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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Verses Nature: Heterogeneity and Dialogism in the Novel

Travers Simon, Joan

Award date:
2017

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Verses Nature:
Heterogeneity and Dialogism in the Novel

Dr Joan Barbara TRAVERS SIMON

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Bangor University

August, 2016

Abstract

The present thesis argues for heterogeneity and dialogism as inherent strategies at work in novel-writing as praxis. It provides a bifurcated response to the question: how can I write a novel in such a way that it remains true to my sense of form, my sense of language, to the limitations of both, and to my understanding of plural subjectivities?

The first part of the response takes the literary form of a novel, entitled *Verses Nature*, a postmodern, rebellious conglomerate of genres, in which I put heterogeneity and dialogism to the test. The intention is to sound out the breaking point of the novel, not only to underline certain limits of the novel as a literary form, but also to explore how this particular literary form positions us as readers.

In order to explore the limits of representation and interpretation, I sought a way to use *Verses Nature* to break into our coding system to change it from the inside. Codes are not natural, but made. As the title of my work suggests, *Verses Nature* sets out to interrogate the seemingly natural. What is a novel? What is a genre? What does it mean to read? How do I read? How am I a reader? What do I expect from myself and from the author? I sought to demonstrate that for each of these questions, there is no straightforward answer and that we must first recover from our assumptions. The open-ended structural and semiotic propositions in *Verses Nature* refuse to play to such assumptions, soliciting instead various levels of surprise. Due to these shattered expectations, readers find themselves having to reposition, to redefine and thus relocate themselves into new narrative/interpretive spaces. Such deliberately loose, at times overlapping, structures render the notion of dialogism and heterogeneity alive. The intention is to agonize the reader so that she accepts that the novel is out of my hands and becomes her responsibility. If the reader fails to see my female protagonist, Carmina, in all her complexity, seeking instead to reduce her to a woman whose racial profile is more pronounced so that she fits ready-made (and white-ordained) notions of blackness, this reader must accept the responsibility for her expectation and hopefully interrogate why this expectation exists in the first place. If the reader is given no clear point of entry into a text, but must decide for herself where she must place her eyes on the page and where to go from there, this reader must accept responsibility for how she makes meaning from the text. If the reader finds herself constantly rethinking, renaming the place this work occupies – is it a novel? Is it erotica? Is it feminist literature? – then because I have not alleviated her of the responsibility to decide for herself what she wants to see. This reader must acknowledge, by virtue of her doubts, that such classification is not quiet, but always on

the move. Not silent, but noisy. By deliberately writing a work with numerous dynamic interfaces and by testing out the various levels and limits of their co-existence in my mind and in that of the reader, I hope to not only provide initial answers to my research question, but to make a contribution to an ongoing discussion about the properties of the novel. This contribution, like the spirit of my research question, seeks to remain open and dynamic. The second part of the response takes the form of a commentary, by means of which I present and analyse samples of my novel-writing as praxis with a view to demonstrating the routes and measures taken to expose what I consider the inherent structural heterogeneity of the novel and its dialogical dynamics, as informed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida. Here, I also examine how a close reading of 'writing in the feminine' as exemplified by a passage in Nicole Brossard's *Fences In Breathing* (2007), further refines my understanding of heterogeneity by allowing me to probe a theme that is common to both our work: how the body interacts with generic structure to create/advocate new reading realities/subjectivities. I come to the conclusion that both Nicole Brossard, a Canadian feminist lesbian writer, and I, make valuable contributions to an on-going discussion about the properties of writing. Neither the potential heterogeneity of the novel nor the multiple reader stances it permits have been sufficiently recognized. The novel, notwithstanding its highly elastic properties, still has room for considerable structural innovation. *Verses Nature* may be seen to demonstrate something of the immense heterogeneity potentially at work within the novel form. In so doing, it is hoped that this novel may invite readers to renegotiate the borders of the novel as a genre and reanimate an understanding of what the novel may do.

Key words: heterogeneity, dialogism, novel, body, reading, writing in the feminine, Brossard

Table of contents

Declaration of authenticity	iii
Declaration of submission	v
Abstract	vii

Part One: Creative Study

Verses Nature

Book One: In The Beginning Was The Heat	3
Book Two: Your Joy Is Your Own	141
Book Three: When Completion Comes	413
Index of first lines	601

Part Two: Critical Study

Chapter One

The Artist as a Wound in Progress:

Heterogeneity and Dialogism as Promise and Peril	617
--	-----

Introduction	619
--------------	-----

Part One: The Search for Structure	619
------------------------------------	-----

1.1. The struggle with form: continuity and disruption	619
--	-----

1.2. The struggle with synoptic limitations to the depiction of voice	626
---	-----

1.3. From the depths where language fails: negotiating space	628
--	-----

1.4. Beyond a monochronic, linear depiction of time	629
---	-----

Part Two: The Flight from Structure: Dialogism	630
--	-----

2.1. The multi-modal emergence of form	630
--	-----

2.2. Mikhail Bakhtin: dialogism as meaning in motion	632
--	-----

2.3. Reading realities: countersigning the text	633
---	-----

2.4. Gender	634
2.5. Plain but not simple: reconceptualizing language	637
2.6. Reconceptualizing prose	638
2.7. The dialogical author	639
2.8. Dialogism between the author and her characters	639
2.9. Jacques Derrida: <i>différance</i> and deconstruction as praxis	641
2.10. The dialogical nature of the socially constructed self	643
Conclusion	644

Chapter Two

Where Truth Lies Blind You Can't Do it Easily:

Engendering Genres by Writing in the Feminine with Nicole Brossard	647
--	-----

Introduction	649
--------------	-----

Part One: Penning Pleasure	649
----------------------------	-----

1.1. Understanding the body	649
-----------------------------	-----

1.2. Nicole Brossard: identity upended in ecstasy	652
---	-----

1.3. From feminine writing to writing in the feminine	653
---	-----

Part Two: Nicole Brossard in Word and Deed: <i>Fences in Breathing</i>	658
--	-----

2.1. The plot	658
---------------	-----

2.2. <i>Fences in Breathing</i> : a collusion in the exploration of forms	659
---	-----

2.3. Meaning in view: entering the other side of the real	660
---	-----

2.4. <i>Inter-dit</i> and <i>inédit</i> : Brossard's aerial vision and optics of praxis	665
---	-----

2.5. Reading realities/subjectivities	670
---------------------------------------	-----

2.6. Re-evaluating the aerial vision of writing in the feminine	672
---	-----

Conclusion	676
------------	-----

Chapter Three

Concluding the Promises and Perils of Praxis	677
Introduction	679
3.1. <i>Verses Nature</i> : a response to heterogeneity and dialogism	679
3.2. The search for a comparative context	680
3.3. Nicole Brossard	680
3.4. Setting new accents in form and language	681
3.5. Writing about woman and writing about writing	682
3.6. Sexuality	683
3.7. Between the promise and peril of praxis	683
3.8. Words and their breaking point	685
3.9. Meaning in view: metanarrative messages	686
Conclusion	688

List of illustrations

Illustration 1: The dialogical author	640
Illustration 2: Brossard's aerial vision, movements 1-2	667
Illustration 3: Brossard's aerial vision, movement 3	668
Illustration 4: Brossard's aerial vision, movements 4-6	669

Bibliography	689
---------------------	-----

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who, in their various ways, have helped me to make this dream come true; a dream I have had to wait thirty years to fulfill.

Thank you to Professor Ian Gregson, whose advice I followed to write *Verses Nature* in the first person. There was a time when all I did was to curse you for this advice. In retrospect, I see that I am eternally indebted to you.

Thank you, Penny Goring, for re-educating my literary taste buds and for your willingness to let me take a peek at your unique mind. I said you changed my life and I meant it.

Thank you to my writer friends, who have been a constant source of support and inspiration; to Matthew Temple, Federica Bianco, Laura Gentile and the Gitzinger sisters, Catherine and Sophie, who never fail to impress me and whom I am looking forward to spending more time with, both on the page and in real life.

Thank you to my children, who never doubted that I would achieve this.

I would need to invent a whole new word to express my gratitude for the support given to me by my partner, Steve. This thesis is, for me, our joint achievement, for I would never have managed without you.

Not forgetting Lucky and Bobby, my dogs, or Humphrey and Bubbles, my sheep. Time out with you is an excellent way to recuperate and relativize.

Especially words of thanks, finally, to Dr Zoe Skoulding. For the chances I am not even sure I always deserved. For your academic and moral support, your flexibility and insights. It has been an honour. You'll never know how close I came to abandoning the project and taking up knitting instead. Thank you for your unerring confidence in me, which has helped me to grow as a scientist and artist.

For Penny & Ian. Thanks for the inspiration.

For Zoe. If only I had your patience.

For Federica. Shut up, you're beautiful as you are.

For my soul-mates and my angels, who know when to pick me up.

And not forgetting my demons. You little rotters. God, I love you guys!

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The present thesis argues for heterogeneity and dialogism as inherent strategies at work in novel-writing as praxis. It provides a bifurcated response to the question: how can I write a novel in such a way that it remains true to my sense of form, my sense of language, to the limitations of both, and to my understanding of plural subjectivities?

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I come to the conclusion that both Nicole Brossard, a Canadian feminist lesbian writer, and I, make interesting contributions to an on-going discussion about the properties of writing and thereby reinforce the recognition of the potential heterogeneity of the novel along with the multiple reader stances it permits. It is hoped that *Verses Nature* may not only invite readers to renegotiate the borders of the novel as a genre but equally reanimate an understanding of what the novel may do.

VERSES NATURE

BOOK ONE
In The Beginning Was The Heat

call me wound that never heals
& we will meet in my bedroom
& i will show you
what happens to the perception of time
what happens to our concepts of desire
what happens to power in my bedroom

(Penny Goring, *Ornamental Vagina*)

In the beginning was the Word, & the Word was with God, & the Word was God. (John 1: 1)

I? Am Tatar, Tatar is my name
I am as I am
I guess everyone can say the same.

Me? I think everyone should be a silly bastard from time to time. Eat. Fuck. Laugh your head off.

I love women, I dunno. I love you. And envy you. And desire you. And take you. I love the taste of you. The feel of you. The sound of you. The thought of you. After three thousand women, I stopped counting.

I am as I am
I'm made that way
I guess everyone could say the same.

We are who we are and please whom we please

What else?

o lovely pussy o pussy my love

In the beginning I thought the hole was at the front.

JOSEPH 1:5

EDEN 1-2

I had my first cunnilingus when I was three. Been searching for that flavour ever since; that of innocence, inattentive of hygiene. A bit fish, a bit salmon... crevettes...

She was the daughter of the shopkeeper who owned the Sadna. Whenever mother went there to buy something, I'd be sure to tag along cos I just had to get a glimpse of that little girl tho I saw her at nursery school everyday, but when there was no school I still had to find a way to see her. We were in love, see. No, really. I now happen to think that her father was rather partial to mother too, he

kept slipping her freebies and their hands would brush. Mother told him of a garlic treatment she knew for warts and another one for hair loss: add five chopped cloves of garlic to three soup spoons of olive oil, soak the paste for two days then apply half an hour before washing your hair, she said. And for that extra shine, let cool the water you cooked your rice in, massage it into your hair, leave it on for a while, then rinse.

You're so knowledgeable, Madame! You know all the tricks of your trade. And I know all the tricks of mine...

Dirty little slimer.

JOSEPH 1:5

EDEN 3-4

Whilst he was working out ways of getting under mother's skirt, I'd be half hidden behind mother and his daughter would be half hidden behind him. She'd come to my place after school when mother had gone to work for she knew I'd be alone. We'd get undressed, go to bed, play mothers and fathers and do a real 69. I'd lick her pussy and she'd suck my dick. Then we'd eat whatever she had pinched from the store, mostly pastilles Vichy though once she brought along a jar of apple and cider jelly, which was rather

nice. I tried to penetrate her and others later but it didn't work. In the beginning I thought their hole was at the front. It was only once I started the finger inspections that I found out where it really was.

All the girls wanted to sit next to me at school. Pretty things with little girl's feet, lacy socks and champing at the bit. She would fight them off like a lioness! She would scratch and spit and tear at them till they backed off, haaa-ha-haaa! This went on right through *maternelle* and primary school till about the age of 8, when she became interested in someone else. And I was free to have all the other girls I wanted.

JOSEPH 1:5
EDEN 5-9

I so spent my whole childhood around girls. Whilst the other morons were kicking a ball around I was playing doctor and performing intimate examinations of girls' privates. I never forced anyone to do anything, they all wanted to. I'd pull them apart and take a good look. Or sniff. I'd finger them, stick my tongue inside and let myself be inspected, too.

The only social outlet we as kids had was the Christian Social Club. We'd go there for religious education but carried on all the same. I would confess weekly to the curate.

Sorry, father, I touched so-n-so, and so-n-so. Oh, and—
He'd tell me,

This has to stop, my son, for you know it is a sin. Besides, you've been telling me these stories for years already!
My penitence would be a certain number of prayers, which I would rattle off on my way out, making sure he could see and hear me. Good, got that out the way, for I was in a hurry; my next rendez-vous was right then behind the church.

Communion preparation was held in a convent. We had to stay there for a whole week. The girls had their dormitory

and the boys had theirs but there was still a lot of sex doing the rounds. When we had a movie night, watching super-8 films, I would sit in the dark with a girl on either side, my fingers delving into the dark wetness of both of them.

There was only this one girl in the group I hadn't had till then. All the others had lost their appeal. I got her to go to the toilet with me. She ran out screaming and crying and straight into the nuns' putty-like arms to tell them what had happened. I had tried to molest her. I had got my --- thing --- out and told her to suck it. The nuns told the curate. The curate had serious words with me. All the goody two shoes stood in clusters and whispered behind their hands. Some showed me the 'finger'. Yes, I did feel a twang of shame but what the hell, it was snuffed out by the intense wave of mépris I felt for them all. Every single one of them.

That was my childhood and I can still see their little knickers, yellow up the front, brown up the back and changed only once a week. You didn't have toilets in the house in them days. Your toilet was a shack in the garden with slits in the floor. We were country folk. You didn't brush your teeth either. I ended up getting my first crowns by the time I was 11. Teeth rotting away from pussy juice no doubt. Life was simple. Life was sweet.

I am Carmina, Carmina is my name
I guess everyone could say the same

Erm, what else?

They want to be independent, right?

time running out

or

running out time...

don't relegate me to a mother

Don't

For we know in part & we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. (Corinthians 13: 9-10)

This is my life:

statement of the problem:

alien cum

tear drop fall (n, n, n)

tear drop fall (v, v, v)

tear drop fall (n, v, v)

tear drop fall (n, n, v)

tear drop fall (v, v, n)

tear drop fall (v, n, n)

tear drop fall (n, v, n)

tear drop fall (v, n, v)

hypothesis:

we no lucky wid men, grandma said, so it might just be a family thing.

experiment:

I sent him a message; a harmless one.

predicted results:

observed results:

conclusions:

statement of the problem:

What is it you keep whispering to yourself like that?

Me? Whispering? What on earth do you mean?

Dressing gown ripped from a chair at my side, slide down rug at my feet before the horrid idea has the chance to mature in Nick's mind that he might like to make love to me. His foul steam scorching my insides from the last time. I perch on the chair in shivers.

