold and when I find myself running -- I  
tell you -- look -- we get into our scenes so quickly so  
quickly me and you -- you never wipe your feet on your  
way into me you trail in what ever is on your boots on your  
mind your tongue has to laugh as well as eat it needs the  
wild exercise of risk of taste and speech each day and the  
snow brings along new possibilities always erasing any  
trace of your movement -- yes the snow erases you and  
then looks prettily at you with no conscience -- that giddy

bride -- and when you arrive you can't help but think about our impossible ending about what is available when the white expanse of snow keeps forcing you to begin again to make your mark again to prove to yourself you exist --

I began with your ear -- I began by reaching you through the tiny bones of the ear squeezing your lobes to the left by many small vibrations to the left word although my words prefer the right ear and my mouth only left the other for the choice but I have your two ears in my mouth well one ear in my mouth is worth one in my hand and in the way the only way we can we laugh I want you laughing for now I want you alive I do not want to choke you breathing I almost cut off my own air to get to you -- almost got stuck on your teeth in my mouth when I see that small eye that you suck from green to blue working open my lips with your tongue sliding the sweet blue eye from you to me causing me to push to buck to knock you over spreading you against the wall -- yes -- butting you the way small goats hit the underbelly for milk -- are you suffering enough or is your breathing too easy when you unzip my dress when I locate you by scar run my finger its length press my ear to your seam -- I must get back inside to feel what I am giving to your ear while I run my words through you while I make myself into the right aggregate into the right mix into the right blend -- tourniquet your arm with your torn clothes twist the frayed cloth into a crude twist find the right vein slap the right blue vein until it is fully engorged fix myself directly into your blood -- let me taste your bloodiest hand let me knead your fingers lick each one in turn bite what is left -- let me put my rings on all

your fingers -- decorate you with beads -- lipstick your  
mouth -- mark my left thigh --

Open hurting running my hindquarters along the floor  
marking the edges of the mattress horse-hair takes our  
prints retrains our knees and hands and the heavy ball of  
the head -- the wood from the fire spits and burns but I  
don't resist when you position my ear when you whisper --  
Is death is peddled as a grand fiction to keep us in place --  
how am I to know until I see you moving over the fine  
tracks of my neck through drawn open arteries until I hear  
your fingers slipping inside mucus until I hear the crack of  
my bone the cut of my sinews your hands prising me from  
skin until I see you deflower my head onto cold linen  
sheets --

I have seen you masquerade in many disguises yes --  
many times we have met many times maybe -- who knows  
-- who can be sure -- can you wish people you love into  
existence someone you might have passed unnoticed now  
here you are here together your hands on the table  
fingering her cups -- isn't that how it goes someone you  
could have passed unnoticed now fingering the table your  
mouth to the rim of the cup -- fingers across the table now  
pouring salt onto the table sugar into the cup the sound of  
pans the sound of food being prepared -- the humming  
kettle spitting to its job -- did you want her then -- did you -  
- is that what you thought as you drank her coffee -- did  
you want to stop all the damn cupboards opening and  
closing on your indecision -- come here eat take this finger  
tip -- your belly so hard -- you sounding like a small bear

the type you push your fingers into you know into the gut until it calls out I love you -- I love you -- or sometimes it just cries -- the belly so hard -- looyo -- but push on you do -- push on until the belly beings to sag begins to soften - - loyoooo -- then make a home in my ear instead -- become a distinctive sound instead -- a voice -- something that rumbles beneath speech some voice only you hear -- make a sound in me a sound too impetuous -- sounds too wet on my tongue where you drink and smoke I watch I wait I taste I linger --

The first time -- before you said there was snow surrounding us -- I imagined all the times I had seen you before -- yes before I saw us in the snow globe -- yes before your head in the painting your head behind glass your head in the ice the glass lit up like the lantern -- the snow veiling your face -- yes before that -- way back -- I am twelve or eleven say -- the first time we met -- yes -- let's say that -- let's say we met many times in many disguises in many other lives yes that's what people like to say isn't it -- yes so maybe the first time you were the red head with the inky lips yes I told you of him once before -- yes of the boy at school -- the red headed twin who swallowed his ink -- who soaked up his ink from the small well into bloating paper and sucked on the skin -- yes let's say our first kiss was stained blue -- no before that I was eleven say -- yes I was eleven and I was sent for the ritual bottle of soda that came in many colours like stained glass that you wouldn't dare swallow but I did of course I let the cheery lime dandelion cut my tongue -- let my fingers

translate the beads of glass while I carried the bottle home -- even then I was able to read glass -- ice -- braille -- yes I was always able to read by the very ends of the fingers as I drunk down the soda as I swigged hard on the bottle you startled me with your be my friend words with your street corner words and your clothes that looked like they couldn't come from around here -- your be my friend words just kept coming to get me and so I just ran -- yes maybe the first time I just ran and as I did I found myself sliding on small stones on small stones and dust it was hot that day my legs scraping the wall and I knew you were laughing and smiling at my foolishness -- at your patience - - knowing that you'd wait years more --

The next time -- yes maybe after this -- the next time we met you were older than me you had on a suit that was brown that matched your skin -- you wore that hat of yours -- that hair of yours was dark as if all the colour had seeped from that dark brown cloth into you and you showed me the pigeons or did I show you -- I was drawn to them -- they pulled at me with that old compass in their chest -- cooing at the back of my throat at the back of our old house in cots in green cots and chicken wire windows and I like the way the word cot sounded -- I asked you repeat it -- cot -- repeat it from your brown mouth onto the silver birds -- vibrate your throat like they do as I crawl on the walls to take a closer look as I tell you how I would like to be set free to the sky to fly to where we may meet to the house where we may end up -- not away from but towards winter -- no not yet -- too hasty -- but to fly to where ever my body wishes -- into what pulls at a large coin buried -- sewn inside my chest -- return was that

already in my mind to return to what I had not yet experienced as I watched the birds fly from the cots -- violent in their escape -- they flew pulled always on and back -- back and on -- and while I am on the wall wondering about the pigeon eggs -- holding one -- stealing one in their absence -- I think I hear you tell me stories but I am only listening to the sounds your words make not the content you sounding sure enough while you fingered the uneven stone fingered my calves -- old money rattling in your pocket -- nicotine only just beginning to stain our fingers and do you remember how curiosity tasted on your fingers our words locked between us on the dry stone wall -

-

I think to kill you have to be in love you'd said once -- when was that -- and of course that was true that day remember that day when I killed you the first time -- when you'd said to kill you have to be in love -- so that's right -- did that prove we had a passionless affair back then -- was it not authentic enough for you to know how to let your hands work of their own volition -- once you would have found a way to my neck now you flounder on the self too much too much self reflection leads to impotence of the fingers so forget about death we could fuck instead we could go for a drink -- what's the point I'd said -- once it's come to this there is no point in proceeding we are already at the exit and me I am ready to return to jail and relinquish my £200 for the chance of sneaking into borrowed moments always one eye on the door on the ceiling on the stairs on the trees -- the first arm around my throat -- there in the ditch -- the ditch where you stopped the car -- dimmed the lights -- yes the first time -- don't get

mixed up remember where we are -- there was something smoochy on the radio when you said I am going to kill you here only five miles from your home so close to your family and Christmas and you tried the gesture but my neck didn't feel right in your hands so I said fool this is how it's done and reaching over to you I squeezed hard on your throat and you died in minutes -- simple -- black hair against the black seat cover against your crumpled black jacket -- I let myself stroke for the last time all three textures hair suede velvet reminding me of our earlier meeting where you'd held me in a dark alley where you'd let me explore the velvet the suede the hair the first feel of you tightly pressed against the metal garage doors rattling with our movements forced to explore our sexuality in gutters in alleys in woods in cars --

My first dream of you was of your head pushing down through my open cunt -- of other women's hands assisting me pulling you free -- women's hands pushing my hands down to touch your hair -- touch his hair. . . they tell me . . . touch his hair . . . you will never get another chance . . . I am afraid but lower my hand -- feel our mucus the solidity of your head pushed half out of me my body working without me -- your milky lopsided smile emerging first releasing your head with a gush of bloodied water I deliver your head a torn neck an umbilicus where a body should have been -- your sleeping head they too quickly wrap in swaddling -- I recognise you instantly -- leaving us alone they instruct me to cut the cord but there is nothing to use so I taste our mangle -- chew our thick coil -- tear with my incisors until a small hole appears -- working in my tongue



I feel the last threads give way in my mouth feel the relief and disgrace of our separation -- this is the first time I hear you cry --

I told no one of your delivery from the snow -- forget everything you said -- six hundred degrees centigrade we spin -- we spin our cocoons -- I offer you my palms knowing you can remove my fingers if you choose a small sugar cube held in the pocket on the hand -- wash me down -- tell no one -- damp hair wrapped around my mouth -- tell no one -- the fat the blood in the snow -- take it at the end of the tongue -- neck odour -- obsessively moving -- the perfect shape of your head -- take it you said -- take it at the end of the tongue the blood in the snow -- the shocking colour of the tongue -- take it at the end of a laugh -- the mouth crunching sucking on a snowball -- white chalk crunched on the tongue -- relief in my stomach -- my sleeves pulled back my forearms exposed -- my very hands -- moving to my face -- the way your jaw lets out sound sounds alarmed cries -- hair scent -- you move just behind my head -- the cat does this trick -- thinks about licking us -- we think about licking her with sugar counting the grains in the snow impossible carrying sugar in my hands impossible or was it salt melting everything I begin to count the grains moved outside still carrying the sugar in my hands -- let's lie face down in the snow -- sugar spills as we knock against the ground -- our bodies spread open in the snow --

