

ILLEGIBLE NARRATIVES:

Towards a Queer Violation of Life Story

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Abstract

‘The Women Who Hit Me’ is an exercise in *queer writing*. Via strategic (mis)uses of the aesthetics of creative writing, it attempts a Genetesque seduction of its readers in order to crescendo the force of its (im)potential disturbances. A novella of sorts — imagined from within the structures, the strictures, of heteronormative language — ‘The Women Who Hit Me’ engages in a self-conscious fictional game that it nonetheless plays dead serious. The focus is Jimi: a protagonist at a queer disjunction with the language that inscribes her. ‘The Women Who Hit Me’ is the coming-of-age story of Jimi’s illegibility as the textual non-binary demarcations of erotica/pornographica, supplication/confession, fiction/thesis battle like MCs until ultimately there is no victor. — Corrosive even to that which it loves, part suicide note part love letter.

As well as addressing the concepts and strategies mentioned above, the exegesis is an idiosyncratic response to the metacritical problem of in/appropriate theoretical speculation. Informed by the night vision pedagogy of Williams S. Burroughs’s *My Education: A Book of Dreams* and the implications of reading the unconscious as a nonsymbolic and nonfigurative social force in schizoanalysis, it aims for a critico-philosophical phantasmagoria, a post-surrealist “look-behind-the-scenes” at the thinkers and poets who claim ante-

cedence to 'The Women Who Hit Me.' Like the creative work, the exegesis is a *queer text*, working against the fulfilment of meaning and toward the disturbance of the poetics it nevertheless desires.

Declaration of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, no part of this work will be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without prior approval of the University of Adelaide.

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Gretta Jade Mitchell

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EXEGETICAL NOTES

On a plane and it is going down and I know this is *reality*. (Burroughs 'Education,' 15)

¹ *Sticky Kniky*: I hear voices in the next room disputing Ihab Hassan's modernist/postmodernist schema (6). I can't place them. They concur with all his points but one: the postmodernist tendency toward androgyny. Surely an economy of sexual difference impoverishes the androgyne.

άνδρόγυνος

<Greek: άνδρo male + γυνή female> (OED)

An inaudible voice is singing. I'm aware it is a travesty role Orpheus. He has a message for me but warring voices are hushed like doctors cutting hermaphrodites at birth.

Έρμαφρόδιτος

<Greek: Originally the proper name of the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, who, according to myth, grew together with the nymph Salmacis, while bathing in her fountain, and thus combined male and female characters> (OED)

Over the black noise I can't hear what he says. Distress wakes me. At the foot of the death bed I purchased for my wife, a child is editing my latest draft. It is Flannery O'Connor. Frowning and locking her

right palm over a crucifix, her left on the manuscript, she says:

[...] (Lost Citation)

And disappears. In her place a faraway echo crosses the Pacific with a broken leg set in concrete. From the Appalachian mountains to the hinterlands of Queensland, an inconsolable elegy, ‘grotesque’ and ‘anti-bourgeois’ (Palmer 162), emigrates.

έλεγεία

<Greek: έλεγος sung lament, of unknown origin + -εία, -γ, suffix> (OED)

Like a bad-debt to shifting first-person, my fiction hovers over the six lines of the ‘clock-shaped’ coffin Cash made for his mother,

κόφινος

<Greek: basket> (OED)

[...] like this with every joint and seam bevelled and scrubbed with the plane, tight as a drum and neat as a sewing basket, and they had laid her in it head to foot so it wouldn’t crush her dress. It was her wedding dress [...] (Faulkner 80)

At a rachitic kitchen table in Edwardstown I eat oatmeal, cinnamon, and honey with three partially written characters who lack the bank-balance to acquire the black symbolism of their death. Askew and screwed like the bolts into a corpse’s face, they agree that *Sticky Kniky* cites the Southern Gothic tradition: the beat-up charm of Carson McCullers’s dramatis personae, ‘born dark and somewhat queer of face’ (20), and the peregrine denizens of Cormac