Eyes fall upon hand. Upon the ring. Upon the hardened circles inside the dressing gown. Looks away. Haste.

Something about the quality of his voice that has never ceased to vex me.

He expels a sound I more readily associate with a stable animal.

crush him... naked worm

Eyes are destined to meet in the mirror.

Fear could have served a purpose. Then.

I sent him a message. A harmless one.

The phone rang. He said he had the afternoon free and thought I meant I hadn't.

So you have?

He said he didn't have any plans for another two hours. He did not ask me to come.

We sat in his kitchen, talked as my hand never left his thigh, one tea bag serving for the both of us.

I spent over ten years in and out of museums and galleries. Three weeks in Paris every summer, soaking up culture. Especially with my second wife. My third wife, what a blockhead. I don't think she's ever read a book in her entire life. She thinks she's smart, thinks she's chic, but a person's face'll always tell you if they're bright or not. And I don't care how much of an effort she goes to with her make-up and her hair-do, when I look at her now, all I see is a face that looks like a pair of skidded knickers.

Take a look at this one. Have you ever seen a tackier, more peevish frame in your entire life? The picture? A masterpiece, far as I'm concerned. But that frame, what an eyesore! At first I wanted to throw it away, get a decent frame, something ornate and gilded. And just as I was about to, I thought, hey no, don't do that! Keep the original, it's got documentary value. You see that they framed their pictures with anything they could get their mitts on. Couldn't afford to be choosy. You see what sort of glues they used, etc etc.

That one twist more, that one step further in the convexities of your imagination, and the ugly is ugly no more... Just goes to show; there is no truth, but that we make it. String half a dozen people in front of a painting and each will come to a different truth. So what is art? Who decides what's precious? Who is authorized to confer such an etiquette on an item; to brand the hide of the cow? There is no art. There is no science. There's only... imagination, desire, and the quest for inner equilibrium; the need, the willingness to construct that other world which is so much more beautiful, more reliable than the one we live in. What is truth? Truth is every single man... Anyhow, some first class Czech impressionistic paintings hanging in my bedroom. Show you later. Maybe.

it cannot be right
it can *not*
to be attracted to this:
man

Goddamn!

you say you have never chased a woman in your life
but you know exactly why you say
the things you say
in the presence of a woman
to her drowning eyes;

Goddamn!

know what it will do to her insides...

it is poison
it is bait
so, of course, all you have to do now is sit back

and wait

It's so easy to impress young girls. They come here, see the artwork, you give em a glass of champagne...

We make you thick, but it's not our fault if you're all so willing to oblige!

I, Tatar, am faithful of the heart, if not of the body. She knows that, like she knows she can't change me. None of you can change me. Do you think *you* can change me?

If She suspects something and asks me, I shall tell her. Medicinal lies. She knows she cannot change me. It is my one weakness.

If you want to know the size of a guy's dick, it's the same as the length from his ring finger to the base of his palm. So many guys have a complex about the size of their dicks and worry that it doesn't suffice to satisfy a woman, but there are so many ways to please a woman. Use your tongue, your fingers. Whatever. Use your imagination. If you can't bring a woman to an orgasm you're a failure as a man. My opinion, for what it's worth. Guys with real big dicks are unfortunate if you ask me. They don't get to use the half of it. Some girls like it, though. I've had girls who needed such a big dick but it's mostly cos they've got a cave of a pussy that needs filling. The only thing a guy like me can do is to ram a cucumber up them and they shoot.

Her? My girlfriend? She's huge inside. Normally she'd need a real chopper to get her going but I know how to take her, which positions are the most effective. I can make her cum with my little finger if I want.

statement of the problem:

trying to resist the temptation to write to him so I'm writing to you.

experiment:

orbiting around him as though warming up to a dare. Put my finger to that troublesome place, bring it to my nose, sigh. What if: you bite my undressed skin, there on my shoulder; there where she cries loneliness...

observed results:

guilt like a nail pushing up through my shoe.

He is coarse. Intelligent. He fascinates me & disgusts me. Fascination won.

Sit still!

He croaked *You Are So Beautiful* by Joe Cocker, peeking over his easel to take a look at me. And Piaf. And Brassens. Hours of Brassens.

I would never know how many strokes he had taken or where he had placed his last. How many times he had taken the effigy of me into his dreams how many cups of coffee, instant, how many rizzlas till the last. How many times I had resisted, resenting his intrusion and how many yielded how many times he had changed his mind, painted it over and what was the intention of that oblong of blue anyway was there room for symbolism in a portrait? Life is symbolism? Ahhh. Ok.

Black is a hard colour to paint with. He grafted shades of my skin onto it. Breathing life into its cosmic potential like the Lord God who saw what He had done and was Pleased.

My shoulders disagreed. Something like this but still not near enough...

This could hurt. Vulnerability is not a concept here.

as if what if didn't matter

as if I knew

Can I tell you something?

Shoot!

I told him to whip me he could fingerwhip me till my backside bled without having to grow his nails extra

o lovely pussy o pussy my love what a beautiful pussy you are!

ahead but fear & supposed chaos

Try not to be afraid of the hard time ahead. Regard it as a precious gift.
Talk lots. And listen lots. And touch.

Think before you speak & don't make any rash promises to God. He is in heaven & you are on earth, so don't say any more than you have to. (Ecclesiastes 5: 2)

you of all people!

I made the mistake of telling my wives about my mistresses, you know, in a moment of trust, like this one now. It spoiled everything afterwards and they always threw it back in my face. Don't ever tell You Know about me. Ever. Then the trust is out the door. You need trust if a relationship's going to work. Trust is more important than honesty.

They will insist on sniffing around me. Wouldn't say no to a squeeze, a poke, a cheap hotel, cash, of course. A blow job somewhere public thus daring/slightly compromising I've always fancied a phone booth, myself. But take me home? Leave the wife? Haughty past me later, or spread nasty rumours because I had dared to say No and I meant it.

One stood behind me in a queue once. I could just feel there was someone there I knew so I turned around, God, not him. Him *and* his boner. Neither of us said a word. He'll be panting after some other piece of skirt now. What was it he had said, his wife had 'lost interest'... too old, but she was afraid of losing him. Pecks on the cheek and not much else for her these days, I suspect. What have you got to lose, woman? In my mind I have her fully serviced by a boy lollipop. Once a week, for starters. Yeeehaaa giddyup! *Harder!* By three times a week she is off the frozen foods and has less butter in her trolley at Tesco's, Iceland, other, please specify. She's revamped her wardrobe, found a job and filed for a divorce. He can't understand. Their life was purring along so nicely why did she have to go and ruin things?

And then there was... the first thing he cared to tell me was that he had visited some elite school or other. As if I cared. As if his being so very special would stop him from two-timing his wife, from almost leaving her and their two point four children for another had this other not left him first. Would I like a coffee? I could read from his eyes the whole of what could only turn out to be an embarrassing story entangling the weeks ahead were I fool enough to go along with it.

No, thank you very much.

Put your tongue back in your head.

Tell me something.

Shoot.

You said you always have at least two women, right?

Correct.

So there must have been another woman apart from your wife before you met me, right?

He smiled.

Where is she now? What happened to her?

I saw her yesterday, we went flying and then for a meal.

You don't sleep with her anymore?

Nope.

And you expect me to believe that?

Yep. I'll show you a picture of her.

He plucked out his cell-phone.

And there's her... and her... and she's nice... and I really like this one... Particularly fond of what was her... she wore my picture in a locket between her breasts.

How do you manage?

What?

To juggle so many women?

Piece a cake.

God, you don't mind admitting all of this to me?

Why should I?

Does your wife know?

Why should she?

JOSEPH 4:1

SALUT, SALAUD 1-4

I love women. I dunno. You impress me.

If you ask me, a woman's in her sexual prime between thirty-five and forty-five. That's the age I like my girlfriends to be although my current girlfriend, she's over fifty. I've been screwing forty-year-olds for over twenty years now. Older women are still attractive. Sometimes. When they're well-kept. But it's not the same. Their skin. Their tits. Their behind, it's just not the same.

When I was younger, the women I screwed were all a good ten or more years

older n me. Some of them'd still like to go to bed with me today but they're old grannies now, seventy and upwards. What do I wanna be screwing them for? We can go out for a drink, for a meal or a chat, but that's about it as far as I'm concerned.

Sex is part of life and it's as natural as breathing. Don't ruin it with false morals or too much thinking. I need sex. I always will. Sex is like a good glass of wine. It's there to do you good. There's no more to it than that. Our bodies are there to do us good and every single part of our anatomy serves this purpose. As long as I'm alive, I can't do without it. And as long as the young girls like me, what do I wanna be fucking a granny for, pardon my French!

ping my earlobes from the back

ping my nipples

ping my clit

ping my big toe, left foot

ping my chinny chin

ping my lower lip

harder

Fidelity's an illusion, he said.

I've always cheated on my wives and they've all cheated on me. Women lie. Men lie.

C'est la vie.

He said,

I'll never live with another woman cos they're all too complicated and things always turn sour in the end. Been married three times; I know what I'm talking about. I want a woman? I have a phonebook full of women. I can have a dozen different women a day if I want to. Women come. Women go.

But I knew he yearned for one who would stay.

Don't get attached,

he said,

for I will not love you. I don't love anyone, apart from my children. Women've broken my heart too often, I refuse to love any of you. Any more.

I suppose I should be struggling with remorse?

curled up on this man I should not love

in a bed that is not mine yet feels like home

asking myself no further questions

for it is spring

the sun pours its yellow cream over my skin

JOSEPH 4:1

SALUT, SALAUD 5-6

Young girls like me cos I know how to make love. The young men no longer have the skill. Wasting their time with stupid computer games and wot not.

You want to know what I think? I think the vast majority of the world's population has never had a decent fuck. When you think about all the moral and religious cobwebs people have... I've had women confess that their husbands have never, ever, managed to make them cum, or older women whose husbands wouldn't go down on them cos they still belonged to the generation of men who didn't do those things them days. I've made thousands, literally thousands of women happy;

woman who had never tried anal sex or the positions I initiated them into. For me, grade one things like the virginia creeper, the train whistle. Springboard. Sewing machine. Women who've never had such bombastic orgasms that they cum all over the place and think they're pissing. But they're not. Every woman is a *femme fontaine*. Few are the men who know that. Women who hate oral sex with their husbands cos the swine don't pay attention to their hygiene and smell like a stand-up shithouse in some back street of Tangiers, such women suck me for hours. They want me to cum in their mouth then stick my dick up their arse. I give them what they won't get anywhere else and that's why they come back for more.

o lovely pussy o pussy my love. You have this way of contracting your muscles when I'm in you... drives me crazy. That's the honest-to-God truth.

You don't believe in God, Tatar.

I *am* God, that's why you can be sure that what I am telling you's the truth. No wonder the guys were shooting all over the place after only a few seconds. What did I do to deserve you. You Know's a fool. A goddamn fool!

He'll be the last to know. Did I tell you I sleep on the floor at home?

You're kidding!

Because I won't let him touch me. He refuses to leave the bed; he's the one who needs a good night's sleep to strengthen him for the hard day's work ahead, he said. He's the breadwinner. I; I only look after the children.

You don't need his bed. You've got mine.

Resistance is futile

Hungry and/or bored?

JOSEPH 4:1

SALUT, SALAUD 7-9

I was at the disco once and at one point in the evening, I got dancing with a lady who was fifty-eight, it transpired. We had a few drinks and a decent little flirt. Women talk more openly than men so we soon got personal. She confessed to me that a man had never, ever, been able to bring her to an orgasm. Now, if you are a normal, healthy woman, the problem doesn't lie with you. I told her,

Ok, rendez-vous.

Are you joking, she asked-gasped.

Nope.

So we met on the arranged date and I proved to her she was a normal, healthy woman...

She came back. Again. And again. I even introduced her to my wife as an old friend. She was a woman of her word and never told a soul. It's not your problem. It's ours. So many lousy fuckers out there just passing the parcel.

I love women. Genuinely. If you call me a *salaud*, you haven't understood a goddamn thing.

There are three ways to have safe sex: I cum in your mouth, I cum in your arse, we go for coitus interruptus.

You can tell who's having it off with whom if you're observant. In our club, it's going on all over the place. That tanned woman, the one who keeps giving me those doe eyes, she continues like that, one day I'm gonna screw her. Her husband's not my friend. We're just club-mates, that's all.

You Know made the mistake of bragging to me about the size of his dick once. I thought, you jerk, that's not what counts. As big or as irresistible as you think you are, if I want her, I can take your wife and fuck her brains out. Anytime. And in fact I think I will. And when she's licking me off, she won't be thinking about you, sunshine.

statement of the problem:

them

hypothesis:

illegibility

experiment:

select one from a collection of wigs different lengths/colours, overdose of junk jewelry in my case, real, stay-ups, high heels, fur coat or collar, whip and/or massage oil within reach and one of those fat, knobbly gherkins...?

yeeeeeehhhAAA, giddy-up, cowboy!

predicted results:

You Know'll go all righteous on me again, make me feel like a slut like the first time I wanted to go down on him and he pulled me up. No, he said. No.

observed results:

suppressed the desire to say:

spank my clit with a fly squatter I'll scream n cum something crazy

conclusions:

don't show/tell either/any of them that, ever

Ah, Nick, what a surprise! Come in, come in. How are you, then? How's the wife? Oh, I'm sorry to hear. Sure. That's what friends are for.

Thanks. I love this place myself. Far too big for me, but I can't bring myself to move out. You think I'm rich but I'm not. I've got treasures in this place; paintings, antiques, but I don't have so much cash. Once everything's been deducted, I'm living off €700 a month. My pension hardly covers my cigarettes. The upkeep of my pool costs me 500 a month, just to give you an idea. I pay for my son, my daughter. Costs costs and more costs. I've thought about moving out and letting the place to some wealthy businessman or politician. There is a demand. But it's my home. Five hundred square metres for an old man like me's too much. But it's my home. This way. Yeah, I know. I can comfortably host twenty people here. Two hundred in the garden if needs be. Used to have lots of friends. People whom I thought were my friends in any case. Every lunchtime around a quarter to twelve they'd turn up to have lunch with me. Every day of the week there'd be someone over. My last wife, though, she took a dislike to many of them so that little by little I stopped inviting them. Now I'm left with no-one. My table for twenty? Hasn't been used for over six years. Ought to sell it. This one guy came to my house time after time. So on the 21st consecutive occasion, I said to him, look, I said, this is the 21st time you've invited yourself to my house to eat. And this is the last time. The next time we eat together, it'll be at your house. Never seen him for dust since.

I've been bleeding for three weeks now that's hardly normal...

as if that'd stop him

run, rabbit!

the absurdity of life at the best of times

1. Sometimes the two of us sit down together & weep.

Who said: I think you should consider fixing a date for regular intercourse. The routine of it will deflate the tension I'm sorry? Disgust? That's a strong word... At some point you'll begin to take pleasure in the act. Once the sexual tension is removed, you'll also find verbal communication less troublesome.

2. Sometimes she helps me to my feet.

Who said: After a fight, Nick busies himself with the children. With the housework. For a change!

3. Sometimes I render her the same service.

Who said: I begin to better recognize his latent, ambiguous, aggressive behaviour though he's keen to pass himself off as a nice guy.

4. Her around me.

Who said: What set off today's quarrel?

'I didn't come to bed early enough for him.'