Was it then that you wrapped me in a sheet was it then that you wrapped me in your coat the coat stiffened heavy with

the cold -- beneath the heavy skirts risen stiffened with the cold -- clean me -- scratch me flea ridden on your skin -- wrap me in a sheet -- in roads people all life disappearing from the corners of my eye -- I know the windows let in air I know the doors are unlocked that the paths meander here and there whiter than the eye the fields starched out like old shirts in the distance the fields bordered like a collar pressed hard on the neck on your cracking spine the clean tongue cleaning the grass from your mouth salt melting the snow in my mouth pushed between fingers -- fingers stuffed in my mouth offering up my palms -- palms over your mouth --

But before this -- yes -- the first day I hear you kill -- you say it is the day for murdering the pig -- for preparing the blood pudding -- the blood will be collected and mixed in tin pails you say until it cools and congeals -- I can hear the clink of metal and then the screams rising with the wood smoke a tranquil scene the fields the small stream -- the sheep in the distance -- an egg just laid all this only exaggerating the frenzy the struggle of human and beast -- grunts and piercing squeals no longer pause for rest only keep filling the room -- I have to put my fingers to my ears but the pig senses my shame and his voice lowers then climbs to find me directly as if he has now found my name when I had imagined the slaughter would be quick the cut clean -- and was it then I went to running out through the snow half dressed was it then I sat squarely on the beast taking the knife from your hand -- no idiot -- this is how it's done -- was it then that the pig stilled under me the three of us on the floor one over the other the forgotten out cried

crows marking the time of death --

I hid your face inviting you on almost small inside my hand almost small inside a shell of flesh and nails I hid your face until my hand only pressed back harder only pressed back over what I had salvaged down over your hardened eyes open wrists the mouth resisting the feeling of panic fingering the nose covering your face sockets tracing your lap on my lap your head lolling in the crook of my arm -- and who will come and say stop -- and no one came and said stop -- you dragging up my milk my milk turning sour too soon -- drink more -- cross over my throat -- how do you know how to recognise the look of a woman -- suck more -- refuse to flee -- on these lost winter mornings the turn of pink again the neck bathed pink taking in the face -- pulling a spider from your hair -- before I saw you in the snow at the window that first time --

The first time I was expecting you you were milking the teats erect your head beneath the cow on your knees again on your knees again you took her milk took the cow's milk in the snow and I was jealous of her then -- yes I wanted your mouth over me instead -- instead I watched I watched from the window I watched you drink from the cow's teats - - I watched her eat as you drank your body filling with her my body a stubborn weight at the window refusing to flee refusing to call out as I watched you drink -- from the window I watched where I saw your head return -- you wiping away the ring of milk from your lips -- a child's mouth opening to lick -- the cow eating while you drank she looked at me while you drank as if she were inviting small

stories out of my mouth as she chewed with you -- you on her -- her on the stubborn grass hidden still beneath still here still there wiping the milk from your mouth with your sleeve -- half eaten bones on the ground -- half chewed bones in my kitchen -- sheets wrapping the neck -- us in our small costumes the clock chimes I see us from the sky look down on to us where our home has the look of a doll's house deserted to the snow I see all the innards spread out before me every room exposed who will know if I begin to toy with our lives who will hear as I rotate wrapped to the neck in sheets sometimes in wool buttoned to my throat in our small costumes with our half eaten words strewn over the ground -- unfitful memory relies on leaving me relies on disappearance on glimpses teasing me something infatuated yes something confectionery -- your smell of possibilities swelling your now flaccid erection deliberating swinging out its pride a pink trail a clue of decadence exposed at the tip rats moved in this way muscles thickened with sleep leaving traces on walls your body shedding skin fingernails too long scratching letters on wood -- small letters rubbed into soap words soap words washed out of my mouth your sounds go either way violent and arousing like tickles like a tickled existence -- your cooking carved from the pig bone mustard a rim of fat feeding me on the day at night -- hair wrapped over my pillow when I thought I heard you secreting dreams when I thought I heard you enter me where I have touched you most where I'd forgotten you most -- watching you most with another look keeping me compelled -- the daily hum drum of digressions -- the tongue knowing for sure that the tip of your head is open -- a soft mouth telling tales on me

-- winter arrives winter evenings arrive where we sit  
together around an open fire where I live you out in fiction  
--

Some days in disguise we leave the house to find food --  
surrendering ourselves to the outside with a speed not  
knowing in our labour what to expect -- we draw a line  
through the ice with makeshift compass around the  
perimeters of the house I moving north-west you moving  
north-east both meeting perfectly at south -- in the dead of  
night we watch the snow fill in the line we draw we rise and  
wander -- stray escape return retrace free ourselves again  
and again--

Crystals of ice multiplying starved for life knit together  
across the ground crunching underfoot marking out the  
sounds of our abandon -- horses still and cautious  
silhouetted in the distant fields becoming restless as we  
approach in search of comfort -- nudging into each other's  
bodies I can sense their ears folding back their eyes  
stretching open reaching to the top of their heads for sight I  
can hear their breath increasing when I draw open my  
palm with an offering --

Into the earth we rummage for berries and tubers --  
pushing our arms deep inside soil ransacking rabbits  
birthed up hot -- their bellies and ears corsage our  
shoulders pleasure our necks as we return home to butter  
hidden pink meat --

In order to cook you first have to kill . . . your voice is  
sharp as you slice open the belly of a great fish -- I  
imagine whole worlds contained in the cluster of eggs you  
find inside her fish womb -- a whole globe in the glint of her

dead eye watering as you cut deeper inside -- her eye suspended in the sentimentality of tears just held on the verge of crying -- scales stick to your palm and the blue sheen of her guts make your fingers gleam -- I watch you skilfully remove the remainder of her miniature interior -- sometimes people hurt things just because they are so complete --

Pushing the gills apart -- you flood them with fresh water until she runs clean of blood -- I almost wanting to take her uncomely face with its down turned sulky lip and kiss it to my own -- taste the salt as a final gesture show her I am capable of love -- but your hands are already removing the head tearing out the fins you are already explaining which herbs will bring out her best flavours which oil will be rubbed into her scaly skin how her pink flesh will turn white in the heat --

And so each day you feed me -- prepare your thick broths to protect us from the biting winds -- animating and seizing flesh like a ghost who has again discovered substance and cannot rest -- you sacrifice chickens by ringing their necks soft feathers drift from room to room -- I watch you take the skin from the rabbit in one piece smear a sac of fish eggs onto bread and devour it in one bite -- we eat like kings gorging on the bodies of others --

**D**id I tell you I began to worry that every thing would happen to soon -- or that maybe everything has already happened too soon without me -- ahead of us -- words may have written themselves without me -- like the snow falling the snow kept falling throughout this it fell as language falling unintelligibly too quick to be properly heard too playful to be properly read and yet if I concentrate carefully on each individual flake meandering maybe something of meaning may emerge yes maybe its all a question of translation -- with the snow it was all a question of translating of listening out of seeing where it thickens where it ends in you where it drifts in you until you feel that you cannot stop yourself understanding that you cannot stop remembering that --

last night you dreamt of your death again -- you were dazzled by the sight of your body spread out in my hands your bony skull filled with flowers on my shelf your doppelgänger doodled on my paper -- you saw yourself multiplied like a line of cut out paper dolls adorning me -- and as I remember as I hear what you dare not speak I see you have your beautiful head faced to mine your taste like salt was that it the word death tasted of salt oh too obviously dragged in and up -- offered up to my mouth again to be taken in again a silence again a tongue slipping images to mine again or have I announced this idea of your death with my mind wandering all over you this idea of your empty skull filled with water full of flowers the paper dolls all that to come or already seen -- am I inside your story or are you inside mine I can no longer be sure was it you who suggested this ending already too soon too soon

everything begins to happen to soon and now I am already at the end unable to tell the end from the beginning -- words I no longer know -- did I mumble or was it you -- was it me or you who sat by the window the snow angry with all we wanted to say -- filling me with ideas that we needed more time -- that we need to move on but where now when I want another ending yes I want another ending but you say there is none -- and what if I tell you this is not what I set out to write -- no -- I had not intended to read all this into snow from one painting from one head you at the window -- when I peeped into the small globe when I carried the globe home -- when I saw us inside -- I had no intentions -- but what if I tell you to leave now -- yes -- leave the story now -- get out now while you can -- or maybe I'll leave -- you'll leave I'll stop I'll say go on -- and all that said what about your name -- have I even once mentioned it -- I forget so much so much remains untold maybe it's of no importance -- your name that is -- her's -- the one in the story the one in the globe -- it's not me it's the one I am telling you of -- she is called Marianne -- I heard her tell you -- no -- I heard you call her name for sure I heard it -- you calling her Ma for sure for short it comes out Maaaa like a cry -- yes -- Maa -- and she responds yes -- she responds well enough to that sound -- but to go back --