McCarthy's landscapes where 'secular aloes bloom[...] like phantasmagoria in a fever land' (172):

a ragged [...] band of [...] characters — whores, drunks, ragpickers, 'inverts', — even a young watermelon molester [...] foul and unhealthy, drunk and profane [...] endearing in their depravities. (Palmer 171-4)

The ruined aristocrat among us, for there is one in every band of destitutes — denied the most brilliant destiny, she seeks only the most wretched (Genet 'Journal,' 218) — misreads *kniky* as *kinky*. She chases me around the kitchen with a plastic fork because she doesn't appreciate reminders that she is Antipodean. 'It's irksome. It's Australiana.' She screams and I escape on whispers into the upside-down halls... whispers of Postcolonial Gothic, of Salman Rushdie, of his observations of Adelaide, the desert city, the *literary* city, to which I was exiled:

Because sleepy, conservative towns are where those things happen. Exorcisms, omens, shinings, poltergeists. Adelaide is Amityville, or Salem, and things here go bump in the night. (231)

It is hush in the halls; and outside room 624 the key I am given by a trepidatious administrator doesn't work. Louche, *déracine*, I pick the lock. Behind the door an analysand's chair takes centre stage. It made its way there

[...] as certain sentences make their way into a text, that is, a letter here, a letter there. (Genet 'Our Lady,' 118)

The aspect entrances me: St Peter's Cathedral and the Adelaide Oval. An empire of Cricket and God, they won it with a bloody war. Hard against the walls, four desks, two on each side. The messy desk belongs to Carolyn, the ordered to Madeleine. Wait, I'm distracted. I'm aware the librarian doesn't like me. She smells the Futurists on me, the malodour of my 'decaying mind' — drinking molotov cocktails with F. T.

Marinetti in Rare Books & Special Collections. He declares, '[...] art can only be violence, cruelty, injustice' (3).

* * *

A letter here, a letter there, the analysand's chair takes centre stage. Somewhere *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in room 624. Basilisk taipans live there with the death drive: 'the urge of living matter to return to a lifeless state' (Freud 137). Yes Michel Foucault, I'm incited to speak of sex (History of Sexuality: An Introduction,' 17-35), the irony is: aren't you? Do not expect me to engage in critical discourse wink and nudge. For I do not care if I am a species or an act; I am critical as one is alone, or horny. Ignoring my desk, I take my place on the chair. Sentences emanate '[...] as cemetery flowers sprout from corpses' (Genet 'Our Lady,' 129). Before we begin Freud informs me that he doesn't like me or my writing. He presses record on a two-inch reel-to-reel. Claiming my right to a 'radical laxity' (Deleuze & Guattari 381), I retort that today, on this the first day of my candidature, I shall impart not my dreams but my theories. He stops the recording, imperceptibly sighs, and hits me on the head with his cane.

1. *All I'm getting are ghosts. Yet this dead address is not conceived as a correction of a denied presence. That is, as an imagined truth. But as a series of fictional confessions to absent gods, the crime of which is the writing itself. Not because we are repressed, but because we are incited.*

2. *The dizzy mirrors of the sexual chronicles of de Sade's 120 Days of Sodom reveal a vital yet meaningless paradox: the (gothic) frame is always already a comment on writing as a true thing. Functioning, nevertheless — as irony — to point to the text's fictional status (see Addenda: Gothic Frame).*

3. *Ultimately the joke is on the writer, who, via the detailing of*

her obscene glory — her sex, lies, and videotape — reveals something altogether other. This revelation we can only presume is the poststructuralist imagining the self erase the self. But,

How transparent that all is! Sometimes I say to myself, they say to me, Worm says to me, the subject matters little, that my purveyors are more than one, four or five. But it's more likely the same foul brute all the time, amusing himself pretending to be many, varying his register, his tone, his accent and his drivel. (Beckett 401-2)