Mhm... Thematic overlap: distance, sexual frustration:

"kiss my arse!"...

5. Aura/Halo.

Who said: It cannot but be a good sign that he dared show his emotion in all its purity.

'but can a sign – an act, it acts, we forgive – ever suffice?'

6. No room for her – for us – in my marriage. We left.

One day there'll be nothing left to breathe.

I couldn't know that I didn't know, I can only know now.

Who said: Soul(stoned), yelling at current things: Words, words, yet more words. Find the right words. Warmth, softness and... look. And absence. And mockery. And lies.

7. Understanding about my own understanding? Doesn't exactly map onto the notion of the silent mind (as I understand it)

Who said: I ignore Nick's request to come to eat. Table rituals, cover-up, 3x daily whilst his father fucks daughter and mother sings soprano in the choir every Sunday.

8. Every second of my existence is spent at a crossroad & I must doubt & do...

Who said: Pattern recognition:

'kiss, cigarettes, eat.'

Who said: A dirty weekend? If you're going with *him* it's hardly a dirty weekend, is it?

Where're you going? For your wedding anniversary? God help you!

He said (pontificating): Your *accusation* regarding my *so-called latent aggression*, my *insinuations*, are based *entirely* on what *I* have told *you* about myself and *not on your... personal... experience*.

Too too too smug smug smug they're all so busy being right all the time how can there possibly be any space left for us?

Who said: When I say that he's misunderstood, that what we're dealing with here is his impatience, the signs couched in this impatience,

He said: That's mere judgement!

He said: You don't know how to *listen*!

9. Disassemble the wife

We returned yet again to the bothersome business of sex and I thought: enter/inter-coarse.

'If I never had to do it again, there would be nothing missing in my life.'

She said: Then why do you do it?

'Because I have to.'

She leaned forward, closer: Why? Who said?

10. Doubt yet do. The conventional way won't allow me to show that I care.

Who said: you like to expand. He distills. Problem?

He said: Dependent independence! You think too much. We didn't come to Paris to think.

Come to bed. Make an effort. For once.

[illegible]

0

as if time didn't matter

as if reality it forges
as if *rien ne va plus*

as if bruised

Why did you marry him?

I thought he was someone he turned out not to be. What about you?

Me? Oh in my case it was even worse; I married her cos I knew she wasn't. Walked into that mess with my eyes wide open. But surely you must've seen that he's fake at everything apart from being a right old prick. It's written all over his face: just small fry wanting to be a big fish but never will be.

He's got loads of nice things to say about you too.

Like what?

The minute you slip a ring on her finger, some of the magic's flown, have you noticed?

0

Love had painted a mouth about to speak words he feared for those he could not control

0

Love up a one-way street and there he was with his gearstick all broken!

0

Don't...

Take the time to see my juice? In Paris? Just spit on me then barge right in.
The Authoritative One.

As in:

Nick sits there in an L shaped out of tensed muscles, misunderstanding. Stutters several times something about the impossibility of knowing I would feel that way about it he could only say he was sorry

but his voice is bitter and he makes no attempt to cover it up

As in:

I reach under the bed for the coloured hankies, take a couple, double them over. Wedge them between the legs to soak up

i) his ejectamenta: hurry-came

ii) pubic whimpers unstoppable, body-fated, pointless ovarian holler

iii) echo wakes up, lonely:

this is the closest I can get

I don't want to get involved in your private affairs, but you've pulled me in so I'll speak my mind. Have you told You Know straight to the face that he's a lousy lay? You should've told him from day one that he was lousy, he might've made more of an effort.

He's making an effort now...

Making an effort cos you're fresh from the clinic and Dr whoever-it-was threw him a look he couldn't decipher when he came to pick you up, you looking not as fragile as he had expected? Too late. He's lost you. And he knows it.

If you want to give him a treat, arrange for a girlfriend to be there one day when he comes home from work. Say nothing in advance. She just happens to be there. You have a nice meal and a decent conversation... and later into the evening when she goes over to him you can make a discreet exit, or join in. You have yourselves a nice time and there are no reproaches.

When he touches me I want to throw up.

Then don't join in, just watch. Or film it.

That could come in handy. For the divorce.

Don't be a bitch.

I couldn't stay long. Today's our wedding anniversary.

Ah! D'you want to take a shower before you leave?

No.

You gonna take one when you get home?

No.

Thanks, Nick. I like to consider myself a bit of a connoisseur. Everything you see here's for sale. The items I like most are on offer at ridiculous prices so I get to keep them for longer; you're not taking any of it with you when you go, are you?

I made my money in the antique business. One of my many passions. I like paintings. I've got over three hundred paintings hanging up in this place. Every one with the original price on the back. For the right price you can walk off with anything that takes your fancy. That one's nice, isn't it? Watch your head. This part used to be an old barn. Some of the beams are low.

What'll it be? Pils. Coming up. So what happened? You did? Well well well, Mr Nice Guy. She did? God. Lawyers. Hate to be *her* husband. Cheers.

Mhm. Mhmm. See what you mean, Nick. Mhm. You're not really over for advice, are you; you just want to brag about the fact that you beat up your wife and bag a bit of admiration before you go home. And as you're not paying for my advice you're less likely to take it seriously, but yeah, why not, go along with what your lawyer said: claim she provoked it on purpose cos she had her eyes set on the compensation money. How much is she asking for? Never thought a female lawyer – she got kids? – would stab another woman in the back like that though. Obviously not your garden variety. What the hell, they want to be independent, right? Truth is not a frequent guest in the mouth of a woman.

Oh, that? That's my official website. Thousands of women've already contacted me. I get messages every day. But you know, the days are over when I'd jump into bed with any old anybody. I've wasted my time too often. Now I insist on a photo and I won't travel more than 40km to see a woman. Why indeed? Plenty more fish in the sea, n'est-ce pas? I've never had problems finding a woman. Never. But I've always found women to be a problem!! Let me switch the damn thing off.

Mhm. Mhm. I had no idea. I thought you two were getting on well enough. She seems nice. Black women're not the same, surely you knew that. Not for us. You want one? Fuck as many as you like till your dick rots for all I care but why did you have to go and marry one? How're things going with the new one? Got a mistress? A man who doesn't cheat on his wife's a wimp, I dunno...

I've been through it loads of times. I'll show you how to doctor your wage slips and a few other tricks to keep the damage low. What's in it for me?

I remember: mother's home-made German-style bread; she wanted to be sure what was in it. Only sometimes it was so hard you broke your teeth eating it and other times it had a consistency of I don't know what; nothing but a pile of crumbs you had to shovel into your mouth with your fingers. Chew at least twenty-five times before swallowing, she said I don't know how many times though I do know I was sick and tired of hearing her say it.

La Sorbonne. La Sorbonne wouldn't talk to mother because mother wasn't educated. And her children were not allowed to play with us. She'd walk daintily by as though we were thin air, fussing at her boys or at the dead animal sprawled across her shoulders. She and her Christofle flatware, her fake Parisian accent, she's nothing but a vulgar village girl, mother jeered. *My husband was born in Strasbourg.* To prove the point, she'd sing *La Belle Marianne* from the top of her voice as she hung out the washing. Mother wished her neighbour the most horrible end. Raised a toast to her when her wish came true without her having to scale La Sorbonne's garden wall or think of ways to get rat poison over there.

I remember: three weeks of side-splitting pyelitis. Mother didn't believe doctors knew better so I sat at the edge of the bed, holding my kidneys for three weeks, sat out the pain as though love alone or pigheadedness could cure.

I remember the first time I took the time to look at you.



Mother, the lying bitch.

I'm sure she loved you, you know.

Well, she had a funny way of showing it.

JOSEPH 2:1
ET TU, BRUTE 1-2

There are three of us altogether. My father's first wife died of tuberculosis and left him with a son. My mother's first husband died and left her with a son. Mother's first husband designed airplanes and died whilst testing one. Because he wasn't in service that particular Sunday, she never received a widow's pension. A beauty she was, from an Alsatian village I

won't name as it's none of your business. She also happened to be a hairdresser.

Father? From Strasbourg. A hairdresser too and looking for a new wife from the trade so they could set up a business together. Someone who knew them both arranged the meeting. Father drove up from Strasbourg to take a look at her. They got married and made me.

JOSEPH 2:1
ET TU, BRUTE 3-5

And Brutus was an honourable man... For everyone else, my father was charming. I fucking hated him. I got on really well with my step-brother paternal side. For me he was a real brother. Brüderchen, tho he was nine years older than me and when our father died, he kind of played the fatherly role in my eyes. Sixteen and already grown up, so when father died, he upped and went. Step-brother maternal side: what an asshole. Every single day he'd beat me up cos I was taller tho he was older. I didn't fight back, cos the Bible had taught us not to fight with your brother. Every single friggin day. Till I turned fifteen. Then I turned and said to him,

so that was the last time you've beaten me up. If you ever – I mean ever – do that again, I swear, I'll kill you. I'd found a gun by then. A gun with a faulty spring I managed to repair. He knew it, knew that I would use it too. So he never

touched me again. And to make sure I didn't kill him, for I would've done, I quit school and left home. Even today, more than fifty years down the road, we can't spend more than half an hour in each other's company.

If you ask anyone, they'll tell you how charming my father was. A man who loved flowers! Took out an insurance on my mother so that if she died, he'd come into loads of money. The bastard didn't think to insure himself, did he, so that if *he* died first, his family'd be in Buttertown. And he did die before her.

We were starving half the time. But he loved flowers, give him that!

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child;

There was this poster of a pig. All smiles he was, holding a knife up in the air. He had cut himself in two and there were slices of salami piling up beside him. Gave me nightmares for ages.

When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. (Corinthians 13: 11)

he lay in a manger
no crib for a bed
she eased back his swaddling
to give her son head

0

Hard On/e

JOSEPH 1:10
HUNGER GAMES 1-2

Everything came from the earth;
potatoes, carrots, peas, tomatoes,
cucumbers, gherkins, redcurrants,
strawberries, white cabbage, red cabbage,
rhubarb, celery. Mother would peel and
boil into the night. Father would help in the
garden. The old dirt cellar swallowed the
fruit, adding the odours of their different
skins to her mood, the jars shelved, glass
eyes glistening iris of red green yellow
marbles too big for the pocket.

.

Whilst we children broke our backs
helping mother with our humble harvest
our mates were off enjoying themselves.
We caught them from the corner of the eye;
the flash of their bikes, of fishing tackle; a
hint you are unsure of so you turn your
head a second– already gone. You buckle
back down to pulling up potatoes, to
uprooting carrots only to plant them again
in the cellar, bury them alive and upright in
sand so that they will survive the winter.

JOSEPH 1:10
HUNGER GAMES 3-4

I never had an old bike let alone a new one; Onyx, Gladiator, Aumon, Terrot, Magnat, Peugeot, where on the old posters the P looked like a bigger version of the G to us children who'd just learned how to spell so were the new authority on the matter. Mine were always put together from spares scrounged from the rag and bone man we children called *le monstre*. Others dashed by on their new gear. Some had new gear without making a show of it but if you know like I do what a bunch of snobs the French are, you'll know these were few in number.

Me? My bike was put together from leftovers. A working-class family nourished from what the patch of earth behind the house yielded. You could pray until you were blue in the face; it didn't cough up bikes.

If you pray for what you already have, Tatar, there can be no joy, mother tried to placate me. Easy enough for her to say. And why that permanent hungry faraway look on her face, were we her children not joy enough? When she tried to kiss me good night, I turned away.

Sneak into orchards, shine an apple on the sleeve. Bite.

Mother would make a tray out of yesterday's news to drop her peelings onto. The lying bitch. She told us a load of cock and bull which we as children believed. Now I know it was a load of bollocks. Even after father died she never brought him home to meet us but stayed his mistress her entire life.

Just before I left he sang *La Vie en Rose* to me at the bottom of the stairs, rocking me from side to side. Me fully dressed and he stark naked with a good voice but bad teeth.

Look!

He showed me his arms.

My hairs are standing on end.

Your joy is your own; your bitterness is your own. (Proverbs 14: 19)

Wenn du ald willsch waere, so blieb vorner von de Wiewer wag, und hinde von de Ross
If you want to grow old, stay away from women and horses
(an Alsatian saying)

Honour and obey. Well, go on, then!

as if I had been slipped a pill...

at last

10. *Her name is Dr. Schonbaum*

I am to call her Ingrid. We are to meet daily. She recommends at least one lunch-time walk a week and regular attendance of at least one group therapy. She says I have a very nice room. It suits me, whatever that means.

Morton House. Of many rooms. They tuck us in at night. Last night was the second time the wo/men came. alien cum

My room.

Knock knock whose lair?

13. *There is little*

to remind me of Him but for these awful sessions. My better half. Beta-Man. lol. Whatever.

Rest: I can't afford feelings.

14. *Too many too too too*

Two nervous breakdowns, one attempted suicide, hair loss, one tooth...

18. *de-sired*

What is a woman when no longer desired? Who is she?

So many cobwebs we need to sweep aside.

21.

No I do not want to. I will take my meals in my room.

The rooms here all have names as though they are able to accost/befriend/molest us. Her in *Victoria Morton*, acute dementia not that I'd know: she keeps walking in and out of the main door and into other people's workshops, bothering everyone. She seems fond of handles. Yesterday she crapped in the corridor. On purpose. In those horrid brushed nylon leggings of hers where you can always see the crack of her arse and what an arse, the top of it spilling over the elastic like dough on the rise. Why doesn't anyone say anything?

24.

We know she takes advantage of us, sneaking into our rooms at night. Some are jealous. She fucks those ones first, to keep them quiet.

27.

You say we do our best to block or enhance our doubt zones. I still stumble over the idea of enhancing one's doubt zone. You'll explain that to me, Ingrid?

29.

Yet another restless night...

Between my legs it smells as though I have awoken from the dead. Unfucked puckered rot.

33.

'If I do this all my life, I will have missed something. And when you realize you have missed something essential, that's when you start thinking about age.' Her in *Isabelle Morton*.

She goes home every night. I fall asleep with her kiss on my lips. Our thoughts are so similar, yet I am the one in here.

I, I, I...

45.

'What you resist persists. That was the thought you were wearing yesterday.' Who said? I'm on the wrong side of the line. Don't think for one second that I don't see through this whole circus. I should be the one on that chair. I, I, I, I

I

I

I

46.

She enters the room.

cf Ger. pref. *ent*: to take away.

To *ent*.her; take her *her* away?

She looks at me again with more insistence this time I suppose I'm no longer 'good'.

She's stopped being kind to me.

German noun. *Kind*: child

When?

She searched deep in her memory bag

vague, unpronounced hormonal warfare going on

What *more* do you want? What *more* must I say?

perforated families damp lost encapsulated sagacious affliction slept and was

59.

I promised not to count the days but they were right there--

60.

A single case, not an isolated case.

Labels. Ideological sleet. Left in a random place. Then the wall came down. Be prepared. Full colour escape.

64.

I disappear in the meaning. What does perverse mean? My mind, full of open doors. Mindful of open doors. Sex and cum everywhere. My mind is not a brothel. I disappear down alleys.

Down the meanings, dug up, yet unavailable to the definitive.

Now only *I* is allowed here.

all owed, hallow'd, all low wed, a low wed, low:moo, lowed/load, lowed: lowered (as into bed/grave), stoop low, lose standing, relegate, gate, door (click, once), freedom (freed 'em, free doom)

Aye.