What if I want another ending -- after all I can see this one coming I can see what you want where she is leading us -- the one in the story -- and what if I know I lie you lie there in the snow all wet through all lies wet through yes true enough the snow eventually lies all around us in this tale all



around us in all ways all around us it has fooled me into getting this far along and now -- now what -- shh -- nothing not a sound not now no -- no repose only my hands opening to the heat of you breathing still breathing still here -- is that all I can ask for -- that the tale continues on -- a few images given the way of the tongue your calls drifting over us like a patient bird who knows that whatever happens I will have seen well but is there anything to be seen only both of us lying perfectly still one wrapped around the other still silence do you hear that silence a sheet of it sheets of paper covering our face sheets pulled up to the neck pulled over the face your head still quietly held in hands already mourning the moment we set out unable to get back -- back where back to knowing where back to knowing there is always the middle to contend with back to knowing that time wants to play us with its fingers wants to make us cry out and rush us forward but I am trying to keep so perfectly still that he won't be able to find us so perfectly still that time that the ending won't be able to find us --

**D**o you want to play content with me want to come play  
want to play content to play knowing backwards want to  
play a lie want to play a lie with me lie me down lie down  
with me tell me everything I have been waiting to hear I  
have been waiting for you -- tell me what have I been  
waiting to hear -- borrow an ending a new beginning move  
us forward a little on then -- I have seen the ending I have  
seen it well enough I have drifted over you well -- saw us  
from far away -- those two trapped figures in the snow --  
don't go -- I had been waiting to hear the snow fall the  
footfalls in the snow -- the sound of digging in the yard --  
she's there again she's digging in the yard -- you scraping  
your nails on the ice again and there must be snow to melt  
the words yes -- give up asking for another ending -- forget  
it for now -- shh -- yes forget it -- shhh -- let's move on  
whatever happens -- yes -- let's keep one another moving  
forward -- around -- each day you sleep curled in on  
yourself in the way life inside the belly pulls the woman  
inside sleeps inside dreams inside the head sleeping in the  
gut the same way you curled into day-sleep leaving me for  
longer forgetting me for longer -- snow knits me a blanket  
of forgetfulness --

Instead for now each day the sweetness of risen bread  
baking your work of baking of frying carving meat from the  
bone picking squeezing slicing wearing an apron tightly with  
plenty of pips to the front the lemon squeezed out the neck  
the chicken rung from the neck all smeared with the zest  
grated each day your work of feeding me preparing me  
your work of slaughter clung to each day each day cooking  
day and night with our mouths open with our mouths open

we are born and will die offering the fat the stink of veined cheese the stuffed apple the ass stuffed with herbs and butter -- and the first time a man took his mouth to my breast I believed he would eat me -- that hairy chested suckler showing no limits to his mouth no limits no shame to his hunger tickling threatening to turn into bite -- every day more offerings always perfectly golden bread always the bloody meat offered up even though there is more than enough -- the red onions the eye running silently a silent running eye offered a severed green eye run over my lips next to the tongue lemon cutting the table in light your fingers forced inside tulips before they are ready -- one violet head offered in each fist -- an offering made on the table -- each day an offering made --

In search of my absence sometimes I feel the need to leave to return to come and go in you the way you come and go in me to lose to overwhelm to taste to the taste of animal remains in the lungs swallowing the morning that needed gasp of air the white larded dishes ash powdering the rotten greens the smell of garlic marking my departure the animal remains my out house filling with a high scent the lungs the calf half gone mad pushed out of its dead mother heave heave out the lungs filling of their own accord now at last at last at last --

I left a note in chalk did it say I'll be back did I say I tried to leave before the end -- before the end coming there was no other ending you said -- when you said take it -- take my head -- no after that -- I tried to leave -- but I'd forgotten the secret underpass the right word I'd forgotten

to sign my name I forget how I sound -- imagine that --  
imagine I might find some one out there in all that snow --  
out here in the open door the taste I recognise and lose  
fresh air the lungs filling where it hurt the first time -- what  
-- the inflation the sudden filling of the air bags in me --  
equal sacs that much I recall -- the bruise of it inflating that  
first breath -- and what if I leave the way you come and go  
in me by the way of over larded flesh the lard the land  
contours content in front of me I open the door wider  
swallow as much as my lungs allow my lungs allowing  
everything in -- I imagine someone may find me imagine I  
might find them -- that's what I thought -- sometimes we  
leave because we can and then we leave and wonder if we  
can where is there to go what is any longer my destination  
-- 33 degrees north make that north west when south  
would have just as easily persuaded me -- as where was  
she to go -- all dressed up all ready to go -- trying to --  
trying to look as if she were forming decisive steps -- when  
before her step away she had scribbled a note in chalk on  
the table it said -- I'm leaving -- I know you will not read  
this I do not sign my name --

Some days I try and leave the story -- and on such days --  
as there were more than one on such days -- when I'd try  
to leave the house to leave your head intact -- on such  
days some days I'd dress and re-dress in unsuitable  
clothes -- in clothes too yellow and brightly patterned too  
silk too low cut and frilled -- their colours and fabrics seem  
gauche and out of keeping with the daily drapery of bed  
sheets and old gowns I have taken to wearing nakedness  
now never far away -- my face magnified in a small broken

mirror before I took myself out before I took it in me to  
leave before we got to the end but I felt the sudden dread  
of meeting others of infecting the lives of others how to  
explain I tried to leave before and so I scribbled you a note  
in the dust scratching in the glass my face an effigy of paint  
my hair dragged into an elaborate decorated beaded hat --  
treating the walk as an occasion some days yes some days  
I'd leave you to sleep open mouthed smelling of something  
run to seed -- your neck open with fitful dreams not  
wanting to be left with you the cat always trying to follow -  
-

Some days

I'd try and remember people -- a type of mislead animal  
their ridiculous speech their comical movements the odd  
flash of colour breaking through the sheets of white -- white  
fields blue marks only leading me in the wrong direction --  
no -- I walked I tried to leave but never found anyone out  
here no other print no words left -- well none I could  
decipher nothing scattered I only reformed circles -- found  
no strangers to follow to grab randomly firmly to me -- only  
the obstinate rhythm of my boots breaking the ice birds in  
two -- sensing you are already awake I want to turn your  
face already pressed to the window watching me walk away  
-- as you clean away the dishes -- my chalk words erased  
taken onto your finger licked with the butter -- the birds  
dragging worms from my footprints the chickens quiet in  
the yard trying to avoid your eye -- me sliding myself along  
in places my breasts remembering finding only comfort in  
forward steps the burdened sky again shifting its weight

again as I reach the field that will take me out of your view  
finding a small sugar cube in my coat I offer it up lick it  
from the flat of my hands -- my firm flanks my glands my  
hips sugar sacks my breasts full eggs my leg of lamb my  
blonde belly all these things you say and all that I love  
about myself as each day you fill me from your body from  
the bodies of animals with buckets full of milk rinds thick  
with fat meat heavy with earth fruit heavy with sky --

And watching the animals gives me the urge to drop to the  
ground to walk on all fours to feel gritty snow on my palms  
to open my nostrils wide to pant to raise my skirts my leg  
to a tree and pee freely without inhibition to watch the  
yellow bubble the snow to see my own steam rise the  
splash to my ankles -- again there is nothing she said  
nothing like peeing freely in the cold earth -- as I child I  
would often defecate in the gutters and now we lose all that  
-- the nearest we find ourselves is in the odd tin pail the  
odd bowl -- in envy I watch the animals lift their tails lock  
their legs while swallowing what green stands between us  
strands hanging from clacking jaws rotate open their  
extremities without the tongue ever pausing nor asking why  
or when --

I confess all the contents I can find in me -- to muster out  
of me into the trumpet of a hare -- a fat hare I pull from  
sleep -- whisper into its oversized hatch -- do you love me  
-- love me not -- feel for its long teeth and cold tongue do  
you love me -- love me not -- I try to feed him try to tell  
him of you -- of the slaughter I can foresee -- tell it I have  
seen your mouth opening and closing like a bag filled

landscape I see myself enter -- I hold tight paws as I try and remember how to break the hare's thick neck like you'd showed me -- the tree impatient over me makes me briefly lose all concentration and strength -- claws scratch open my thigh into fine almost perfect lines that bleed pleasantly enough my mouth naturally drawn to the lick as fur escapes the length of me runs away sideways tumbling chewing my red woollen thread sticking from its teeth --

Some days . . .