² *cuming*: I'm not sure where I am, but I can smell expensive steak cooking on a grill. A homosexual academic has mistaken me for a boy. The honour is ironic and as my mouth waters green bile, it hits me — I'm starving. He's smoking weed; and he eyes me like the disaster of perfection he'd love to creep for around Venice before violating in the *imaginary* on the beach (Mann 197-267). A sharp buzz in my left ear fades in, fades out. Visualizing my indignity he asks, 'Should a homosexual be a good citizen?' Should I 'rage for respectability' (Bersani 113)? I presume his questions are rhetorical so I raise my left eyebrow and seek his Ovidian advice. Should I pursue a girl I would like to rim who reads Marcel Proust while I prefer Jean Genet?

Girl? My dear boy. 'The heterosexualizing of inversion condemns the Proustian invert to a loveless life without even the consolation of good sex' (Bersani 134). On the other hand, Genet

repeats society's accusation of him as a homosexual outlaw, meticulously seeking out every ramification, every implication of that accusation (much as his tongue industriously and lovingly sweeps up the waste around his lover's anus). (Bersani 161)

I laugh and ask him how to spell *cum*. His disdain becomes evident with a grin that reads as a snarl, a quote that sounds like a threat: 'I mean "unnatural" and "come" in all their semantic richness' (Bersani 129). Revealing more than he intended, his lust rhymes with disgust. Touching his mistake, my androgynous hand,

he's not finished with me yet:

Indeed, the practice of rimming could be thought of as [...] Genet's ethic of evil [...] for the aesthetics of betrayal serve all that is the intolerable moral logic of Genet's erotics. (Bersani 160)

How then, Gretta? can a man like Jimi serve the state? I want to say with an impure gesture but his tongue is on my rectum. With a dirty lick of my lips he dismisses me with the last word when I ask him to buy me some food:

a new possibility emerges: evil not as a crime against socially defined good, but as a turning away from the entire theatre of the good [...] a kind of meta-transgressive *dépassement* of the field of transgressive possibility itself. [...] Not a betrayal defined by any opposition to loyalty. It is a betrayal of that opposition [...] (Bersani 163-8)

I wake up groaning desolation. Murmuring as an after-thought one of his quibbles. Dear Gretta, you're just another queer outlaw with scatological aesthetics: 'getting high on linguistic waste' (Bersani 181).

³ *doorstep of hell*: and this is where I was born. Off-centre amid The Goodnight Scrub, off-centre amid the Central Queensland Bible Belt — handsome, if not for the Mark of Cain on my right cheek. Born, 16.05.1977, in a place without poets, a place where 'no poet speaks [...]' (Clarke 35); and yet a 'weird melancholy' permeates the quotidian scene of the town of Yeppoon before me, as if Edgar Allan Poe were dying drunk under the ghost gum trees: those 'strange scribblings of nature learning how to write' (Clarke 36). Deserted deserter (alone with the strange scribblings of my nature learning to write), I'd see him at night in the bush. And still I howled with the dingos, *no poets but me*. By the time I learn of my mistake, I'm a sub-citizen of an insignificant city, a Neo-Romantic Post-Poet seducing a meth-head femme. Kleptomaniac, she dresses in black leathers and reads pilfered Jacques Derrida on the floor of

the public university library. Alike we understand 'predication' as 'the first violence' (184). Her hair is black and blue; she perfumes me with drug-sweat and we concur:

A Being without violence would be a Being [...] outside the existent: nothing; nonhistory; non-occurrence; nonphenomenality. A speech produced without the least violence would determine nothing, [...] say nothing, [...] offer nothing to the other [...] (Derrida 184)

Her high-heels are trashed, her feet grimy and calloused, reeking of the men she fucks... and I wonder if her father has money. Good and pure — as a philosopher must be — she "logics" away from me and from the call numbers of fiction (where I laze in an erotic daze) toward a concept of nonviolent language: 'pure invocation, pure adoration, [...] purified of all rhetoric' (Derrida 184). And I — Evil as a writer must be (Bataille 'Evil,' ix) — wallow in impure symbolism, impure artifice, the impurified rhetoric of queer writing. Over affect and espresso, we (de)part.