Push me through my paranoid aria as if I can meet you on your terms, raw & rigorously.

66.

Hear no evil. See no evil. Speak!

70.

Anticipation: constitutes a danger for the reflexive, critical mind since it means that conclusions have already begun to be massaged into place. This in turn renders us potentially blind to unforeseen eventualities wherein might precisely lie some of the answers to some of my questions... She said.

Maybe I should have said this much, much earlier:

Am I ready to go home?

Mother: door's locked. No way in or out.

Grandmother: door's locked. No way in or out.

Her mother: door's locked. No way in or out.

GreatGreatGrandmother: door's locked. No way in or out.

GreatGreatGrandfather: slips the key into a pouch about his neck, rides off for days (Bang!) and (Bang! Bang!) days.

The dolls are as beautiful as ever.

experiment: marr-ied life?

observed results: womenlaughter
in.in.out

conclusions:

Pussy puss he pooh sss s/he pushed back tug o war on ← ← only one pushed harder the
bruise glowing up her collar like an unke(m)pt promise to make him blush she turned the
other cheek. It wasn't fair(er).

alarmed.

cf *larme*, (Fr. n. f.) *tears* in Engl, (n. vb), also *lame*, (Fr. n. f.) blade. *Lame* in Engl: unable to
move. cf *arme*, (Fr. n. f. + Engl. n. *arm*) weapon, cf *arm* (Ger. adj.) poor, cf *âme* (Fr. n.) soul cf
Engl. homophone: *sole*, meaning *only* but also the skin at the *bottom of my foot*. cf
homophones *âme* (Fr.n.) *am* (Engl. vb)

I can't say that anyone knows me in real life. My doing & being are not yet in tandem. Must get
that sorted before I die.

skim uninterrupted against precious lies

rivulets without explanation sparked
abandonment

inexhaustible reds

beauty fall

0

Don't we all need our failings? Aren't they part of the system, of God's sense of humour, his gift so we may learn to return to the divine love, like the mother slipping a sweetie into your coat pocket for you to discover much later when your mind's off somewhere else.

Got one such sweetie in my hand right now: a fear-flavoured, powdery-coated bonbon I will suck till nothing but sweetness remains.

'No, I've never done anything as nasty as animals. Why, is that a particular fantasy of yours?'

So you think you're Cinderella? Think twice.

Everyone's game, he said.

Not I, I declared. You'll never have me.

It's all a question of what you want.

Well, let's change the subject.

A month later I was in his bed and it was I who had chased him there. The way of all flesh.

Now I can stop trying to be an angel and get on with my life.

disappeared lust of the early years

scud

rove

dustmote-like across my broad interiority

When I see what I call cottage cheese piling up on my thighs where formerly there was none I don't panic I'm almost relieved.

Simply being *is* the event, my event.

He hadn't made the bed, for which he apologised, but it didn't bother me. I trampled on her blue sequined slippers as I climbed in and trampled on them once again as I climbed out, not that I had anything against her, they were just in the way. Sex was good. Came several times and got the chance to scream my head off. Passion nevertheless shushed by a sadness I didn't quite know where it came from or where to put it so I ended up stuffing it into the crease of cloth between the two mattresses. Big toe right foot.

I don't normally like having my dick sucked so much. Doesn't turn me on as much as it does other guys it seems but the way you do it's heavenly. Where did a good girl like you learn to suck dick like that? (It's my toy.) Gonna cum in your mouth (won't it make me sick?) Don't talk nonsense! Won't make you fat either, only has 15-30 calories per shoot. (Then what do I do, do I have to swallow it?) Up to you. If you do it'll help you to lose weight. I'll feed you millions of little Einsteins. I'm old enough to be your father. You won't want me in a couple of years when my skin's all saggy and I can't fuck you anymore.

All the sperm She hadn't been able to summon, splattered all over the sheets now. He fed me a clump of it with his forefinger so I could taste it, properly, not like the last time, when he had exploded without forewarning into the back of my throat and it got slung directly to my stomach lining, choking me along the way.

My very first fellatio? I was a baby. It was mother. Been partial to soft fellatios ever since. No erection. Nothing to do with sex. It's more like an act of worship. Like drying His feet with her hair. Some will insist on downplaying that scene but the bigots've got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Again. Did you know that one of the devil's grandmother's Alsatian? So the saying goes.

Twirling it around in my mouth; what did it remind me of?

Have you never swallowed sperm before? I once had a girlfriend who lived off the stuff. As early as 12, 13 years old she was guzzling it. It's pure protein. Good for you.

Ambitious people have ears which're higher than the middle of their eye. If your ears're sitting on the top of your head, you're really going places! You? No.

He said,

I'd give you everything. Everything! I want to give you a wonderful present I'm just trying to think what it might be. If I had one hundred thousand euros I'd give it to you on the spot. Maybe I'd even marry you one day.

Would I marry you? My mind on the sequined slippers I regularly trample on. If beauty were celestial and came looking for us under the mantel of darkness, the wife would be the one to hold the candle without the wick, where had I heard that or something similar? Suddenly I knew why I was so sad some place so soon on into this Wonderful: for although – and against my better judgement – I constantly lay myself bare, he doesn't believe a word I say.

Women know who I am, I make no secret out of it. I have my wife and I have my mistress. That's the way it's always been and that's the way it should be. More marriages would last if you all followed suit. What is love? Love must surely be when you want your partner to be happy, mustn't it? Well, if these women really loved me, they wouldn't try to change anything about this arrangement because it makes me happy, right?

Wrong! You said so yourself; every woman wants to feel she is the only one. Your wife may kid herself into thinking this if she knows nothing of your mistress, but your mistress *knows* she's not the only one.

But she's better off, isn't she, just as I'm better off being your lover than your husband. I'm not jealous of You Know. You can screw him till the cows come home no skin off my nose. But if I were ever to find out you're screwing someone else as well I could kill you. I probably wouldn't cos I like liberty too much and couldn't bear the thought of being locked up, but there's a latent murderer in me, I know, and one day he might break out. I don't want to frighten you, but you should know.

Who said: time can only be of relevance to things that become, to things that cease, but not to that which is, always will or can be.

as if in.vulved

as if the slice fell

as in *limitation oblige*

'Dear Suzanne,
I think I could be both. I mean bi. How can I know for sure?
Geneviève'

'le relook du nid d'amour pas cher'
low-budget face-lift for your lover's den

Not sure that these mags are the right material for a therapist's waiting room. Are they supposed to take our mind off our worries for a minute or two? Or drive us back to The Good Life? Ah, psychology mags, that's more like it. She's running late so I have the time to leaf through...

nothing to distinguish them from the rest

JOSEPH 2:15
FOR THE RECORDS 1-2

When I was 18, it was time to do my military service. I had nothing against the army, so in I went. At the interview, I told them,

Honestly,
I said,

I do want to join the army, but, please, find something for me to do which doesn't involve me being bossed around, it does my head in. I'll be a cook, whatever. Just make sure I can be on my own with no-one lording it over me otherwise I could end up killing him.

The dickhead who interviewed me, sergeant, captain, whatever, just laughed.

Who do you think you are?
he bellowed.

You won't be the first prick we'll have brought to bow and you certainly won't be the last!

You see, that's where it starts:
power, power, power,
I sighed. I don't think he quite knew what to make of my response. He was all red in the face. Me? I stayed nice and calm. And very, very polite.

You and your army, you think you're capable of everything, but...

JOSEPH 2:15
FOR THE RECORDS 3-4

Let him wait, let him already start to get himself all worked up all over again,

but... you'll never be able to drive out what's up here, by me, and I tapped my head.

So, ok,
I let my fingertips touch to form a steeple. I looked him straight in the eye.

I'll join your army. I'll follow your orders. The first who does me wrong, I'll swallow it. The second, I'll swallow it. I'll be brought to bow, as you so nicely put it. But one day, one fine day, you will put a firearm into my hand. We're in the army, after all. And once I have this firearm, I am going to go out and kill every single one of

you who has ever wronged me, and that, sergeant, will be your fault. Now, I've told you, haven't I, so now I want that in writing, the fact that I told you that, for when the day comes.

You could see the colour drain out of him like you were drinking him with a straw. He ordered me to the psychiatric department, where I was kept for five days. Did all manner of tests, they did. Then they came to the conclusion that I was a deeply honest but extremely dangerous person as I supported no authority over me whatsoever. That's what's written in my military record. Fancied it up with no end of big words, they did, but that's the gist of it.

I was ordered home.

Your ears smell nice!

Thanks! Must be the new mask I tried out this morning. Yoghurt, honey, strawberry.

Home-made. Got a fag?

Don't talk like that. Say cigarette. Fag's vulgar.

You say it all the time.

You don't want to be like me.

I wish I could lick my parts like a cat shamelessly

chances are...

Then the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate it & guard it. He said to him,

You may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree that gives knowledge of what is good & what is bad. You must not eat the fruit of that tree; if you do, you will die the same day. (Genesis 2: 15)

beauty fall
beyoutofall

as in free doom

0

repair. destroy.

.

who said: if you're in a hurry put this back!

take the men...
take them an...

a-men

wear it out

The familiar question in a new frock: can we change?

New question(s):

- i. Is change always development?
- ii. Is development always the same as learning?
- iii. Does change come from the inside or the outside?
- iv. Is God essentially an inside or outside affair???

Take a maturational view of change/development/learning, then you'd go for inside. Take a catalytic view on the other hand, you're more likely to go for outside. I guess. I've heard people talk about readiness for change, just as I've heard others talk about being vulnerable to change. Also had to think long and hard about one account of change as the attempt of a complex organism to be more successful in its environment. See, I'm not some blockhead just because I choose not to speak as though I've got a broom rammed up me arse. I think, seriously I do, about these terms: change, growth, vulnerability, success; throwing them into the basket with God.

I don't mind admitting: I've got my issues with the church, like I've got my issues with anyone/thing it takes you less than ten seconds to see through. I fucking hate that lot! I keep re-assessing the joy-to-pain ratio of acts done in the name of the Lord. You can imagine the rest.

We call it knowledge. Isn't it desire?

Desire. Desire. We do not desire a thing because we deem it good but deem it good because we desire it (said another wise man).

Brain slobs and/or fundamentalists, back off. I don't care what you lot think.

Am I a masterpiece?

In the beginning was (tick as appropriate)

- 1) doubt
- 2) deed
- 3) word
- 4) quality
- 5) space
- 6) time
- 7) light
- 8) silence

That shade of red smells just like the period I can feel tearing itself from my insides, riding on a drenched tampon, musty warm over my fingers that I scrape into an empty anti-age cream jar cos it was such a lump of flesh I wonder whether it might not be a baby after all.

‘I can smell when a woman’s on heat. It’s that old dog instinct in me. You might come along in your tights, your high laced-up boots, your long over-the-knee skirt with lining, thinking that’s gonna stop you, or me. I can smell that you want it even if you don’t say a word.

When I touched you, you were soaking.’

There's innocence. And there's ignorance. Don't mix them up. Most of what you'll encounter's ignorance: ignorant bastards as far as the eye can see.

Philosophers are particularly grumpy old bastards passing themselves off as clever ones. You're better off with an artist between your legs than a philosopher, any day. An artist will peel your lips apart and lunge in. Artists know the meaning of abandon, of innocence, but your philosopher, here's what he'll do; he'll just stand at your gate, ruminating about the futility and/or transience of life. Only way you'll get yours'll be to grab him by the ears and shove his face in there. He thinks he's clever, well he's not. Cooped up in his head all day, what has he ever achieved? All he's got is a way with words but cos he can't (see why he should) free himself from the smog of words, he'll never reach true enlightenment, not like your musician, or your painter. Not like the child. Philosophers belong to the ignorant bastards but you can't tell them that or you could but they won't listen so why bother. Your crappiest artist is worth ten philosophers. Nietzsche? Keep him. Life is not for (the) thinking, you know!

journalism journal ism jour analism sodomites cyber bytes

as if I hadn't noticed how my wor(l)d resists disorder; indoctrination's too complete

↵

this / dys

order (Eng. vb), to command; cf *comment*

(Fr.), how; *comme* (Fr.), as if; *froment* (Fr.),

yeast

ordure (Fr. n.), waste/refuse/impurity; cf

refuse (Eng. vb), not accept; *dure* (Fr. adj. f.),

hard, to last/persist (vb 3rd person)

iso (Gr.); equal

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hypo 1: passion

from this it necessarily follows?

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hypo 2: abatement

There are four things which are too mysterious for me to understand:

an eagle flying over the sky

a snake moving on a rock

a ship finding its way over the sea

and a man and woman falling in love

(Proverbs 30: 18)

Our passion will abate one day and life will become regular. That is when I will need a new woman. That is why I change constantly. To keep this passion alive.

If you're all so respectable, what're you doing in my bed in the first place, all you women with your lies at the ready for partners you can't bear to leave. How many of the thousands who've passed through here are really worthy of respect, what's your guess?

they're so bloody obsessed with their tackle, like that's ever got anyone anywhere in life
shoving those extra centimetres in our face like it's the offer of the century

so much more to life and/than love

as in:

blow-healed azurean moment

recognition abstained half-light conjures

sultanesque cosmic frenzy

as in:

mornings unshackling like sound

I remember how much we hated having to go out to fetch the wood, Brüderchen and I. Remember when there was no wood left and mother wouldn't ask where we'd brought it home from.

I remember mealtimes:

How much do you want? Just a little or not too much?

The big boy from next door. Toenails like a cheese grater.

Hanging around outside in the field till the night fell upon us. Parents didn't fret as they do nowadays. The son would return. Sweaty. Exhausted elated. Ready for bed.

There *are* angels in this world. Once she came with a mattress. Then she slipped me what it would take a modest soul to buy food for a week, the sum skimmed off her own alimony. Then she drove nearly two hours after her night shift to bring me 5L of petrol when my calculated risk to cross the border on my way to work, there where petrol's cheaper, didn't pay off. Yes, I go to work. Have always worked. Yes, I have had to get up at 4.30 in the morning to catch the 5.10 so I can start work by 8, praying that the children will get up on time and be ready when another angel's engine mutters outside the front door to take them to school. But still the ends won't meet. I'm up whilst he'll still be snoring, still be spilling saliva onto her shoulders, indifferent to his children's plight, so determined is he to avenge himself.

She who laughs last

at last!

Would love a holiday tho brought up not to *do* credit; cut your coat according to your cloth, it went, and because grandmother was Jamaican, cloth came out *clart*. She had a verse from the Bible at hand for every one of life's tribulations. No such walking aid for me. I preferred her self-made ones. May she rest in peace. Slog my guts out like everyone else to keep atop of the mortgage and bills. Then die? Don't we deserve that holiday, even if on pump? A treat after cold floor nights or the three of us huddled in front of a weak fire in chimney when it's -17°C outside and our heating's broken (I turned it into a game, sort of. They went along with it, bless them). So when they call to remind me You're overdue, they're only doing their job, I won't take it personally or turn offensive, cos they go home to their bills and similar(ly) dreaded calls too, I guess. If I had it I'd pay, wouldn't I? And when the credit card company gives me a call, relax, we've had that badly-needed holiday now, they can hardly take it away from us can they. When I've got it I'll pay you back.