I cast a frightening enormous shadow of myself cause myself to move too buoyantly for one so lost -- covering obliterating the ground that casts the thing that thing that lays itself before me beside me behind me depending on the sun my position its wilfulness eventually elongating into a thin hungry colour that walks without me any longer seeing the cord that joins us or is it some part of the head at the belly at the hand my shadow shuns my kiss turning her head in profile or obliterating the face as I face her -- all organs emptied out -- I wore an indigo dress like hers once like my shadow once a gown that swept the ground sneaking up on you running wild over the evening icicles hardening moving into me into me back on myself an awkward shape I step back on myself -- I count -- adjusting my boots -- wrapping my flimsy coat around my face -- already parcelling myself up against the cold for the journey back -- encouraged by the feel of fresh snow the surprising strength of my arms the steady sheeps' bells moving away too swiftly to hear me keep to the path made on my outward journey -- I find myself always returning to

you even though I try hard to lose my direction remembering the door is ajar always the rustle of beech trees pulling me west I throw the stones from my pockets as home spreads open inside me gives me the urge to rub handfuls of snow into my face to soar to spread large and sovereign to surrender to a loss of gravity to watch myself circle around the twisted cockerel around the weather vein around the taste of smoke from your wood fire -- deciding if to return or flee I cast a frightening enormous shadow of myself always you sense my approach -- a tongue mutters on the stove --

With an absence of our details you stripped the walls you emptied the rooms you decorated the rooms with our empty shapes uniformed by joined hands like a line of cut out dolls the thigh the hip the arm our all empty heads conjoined duplicated hands held one another in chalk in shaky imprints holding hands our bodies drawn around again repeated patterns contort stretches us over the floor the expanses of wood the uncovered walls the emptied rooms the rugs rolled away -- we are all too fleeting to be caught with the eye -- with an absence of detail I greet the outlines of us joined around spread open on the walls repeated on the walls repeat after me -- write here -- write everywhere -- the sweat cools on your body -- hold my hand -- repeat after me -- hold me -- hold me as hard as you can -- you do not always see me watching you do not always enter me with your hands but inside me with keenness with the the lather of horse sweat -- I watch your body as you drag up the rugs empty the walls draw around our bodies shapes -- press me into the writing stone the



drawing stone -- press me in hard -- draw around the edges of me fill in the gaps leave the chickens safe to egg another day -- the taste of uncooked meat still fresh under my nails --

It is sometimes better to begin than to every day stare at a wall of blank canvases or a wall of your outlines waiting for me to start saying come come come come it is better to begin in doubt anyway always in doubt to think is to doubt - - no to doubt is to think I think it was said was clear that some days I write you in doubt -- I fill in your outline from nothing more than the childish rhymes -- I make you from the incoherence of speech I make you from errors amusement erasures from the gaps in language from spelling mistakes with a disregard for grammar with an absence of punctuation in your body -- concentrated on the head always -- skin ages in commas and full stops and stocking tops and graffiti and have you ever licked a semi colon all over your thigh -- the colon the semi colons the sexiest of all -- the hot mamma of the family ; the "scare" quotes over your belly the parenthesis we are always caught inside and if I have the courage I will one day leave your outline empty I will one day let it speak for itself I will one day trust that the empty imprint of your body will soon tell me everything there is to know without the need for filling without the need for obvious meanings -- instead the scribbles now visibly bring me a change of mood -- yes I drew in emotions the second time around I came to you in a whole range of tempers and laughter and tenderness scribbled in your chest

why are our hearts disposed to the left --

I realise something has been spoken by mistake as I press myself into the writing stone something had been spoken by mistake I keep asking for another ending but you keep saying there isn't one -- I chalk the wooden floors -- I ask again -- give me another ending -- but I know your tricks your tastes of bitter slush your dead-earth stories gritting my knees -- me spending my time too close to the floor inside my home made book of dust where I graffiti our lies -- my hair lettered up with chalk until I merge with the white walls -- I walk our story pick up the chalk story on the soles of my feet so you shall never lose your way to me --

**enco' mpass** (ionic' m-) *v.t.* Surround, form circle about, espy. to protect or attack; contain; hence - MINT *n.* [ *f.* EN -1 + COMPASS] **Compass 1.** (Ku' m-) *n.* 1. (us. in *ply.*) Instrument for taking measurements and describing circles, with two legs connected at one end by movable joint. **2.** Circumference, boundary; area, extent, scope. **3.** Instrument of navigation showing magnetic or true north and bearings from it.

**Y**es maybe if there was a story to be found as I peered into the globe it is at this point that you made death into a character -- that old cliché be careful what you wish for -- let's make her up you said -- let's make death into a woman let's dress her up -- let's take our time with her -- let's say she came to stay a while let's say that's what we wanted --

But was I expecting her -- is that what I wanted and now you had mentioned her now you had so swiftly put the suggestion to me how could I then say no -- my indecision -- I was always too easily persuaded -- yes too easily persuaded that as the end approached too soon everything becoming too soon -- was I now convincing myself I needed an accomplice -- in the way Artemisia's sword was undecided in the way the sword was washed away at the end of the bed did I now wonder if I too needed help -- was I thinking of the painting of the two women over the head the head beneath the two sets of arms the complicity of two women over one body -- no easy feat to carry out such a thing alone -- still I am ambivalent -- jealous you might say -- yes -- of another's presence of this need for another to be brought in by you -- I never wanted her -- I'm sure of that -- but let's say she comes to help -- that maybe she is my invention not your intervention -- yes maybe you know nothing of her -- maybe it is me who falters half way -- who feels the need for another -- a little company -- a little moral support -- what you ask of me is no easy task -- to follow this through -- death came and went after this didn't she -- I never asked for this I said -- let's call her my death-girl you said -- she can be whatever she wants -- we can give her a mind of her own -- there she is -- there she

was already abbreviated -- look how soon you became familiar with her so soon -- d -- you called her -- dee dee -- were you laughing as you said this -- yes -- sometimes abbreviated like a doll -- sometimes she is older than us -- she can be anything she wants to be --

Yes -- maybe it was you after all who dragged her in who named her who abbreviated her made her into the familiar form -- d -- yes -- did she not first appear when you brought her home one day -- one day you were out killing again -- yes maybe that was it -- after all -- all through this tale that's all you did -- you worked your way through chickens pigs small birds rabbits fish even a small swan -- and then when she arrived -- my accomplice my acolyte -- that day you'd brought back a steer's heart -- you later buried it in the snow -- the steer and the heart -- that day you went too far with the heart -- cooking it for me dropping blood all over the floor -- you cut the heart out of the animal in the yard you dragged it home -- don't you remember -- its still unformed horns scratching a trail home its still eyes on me -- you went straight for the heart -- carried the bundle to the sink flooding the small pockets with water patting it dry so carefully salting it -- talcing it in flour a little nutmeg too many onions making us both dribble -- you served the heart in a bed of leaves lit candles sat at the centre of the table -- you thought it was one of your best meals -- but I didn't believe you -- you looked suddenly vulnerable as you placed it before me -- you were dithering about where to insert the knife the heart collapsing slightly as it cooled -- dribbling as it cooled you still floundering with the blade -- it was then I threw it to

the ground -- I was disgusted with the endless dishes before me with the heart with your indecision you holding the knife over it -- you scrabbled to pick it up -- you wrapped the heart in a bundle -- in a paper bundle -- you ran into the snow -- you dug a small hole and buried it -- silenced it -- your hands raw with the cold your head in my lap pushing open my pelvis --

Since then you've been looking for someone in the pond -- you didn't say so of course but that wandering look was enough that way you checked the mirrors -- lay prostrate on the ice -- I'd told you that story that simple tale that absurd tale only the morning before -- just before you brought this other home -- the morning before the heart -- I'd found an old copy of a play -- it was aged with nicotine - - I'd always liked to read to you each evening and often when we'd wake -- I'd read you small passages each day your head to mine -- the book this book was yellowed -- it was a small tale of a couple -- yes a couple who kill or find their lodger is dead and for days they discuss what they will do with the body how to dispose of the corpse -- and the woman knits and they sit together of an evening discussing how they will dispose of the young man who lays in their spare room -- over time the man's body begins to grow and fill the bed -- falls from the bed his body spreads everywhere now covered in fungi in small mushrooms -- I told you it was absurd -- and soon the body in that tale becomes so big that it takes some time for the couple to push their way into the room -- when they decide that they must now -- that night -- they must dispose of the corpse -- they have no other way of doing so but to force the body from a large picture window and into the street below -- the

woman pushing the man pulling outside -- the huge body falling into the street -- in fear of being caught and yes he is soon seen -- the man panics and tries to drag the body out of sight -- but soon finds himself being lifted the body floating into the sky -- carrying the man up -- the man clinging to the corpse's leg -- maybe I made that part up -- but the huge corpse does make it to the sky --

do you see --

It was then -- it was the day of this absurd tale the day of the heart that we made death into a character that you first abbreviated her to a girl to a woman that came and went -- dee-dee -- you said -- bringing her home with the heart -- yes you carried the heart she carried herself to the window -- invited herself in -- death you said comes in many disguises -- in a car that breaks you in its wreck in a cliff edging sea in an opened womb a nylon garrotte in a sour bite in no breath in love ageing in a twin in a long glass nail a plum stone a chunk of gristle in monotony in combustion in a woman -- in a woman wearing a dress that belonged to me -- and when I see what you have called up -- her wearing my clothes -- I'd forgotten the dress --