On my way out of the shadowy library I lose Julia Kristeva's skateboard. Keen to the syntagmata of managing withdrawal with substances, she says I'm implicated in the 'quibbling' (94). I'm not listening, but scribbling: *Glad I lost your skateboard.*

Outside ancient graffiti reads: *Lucifer woz 'ere.*

(I understand I'm not alone. I carry Dreamtime flowers on my way to you.)

On a dilapidated tennis court, high in the hills, a colonial poet — known as a 'radical' with feminist and

Marxist sympathies (AustLit) — shows me what's left of her empire. '[...] the first of five children to survive childhood' (AustLit): Rattenbury, Mary. 1878-1937., a veritable self-made woman of letters. Reciting a poem by her old-fashioned heart, she makes a posthumous pass at me. All words and wonder, period prose, her fine hair is pinned in a loose bun. The fly-offs catch my mind on flights of escape. Her summer suit is pressed to the perfect degree of informality; and yet, the textures of her wholesome fabric can't help but desire my tobacco denim, its bohemian fix, my dark, cocoa belt, the sound of it whipping open. She trembles as she speaks. Legend has it that Lucifer walked these very roads. From here we espy the incongruous place where he 'lost the key of his sulphur mine' and could not return to hell (3). She points to The Strand Hotel, wistfully. The once 'peaceful land' is overrun; imps cause 'trouble' and 'woe,' multiplying at a 'terrible rate / As devils do, you know!' ('Hell,' 7-12), until at last the key is found, 'On the door-step of hell, Yeppoon!' ('Hell,' 24).

It's our hometown. In silence, in ruin, we descry. Far from a simple damnation, it's an ambivalent response to place, obscure and complex. From 'zero to two: the unit "one" (definition, "truth") does not exist in this field' (Kristeva 69). Which is after all the field of writing; and the 'minimal unit of poetic language is at least double' (69). Ambivalence. Consequently, the doorstep of hell, is also a place where '[...] you'll be next to heaven, / On the bluff with the girls at Yeppoon' (3-4).

But give me Yeppoon after dark,
When music and laughter are nigh.
Oh, give me this jolly old life,
And blindfold the silly old moon.
Let me live in the light of the smiles
Of the beautiful girls of Yeppoon. ('Girls,' 7-12)

I offer her my manuscript. Yeppoon, after dark.

⁴ *the book that won the boy*: See note 5.

⁵ *Our buttocks are not like theirs*: a clue to *the book that won the boy*.

⁶ *the devil in Jimi's features*: Kara Walker is reading the pornographic story of a headhunter — psychosexuality, told in 2D. We have climbed a paper tree and sit out on a limb, feet swinging. The grand house is desublimated, a background hut. She is an exhausted virtuoso; no one can do what she does (Barth 65); and I love her. So long as I don't profess my love, she will continue to be my friend, continue to read me stories of the headhunter. So long as I don't try to touch. O, how I want to touch. The tales all end in a sky of thirty-three black, stencil clouds. For,

no mere words can Adequately reflect the Remorse [the head-hunter feels] at having been Cast into such a lowly state by her former Masters and so it is with a Humble heart that she brings about their physical Ruin and earthly Demise. (original capitalization, Walker 185)

Kara's narratives are a 'grand psychosexual melodrama' (Reinhardt 128). Moreover, sex is the name for war (Halberstam '*Failure*,' 137). Hers is not

a world of redemption in suffering and virtue in victimhood; her art is not shaped by her overwhelming desire to avoid being pitched into the fires of hell. (Reinhardt 129)

She's a headhunter!