Scouring the house to see what I can flog. Trophies of happiness. Of success. What a fool!

Will you miss him?

Who?

You Know. Nick.

Not even for a second.

After all those years?

Because of all those years. Not a day will go by, tho, without his mind on me.

Did you put a spell on him? I knew you were a witch.

I know his future. I don't need to be a witch. I *am* deeply satisfied.

Me to thank for that.

No. Me.

If you send me an sms, my phone rings every minute till I open it and read it.

Oh, I won't do that anymore when it's so late at night. I thought I had better not ring since She might hear it.

Your messages are so wonderful, I wish I could keep them, but I read them and delete them, it's safer that way.

Never mind. I delete them from my phone too but I store them somewhere else. I have every single one.

That's good.

You will go a long way if you stay with me.

and if I had to die tomorrow?

The spirit is willing. The flesh wouldn't mind a go, either.

I would like to say so much, to clothe my ideas in a worthy language, yet with so much to say, I have sacrificed lyricism for expediency, trusting that you will not think ill of me for it.

Nothing is irrelevant.

BOOK OF PARABLES 1:3
MANNA

I remember: I went with mother to the baker's.
The baker's wife offered me a saltzstange.
No, thank you very much, Madame.
She asked me again if I would not like it.
No, thank you very much, Madame.
The two women exchanged smiles. Grown-up smiles that I had long learned to read.
Outside, mother, intrigued, applied a bit more pressure to my shoulder, asked,
Tatar, why refuse what I know you want so badly?
How comes I could read her better than she me.
Mother, didn't you see? It was broken.

A clever but by no means unimpeachable theory.

JOSEPH 4:3
PHOENIX

I'm just full of ideas, me. I could be a billionaire if I were money-loving enough, instead of being an early pensioner with an invalidity permit and 500 euros a month from the State for my pains.

Once when I was in Phoenix, Arizona, I noticed that they didn't have a single decent antique shop. I found out they were buying their antiques from New York, or wherever. Imagine, 350,000 inhabitants, as it was at the time, and not a single antique shop. I had stock back home worth over 2 million francs at a time when \$1 was 5 francs. I could have sold in dollars what I had paid in francs...

I went to see a couple of lawyers over there with my business idea. They thought it was great and said they would do everything to help me pull it off. I came back to France, all excited and raring to go. Got all the paperwork sorted out and wanted to take along a good-for-nothing relative of mine to keep him out of trouble and teach him the trade. He really was a good-for-nothing, that one. I started teaching him the job, took him in, and one day he came up to me and said that he had an itch. The idiot had caught pubic fleas

from only God knows whom. So I bought all the products and got him treated. Then he started smoking weed in my house.

You can't do that,
I shouted.

No drugs and no junkies in my house, get that into your head!
He had hardly been there a while but he was clever enough to find out where to get his dope, alright. The last straw came when he started pinching my money. He thought I wouldn't notice because there was so much of it lying around, but I can tell you at any time of the day or night how much money I have, right down to the last cent. I threw him out. I had to, didn't I?

Then there was my wife, who didn't want to go in the end.

Some time later, she showed me an article she had cut out of some newspaper: new antique business opens its doors in Phoenix, Arizona. The lawyers had pinched my idea, found some other Frenchman to organize the exports. I bet they are multi-millionaires by now.

Who said: It's funny you should speak about tempo when I feel ahead of everything and I amaze myself asking myself why all my days can't be like

like just imagine where I would be now...

If you can have something then there's no need to fantasize about it anymore, is there? So what does a person who has/is allowed to have everything fantasize about? Is this where perversion starts? Perversion or innocence?

Every word is (but) a label: impossible to stay upright on ideological sleet

Artificial boundaries of words not found in your memory fragile memory always on the move and the air in it is conditional

ON THE ROCKS

there was this young woman who lived in a shoe
with hubby & 4 kids (churchy they were too);
sunday in choir,
weekdays for hire,
marriage needs patching?
by God she's your man!

monday at 10?
candles & Rescue®,
Bach blossoms or prayers?
the power the glory o' the goodbook?
what then?
in fine catholic fashion
(i.e.) modest in passion
she'll wend her way home to
subdue to His will

thursday at 3? Oh, school, silly me;
friday at two ought to do?
till then duty awaits, there's
1) wifedom to kill
2) orgasms to fake
3) tempting stashes for pills: must update!

our catholic counsellor locks up – gotta dash –
her lover is waiting to open her latch,
they're cousins but so what, he's better than *him*,
got a whollopking kingdom
plus he's partial to rim

Haaa-ha-haaa!

How much do you want? Just a little or not too much?

The sewing machine. Just a little. Please.

if I choose to flee rather than to fight, forgive me

a garden, not a jungle, I was in search of

fascination won

I'm ashamed to be white but if I were black they'd've killed me by now.

She's thinks that erection's for Her, it's just that typical early morning bursting to piss.
Never done that in a woman's mouth before, come to think of it... should I ask?
Not me!

The purity of childhood, a state of wisdom; not yet (fully) contaminated by language: we know without being able to say, without being able to articulate and it is this, the blessed state. But you know what this means: this means that we others, the writers, the artists, the ordinary wo/man, must peddle a dirty trade, must forever wrangle with guilt; the guilt of knowing we are, at heart, at best, charlatans, not wittingly setting out to deceive, but succumbing nonetheless. Language does not admit any other course.



-Father, I no longer wish to become a clergyman.
-Why not, my son?
-Because.

Because:

There's something about your first fuck that you latch onto forever, seeking it in every woman thereafter. With Bernadette it was her red hair. I see Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus* and think: Bernadette. Courbet's *La belle Irlandaise* and I think: Bernadette. I've even mentioned, supposedly in passing, that I'm partial to redheads, and women have dyed their hair for me. But it's not the same. They are not the same. No woman has ever matched Bernadette in tenderness towards me. Tenderness and abandon. She had nothing to lose.

Stay away from him

From whom?

You know damn well who. You're still my wife!

On paper

on keeping the smoke coming out of the chimney

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I'd like to go riding but perhaps there aren't enough horses

0

mywillbedone

not waiting on the barbarian

There's the me I know in the here-&-now. There's this other me. This other me's the me I could have been if the blue that's me had taken the red path and become purple, not the yellow path and become green. It's the me who left home at sixteen /anything to get away/ and it ended up as a cashier at Tesco's. Tesco-me has two children like I do, well, okay, let her have three; let's make one a boy, see what difference that makes.

Tesco-me has a loving black husband tho when they make love the earth does not move either. The house is small, the walls are thin but ours or will be, thirty years from now.

Macramé, not oil paintings; we cut our coat according to our *clart*. We don't live in a good part of town /yet/ but we see to it that our children work hard; they *will* have it better in less than the thirty years. Tesco-me sits at the till all day, returning to her aspirations at night, tired /sad it must be said/, consoling herself by eating her way through books. At the moment it's Emily Dickinson. Tesco-me puts her apron on, her name badge on – no, not so you know who to complain about but whom to thank – and she can't help analysing the customers, their purchasing practices matching one-to-one their lifestyle. Yes, there is disdain. That fat lady – varicose veins, irascible thinning hair – bought three different types of butter last week, here she is again with the same in her trolley and squinting at the prices. So much butter in a week, woman, get a hold of yourself. Seeing what these people buy puts Tesco-me off what these people buy. I like to think I have nothing in common with that lot but we're both nailed to that there-&-then, right? Under the till or on my lap I'll have a notepad. One-line observations mostly. People-watching, note-taking, keeps Tesco-me going. She wouldn't call herself a writer, no no no, won't show any of it to anyone so no one has said it's any good and how can it be, Tesco-me, low on self-esteem, esteem. Just as well the /her/ earth doesn't move, she'd slip off and end up God knows where. Guess who still loves her, tho: husband plus two /or three/ children. Not the me I know in the here-&-now, the Tesco-me tho /God knows/ the one's no more real than the other; both mere choices I've made or didn't make. They can meet in the real world. I can go to Tesco's tomorrow and meet me. Anytime.

JOSEPH 4:22
PARADISE LOST 1-4

Ile de la Réunion – I fell in love with the place. Found a splendid piece of land with a view of paradise: a sumptuous property with these magnificent old trees whose flowers remind you of those plants we sell here mainly at Christmas time.

The property fell in terraces and the idea was to build a house on each terrace and let them out as holiday homes. A friend gave me the idea to let them out to the military stationed there, as they would be reliable clients. Brilliant!

I found out who the land belonged to, and negotiated the sale. He wanted 775,000,00 FRF, which was a wad of money even in them days. Down payment? No way, but my word, which was good enough.

I had the land all measured out, and back home, organized a whole troupe of people to get this project born. People to build the houses and organize the material, which was much cheaper to buy in France than over there. I talked it through with the bank manager, who gave me a credit of two million. For at least three months, my entire energy went into making this dream come true.

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JOSEPH 4:22

PARADISE LOST 5-7

We had the papers drawn up and everything. Then I flew back out to the Réunion. The appointment was for Monday at 10am. 10am came and went, ten thirty...

Where the hell is he?
I asked the notary.

Be patient, Monsieur,
he soothed.

This is Monday, and you are in Réunion, not in France. Here, things get done at a different pace.

Listen,
I said, already feeling uneasy.

I've worked my balls off for the last months and I've just flown 9,000km to be here. Where the hell is he?

Later, much later, the proprietor turned up.

Ah, Monsieur, bonjour! So, we are ready for the sale? Well, Monsieur... erm, Monsieur, we will have to round up the price a little bit...

.

Ok ok, but let's get started, I said.
I had calculated a 30% margin, so I would still be within my budget. Round up the price *a little bit*, he had said...

Monsieur, Monsieur, my property is worth at least 1,000,000,00 FRF, Monsieur...

What!! You cheating, you greedy sonofa-
I showered him with all the verbal abuse at my command and put a curse on his head.

Monsieur, Monsieur!
The notary attempted to intervene.

Calm down, Monsieur! There are other properties here in Réunion.

But I don't want another property, you cretin, I want this one! You bastard, you greedy mother-fucking-

All those people who had helped me out, who had slogged their guts out over there as well as in France. Some won't talk to me to this day.

But my ideas never run out. I was the first to have a tent up during those winter flea markets where you'd stamp your feet and freeze your balls off waiting for clients to stroll by. They would then come and stop at my stall so as to be out of the rain. And whilst they were there and the rain out there, they would browse around a bit. And find things to buy. Of course. Within no time, all the other vendors had tents up so that the whole place looked like a Bedouin camp.

Similar story, some dealers got together and hired a hall. The place was freezing so I made some walls for my little corner, all things found at the scrap yard. I put in some windows, some old carpets on the floor, not the valuable ones, but something inviting and making it soft underfoot. And I put in a little stove. Who got the best sales? What did the other vendors do before you could even say atchoo?

Now you have two men who'll kill you if you cheat on them.

Nick'll set up with the first thing that crosses his path and make the same mistakes all over again. I won't. Let's see where he is in five years from now, where I, five years from now, then we'll know who is who.

You'll be my Lady Godiva. 'In the land I shall make, where Love shall be King, where Love shall be law, and you, my Queen.'

Let's see.

Get it done now don't put off any of it don't listen to anyone else don't even listen to reason just get it done. Now.

Beige shaggy pile. Chrome. White leather. Glass front. Garden. Forest. Horizon. How long would it take me to walk to the horizon? Won't be able to see my home from there; my microscopic life of needs, lost on the rim of an eiderdown of fields. Cows. Freckles. Clouds churning anti-clockwise.

Do you wanna suck my dick?

No. I want you to suck mine.

If you dream something three times in a row, it'll come true.

He watched me as I cooked, as I tore the salad with my fingers. What did his look mean?
Wasn't I doing it right?

How do you pronounce this, he asks: Kayth?

No, I say. Keith, like kiith.

Kiith? D'accord. Jarrett. You liked that the last time, didn't you?

I wondered whether he had brushed his teeth, his tongue, in between women.

He tries to put a condom on but can't so ends up throwing it away.

I can't work with one of these bloody things on!

Can you still feel me inside you? If you can't feel me anymore it's time for a break.

You won't be able to walk for a couple of days now.

Make up (verb): to invent, to create, to assemble. Made-up (adj): invented, untrue. Make up (verb): to reconcile. To re-member??? Make-up (noun): components, elements, constituents, cosmetics

The truth and I:

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and the moral of the story is...

who said: vibrant in the here-&-now, I prefer the horse's mouth

If everything God did was good, what was his intention with that Tree? He is sly. He created us using his image. One sly sonofabitch.

and the LORD replied:
ask me no questions, tell you no lies

Angels & demons everywhere, sucking on cocaine tablets, talking mellifluous

Where there is free will there will have to be victims

Well, if that doesn't eat at my kidneys!

And: cut?

Hot water?

he said,

Just hot water? An English woman I met once at a round of group sex, she showed me how to make tea.

Years ago you could swim in the river and even drink it. Today you don't even dare drink what comes out of the tap.

When mother died for some strange reason I kept coming back to her toes; who'd miss them or had ever even seen them? Who'd miss the thoughts that kept her up at night, not that I'd know; I didn't know her, she wouldn't let me. Cold-hearted bitch. Our two mothers would have got on like a house on fire, Tatar. I don't think mine ever had a best friend. No-one was ever allowed over. Everyone a spy, in her eyes. Like her life was worth spying on.

I remember: all the things she didn't say...

I can say No too, you know. Fancy that!

She had long ceased to be *mother* in my mind anyway, simply *that woman*. That woman who... the list of injuries read long. Dead to me for ages already but I'll send flowers for the funeral now that it's official. Should I send a card?

'It would be nice.'

What do you write in the card of a woman who hasn't spoken to you for decades, a card addressed to *the family* whose name you share on paper; a woman you cannot call mother:

Peace.

Who's next, they'll all be thinking. I know who I'd like it to be.

Do you want us to pop a bottle of champagne?

No.

Do you want to sit down on me?

No.

Then what the fuck're you doing here. Put your clothes on and go home.

I thought he'd understand.

I thought you'd–

Well don't. Don't presume to know me.

JOSEPH 7:3
OLD BUT TRUE

Why are so many men lousy lays today? Because they belong to generation billy boy. How can you screw decently with your cock wrapped up in rubber?

In my day, I reckon half the men would've been a decent lay. Nowadays try finding a man who can do more than piss with his cock. Back then, and we're talking about half a century ago, the whole village was at it and from an early age too. That's the reason why people married so young: you got her pregnant, you were man enough to do the right thing. Most of those couples are still together today. Imagine! Nowadays, you're a fully grown man of thirty but you're still living at home with mummy. What the hell use can a man like that be, now tell me? Either they're overgrown babies like some monster tomato cultivated in a Dutch laboratory, or they're all so afraid of the lurgies, of AIDS and wot not, that they hardly ever get their dicks out and when they do they wrap it up like a newborn on a winter's eve so you can't feel a goddamn thing.

Practice makes perfect, n'est-ce pas? And d'you know what that means; when you walk around and you see an 'old guy' like me, pushing on for sixty, not the type already wearing those old people's clothes cos he thinks who's looking anyway, but the type who's still keen to please, his hair groomed, nails clean, smart shoes and a twinkle in his eye even if his figure's no longer the best, well, you're more likely to get a shag worth writing home about out of this smart old guy than from that strapping lad with his greasy hair, plucked eyebrows, his tattoos and his I'm-with-it way of walking. Haaa-ha-haaaa! They shave their pubes and pluck their balls as well nowadays, I've been told. Next thing you know, they'll be waxing their legs.