It was then I remembered two sets of prints in the snow -- you were calling to someone -- you were calling up another like an imaginary friend you dragged in -- yes at this part of the story you were looking to bring in another -- I see you hesitate but you called out to her -- isn't that what you wanted -- you held hands I remember I remember you were whispering and giggling together as you brought her

in invited her in -- you were whispering and giggling you and her -- you made sounds that filled my mouth with saliva -- I did not want to swallow -- my milk-maid you said -- the sound of her heels my dress too long on her -- she was wearing my dress when I first agreed to you bringing home another -- someone to help you said -- my dress was dragging on the floor the first time I saw her -- the first time she wore it and it was almost ready for me was almost my size it was mine -- she didn't know how to keep it on -- she kept pulling up the straps -- she kept lifting up the skirts as she walked -- I tried not to smell your premonitions but your words your calls kept putting pictures into my head and at first I thought it was me who had called her up -- this girl you brought in -- my accomplice you said -- stop saying that -- as if I could not do this alone -- no -- instead you were spending too much time with her in the bathroom hiding around the corners of the outhouses with the slaughtered meat and her close by - - I could hear you talking -- I heard you talking in the wood shed -- heard you pushing up my skirts my dress around her thighs -- three's company -- no that was two wasn't it -- but I know the sound your tongues make as you wait for my reaction -- you crying from her mouth -- she cries -- of course she does -- she laughs she cries she's the same as all of us -- I heard her in you one afternoon -- crying that is -- as she came in -- she made her entrance in a very sensitive mood -- but don't get me wrong -- she was laughing too -- uncontrollably she got the giggles in you all at once laughing and crying at your moods -- at our decision and fear -- she was taking the form of too much flesh -- she was making herself known by the cheap

perfume you took to wearing -- was it hers -- sequins an avalanche of hair -- by her clothes too big -- hips and breasts that move you to touch -- buttered lips -- beads in her tongue -- a cheap toy you have brought to the door the way my cat brings me half dead rats and bird wings -- offerings I do not want -- mirrors no longer reflect what I remember of myself as if they have given up on me have decided to take their own path and reflect a different kind of truth -- but I know you went looking for her -- I know you called up her up in these glass eyes around our home - - I've seen you waiting around staring -- startled -- licking at the glass -- I've seen you prostrate yourself outside crawling on the ice looking for her -- scratching her image in the frost -- you slowly making her features into mine -- covering her with a smile that is too proud -- showing me we are one and the same -- that the dress she wears will soon fit me and her expression is my disapproval --

I heard her scream today -- I thought you had made her up but I heard you fighting today -- I think it was your first fight -- it had the drama and the endless length of a first fight -- I saw the marks in the snow I saw the animal bones chewed over -- now I see her every day --

But before this before you calling her up before my jealousy -- I had woken I couldn't properly sleep I had dreamt that you came back in time that you'd been long dead that you walked through a room full of people to find me that no one else saw you -- I was sitting at the back of a cafe at a table on my own -- the people talked stood and sat around -- drank coffee -- the colours the sounds were



mute -- not thinking of you I re-applied lipstick holding a small mirror at an angle to my face -- I put too much red on my lower lip -- the colour slid as I saw you approach -- you were smiling with wet teeth -- you looked only at me -- I saw only your head appearing over the shoulders of others -- your hand reaching through wiping the lipstick from my lip -- running it down my left cheek -- you peeled a warm black egg -- bit into it fingered out the cooked yolk fed it to me -- walked away laughing --

It was when I woke to look for you that she appeared in my dress -- dee -- she had her name written on her hand she had it written the way a child does on her hand so she wouldn't forget -- it was then she first came to me when I was alone -- she was wearing my dress -- she was older this time she was older and already ahead of me -- she was wearing my dress I recognised the beading -- the silver blue skirts -- the torn lining -- she sat filling the chair -- resting her hands -- they were so gently resting on the antimacassars -- her nails were thick uneven grubby with soil -- I noticed these things -- you had left the room you were outside searching for something alive and warm to eat -- I ran to the window to check -- I saw your torch light yellow the snow -- the bare boards under my feet were surprisingly hot and I felt the fullness of my flesh move beneath my loose night-dress -- the simple floral material made me modest as I stood before her like a shy horse one ankle bent ready not sure if to kick -- and at first I thought with all this talk of your head and your death that she had come for me too -- that way she had of smiling

with her eyes so I felt soothed even though I stood away wanting to stay and look but was ready for flight if she should move to raise herself up -- and it was as I moved closer to her it was then I heard your voice in her mouth -- I recognised its foregone language almost oscillating between my resonance and yours -- I saw her lips twitching slightly as she worked like a ventriloquist telling me she would show me what to do -- her voice had the feel of hands working the knots from my head her voice telling me tales speaking of you of the mound of snow in the garden the dead animals her face kept making pictures of you over her skin I could hear the faint scratchy sound of *Stormy Weather* being played on a radio she was ahead of me her body filling her features becoming yours your mouth your smell your voice foretelling -- you on her face she you wearing my dress as she continued the monologue that I recognised as our story -- she was counting my fingers -- I said count me then count all of me -- come close to my eyes as you count -- come here and count all of me -- it's not so easy to concentrate from this close from this position is it but I like to think of you in your counting house -- was it me she'd come to claim -- was it me who had called her up as if all this talk of you was a trick -- I thought about leaving again about ways to keep her in one place for long enough to answer all the questions I had -- my hand across the blade across the glass in the fire -- I couldn't remember if she was showing me my face or yours frozen in the ground -- me at night drawn to water on a pond of ice looking in -- was it you or me skating over a face suspended beneath ice -- was it your hair rusting your eyes blind to me or my eyes sealed kissing lips until they stuck

and burnt reddening my tongue was it me lolly licking you -  
- your bones and teeth in her skin -- you already feigning  
death wearing my dress now hitched up your hands now  
resting on her bare knees -- me touching you in her  
burying my hands into the darkness of her mouth kissing  
your mouth until the last of my breath is prevented -- when  
she vanished -- vanished as I heard you approach when I  
heard your feet scraping the slush from your boots -- she  
left the dress I could feel where her body had been where  
she laid it on the bed -- I wanted to push my arms inside to  
see if it fitted but I was too afraid that I would be taken --  
she returned like this several times -- never talking to me  
directly only via your mouth on hers -- I tried to tell you --  
I thought about calling to you -- to tell you to come to see  
what she was showing me but all this snow dulls the senses  
-- always she left the dress shining blue filled with beads I  
counted every one --

I have a memory of the locust --

The locusts had taken to eating one another in a great  
plague -- they had fallen from the sky one summer and I  
woke one morning to the sounds of their crunching -- heads  
being bitten off wings disappearing inside tongues the  
slowness of death no sign of resistance just a slow  
acceptance of fate -- I squashed my nose hard against the  
windows and watched them on the glass slowly  
disappearing one inside the other -- is this what we do --  
when a twin first finds sight it has no sense of other  
thinking thinking that the face it tries to kiss those  
encircling limbs to be his own --

I begin craving tomatoes -- the potassium you say -- I want the stinging taste of watercress -- the iron you say -- I cannot find either in the snow so you bring me coals and liver to lick -- obvious enough -- when I wanted only the simplicity of contrasting colours -- I dreamt of tomatoes growing heavy and low on the vine bursting with juice and seeds bunches of watercress adorning my table in celebration I cannot fill myself with enough colour -- making too many paper hearts I apologise for my short-sightedness -- the crows still pull worms from your footprints -- a rat gives birth in your abandoned shoe -- the fire ticks -- you slice into the ham and I taste bitter cloves in its fat --

Last night I dreamt of you as a young girl with prominent dark eyebrows -- I had no milk -- my breasts were soft and empty -- I couldn't remember the labour or how you got here -- I kept asking you if you remembered -- I wanted the details -- to feel the pain -- the tearing of flesh -- I felt cheated but you were too young to remember the words I tried to teach you -- you only kept opening your mouth for milk --

there was only the cat licking our words from the wall -- taking what she is denied -- smiling as if she understands something we do not -- eating too many of our sayings sick on the fat of them -- vomiting up a word ball -- you carving a lollipop of ice for me to suck on -- your eyes like mirrors dropped by accident smashed reformed unlucky eyes no matter how much I stare into I turn I find by accident that

your eyes change colour often --

the season stagnates --

You had slept into late afternoon when I heard dee's red stilettos on the stone floor waking you -- I could see her black dirty toenails peeping from her shoes -- dark hairs shadowing her torn knees -- as you woke she was taking up her red stallion pose satisfying herself as she watched you move as if she moves only to pleasure herself -- an old worm growing between her legs -- we all three now overdressing for dinner -- she impatiently watching you -- pacing the room with her bare belly swelling swishing her hindquarters getting her image all wrong -- what you brought into this story embarrasses me sometimes -- your eagerness for my reaction -- her stomach growling behind me -- her laughter becoming hiccups -- her standing between us -- her squatting on the floor beneath our feet like the cat waiting for scraps -- her drawing you out of the room -- her drawing your face in the condensation of the window -- I hear your laughter flicker -- voices close by -- you lying on the floor with her again -- the two of you together on the floor her with a mouthful of hair her all shine and tightness -- this time you were wearing my dress and I wanted it back -- I wanted it my size -- I wanted the zip sliding easily together -- you looked ridiculous -- I tried not to let your cooing work my guts -- I tried not to watch you preening yourself in her hands -- I feigned sleep -- turned away pushed my head inside a pillow -- I heard you say that you have never been able to find your reflection in the glass only her body is now glistening full on -- you said

you were engorged beneath her skirts -- you made a pose over her not yet properly divined -- you ready in my dress -- then I heard your high cry a wail I'd forgotten -- the sound squeezing us back together -- your cry held in undeveloped laughter your call carried within hers a faint wish made one to the other -- I tried not to react tried not to let your cooing work my guts -- my eyes in the snow in the windows above us -- my body re-positioned away from you to the moon just visible -- you lying alone now beside me on the floor in my dress -- giving in to an inevitable pull to turn into me again to rub your face dry on my back -- me taking back the dress -- taking the dress off your body the red lining accentuating the darkness of your chest hair the small tattooed bird peering out as I slip myself inside the warm costume hear the run of the zip feel it tighten around my breasts straighten over my thighs -- my hands counting its small beads -- we lay together forgiving the empty sky nothing will stay put in its mouth -- dreaming and waking merging with the aftertaste of our longing -- outside the animals lick ice from one another -- speaking of the comfort they find in one another's smells -- a kind of cruel steam the body exudes when our breath meets the cold air -- we all mixed up inside them -- when I make a wish that someone is watching -- I hope that someone is listening out for us -- a ear splayed open that will capture and steal our sounds balance our memories -- that all our memory is passing the way of the ear that all our thoughts are sealed in someone's wax that we are held deep in someone's head -- I rock us as if we are bound to an invisible horse locked between my thighs -- we continue like this for some time but get nowhere only lunge back

and forth on the same spot dreaming of other times of other ways forward --

You tell me . . . I have an image of you which seduces me -- you tending my clean bones arranging me with flowers but before that -- I see us in conversation laughing kissing sitting beneath a tree beneath a tree that is erupting beneath a tree that is overgrown and blisters its intestines through the grass -- roots spilling the ground -- a winter tree that never loses its flowers a tree that knows no limits moving itself outwards and upwards waking from the ground breaking bindings -- I see it growing all over us --

you are sitting up now your face becoming animated and optimistic again you kiss me in the beaded dress telling me that tomorrow you will find and cook a peacock and dress me in its finery -- when the dawn comes I'll go looking for them . . .