From beginning to end, her tone is satirical, her mode hyperbolic [...] a kind of comedy. Yet the targets of her humour couldn't be more serious. (Reinhardt 127-8)

I cannot hide my love for Kara, nor feign an intellectual disinterest, an insouciance... my only chance to seduce her. Her hero, the headhunter, is an 'insufferable cunt' tormenting herself and her loved ones as an ingrate (133). She knows the 'caged bird sings' and

knows 'too how coos her captor' (180). She is given

"chances," "inches" as well as 'Miles' [and she takes] them all [...] And spit[s], spit[s] in those faces, bite[s] those hands [...] defecate[s] on heads from [...] a bare branch perch. (Walker 133)

Gretta, she says, 'They did not care to know about impending doom' (139).

* * *

(I can't read Lil Wayne's handwriting. He tells me it's the writing of a Doctor of Literature.)

* * *

Here is our list of complaints:

O Angel, the most brilliant and most wise,
A God betrayed by fate, deprived of praise,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

O Prince of exile, you who have been wronged,
Who, even conquered, rises yet more strong,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Great king who knows the lore the earth imparts,
Intimate healer of our anguished hearts,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Who even to the leprous, the despised,
Can teach by love the taste for Paradise,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Who with your old and hardy mistress, Death,
Breeds Hope, a charming lunatic at best,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Who gives the prisoner his calm disdain,
Who damns the crowd around the guillotine,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Who knows which corners of the envious lands
The jealous God has picked to hide his gems,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Whose clear eye sees the deepest lying stores
Where, buried, sleep the metals and the ores,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Whose large hand overrides the sudden edge
For the somnambulist who walks the ledge,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Whose magic gives a strength to ancient bones
Of drunkards trampled on the cobblestones,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Who to console us in our fearful lot,
Taught us the mysteries of shell and shot,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Whose mark, astute accomplice, will be found
On Croesus' mean and unforgiving brow,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Who sees that women's hearts and eyes sustain
The love of rags, the cult of wounds and pain,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Staff of the exiles, the inventor's lamp,
Confessor of the hanged, plotters and tramps,

Satan, take pity on my misery!

Adoptive father of the ostracized
By God, and banished from his paradise,

Satan, take pity on my misery! (Baudelaire 'Litanies,' 1-45)

⁷ *those heartbreaking regions*: At my desk after a long absence, thinking to myself, this time it's really going to hurt. Don't blame me, blame Georges Bataille. His novels 'might be called an education in corruption' (Mishima 9). I'd disappeared for two years into the bowels of a black library, vanishing below... the dark-side of the humanities: where eroticism is not treated as 'bawdy jest' but as *tragedy*, where sex is considered with the gravity traditionally afforded death, where we do not, as is commonly misunderstood, wish to return to the woods and 'devour whoever we please and whatever ordures,' — *au contraire* eroticism reveals a 'vista of anguish, upon a [...] lacerating consciousness of dis-

tress;’ we know ‘we know nothing’ yet see in the darkness that ‘joy is the same thing as suffering, the same thing as dying, as death,’ where God is nothing if not a ‘public whore,’ where we require ‘limitless doom’ to discover the ‘triumph of *being*,’ where we, of our own volition, ‘join in the terrible dance [...] that ends in collapse,’ where ‘open to death, to torment, to joy’ we cry from twisted mouths an ‘immense *alleluia*, flung into endless silence, and lost there (Bataille ‘Mother Edwarda Dead Man,’ 124-9).

⁸ *blank*:

⁹ *knows only theft and gift*: Feeding delirium with stimulants from the underworld, a sex dance is purchased for me. A late-capitalist gift. Red (or are they green) lights, street food, liquor and white, rumble beneath my tongue. The girl chosen for me is petite; the spikes on her dog collar, three inches long. She was scared of me at first — an old friend, his inebriated ogling, didn't help. I dismiss him without a word and she is confusedly impressed. I don't have to wait long — once we are in the prepaid private studio, alongside the other men and their emptying wallets — before she's captivated and lets me touch... besides and insides, digitally, orally — so long as Madame doesn't see. She trusts me, my skill, my prestidigitation. Against her fading will, she opens her mind. Hot pants, a cape, and future fashion platforms, only flimsy fabrics cover her. She asks me to take off my jacket; I refuse as she dissolves like powder in icy, blue water. When she notices my concern, she tells me that the bruises on her thighs are from *the poles*. She emphasises the words like any common enemy — an enemy who pays her to bruise. It's clear, by the way she grips my hips with her knees, that she's had enough of my impecunious empathy, and before changing the subject, she says she has grown accustomed to the money. Her lips are purple; and her hands, diaphanous, belong to a musician. Like a couple of dizzy fools, we fall in prepaid love. It lasts a counter-clockwise hour. She whispers, while we lose our heads, becoming only zeros, zigzagging zones,

the unconscious is social... '*there where there is desire*' (Deleuze & Guattari 323) and 'delirium is the general matrix of every unconscious social investment' (Deleuze & Guattari 317). No more daddy-mummy-me, no more daddy-mummy-me. There are *two poles* of delirium: 'paranoiac fascisizing [...] I am your kind, and I belong to the superior race and class' and 'schizorevolutionary [...] I am not your kind, I belong eternally to the inferior race, I am a beast, a black' (Deleuze & Guattari 317). I am speaking of 'contradiction *in principle*,' (Deleuze & Guattari 318) as these *the poles* of delirious 'libidinal investment' — paranoiac fascisizing

and schizorevolutionary — bypass familialism to bear upon the social field. And yet they are enemies. Paranoiacs ‘engineer masses,’ schizos ‘no longer obey the statistical laws,’ paranoiacs study ‘large aggregates,’ schizos study ‘micromultiplicities’ (Deleuze & Guattari 320-1). Both investments are collective though ‘radically’ different (Deleuze & Guattari 321). The paranoiac fascisizing delirium, due to its macrophysics of mass phenomenon, ‘socially and *psychically represses the desire of persons,*’ while the schizorevolutionary delirium, due to its microphysics of flows, devises ‘infinitesimal lines of escape’ (Deleuze & Guattari my emphasis, 321). Withdraw! For escape is revolutionary (Deleuze & Guattari 317). We are part of the earth, broken-down desiring-machines. Crashes to crashes. Rust to rust.

My hour is up. She slips me a creative writing thesis
and the address of a Day Club.

— AN ORPHAN, AN ANARCHIST, AND AN ATHEIST

Take it from an ecdysiast: ‘sexuality is everywhere.’ Office workers ‘fondle’ their ‘records’ and ‘banks get a lot of people aroused;’ the ‘bourgeoisie fucks the proletariat.’

Because ‘we always make love with worlds,’ I refuse the anthropomorphic representation of sex: the idea that there are two sexes, the idea that there is only one. Anthropomorphic representations of sex betray an ideology of lack. Desiring-machines escape castration via nonhuman sex: ‘not one or even two sexes, but *n* sexes’. It is our anthem: ‘to each *its* own sexes’ (my emphasis, Deleuze & Guattari 334-337).

Jimi dreams of ‘flight and theft, stealing and stealing away’ — she is ‘always infernal in the family dream. [...] neither passive nor active, neither consenting nor insubordinate, since she is the pencil point that traces the design, she is the stroke itself... It is a chain of escape, and no longer a code’ (Deleuze & Guattari 360-374).

¹⁰ *she was named Mikhel:*

Gilgamesh was his name from the day he was born,
two-thirds of him god and one third human. (Sin-liqe-unninni I 45-8)

[Said Gilgamesh to her,] to the tavern-keeper:
‘[Why should my cheeks not be hollow, my face not sunken,
my mood not wretched, my visage not wasted?]
[Should not sorrow reside in my heart,
and my face not resemble one come from afar?]
[Should not my features be burnt by frost and sunshine,
and should I not wander the wild in lion’s garb?]’ (Sin-liqe-unninni X 46-52)