We are the men. By the time we were eighteen we were on our own, earning our keep and starting a family even though the age of maturity was twenty-one. Today, at eighteen, you have all the civil rights, yet you're as wet behind the ears as a boy can be.

who said: when I myself am afraid to tread...
you live by your faith and pay the price

I actually like the way it feels. It's like a lively orange that comes more from the red side of the colour wheel than the yellow one.

I've got no idea what Thibault thinks of me. He doesn't talk a lot. My daughter, Brigitte, admires me, that much I know. She's a bit of a dumb-bag though. Mother's brains. 'Snot her fault.

Object concocted, vague, distorted resemblances in space not leaving time out of it as they changed as it did you could suppose it was the same with us humans; nothing so real it cannot be.

He drew the line at the menstrual blood I had gathered in a jar of Bonne Maman.

What'm I 'sposed to do with *that*?

Mix it in with the gravy.

His turn to flinch

I prefer spastic to plenty

What do men like? Why're you asking me? Ask them! I don't like it when a woman likes to take the lead. I like a woman to let me spoil her. Sexually and otherwise. I'm a giver. I want to please. I like you to yield to me. To let me do everything to you. You still fight too much. You can't relax. You've got too many hang-ups, too many false ideas in your head. There are no taboos between two consenting adults. None! I can't anymore, not for now, I'm whacked! Why don't you suck me a little, caress my balls.

On the train back from Strasbourg she late forty mid-fifty sat next to me, he ditto opposite her, a table and silence between them. After looking at her watch,

So late already, mon dieu!

At her feet, a bag with provisions. No suitcases overhead on the racks though. Out came the tupperware. Sandwiches breathed tuna and mayo my way once their tin foil coats had been opened. Brown bread with no crusts. I didn't know you could get brown bread with no crusts or had she cut them all off? The r-d-d-dm of the train caused the coffee to spill and the husband to tut. He didn't even say Thank you.

We have to respect the difference, he said. A leg of his strewn across mine like a fallen oak and me texting Her by allowing an arm to wander onto her side of the bed in the hope of what?

Don't mother us. A guy likes to be spoiled, not mothered. Being mothered's a real turn off. It's emasculating. I bet he hasn't fucked her in years were there any sex vibes between the two of them, not one. Bet? You'll not want to fuck your mother unless there's something wrong with you. His balls'll rot cos he's not getting it. Not wanting it more like. The only thing he will get thanks to her's cancer of the prostate gland which'll cause her to mother him even more. God help the poor bastard.

He saw the look on my face, said,

What?

Particularly fond of what was her... she wore my picture in a locket between her breasts.

All my life I have started things I haven't finished.

You want us to stop? I can stop from one moment to the next. We can stop and I'll forget you in an instant. If you leave me, it's definitive. I will never – never – take you back.

'Dear Suzanne,

My 8-year-old son has discovered masturbation. I thought I'd be a modern mum and leave him to it but now he's started tugging his diddly in public. What should I do? His father's likely to beat him if he found out so I don't want him involved at all.

Christine'

'5 tips for that perfectly flat belly!'

Tomorrow's Father's Day. I'll be staying at home for the first time in 10 years instead of hanging out with my biker cronies. My daughter'll cook for me. The mothers of my children will be there. Brigitte'll make a mess of the meal as she does every time. She'll ask me how it is and I'll tell her; disgusting!

Why do you do that? Tell her it's fine.

Why should I?

To encourage her, I dunno.

I'm like you, I tell you the truth. You Know asks you, how was it, and you tell him, honestly, that was lousy. My daughter asks me what I think, so she'd better brace herself to hear the truth. She keeps her mouth shut, I'll keep my mouth shut.

The buffet has bad vibes, my children will have me believe. Its previous owners, wicked people, they can tell. Above all, they can feel, the wickedness of them lodged like yesterday's food between your teeth.

They are people who would've never liked you, maman.

Statement of the problem:

I'm rather partial to that sturdy buffet with its matching table and chairs. What I see is more than mere furniture, I see excellent craftsmanship.

experiment:

throw a tablecloth over it. It's a bedsheet really thus so much cheaper and who can tell the difference anyway? When I have the time I'll embroider my initials onto it. Maiden name. Naturally.

observed results:

the children nonetheless refuse to sit at the table so now we eat in the kitchen, my best porcelain and silver indignant at their contact with metal legs on formica.

Did you know: there are twenty thousand feathers on a swan's neck alone, he said, stroking the length of mine.

You seem a bit bloated today. Could be a sign of ovarian cancer. I'd make an appointment if I were you. But if it's just wind, just fart. I don't mind.

Ladies don't fart.

Oh yes they do! Ladies fart and a whole lot more. They're the biggest sluts on earth when they get the chance to lay off with their airs and graces. Aren't you? Don't know what it is about marriage that puts a death warrant on all that.

Do you think You Know's cheating on me?

Why shouldn't he? It's not cheating, anyway. Just recreational sex. No big deal. Know what, I'm sick and tired of all this theorising about everything in life, especially theorising about sex, racking your brains about whether an obsession with sex is indication of a primitive developmental level cos–

–in the beginning it was purely for the preservation of the race, wasn't it. And today it's increasingly a form of escape. But doesn't to want to escape from your life mean that something essential is missing? Or is it the quickest route to enlightenment/innocence?

You just interrupted me. Next time, don't. Whatever the theory, what has it changed? Who the *fuck* cares? Can't you just see the Almighty, up there, shaking his head, thinking, I gave reason to Man, him being my beloved, and this is all he can think of to put this precious gift to? Our Almighty'll be thinking: next time I won't bother. And we can see that he didn't.

Hey you, watch it!

Haaa-ha-haaa!

You had to find the twins who were the most strange. There was a black girl and her white twin sister, and a 36-year-old man with his twin-brother who was still a baby. We lived in a huge tent; mother, Valentine, other blonde people. And the 36-year-old baby. We – Valentine and I – had lost Jacob. Mother was about to return home. It was dark outside. Panic. How to hide the fact that Jacob had disappeared. I put the 36-year-old baby in Jacob's bed. When mother arrived she threw a suspicious look at the baby. He's smaller. He's *smaller*! Mother's voice escalated from doubt to hysteria. I panicked. What do I do now? I pointed beyond the window to the great bright red-varnished building squatting there and the red-varnished tables scattered all around it. That, I asked; what's that? Oh, that, she said, calming down gradually. Mother was the type of person who adores being the centre of attraction. She left the tent, taking me with her. That's the Red Town Hall. She treated me to a lightning tour of the place, then asked: Where's Jacob? I dashed back to Jacob's bed and took the baby. Baby wrapped his arms and legs around my heart and stomach and we fled.

The children and I swopped memories as we sat there, polishing the silver with rags dipped in potato water. It's amazing what they remember. Do you remember they'd ask, and mostly I didn't although I had been there too. They tossed each other morsels of memories,

Do you remember Lake Hanau?

Course I do, do you remember Cuidad?

challenging the other one to come up with more details, forcing me to reshuffle my memory bank. And dreams! Dreams better than the best(est, as they liked to say) storybooks, fantasies welding us together, beyond Their reach.

Hard times lay ahead, if only they knew.

Maman,

they said in that way that made me know that something crucial was coming,

Please don't let any more men live in this house, let it be just the three of us from now on.

What an easy promise not to break.

My wife, the silly bitch, was jealous of my daughter from my previous marriage. She kept thinking my daughter was getting preferential treatment and that her own son was losing out when in truth it was the other way round. At least my son got to live with his father and that. She kept pushing me to make choices between the two of them. She'd lose out, every time. I would always, always, choose my children before any of the women in my life. Blood is thicker, isn't it? This one girlfriend was so nuts about me that she wanted to leave her three kids so that she could be with me. What sort of a mother would do that? Needless to say, I dumped her.

I'm so rich. I'm so rich I have a sauna in my car. This car cost 300,000 FRF when it was new and it doesn't even have any bloody air conditioning for that price. Only Mercedes could get away with something like that.

I, Tatar, am faithful of the heart, if not of the body. She knows that, like she knows she cannot change me. None of you can change me. Do you think *you* can change me?

I am not important enough for him to want to protect us both. That's why I can never fully let go.

This will have to stop. I shall be the one to decide when the game is over.

I

I

I

I

You will lose nothing. Least of all your heart.

weight at rest

angle imaginaire

my illusion my mistake

And: cut!

BOOK TWO
Your Joy Is Your Own

A beauty prepared for hours to say
eventually natural effacement
because nobody defines

(Sophie Gitzinger, from *Alnerism, the Hedge and the Invisible*)

In the beginning was Desire...

I? Am Tatar, Tatar is my name
I am as I am
I guess everyone can say the same.

Me? I think half the problems of this world could be solved if everyone had a decent fuck.
When you're at peace with yourself all the rest will follow. Look at all these stupid old men who rule our world. It's just written all over their face that they're not getting it. Either get yourself a young girl and fuck her brains out or learn to suppress the sex drive altogether, but properly, not like our clergymen who only pretend to but touch up every little boy at the first opportunity.

Be honest. There can be no peace without honesty.

Erm, what else?

I am Carmina
Carmina is my name
I am as I am
It is right that way

Don't tell me what I should think-say-ask-try

Don't

But what if...

Love is...

a search engine

voulez-vous...

~~Don't Know~~
Don't Know
~~Don't Know~~
Don't Know
~~Don't Know~~
Don't Know

'you have to be in there up to the elbows & over your head. Longer you ain't in there, more scared you get.' (Penny Goring, *Come and get me Brick by Brick*)

You like Green Eggs & Ham for now but one day you'll love sausages. Who said?

No safe words here, get that straight. Coming?

None anywhere.

Coming?

I'm here, aren't I?

JOSEPH 4:20
GENESIS 1-3

I remember the exact moment my son, Thibault, was conceived. My wife wanted to have a child four years on into our marriage. I wasn't so sure; I was already 40. Our whole time together had been one big party till then. Lots of drink, cigarettes and party.

Sleep on your right side, it will influence your dreams, she had picked up from God knows where. So she slept on her right side and dreamt of babies. Every time she thought she had fallen pregnant, she'd try out another one of her best friend's recommendations. She peed in a goblet and added a large lump of salt. After two hours the salt still hadn't melted so she wasn't pregnant. She peed in a plastic box, put a brand new needle in it and put the lot in a cupboard away from sunlight. After eight hours the needle still hadn't turned rusty or black, so she still wasn't pregnant. After two years of larking around like this, we conducted some proper tests.

Everything was fine with her, it seemed. The doctor wanted to know if the same could be said for me. So, in I went to the hospital, they gave me a container, said,

Bring it back in 5 minutes.

I went into a room where the tables were covered with porno mags and films. I must have wanked for about an hour, my hand even hurt, but not a drop came out. I went back the next day. Same story. The nurse was standing behind me, she kept coming over every few minutes:

Any better today? Come on, make an effort! Have you finished?

For crying out loud! She should have come over and played with me a little, or let me have a sniff of her, that would've been much better.

Listen,

I said,

there's no way this is going to work. So they told me to wank off at home the following morning. On an empty stomach, mind, then bottle it and drive it straight over.

That's what I did. The test results said that I had enough secretion and there was sperm, but that they were extremely tired. Is that any wonder, with the lifestyle we were leading?

We went for a week to the Costa del Sol and in that time I had nothing to drink cos the wine there was more like piss than anything else anyway. We ate well; I had lots of meat and just a bit of salad, not all that rice or potato stodge, and I did lots of sport everyday. Avocadoes and almonds were a regular. Loads of vitamin E in both. Good for your sperm. Zinc and selenium in almonds for that extra boost, tho I know that some swear by drinking the water you'd boiled your eggs in once it had cooled. Can you see me drinking continental tap water to foster the birth of *my* child? I'd be up at five whilst all the other holidaymakers were still snoring, I'd swim for an hour then go up for breakfast. And in the evening, I'd be sure to sprinkle a generous dose of fresh parsley on whatever I was eating; great for men's reproductive health.

The second time we made love, there was something about the way her body reacted: I knew she had just fallen pregnant. On the flight back, she kept saying,

I feel sick, I'm gonna throw up.

My dear,

I said,

you're pregnant.

Oh, you and your bla-bla-bla!

She didn't believe me for a second.

When we get back, you'll go to the chemist for a pregnancy test. I don't want any more jars of piss in my cupboards, got it?

The test came back positive. To be on the safe side, I sent her to do a blood test. Positive. I could tell the doctor exactly when the baby was conceived. Not simply the week, but the precise day and the precise hour. He believed me, because it *is* possible, but very few people are so tuned into their bodies let alone the body of another.

I know the exact moment when both my children were conceived; there was an energy, a reaction: I just knew it. And if I listen deep down in myself, I know that I was a father already at the age of 14. That 19-year-old I had, before my mother had explained to me coitus interruptus.

My wife went along with my biking mania. She did the license and I bought her a brand new Harley. We had money in those days. A brand new Harley with all the trimmings. And our son, Thibault, in his seat on the back.

feeling too melancholic today
not to mention the soirée pizza

I'll stop explaining my mood swings to him

orange or blue

won't show him the blue
not any more

Watch me piss.

He pissed on the rosebush, anointing it with the sign of the cross. We had just made love on his beach chair.

What about the neighbour?

What about her?

He strolled back over to me.

Lick him clean.

If I tell you all my stories why should you ever return?

I could fill your lifetime with my stories...

men always have some info to (try to) impress me with. I am not (easily) impressed

to mourn is meaningless

memories sit loose; loose like rotting teeth

We had a neighbour mother called La Sorbonne. Stuck-up bitch she was, but once her sons invited me and my brother over to see their model trains. In their bedroom, the boys pointed at the ceiling. Up there, they said. All we could see was a huge board and a string that went from it to a hook on some point on the wall. They weren't allowed to touch that string. Didn't see why my brother and I shouldn't, though. We let the board down, spent the afternoon on our stomachs playing with the trains and had the time of our lives. Whenever they were out with their mother they would still walk past as though we were thin air.

don't ever fit into our holes ever ever

He flung me over his shoulder, carrying my unserious protests to his bedroom.

When I was young, I used to be double-jointed. I could do a backward crab without my joints cracking, and I could do a wide-legged cartwheel. And the splits, when I was young. Just slide down into a beautiful split. Grandma would get all upset and say

stappit!

If I continued doing that, I wouldn't be able to have babies when I got older, since doing the splits pulled all you *tings* outta place.

Mother said I wouldn't have any babies anyway *if she know what good for her*.

Father was proud of anything I could do. He could never pull his thumb back till it touched his arm the way I could. He said I ought to be in the theatre, started talking about entering me for a talent contest.

Mum told him to

shuttup you foolishniss,

she'd rather go on a cruise if they had the money; all the money they had wasted on the pools, they could have gone on a cruise by now.

Grandma said they were both a pair of dreamers.

You ever see somebody give you someting for notting? An' you stap pulling back you tumb back like dat,

she said to me, or else when I got old, I would

catch arthritis.

Dear Mme X,

With reference to the case at hand, I am afraid I have no proof of Mr X's income at the start of our marriage, as the first thing he took with him when he left was our tax file. The most recent declarations however show a vast increase in his salary in comparison to the unchanged nature of mine (see DOC).