I used to keep them once in large cots . . . remember . . . remember when I let them out I had to clip their wings to stop them flying of . . . I used to watch them shit eat breed . . . their eggs splitting open would make the most lost of sounds would sometimes me cry once very spontaneously . . . when I took away their eggs they would run through the house slipping their costumes and I would comfort them by feeding them scraps from the table . . . let me find you one . . .

No . . .

No one will come looking for us I have rubbed the word

family from my wall --

I have to remind myself that we are occupying a suspended ball -- what a joke -- relying on and only just believing in gravity -- when I interrupt the belief do I plummet into oblivion -- and sometimes I admit I admit I am too afraid of you until I remember my capacity to lose myself to pleasure myself in my own anguish in you -- what frightens me more is the way we force each other to change direction when we least expect to when everything is flowing our laughter so open our mouths so musical that we leave ourselves forming a separate being a being that rises over us a being that is the best of us of our language a being that looks down at our entwined bodies with compassion that spins with our communion like a humming top that rises and swells vibrates with colour and song until one of us will regain a unexpected self-consciousness will pull away split laugh the brutality of a sentence cleaving the other apart aborting our tender form until a trusted voice again returns eases beguiles me with small tastes of the sea -- sshhh -- sssshhhhhh -- I no longer recognise the feel of your ear tips bulbous lobes sliding into my mouth I watch your beard grow -- move as close as a disorientated insect in search of comprehension -- look for the tell tale marks on my skin -- odour rising from the glut of your seed congealing on our bodies -- disgust and love tremble along the same tightrope spawning monsters -- I listen to you sleep -- already in the domain of remembrance -- thoughts become our own private bird cage -- sing my love . . . sing

. . .



Today dee returned before you had time to properly wake -  
- I saw her in the doorway she was shaking the snow from  
her hair -- she was humming to herself she didn't speak I  
was not expecting her so soon but I knew she looked  
prepared for anything -- I saw her lay out my dress on the  
bed -- she left out a locket with your picture to the right --  
dead hair coiled inside the left window -- she was wearing  
your suit -- it looked laundered -- its seams were pressed -  
- a tie was knotted loosely at her throat the trousers didn't  
fit her properly and her ankles were exposed -- I saw she  
had washed her feet -- shaved her legs -- painted her nails  
different colours -- then I heard her cleaning up the kitchen  
-- she wrapped a large clean apron over the suit she wore  
and she opened up the windows -- let the snow drift in --  
she washed the floors -- scrubbed the wooden table with  
bleach and salt -- her hair was damp and stuck to her face  
she smelt of polish as she moved as she began running  
your bath I tasted the evaporation of salts I heard her  
scraping up the animal bones the sounds of snow being  
shovelled -- knife on stone -- the bath almost over-flowed  
while you slept on while I pushed my hands into the down  
of the pillow pushing mine softly over your face tightening  
my grip as if it is my most important of jobs -- I counted  
quietly to myself hearing the distant gush of water the  
pressure drop --

And here you are being slowly kissed by ducks -- who  
would have thought these gentle creatures -- their soft  
down -- such sensual bodies would end up preventing the  
last of your breath -- you struggling from sleep uncurling  
into the realisation that I am watching over you staring at

you too completely -- sing my love sing -- pushing skin over bone -- your voice spilling into my mouth calling me on -- it is not always possible to touch myself in the way you touch me -- I feel the difficulty of containing my whole self and if one of us is to falter what should I do with my limbs my mouth my hands -- I am so used to touching with skin so used to biting experiencing the antithesis of words that if you were gone what then -- my nails seem shockingly brittle dirty human and uneven against the floor as she wakes you as she escorts you to the bathroom as I hear your limbs disturb water as she licks the tablet of soap over your back as you are taking longer than usual to bathe as if you try to put off the inevitable and return to me -- I hear her instruct you -- lather up balm with water -- wash away bruises my saliva and salt from your skin -- you protrude your shoulder blade for her as if it contains some sort of growth I'd created -- and how good her hands feel as I slip on the blue grey dress laid on the bed -- the zip closes with ease -- I rub my chest and neck with cologne -- I re-arrange the bundle of my hair with long pins -- beads and broaches anything I can find knowing I will play out my part with dignity with all that is expected of the final act -- powdering my face and neck a fuchsia heart drawn high to my cheek -- that makes you remember -- geranium smears my lips I can already smell what will follow -- I can hear her pass more and more soap into whiten your hair -- the long rasping scrape as she parts with your stubble -- my feet look dead against the dress against the wooden floor as I try to imagine all the different ways I will arrange a sentence when I face you for the final moments as I try to rehearse where I will put the intonation will I look at you

or not -- will I appear relaxed or mournful will I speak at all  
will I be able to stop myself -- my tongue feels nothing  
more than a piece of meat inside my skeletal head -- water  
draining into the throat of the bath greedily sucking  
digesting the last particles of your waste -- I see vapour  
rising from your chest and arms as you approach as you lie  
beside me placing your head into my hands my mouth  
ejaculating to the lime of your damp skin -- you putting  
your eyes to mine as if looking for clues your eyes crossing  
with my proximity your tongue filling as we kiss a perfect 0  
-- today I can think of nothing but slaughter

For I had executed you from the first

**T**here's the force of water the noise of water but I don't recognise my mouth -- my fingers caught in your wet hair - - your head in my hands -- its slow rhythmic turns around and back to face me the weight of it surprising me -- once I begin the moment feels surprisingly arbitrary I simply reach over it happens simply an open neck -- I watch you take a large gulp of air expanding your chest I watch it move your mouth your throat my grip pulled tightly -- yes there is time for this moment -- moving my fingers into your scalp and you are receptive as we knew you would be -- you sunk into wanting this at least you will know that I meant it enough to carry it to completion -- ready to work my muscles do not flinch my arm flexing the action of eyes and warning smells rising from both of us -- twisting your hair in my fingers as death permeates all through you -- I was holding your head when I cut -- long opening slices stroke your throat -- one slice like a guillotine one moment could not have been enough with so basic an implement twisting both of us -- contorting -- less pressure greater or less pressure with my arms my body having to invent new sounds as our cries release my hands -- small bones splinter our mouths filling with liquid chewing and cutting the resistance of tissue and sinew all the work warming blood as if you have stored it to just the right temperature for my pleasure -- my clothes patterned in after images -- the metal blade changing like a slice of mirror reflecting all our details blurred incessant reds through to blue black a whole spectrum of hair strokes your throat over the block of my lap where I crouch I use the cloth the dress impatiently lifting it around my thighs -- my thighs burning with colour -- colour smeared the length of my thighs

cradling you in my lap -- I clean without feeling you fall away feeling the sudden weight of your damp head -- spent muscle falling quiet -- your wet hair clotted together I try and smooth it down in tufts --

Do I expect myself to laugh to double up at the moment of death for I am alone with no one to see or hear or judge if I should laugh loudly until my belly aches who is to know or laugh or cry both bring on the same response to rid myself of salt leaving me lighter with relief a little sweeter --

Can I close your eyes -- I didn't know if they would close so I hold them down with pennies -- if I close your eyes will they close inside -- I close my eyes and imagine me covering your eyes with pennies metal staining my fingers black --

Somewhere here in the tangled sheets there are lines I know they are here somewhere I know we have lost limits within lost geometry here somewhere I saw it put it somewhere as shapeless as the sheets in the bed we occupied edges blurring and merging my body and yours quite quickly heavy and damp no longer able to differentiate my shivering I'd felt warmth in another part of the room now redundant your mouth from your neck words leak as if you are making a final speech as if someone has torn off my blindfold too soon there is too much to look at -  
- my arm still gripping skin running eyes making a panoramic room open into red walls resonating the uncaring house as the thump -- the cruel thump seems a cruel ending as my flaccid arm unceremoniously drops your head to the floor --