‘What became of [my friend *was too much*] to [bear,
so on a road [I wander the] wild;
What became of my friend Enkidu [*was too much* to bear,
so on a far path [I wander the wild.]]’ (Sin-liqe-unninni X 240-3)

¹¹ *queer: Chasing the dragon with Burroughs in 1950s
America. The miniscule manuscripts of our novellas re-*

main unpublished for thirty-three years (Harris x). He keeps them in his underwear drawer: 'Queer' and 'The Women Who Hit Me' — also a deck of cards, a pistol, and a white trash Bible. There are no hard-drives. Writing is loud and messy, a masculine job. More ink than inkblot. Every letter is a smash. Addict journalists chase highs like headlines, and every good story begins with a dirty joke:

Lee turned his attention to a Jewish boy named Carl Steinberg he had known casually for about a year. The first time he saw Carl, Lee thought, "I could use that, if the family jewels weren't in pawn to Uncle Junk." ('Queer,' 1)

queer

<Origins unknown> (OED)

Capitalist degenerates surround me — the degeneration of

Hébert the revolutionary [who] never began a number of his news-sheet *Le Père Duchêne* without introducing a sprinkling of obscenities. (Barthes 1)

Our best ideas reside in the unconscious; we carry twisted copy. Our improprieties hold 'no real meaning' so we creep for obscenities like sex-on-site. We, like our profanities, are nevertheless significant (Barthes 1). We practise murder: writing 'exerted towards the destruction of language, with Literature reduced, so to speak, to being its carcass' (Barthes 5).

And the sky cast an eye on this marvellous meat
As over the flowers in bloom.
The stench was so wretched that there on the grass
You nearly collapsed in a swoon. (Baudelaire 'Une charogne,' 13-16)

Losing William somewhere between New York and Paris and Yeppoon, I wander the homes of those who live in a small-town cemetery. An empty house is haunted; mine by a deadbeat exegete. All flannelette and bone, he ingests 10mg of the logic of opioid scenes and tells me something hurts. The society that kept him, willed him

to commit suicide. Do not speak to me of his death wish — ‘anybody who keeps his eyes open sees people wished to death all the time’ (Burroughs ‘Education,’ 104). And yet a *slow death* is not enough to quench their blood-thirst. So he came to Yeppoon — to die in the subtropics, to die somewhere warm. He finally ceases to die, by dying. (Deleuze & Guattari 375-7). This, his final gesture is designed to offend any God who doesn’t know how to dance (Nietzsche 7). Screaming ‘*Zarathustra!*’ he jumps from the Kemp Beach Cliffs. They’d expected him to ask: How does his conception of *queer* function?

A couple of lifers, we are coerced to

[...] live in a system that equates success with profit and links failure to the inability to accumulate wealth, [a system where] losers leave no records, while winners can’t stop talking about it. (Halberstam ‘Failure,’ 88)

A cyclonic gust scatters the dry flowers of an aged Bougainvillea. Faded, stray cats distantly miaow. Danger, danger, danger. Death is not an abstract principle (Deleuze & Guattari 379). It begins, earthling! I run for the shelter of a wealthy death, through the horizontal rain of terminal illness, through white-outs and poverty hail, to the hallowed structures of stone. There, close to the lightning, back hard-up against the protection of my enemy’s rich ruin, I retrieve from my backpack a black journal and a six-plane-sided pencil, dark and mean. A letter is waiting to be written.

To those who want me dead,

I lie in wait for the dissection of your penetrating discourse, lie in wait like pestilential carrion for the go-and-get-fucked critical thug. Some of you take an educated guess. The meaning... chance upon its existence. Then I understand I’m mistaken. For ‘rational thought can conceive of neither disorder nor freedom’ (Bataille ‘Mother Edwarda Dead Man,’ 181). Street-cred is all I crave; for, respectability is a dirty lie.

Gretta Jade Mitchell

¹² *Lee*: See Addenda, 'Learning to Read.'