Best wishes,

My son's mother's a real stupid cow. I reckon the only reason I stuck it out with her for so long is because of our son, Thibault. She wanted to call him Alain. After Alain Delon. In the hope that he'd have his good looks. When she said that, I thought to myself: I'd be more than happy if he doesn't look like you. Whatever. One day she said to me:

Can't you just make love to me normally for once?

The stupid bitch. Now she's with some old black guy she spends more time complaining about than anything else. I don't even know his name. Can't remember her ever saying it. She's more likely to say that stupid nigger of mine did this, that hopeless nigger of mine did that and she'll roll those big frog eyes of hers I'm so glad our son didn't inherit. Let's just call him Fred. Fred's built well, it seems, dick like a donkey, that's what she needs. Rammed in, one two, that's it. Pig shit thick, Fred, but then again so is she. And she's so bloody stingy. I give her 300 euros a month keep for our son, but she earns loads more than I do. With all the flats she lined her pockets with after our divorce, plus her regular salary, she must be on around 50,000 francs a month. I said to her, has it ever occurred to you that if I didn't pay you the 300 euros, you would be in a different tax bracket, and would probably end up having more than you do now?

Father had been as pleased as ever. Slipped into the house like a criminal, he had, then eased the door to behind him.

"You pleased?" he said in his breathless way, pleading into my eyes.

"Of course, Dad."

I showed him around.

"That's our bedroom," I remember standing there, trying to make up my mind to open the door.

"Yes, well, we no need to go in there," he helped me out with an unskilled laugh.

"Joss mind you head don't get too big," mother had said at the end of her first visit.

My back against the front door, eyes closed, I'm waiting for her to close the garden gate.

Trying not to breathe until quite, quite sure that that woman was out of sight.

On tiptoes, back to the living-room, to the bay window, to look down the road.

The milkman waved again from next door but one. Whenever he does that I feel naked.

Perhaps he would have loved mother more had he not married her

I know you want to help but you can't

On my back, skinny and almost innocent in my bikini with the frilly bits around the edges.
Little girl's breasts as hard as plums. Danny kept touching them accidentally on purpose as he
heaped sand over and over me.

"You're my prisoner," he had announced, dragging me off.

He said once he'd buried me good and proper, he could do anything he wanted with me.

I told him to

belt up!

He threatened to force feed me with seaweed.

When you ask, Do you want to marry me, you're asking for the impossible. What you're really asking for is for the now to last forever, but it can't, can it. From that point on, it's downhill all the way. You slip into a routine: love on 30°, economy, spun dry. Folded nicely and stacked away in the wardrobe. Conversations aren't even real conversations any more cos nothing new's being said. You only half listen. Nod in the right places. And the sex...

When will we ever learn.

you will not see your mistress without her make-up on
you will not see your mistress with curlers in her hair
you will not hear your mistress snore
you will look forward to seeing your mistress
you will not see your mistress running around in shabby clothes flicking a dustcloth
you will not see your mistress start to neglect her nails and skin
you will not see your mistress come to kiss you and her breath's all sour
you will not see your mistress fart like it's nothing at all

When will we ever learn.

If She suspects something and asks me, I shall tell her. Medicinal lies. She knows she cannot change me. It is my one weakness.

Suck my dick if you know what's good for you.

All of us in the bathtub together. Mother included.

It's hot,
she'd say.

Everyone in!

We slept in the same bed too. Once, I made advances, groping at what was under her nightie. She gently pushed me away.

Next day, a carpenter was there to section off a space.

You're a big boy now,
mother said,
time for a room of your own.

Psychoanalysis. Got me back as far as my last bottle at the age of 9 months. Didn't want to go back any further, right up into my father's balls. Therapy ended cos, well, I ended up screwing my therapist. Things didn't work so well after that. *Ah oui, ça termine toujours au pieu.*

I fantasize about young girls, I mean really young ones, going down on me, sitting on me, but I wouldn't touch one.

You feel all oozy because when you get up that quickly out the bathtub you leave all your blood behind.

Danny came out with his hair all wet. That little rat stuck his tongue out at me. I stuck mine out back, and longer. So there.

Anyhow, I'd peeped through the keyhole and seen it.

After my last wife, I decided that if a woman ever came to live with me, she's not bringing a stick of furniture with her. Not even her bed-sheets. Whatever she brings must fit in her car. For when she goes. My house, my rules. I'm not moving a stick of my furniture to make space for anyone's things, only to have to put it all back to how it was before sooner or later. Nope. I said it wouldn't be easy living with me.

If I were Her, I'd keep my own place and I would see you when it suits us.

Well, you see, you're obviously more stupid than she is. She gets to live with me rent-free. All she'll have to do is help out with the shopping. The money she gets from her divorce and the sale of their property – what you would invest in a place of your own and consider yourself smart for doing so – well, all that money she can invest in a big house with a couple of apartments in it. I'll do them up for her and she can let them out. That will generate an income she can always fall back on, even in old age. She'll have more than she had before, and if push comes to shove, she can cancel one tenant's contract and move into one of the flats herself. See. That's being smart. Women've always left their relationship with me richer than when they entered. I show them how to calculate right. And then you leave me.

I prefer not to comment for now. Which doesn't mean I have nothing to say. It simply means I don't know how to say it. For now.

i do(n't) know (why) I do((n't) know (why)). wot??

think/ing/ (i) will (damage you/r health/)

I think it's time for another orgasm

Your mistress' eyes will shine when she walks into the room

Your mistress' eyes will shine when you walk into the room

You will want to keep something of your mistress on you at all times, if only a memory

Me sick an tired of telling you to lock that door when you go to the loo,
said grandma,
There are men in di house.

Men,
I heard my mother laugh.

Men!
You think it's funny
grandma snapped back.

Well, let me tell you, funny tings get started on account a tings like that, and mek no
mistake about it.

"Men!"
mother snorted.

When's the last time I ever saw one a those!

Grandma mumbled something as she went past, I heard her, but mother was too busy
snorting about no men, so she didn't get the last bit.

When you say Darling to your mistress the word changes colour; soft as her inner thighs

your mistress will not go through menopause and bother you with her flushes	your mistress will not grow old your mistress will not say <i>pas touche</i> your mistress will always smell nice
your mistress' breasts are just the way you like breasts to be	you will see your partner give up an endearment one day. Something s/he's always done, a sign of affection that stops. S/he no longer kisses your ear that way. They won't even notice that they've stopped
your mistress is funny and forgiving. And if she isn't, she will not be your mistress for long...	
One day something you once loved about your wife will drive you up the wall. My wife sings out of tune	One day I heard You Know tut for the first time One day something about him will have irritated me for the first time
security or passion, you decide. Or you can have your cake and eat it, like I do	Grains in the eye

He had sat there with the sheets pulled up to his waist and had insisted I left the light on as I undressed, knowing how I hated it. I was to put on a good show.

There was a ladder running up my tights.

Your mistress is game. She will do anything to please you.
You tell her, let my dog lick your pussy.

Your mistress is game. She will do anything to please you.
You tell her, let my dog lick your pussy. Let my son watch.

From now on he wanted me to wear stockings and suspenders. He would buy me a pair. Red and black ones. With frilly bits. Like in the catalogue.

He had started rubbing himself under the sheets.

My bra and knickers didn't match; I said I was sorry.

Your mistress is game. She will do anything to please you.
You tell her, let my dog lick your pussy. Let my son lick your pussy.
Let me watch.

Your mistress is game. She will do anything to please you.
You tell her, let my dog lick your pussy. Let my son lick your pussy.
Let my son fuck you. Let me watch.

I had to get down on all fours

Slowly!

he commanded

do it slowly... Crawl over to me

he said

Crawl up to my face...

The pipes in my throat clammed shut

Your mistress is game. She will do anything to please you.

You tell her, let me punch you. Let him watch.

Your mistress is game. She will do anything to please you.

You tell her, let him punch you. Let me watch.

*He always came crawling under the sheets and told me
not a word, you hear now! Quiet now
and his breath would warm up under my nightie*

And then he'd start touching

Your mistress is game. She will do anything to please you.

You tell her, Darling, this is Guillaume. He is a friend of mine...

Your mistress is game.

Darling, this is Guillaume. And this is Pierre. And this is Arthur.

They are friends of mine...

He had always wanted a show, he said.

His hand moved slowly – pacing himself – he smirked.

I should rub my cunt on his face.

That's what he called it.

Then he got his tongue out

I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to grab the mattress but you just can't keep it in your fingers

He threw the sheets back dramatically. I should rub my cunt against him, there.

Wait!

he ordered, putting his arms up to my waist.

Wait. Let me look at you.

Saliva would hang from my pubic hair and drool onto his stomach.

He looked at all that sticky stuff. And grinned.

I didn't know where to put my eyes.

I had to jiggle up and down.

Faster.

It sprouted up between my pubic hair, then disappeared again.

Then he got his ... out and squashed it between my legs and started jerking

Then he... then he

then he...

A woman's arse is looser than a man's cos she hasn't got the prostate gland taking up some of the space. My poor little dick's been worked so hard in his life, it's become insensitive. If I'm gonna wank, I have to give it a real good yank. And if I'm in you up front and can't feel a thing, then I'll turn you round...

I turned up in a fur coat and nothing else

I refuse to wear a condom. Old school, me. Condoms don't protect you from anything! Do you put a condom on before she gives you head? Do you put one on your tongue before you lick her out? Or when you kiss? Ever heard of a finger condom? Haaaa-ha-haaa! You just have to choose your partners carefully. Men only have a four per cent chance, women an eighty percent chance of catching something if you sleep with a contaminated partner. I do a blood test every six months. And I steer clear of junkies.

On: look(ing) past the nasty bits you (don't) like

On: flab skin and bone

no one's admitting

aye

And no, it doesn't wear off with age. It gets worse, cos you're still interested but who's still interested in you? I've been giving my ex-wives tips on how to pull a bloke on the internet. So much for you can't teach an old dog new tricks. If I were twenty years younger, I'd open a brothel for senior citizens of both sexes, say, seventy and upwards. These mature specimens of the human animal've got the finish line in sight, cash in their pockets, assorted ailments to forget, if only for that moment. And ungrateful brats as offspring, crawling out the woodwork to see you off. Above all, these oldies are thirsty. It'd be a runner. Especially with the women. With my neighbour, for starters. I'm not taken in by her impenetrable purple rinse, her 40den tights, the orthopedic shoes or the slight limp. Course, no-one's been near her labia minora for decades but she was a real old slag in her day. Brittle hips weren't her problem back then, I know a few who'll vouch for that! When she did what she termed the fandango on your ramrod guess what else she clung to, calling them her castanets? Said she had him steaming like a horse after a hard race. The way she looks at me even today. Teeth tarnished. Slack wet slit where her mouth should be. Gives me the creeps. She'd pay. Bet she would.

Love is...

‘nympholeptic haute couture’

I won't cry

He had been holding back so long with his orgasm that when it came, all the blood rushed to his head and made it feel like it would burst.

The circulation should be the other way round, see?

That had happened once or twice before.

I'm gonna die that way, I know it.

The first companions God thought to give to Man were animals. Says a lot, dunnit?

Did you know: a fanny's a self-cleansing organ, like the eyes? The maximum number of orgasms recorded in one hour is 134 for a woman and 16 for a man. And a pig's orgasm lasts up to 30 minutes. We've got work to do!

Did you know: almost 50% of headaches can be cured by the endorphins released during an orgasm. So when she says Not Tonight, crash her face into the pillow and give it to her good and proper!

We always say women serve up that excuse but men do too, don't they?

No. A man will always be ready to fuck. Always.

That can't be true.

Well it is.

2nd marriage, mid-30s: I mean it's not *that* bad. We mostly lie there and it's in my hand, all soft and harmless. There *is* a closeness. It's just not...

49, diverse problems: Well what do you expect?

Two nervous breakdowns, three children, husband left her for another man: It must be a plague, always having to prove yourself... can he manage without pills?

2nd marriage, mid-30s: Course he can't. At his age? I pretend not to know. It's so important to him. His manhood. Sometimes I pity him. And sometimes I just want to rip his hair out, know what I mean?

Collective laughter.

49, diverse problems: He loves no-one, least of all himself. That's what I think, so why should I?

and I'm left wondering just exactly whose husband she is talking about. I can't see any of them, any of us, returning to a healthy relationship. A salvaged relationship. Whatever truths we gain can only prepare us for departure.

These group sessions are supposed to make us feel less alone with our problems. They take place in a safe zone and we have all agreed never to discuss any of what takes place there outside the group but I trust none of them. Not even Dr Schonbaum, who mostly plays the role of the understanding listener, letting us take all the time in the world to find the right words which, should they refuse to come, she will tease out of us with well-placed questions. I bet she delivers all the anecdotes at her dinner parties, where the guests may laugh at our expense, may feel less fallible for those few hilarious minutes. She's actually quite nice, Dr Schonbaum. Under other circumstances she and I...

but it is now my turn to contribute to the discussion.

to throw back the sheets and light-step into the new day (like I used to?)

I would close my eyes, wait for him to roll off me back onto his side of the bed, then I would go for a pee and finish the job properly

in the beginning is a lie
in the *beginning* is a lie
in the beginning *is* a lie
in the beginning is a *lie*

It's up to you to sort it out.

Apparently You Know asks the neighbours if any men come calling.

Seriously?

Seriously. One of them came back and told me.

I told you. What a jerk. How comes someone so goddamn stupid thinks he's so goddamn smart? Doesn't he know he's made himself the laughing stock of the whole village cos what they'll've registered's the truth behind the matter: that he can't give his wife a decent fuck and he's shit scared than everyone else can. Typical intellectual. Hasn't got a bloody clue. They think we all envy them their education, but who's bed're *you* in? Yeah, so he's got more dough and a flash car. Your wife's sucking *my* dick and loving it.

You make it sound like revenge.

Well it's not. If he had come to me and confided that you were having problems I'd've told him how to fix things. Told him his energy's flowing the wrong way, up to his brains instead of down to his balls. Your simplest country bumpkin, pig shit thick and crossed-eyed Barnie'll know that if you fuck your wife good n proper, she'll put up with all sorts she'd probably not put up with otherwise. Don't need no fancy university education to know that. Besides, you can go to their place or meet elsewhere. What a pathetic man. No, not even that. He's just plain pathetic.

Sitting on the loo having a pee and a poop whilst writing this.

Whenever I'm happy, it goes wrong. I dunno why...

I'd like to end my days in the desert. Just stand still, and dehydrate till I become a stone once more...

Say *Motherfucker*

Motherfucker ?

Louder

Why ?

He was supposed to be an old man, sinking into himself as he returned to the soil, the imprint of his rump in the musty armchair that would end up in a flea market, after that in student digs. He should be repenting like everyone else. Not. This.

Everyone busy. Everyone going somewhere

left... right... over... and under, like the pigtails I had tried putting in my best friend's hair, that is before I had worked out that to make pigtails, you needed 3s and not 2s

Those that have shall get. Those that don't; hard lines.

He said,

I would've been a great Jesus, what're you wincing at? I can motivate the masses; win their hearts, show them the right way. They'd follow me to the end of the earth.

He peacocked over to the fridge. Opened the door. Didn't seem to be able to find what he was looking for.