My reflection is peeping at my name in the mirror returning  
the room returning from skin I peel myself from two small  
holes in both knees out of tights my smell a bra only  
knickers one plastic animal has its eye on me coffee rings  
dry on the cups my lipstick kisses the rim some left over  
breakfast rests near the mustard relish salt and pepper  
somewhere near stopping settling your head rolls around  
the table covered in cloth with a sudden undignified gesture  
I see it swallow I see open eyes my releasing arm trying to  
flee an upside-down kiss -- next things change so fast one  
thing rolling on to the table lemonade tasted bitter I missed  
out a whole season of time I felt heat on my skin the  
sounds were dry and thirsty just a moment ago in winter I  
dreamed I fell asleep in the summer -- lemonade I sang  
out of tune a lullaby I sing cradling the bundle of damp  
cloth your head the portrait of my head catching my head  
disconnected in the glass cut off by the sill bordered in a  
frame -- I sing out of tune -- I look for a moment into the  
centre of the soiled dress your head I cover but nothing is  
covered --

Unwrapping you is difficult -- wrapping you is difficult -- I  
notice the bird's eyes upon me they peer through the  
steamed glass -- one bird sticks his head to the glass fills  
his chest with air opens his beak wide but no sound comes  
out the tune has been ripped from him without his knowing  
-- he shits onto the gritty sill -- makes several erratic  
movements before flying off -- I bathe scrub my skin raw  
hold amber soap to the light slide it between my hands I  
spit and immerse my face taste the water -- reaching up to

switch off the light I float in dark staying there a dangerous length of time not wanting to hide anything not wanting to return to leave the fluid security of this shape holding me so carefully lingering completely still floating murky red unnecessary particles of water collect hair and dead skin -- my body will soon have you cleaned away --

I'm a little tired and I just woke forgetting it was winter I dreamt I fell asleep in the summer I'm running a bath and on my kitchen table there's your head lying right of the pepper pot --

Unwrapping you wrapping you I cannot put your head straight onto newsprint finding instead my old stripped pillow case sentimental to the last -- I peel open the wet cloth -- take the bundle of your head off my table -- your cheeks still freckled from my dress beads moving carefully around your eyes open eyes run to hair -- tattoos of news prints my clean fingers -- I hide you beneath the floor boards beneath my bed --

I cover the walls with our story it takes at least two hours to fill one wall depending on how fluent I feel depending on my memory I don't even know if I've done this it takes at least three hours to cover one wall the full stops mean nothing I shall not go out not after today I shall not go out -

In the room I stare at the balloons you gave me feeling the tightness of your breath expanding their skins the only breath you have left -- the night inhales exhales and toys

with colours -- still adjusting to listening I lie awake you sleep beneath balloons that drift out of my reach I taste bronze and silver tarnishing on my tongue I place egg timers around my room my every movement turns them -- and I wonder does everybody know from the smell of damp stones my actions caught in mirrors -- below in your tiny crawl space you draw me my head drawn next to yours in the dust -- from your floor bed I think I hear you call --

I'll tell you something your shoes were difficult to remove I got the laces all tangled I didn't know if I should leave them on or off I wanted to ask you what you wanted there are so many things I want to ask you --

And time is never really right the wind holds the power of invisibility giving the impression of uncontrol yet gets inside me in slow motion everything decays when exposed to the air we have to breathe in as well as out it's a design fault still I tried to keep my routine in place I tried once I knew a head will not be sufficient but for now --

Should I have waited for the right kind of day for the right kind of weather should I have licked my fore-finger to the air to establish my direction I keep trying to remember not to forget the seasons flakes entering the room through four open windows some of the metallic balloons drifting to freedom -- the sky no more than an ash can tinged with regret -- my cat following me like a purring conscience and if you asked me to describe myself I could not say in what way I am different but I know I have changed after all you



are dead I know this to be so no denying my bravado -- I know from the drop in temperature I tell myself I must make myself more sweet tea -- I know about sugar -- I layer myself in cardigans any woollens I can find -- your long coat smells of your skin and hair layers of you your history held in this coat sweeping the floor as I move -- still the shivering persists for some hours -- I turn the heating on full -- the rattle of the pipes consoles filling the arteries of the house as winter confirms itself to me -- the first snow of the day outside the window my nose pressed to the glass I feel the minuteness of myself -- someone up there has shaken the sky shaken the world with their swift hands so quick I didn't even feel the tremor only the aftermath of winter snow bringing me a different vision -- enabling me to finish what I've begun -- you -- I -- completely alone again -- obliterating the red landscape white covering all evidence doorways drains the snow continues to arrive expecting you to call out I will tell no one but no one comes a pressing thumb knowing how to make me scream -- yes yes -- with the promise of warm hands small words secrets make fools of us -- secrets fumble between the layers of my skirts -- they know our exact places -- someone should come and wash me down lay me in clean sheets forget the feel of my hips spread open against the floor a confessing finger on your throat -- stop all this -- bring someone -- maybe someone will be here soon -- will persist until I open the door -- maybe someone will clear away the remains be responsible for my comfort bathing hair combing feeding --

And why I don't discard you immediately -- your head -- instead I send myself flowers -- see my words written by a strange hand -- I read once -- flowers are a ritual we need

in times of fiesta and tragedy -- I find several bunches pushing through -- they are difficult to find this time of year -- this time of year -- I arrange them carefully -- with my left hand I write my name on a small card -- no longer needed insomnia leaving me while sleep takes me very far away but I cannot remember my dream when I wake I cannot remember anything -- the time the smell sounds give it away certain types of light -- I lie horizontally across the bed not vertically -- I like to sleep horizontally -- I like to hang over the edge -- I always end up in that position -- my body like a compass reacts constantly so that my feet greet the morning sun and my head rests where it sets -- I move accordingly for a time as if the flowers are pulling my insides -- and for seconds I cannot remember anything -- I touch skin -- it feels like another's face -- search for myself the quilt large handfuls of down -- strong arms -- I remember my arms you telling me this -- my first memory is of my arms stretching pulling me towards the light the first thing I see -- a lost sun -- everything tidied away so neatly -- the room immaculate even my excess clothes are folded over a chair with precision even the writing on the walls perfectly executed and the swaying of balloons around the room is a sight which does not alarm me --

There is a moment between sleeping waking where even the calling of my own name sounds unrecognisable -- illegible from a voice that is not my own a voice that is calling beneath my head a voice becoming audible as it clears its throat and speaks with greater intensity yet the name sounds a question as events your voice the realisation that my head is hanging over your head makes

me feel that my ears have slipped so that I am reacting to sound in some part of my stomach --

Marianne -- I'm hungry . . .

Marianne -- is that my name -- it sounds like a made up name a name spoken from another time -- yet I seem to recognise it by the syllables by the Maaa . . . Ma . . . Maybe it is the returning sound of the bleating sheep that used to lull me to sleep from my window as a child maybe the bleating was the telling of my name and I never before understood maybe I'm mixed up with the sheep yet I am not made of wool that much I know I do not eat grass -- Maaaaa . . . And I find myself nodding as I begin to feel this must be who I am -- how you remember me -- how do you know maybe by my smell -- the smell -- and then I realise that my head is over your head my head hanging over the edge of the bed over the boards beneath -- and where to begin I am afraid to look -- maybe it hasn't happened -- everything is tidied away -- I must have worked so hard not leaving a trace -- plants mirrors and books clothes folded over chairs clothes towels the room the stillness -- I hear my cat begin to cry calling out her accusations -- her smell pervades the room as she cries and claws at my bedroom door removing the paint work -- I let her in as she intimidates me -- she the silent witness is carrying a dead mouse still warm from the kill its loose neck curls towards its tail -- she discarding her present onto the boards as I hear you deep in the belly of the dark floor -- my cat is a jealous creature her sensitive fur her yellow eyes know everything I swear she is betraying me

rubbing evidence from my skin to begin her inquest -- her black and white is like the blood on the snow flowing away into the crack in the floorboards the rhythmic beating of her tail returning some sense of time passing -- I still imagine that you have lungs that the pounding of the cat's tail massages your heart awake that she knows these tricks she is much more than a killer of vermin -- I can feel those inflated lungs warming up so we three become trapped in this room that has become an iron lung with only the head surviving with only a mirror to see with only the drone of the breath --

Maaaa . . .

I want to pull you out straight away but I am too afraid so I just touch the bare boards -- let my hand hang over the side of the bed the wooden floor as I hear the calling of my name once more my fingers clawing at the gaps in the boards your head on my lap the weight of you surprising me --

Unwrapping you is difficult -- all I see is white chalk mould covering your face and your sagging dummy mouth -- whiskers -- I momentarily get you mixed up with the cat and believe I can hear purring -- do you ask for coffee -- the word coffee demanding a response and I know I am soon to speak and that my reply whether blunt or playful will be received with pleasure -- I speak missing out letters -- putting the stress in the wrong place -- the sound of laughter the pitiless rhythm . . . I thought you were dead . . . you want food --

All I see is the white chalk crusting your skin -- a rash of  
mould your eyes running into a gummy mouth reminding  
me of your hunger -- I clean you carefully laying you onto  
new sheets -- making the coffee thick -- three sugars --  
just as you like it -- I pour a large rum into both our throats  
-- propping your head beside me I lipstick our mouths push  
a cigarette between our lips -- we play opera open up the  
windows and howl into the snow --

To embrace another's body -- to take a little salt with warm  
porridge was our favourite -- there are amounts of food I  
like to prepare you showed me how to fill another's belly  
one too large --