¹³ *I never see them*: I cease to use the elevators after a nefarious nightmare featuring a collegial saboteuse, a blank keyboard, and the hubris of the humanists: those good old girls. Six flights ascend to a postgraduate office in an utilitarian Arts building on North Terrace. There is no one around early Monday morning. Running the stairs with ease, I have a head start because I already know that *literature* means *sex* and *philosophy* means *death*. My respect is reserved for the only female professor of the discipline, her office on the fifth floor, she wears stupendous equestrian boots, possesses the love of a famous writer, and thinks me *strange*.

It is late when I sneak into the festival of Saturnalia: a secret rave in Room 624. The analysand's chair has transfigured into an electric chair. The executioner is wearing kid-leather driving gloves, a balaclava, and a name tag; it reads: Dr. Rosslyn Winifred Prosser. She tells me to have a seat; and after stating her rhetorical questions — '*Why is this (i.e. my fragment) here?*' — asks if I have any final words.

Let me begin by engaging with Butler's use of the word trouble. Like the present queer theory of Judith/Jack Halberstam (and her use of the word failure), Butler's critical thinking is painfully aware of the hegemony which exists in the very language we use in our attempt to demystify the structures of oppression. I imagine this reflexivity fighting against itself until it settles on a word which because of its negative common use and understanding may be used to itself unsettle the hegemony of language. Thus we are presented with Gender Trouble, and the trouble we are in, is, not necessarily a bad place to be.

I do not assume that everyone present is as obsessed with the trouble of language as I, and I hope to hear your idiosyncratic engagements with this reading in the following discussion. For me, however, accepted forms and uses of language (and its daughters, narrative, poetry, philosophy, law) are responsible for what Butler terms the unthinkable. A genderqueer thus becomes unreal, actually un-real, because we have no place in language, we have no life story.

'Learning the rules that govern intelligible speech is an inculcation into normalized language,' writes Butler, 'where the price of not conforming is the loss of intelligibility itself.' She continues, 'It would be a mistake to think that received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radi-

cal views, given the constraints that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself' (xviii-xix).

What I am doing now — this ostensibly harmless synopsis — under a critical paradigm like queer theory, whose enemy is hegemony (i.e. the taken-for-granted truths, the axioms of biology), is, in fact, a malign act. The schizzes I feel may however be, contrary to common sense, quite healthy. And perhaps I can take heart and “turn” language queer, by refusing accepted significations of words and feelings and actions, and by celebrating trouble. Or, maybe I am doomed to never making sense — linguistically and thus physically. Yet, even then, maybe legibility is overrated and hell's just got a “bad name.”

As I re-engage, on this, the night of my execution, I must state that I disagree with Butler's point on radical language. As Charles Baudelaire and Jean Genet's poetics have taught me, it is the disjunction of form and content which possesses the power of deadly disturbance. Rather than reduce received grammar, reduce received formal traditions, in an attempt to make ideas fit form, it is more effective to put to use those conventions and make them play with and against what they assume to be illegible.

— one last confession elegant judge. Without a skerrick of intention I have uncovered the quest of this thesis (that very quest I'd swear black and blue, if you will, nary extant). It can be traced to my research proposal and the questions I intended to solve. As Burroughs postulates, 'The answer to any question will be revealed when you stop asking questions and wipe from your mind the concept of a question' ('Education,' 25).

What constitutes a life story and by extension a life? Is it possible to write narrative without succumbing to the hegemonic structures of anti-queer language? If it is impossible to write the narrative I seek, is it impossible to live? (August 2012)

An instant hence, the chair metamorphizes into the three-quarter bed I share with the woman — fervent, fearless, the possessor of deadly desires — whom I'd been banished for loving. Ros is nowhere to be seen. High summer hangover, we sing silent, sweaty prayers for sunset. After watching *Death Proof*, I drown her stray cat in a paddock dam. She'd been sick awhile and I couldn't afford a vet. As I bury her, I say I'm sorry.

ἀπολογία

<Greek: defence, a speech in defence, ἀπό away, off + -λογία speaking> (OED)