Some nights I swear I can feel you writhe beneath my face  
your face still feeding me on great lumps of meat on  
creatures barely cold threatening to throw up through my  
mouth -- it is barely dawn as I feel you slip from your story  
to mine hear the crack of my neck your smells of cooking  
spread with a knife our tastes of smoked fats and well  
salted meats the fearful longing I have to eat you away  
enables me to untangle myself to crawl to the wall hear the  
silence of my chalking you out of me dust words warning --  
calling you out of me calling from a dead sleep lulling me  
back across the floor to the spread out sheets -- I resist  
still I fidget still I don't like being held in this way I can  
hardly wring out the sheets -- I taste blood slowly to begin  
with suck a little from the cloth wring it out my hand into  
my mouth -- your mouth eating out your tongue -- worms  
slip -- earwigs work much quicker -- or is that the flies  
laying their eggs -- I sieve out what I can -- pick out what I

can -- do what I can combing out all life from the dust  
wrapping you in more paper wrapped you like a fish supper  
re-wrapped in paper in cloth and plastic --

Each evening the cold air eases both of us -- you  
arranged in my food basket carried around the fields -- in  
the corner of the garden lines of washing greet me open  
gestures hang frozen -- I make a miniature snow body  
waiting to receive your head -- a compact body made from  
hand prints bigger than I remember -- cracking insects  
between my nails I groom you clean adjust your head --  
your thinning hair -- a half chewed nose -- smudged eyes -  
- my breath pouring into your mouth threatens to give you  
delivery -- I cannot find enough debris to finish your kiss so  
some nights I leave you with half a grin -- the garden  
filling nicely with circles -- my cut out sods of soil finding an  
awkward rhythm in the resistant ground -- once I've  
completed my digging I dance self-consciously to begin  
with -- once the surface is ruptured I dance --

There are many ways to preserve -- formaldehyde an  
epoch in liquid those sour brown onions always too sharp  
with stink filling eyes -- skin bruised -- palm wine making  
you sing the hit of cedar to your veins -- bursting fever  
blisters in candle light I elevate your head northwest --  
your head prints the winding sheet your head reminding me  
of Kabuki a masked white paste a disinfectant I liberally  
sponge the strong smell of violets the lime slack fizzing  
particles crunch as I swallow my spit mixing the chalk --  
chalk whitening my teeth slide over the teeth crack open an  
explosion of lime calming my belly -- chalk as different  
from cheese forming a skin -- not so different after all --

cryogenics next to the fish fingers -- there are many ways to preserve -- turning you inside out like an oozing meat sausage -- my words moving into your head a direct line like a phone call I speak directly into your ear through vibration I move inside run my sounds through your head - - and if I tell you I understand the words the over layering of dust erased and over drawn what will you give me -- you beneath the floor beneath my body you listening out to the sound of my reading -- I read to your ear -- your ear turned to my back -- wax runs and hardens -- I love the rituals -- do you smell the cat spray the walls with her scent marking out the lost days do you hear I light candles do you fear the feel of snails moving inside your head -- empty shells I hold to your ears -- your ear turned to my back -- beneath my bed -- your long periods of gruelling sleep -- handfuls of hair -- knowing that I squeeze you too tightly -- only your small teeth collected and how many sixpences are they worth -- or are those flirtatious creatures only interested in the enamel of youth --

I begin to think I should transfer you to the earth -- it seems only proper -- its dry sweet smell -- it will all be forgotten the tar mouth yawning your monotonous calls -- each day pushing the drifts from the door -- you in the food basket -- in the garden around the garden the sky too still - - still I pack you in medicinal snow fulfilling a need to gasp I am still here -- and what if I bury you beneath the pines to mingle with their whiff of antiseptic -- what if I place your head like a child in the earth -- carry you three times around a random spot -- a hole made from a random spot - - I dig -- so many holes the circumference measured with

an old bucket -- the spade too small for the job there was no plan no everything was random -- the way I removed a circle of dirt -- one each day-- my indecision was touching - - one here one there I could not decide on the bed spot -- the way I poured milk into your ears as a blessing the way I danced awkwardly to begin the way I placed your head inside the cupped out soil -- replaced the unbroken sod of earth over you the way I danced until the grave was scarred trodden down blemished ice a pattern of feet the cloven hoof the way I let the hens lay and scratch and scatter their eggs until no trace could be found -- all of it random -- nothing thought out -- words running under the ice -- all the letters that went unopened -- me waiting open mouthed beneath the door for someone to come for someone to send word -- only more tracks the day always hiding in its part of the world -- the letters stuffed under the snow -- the stench -- I made coffee just the way you like it I painted your face I smeared lipstick on your lips tried to bring back some sense of colour to your mouth -- I dug you up again -- made more holes -- still undecided -- how everything goes back to normal sometimes --

Do you remember how as children we would roam the ramshackle graveyards -- how we'd sit amongst chiselled stones sojourn with the dead -- do you remember playing games walking between the cracks of the departed -- if your foot touched the stone inlaid into the grass you were dead -- letters erased by weathering so you had to gather what we could of what lay beneath scatter our lists thrown to the air as we'd re-name each other. . . Ida Valentine Octavia Silvie Delilah your Zaza my Dodo born in the heat



fell in the snow -- we would picnic -- our cheap paste sandwiches absorbing our prints as we sat with the unkempt the forgotten the uncared for finding the polished marble and green even grit of rectangles too symmetrical and clinical too ordered bordered defined -- what chaos what orgies I imagined occurring beneath -- we instead were drawn to the unnoticed to the unmarked unordered mounds blistering the earth -- tangled bodies laid one on to another from generation to generation -- sons reunited onto the bellies of their mothers -- his weight surprising again -- taller than she remembered -- the flesh older fatter worn through since she last felt him -- we liked to sit with the unwanted the flowerless the overgrown the unweeded the nettled and thorned there was a steady motion the chatter of them -- remember --

I find myself saving bits of you beneath my bed under my pillow hair teeth tiny bones carefully placed in discarded birthday wrap patterned with flowers -- balloons numbers the word HAPPY written between -- everything was random -- the choice of time and day the remains left the birthday wrap I found by accident -- I placed each item separately into the paper using lots of tape to keep them in place and I buried them deep in drawers full of other debris -- broken toys discarded notes old photographs and sentences some hurtful at the time with buttons always buttons -- I threw earth from a nearby pot of chrysanthemums as a gesture in keeping with tradition -- I droned -- in time when I have almost forgotten I anticipate that I will find you at the back of the drawer when I least expect to when searching for something completely unconnected -- I anticipate that I will

unwrap you hurriedly frantically pulling angrily at the yellowing tape which will tangle into a long indestructible line so I will have to cut and chew at it with my teeth again -- parts turned to dust will rise and settle again -- I will make up the fire wear my dress inside out and gaze at my reflection as I glue the souvenirs that are left of you on to board re-making your face -- and only we two know only we two know no one else will be able to hear -- this will dissipate all sound --

To bury your head was delicate

**P**atting the mound little gestures I leave you my hands my red hands making the first gesture that's how I was meant to remember that's how I recognised the garden the fruit trees bare and still hanging with dolls making holes in the garden for the first time repeating marks making a circular motion towards I dig making the first gestures making the first marks afraid of pieces too much handling will break moving you from my basket a familiar shape hardly what I remember hardly recognisable your skull my tongue stuck lips burn your jaw kisses slide your frozen mouth sleeping for a moment lying down beside you I search what remains of the soil something soft to fill you to fill the ground an engorged worm in the hollow of your mouth squashed you eat you crack the ice offering the bread until you no longer call my name I stuff your mouth over to the sounds of ash beneath my knees tangled grass muddies snow my hands pat the mound my footprints fade an open cut of clay not listening to the tulips open one violet head offered in each fist of ice not listening not fully listening I empty the basket to the orange light of the house

**O**utside the thickened snow bears its scars where I have dragged myself back and forth these days to harvest the last of you -- clean bone flawless as a new cup -- I rub my hands inside pieces free of blemishes all meat married back to the air -- I place your jaw bone carefully open on the shelf next to a teapot -- fake flowers -- knowing you are now free of the cumbersome taste and burden of words -- your jaw becomes an ornament of laughter held for always in the upturn of the joke --

Some nights you lick me awake -- the tap tap tap returning hitting the pane with a tongue furred over a kiss beginning everything again your head again slipping down to my window and pushing its great oversized face to the pane -- dribbling your sop slavering the glass between us into a thick blur -- so I open the window -- do what I should never do -- you preening yourself before me your tongue rough and thick the sort a village woman would cleave fresh from a bull and boil in a stew pot -- your gossiping tongue is telling my name -- repeating the sounds of our story until it hurts my ears -- I try to forget that you come as memory my mouth filling with an instinct to open it wider than my body will allow as I think about enveloping you -- put out my tongue taste a faint odour of rat -- I feel my jaw begin its dislocation my windpipe moving forward a vibration making my muscles relax wanting to inch you into my throat to crack you open with my backbone squeeze you into my belly with each contraction with each swallow the unclean taste of hair eyes and teeth -- instead you laugh at my notions grind your teeth inside your bald face -- how many others have tested your wounds as you pretend you

have been far away --

It is three in the morning when your tongue rises and taunts me awake -- three AM making itself known at this hour at this face to the insomniacs who care to sense the difference --

The day has long descended the sun hidden itself shyly behind the mountain's skirts -- tucked itself high up inside -  
- I have no say over time -- your eyes now look like beads I've absentmindedly threaded in my sleep but I remember how good it is to see you again to sit quietly and watch your face

~