'No matter how long you live, remember that you will be dead much longer!'

I don't have any male friends cos they'd be scared I might fuck their wives – you know, my reputation – I won't fuck the wives of friends, so I don't have any male friends.

If me & You Know were to become friends, that'd be the end of you & me.

Darling, this is Guillaume. He is a friend of mine...

vicious joy

Something unpleasant. Hostile.

Harder

Take me away

Look past the words to the intention. It had nothing to do with promiscuity or love, but everything to do with protection; with power. I'll explain it to him one day, if his interest ever extends that far.

His 'hello' was more than a greeting. It couched the message: I'm alone, you may come.

He told me I couldn't stay too long, then, hastily corrected,

Stay as long as you like.

He already sounded saturated and would fall asleep if I came, even if all I wanted was to lie next to him to touch his skin.

I don't care if he fucks royally, I'm not going to put my health on the line. His secret garden multiplied by Her secret garden – the accrument of risks – I must get out whilst I still can. Before I am punished for my greed. I'm afraid that we will go too far, I admit down the earpiece, despising the way I talk, sounding like some love-stricken inarticulate adolescent. Go too far; anathema to the Epicurean.

What, for goodness sake, does that mean?

He staccatoed back in a way that could barely cover his sudden loss of interest.

Thank you. This makes it all the easier for me.

Cables everywhere. Necessarily forgotten entrail kept just in case of what she could knit a bag big enough to drop her house into like small change

did I make that last bit up or have I read it somewhere?

there's a white egg and a lemon in a glass dish over there. For me that's all it is but for him it could be art. I am art. He wants to capture me forever and ever. How does he manage to hide that from Her?

What's her name

I had asked

He said

That's none of your business

There's not a picture of Her anywhere

a.noun's.meant

up.se.shun

but.her.flies

nigga.she.ate

plier.bull

on I am not sure whether we may conceive of time and space as independent variables I
rather see them as co-defining each other

on how can anything be said not to have a form?

my toenails look more and more like cornish pasties. If he's noticed, he's not said anything

aggression

unpardonable aggression

statement of the problem:

every second of my existence is spent at a crossroad & I must doubt & do

doubt yet do

push

JOSEPH 2:5
MOTHER

Mother was a beautiful, sensual woman, wasn't she? She had a string of lovers after father had died. Brüderchen had gone and left us. She fell in love with the local forester and was his lady love for the rest of her life. He kept making her vacant promises about leaving his wife, but he never did. Or he'd say his wife was a sick woman but she outlived both of them and is pushing on for a hundred now. Mother died in her late sixties. I guess she was just tired of living, so she just stopped. April 1st. There's humour in it, I suppose.

When he learned that she was dead, he came to see me. He pushed me a fistful of limp notes and told me to buy flowers

but he was sorry, he couldn't possibly attend the funeral. You want to know what I did? I took his fistful of lousy notes – five hundred francs it was – I tore them into pieces before his eyes, and punched him in the face, was that all he could muster, after 40 years with my mother? Not even the courage to attend her funeral? I threw him out, never to set eyes on him again. Dies a year later, I heard. I reckon it's because I punched him in the face and he suddenly woke up to the bastard he'd been all along.

I've never had any luck with men. Maybe that's why I love women. Women will lie on you, lie about you, they'll two-time you and hurt you in innumerable ways. But they're not traitors.

Art is an honest man's philosophical debate with space and time, he said.

How had he managed to paint those lips so perfectly dark on the outside bulbous shining and shaded lighter on the lower lip like the way I did mine made me want to kiss her though she was only an oil and though cheekbones and that tilt of her head suggesting carnage

He loves me. The way he had painted that mouth so delicately, perfectly set somewhat back in her face out of his reach, a shadow perching on the other side

Love had painted a mouth about to speak...

Love, those black eyes sizing him up or were they closed they looked different every time now they looked as if (what if???) she might be crying over whom?

JOSEPH 5:5
SACRIFICE

My biker period started when I was around 40. I grew my hair long, refused to shave. Got in with a whole new bunch of cronies. It wasn't a question of reliving my youth, it was a question of having a youth, see? At 15 I was already leading the life of a man, but of course you can't regain your youth. It's gone and it's gone, basta! I'm still 15 in my head, but the mirror tells me otherwise.

Then mother died.

The day of her funeral, I heard her voice talking to me:

You can't bury me looking like that, Jean-Joseph! I'm ashamed of what you've become!

So I cut off my beard, had a clean shave, and buried her.

Lost 1000 francs because of that. We'd made a bet, one of the many stupid things we did: the first one to shave his beard loses and must cough up 1000 francs. The wife? Oh yeah, she went along with it. I was playing stupid but she was plain stupid by nature. Once I had gone through this phase, the people from those days who saw me afterwards didn't recognize me. Said I was a different man. They never really knew that they'd never really ever got to know me the first place...

If you wanna grow, you have to give up something(s). Always.

On: if my hair were silkysoft would that make things (better)

On: there are men out there tracking me fearing I will call them by their name

On: don't tell me i fucking can't!

Why can't my husband be like Brian Ferry i could really do brian ferry...

Love is...

‘a black cab with its clock ticking over’

My wife should be back any moment. Relax! I locked the door. If she comes home and sees you, so what? If she loves me and wants to keep me, she'll just keep quiet about it. And if not, she'll have to go. So what? She knows me.

intuition is leading me to places that I have yet to operationalize

miracles swarm silently rotting

tick as appropriate the bits you haven't made your peace with yet

I'm not giving you any money cos you'd leave You Know and I don't think that's right.
Not a cent will I give you!

He flicks his thumb against his front teeth. He is uglier than usual. I hadn't asked for a penny nor had I the slightest intention of doing so anyway who do you think you are?

If I'm in love with you, that makes your life hard. I'm warning you. I'm ferociously jealous. If you say you're going shopping and you come back two hours later, well, I manage to get the shopping done in half an hour, so where the hell were you and what were you doing for the rest of the time? You see? You can screw You Know. That, I don't mind. He's a lousy lover, anyway. And you can screw any number of girls. But if I catch you with another man, I'll kill you.

statement of the problem:

there are too many of you around me it makes me scared

Furious neighbour from a few streets away. Fists thundering on our door. Someone had thrown eggs on his cos it was hallowe'en and he didn't want to treat, but it wasn't my children, how could it be. Some minutes later I heard the commotion, went outside to see what it was all about. A cluster had gathered around something on the ground. Flashes were going off, gouging the night. It was him. He'd got so worked up that he'd keeled over. I ran up the path of the house whose portion of the pavement he was obstructing. I knew them, they were nice people. There's a corpse outside your house, the words rushed out like that the minute they opened the door. Not what I wanted to say and how did I know he was dead anyway. By the time the Samu came there was a good crowd they had to push and shove their way through. They tried everything; mouth-to-mouth, electro shock. In the end all they could do was throw a sheet over him and when they did that, this one young woman let out a, it wasn't a scream, nor was it a moan, but it went through and through me and it was awful.

Haaa-ha-haaaa! was all he said when I told him.

To lose your life because of a couple of rotten eggs. Silly git! Someone'll be pleased to see his name in the obituaries.

He laughs at everything. Even at the cry of the daughter who, as I later learned, had lost her one remaining parent. At least she'll get the house, he said. Save herself the trouble of building one.

I wouldn't let him make me cum. What's up, he kept asking. Nothing, I kept saying.

What else are we supposed to do about life other than laugh at it? You got a better solution?

Am I an accomplice in destruction?

Darling, this is Anne-Marie. Anne-Marie is a friend of mine.

Darling, sit on that chair and watch.

Come over here. Join in.

Lick her pussy. Let me watch.

Let her lick your pussy. Let me watch.

Punch her. Let me watch.

Fetch a cucumber. Let me watch.

Now watch me.

Fetch that belt. Let me watch.

Harder!

I want to see her blood.

I want to see your blood.

Both of you, come over here.

Good girls!

Lick him clean.

When I was younger,
he said

I fucked anything. If it moved and had a hole in the middle, I fucked it. Young, old, ugly, pretty, big Bertha, bag o bones or hunchbacked. Now? I don't need to. I've got Her, she's fairly boring but she'll do. And I've got you.

I don't believe you stop at two.

Why should I want more?

You always said you try to make a woman feel she is the only one so that goes for me too, right?

Shit!

Ha!

No, seriously, there are too many lurgies out there today. I'm clean. My blood values are excellent. I went out the other day with my girlfriend who likes rock n roll. I sat at the bar, as I always do, paid a few rounds for my friends and the proprietor. I soon spotted three different women in the crowd who wanted me. I can smell it. And see it in their eyes. If I had wanted to, I could've bought them a drink, taken them home, and shagged them. But I'm not into that anymore. At least, not systematically. I'm not saying it'll never happen, you see? It's weird, the older and uglier I get, the easier it gets to pull a bird. Seriously, you know what it is? Women're more emancipated nowadays. They're the ones doing the chasing. They're the ones shagging you. You're independent nowadays, right?



Jack and Jill went up the hill...
Maman, I'm just showing monsieur the way to a friend's house
so that he can show them his merchandise

the space to write and to go crazy once in a while

Unterschied zwische Frau und Frosch?

Kener, alli zwei han immer kaldi Fies und Angst vor em Storick

What's the difference between a woman and a frog?

None. Both have cold feet & are scared of the stork

Talk lots. And listen lots. And touch.

Who said?

I play hard, sell myself as thick-skinned but the opposite is true. It's just a front to keep people away, like my clowning around and refusing to take life seriously. At heart, I'm super sensitive.

Most people don't take the trouble to see that side of me so I don't bother to show it. But you, you're a burrower. You want to see the lot and I don't know why but I feel comfortable talking to you. I hope I'm not going to fall in love with you.

when I'm around people, it's like a crossword
I try to figure them out
to read between the lines; spy out those elements
they're not even conscious of showing

Women, it's an art. I've never been disappointed; never once picked up the whiff of a woman who I thought wanted to, only to find out she didn't after all. Never, Nick.

If you want to keep a woman, you've got to put her under pressure. Don't let her know where you are all the time. Keep her guessing. Let her wonder: is he really out with his mates, or off with a lady somewhere? And if he *is* out with his mates, is he out with the ones he said and are they going where they said? If you don't spice things up, it'll soon turn tasteless. Who wants food that tastes of nothing? But she, and here's the beauty of it, she'll be so keen to prove that she is true, she'll be dropping you little messages all the time, letting you know where she is: darling, I'm just off to do the shopping. I'll be back at three... Nature's on the side of us men, innit?

Once, I was juggling nineteen women at the same time. Each thought they were the only one. And once I was invited to dinner by seven different women in a single evening. The first two were manageable but after that I had to throw up to make space for the rest. Thank goodness I'm neither a rat, a mouse or a rabbit in this life. None of them can vomit. I'm telling you, someone ought to write that book.

experiment:

I remember: wash empty butter tub, fill it with clear water. Cover on. Go to sleep. Cover off
(predicted results? observed results?)

Cover on. Go to sleep. Cover off (predicted results? observed results?)

Cover on. Go to sleep. Cover off:

observed results:

life in the water! Dark dots darting, mini legs and/or wings struggling on the surface just like
me (delete, replace with) my own mind trying to work out how they got there, what with the
cover on.

conclusions:

Further action:

tip the lot onto the roses.

cheaper than the cost of losing memories

I remember having to fetch dad from places like 'Joe's snack bar'. 'Pete's cafe on the corner'

Dad!

I would stand near the entrance and shout over.

Mum says dinner's ready!

Dad would look at his watch, a digital watch he'd got cheap from some mate at work and he'd promised my brother, Danny, one and Danny was ever so pleased.

Me coming

Dad would say. He would finish off his cigarette and get to his feet, shrugging on his coat and jingling up his keys to make sure he hadn't lost them.

I would wait outside. *Once I saw a sticky bun at the baker's next door, where one of the black bits on the top wasn't a currant at all, but a lazy fat fly...* I would pull up my once-white-now-grey socks and wish for a new pair: dazzling white socks with so much elastic, they would leave an imprint on my legs for ages and ages.

What the hell's *she* doing here?

Who?

Crusty Gusset. She's just pulled into the courtyard. Oh, great, she's got her sideshow with her. Donkey Dick. Listen, just stay put. I'll have to invite them up for a coffee. If I don't, she'll know I'm not alone. I'll get rid of them as soon as I can.

What does she want?

Money. What else? I probably promised her something for Thibault then forgot all about it.

Why can't you just exchange a few words in the courtyard anyhow what's it to you if she knows I'm here. You can do what you like, she's not your wife anymore. Are you scared of her or what?

Don't stick your nose in things that don't concern you, okay? Let me handle this my way. I'll lock the door. To be on the safe side.

Why on earth should your bedroom door be locked if you're at home?

True. But I trust that nosey bitch to look in on her way to the loo.

You're not going to tell me to hide under the bed, are you?

Shut up, let me think... I know, I'll say I was–

Did you just tell me to–

I did. And you will. For one minute. If it's not too much to ask. I'll say I was on my way out. Chat for a few minutes. No time for a coffee. She won't have time to go to the loo. We'll leave together. I'll be back in a mo.

He told me to keep my hands off you.

Told me too.

What did you say?

I said I wouldn't make the first move but if *you* did I'd fuck your brains out.

He said: you're still my wife.

On paper.

That's what I said.

My dick's not sensitive at all. When I wank off, I pull on it really hard. Really ha-
ow; not that hard!

He should listen to Sarah Vaughan say *born...* now say: *vorn*, well, that's near enough, especially
Idle Whispers, in my absence.

It's time for you to go. See, you force me to play the hard man again, cos if I didn't,
you'd still be here all day. Come on, get your clothes on!

He laughs at the flimsy string I pull on.

Those're supposed to be knickers? Once upon a time, you could wash your car with a
lady's drawers.

Brigitte was in the courtyard. We left the back way, taking his sports car.

if you're happy and you know it–
rotten stinking filthy!



King o the castle.

The rooms upstairs were no longer used. The smell of old carpet.
There was bound to be perfectly good oiled floorboards underneath.

I used to put wax crayons on my fingernails because there was never any nail varnish in the house. Grandma always thought mother didn't look after herself and I heard her telling Dad once he could've done better.

He told her to mind you own business.

Anyone forcing you to come round?

She went home crying, saying she'd never set foot in the house again.

She came round as usual next Sunday for dinner.

God, I hated mother at times. Hated that it wasn't I, her darling. Once I was so angry with her I wiped my arse on her dressing gown. I turned the shitty side to the wall then returned to my seat for breakfast. Family chatter. You know how it is. All the crap about paying attention at school, like she cared. I'd been forging her signature for years. Lucky for her I couldn't gain access to her bank account. Whatever. She made it to the bathroom eventually. Should've heard her screams. Haaa-ha-haaa! I got her darling to say he did it, I knew he wouldn't be punished, whatever he did.

How did you get him to own up to something like that?

Everyone has their price.

she ran a finger along the table
I saw her he nudged her with his knee I saw that too
plus point for him minus for her
when she offered to help in the kitchen I said It's quite alright I can manage
my eyes were cold I made no attempt to cover it up
don't be so touchy, He said, my parents are alright people shouldn't be so touchy

Dem is a wicked people, Grandpa said.

We no have no luck wid men, Grandma said.

Stretch your arm. close your eyes. trust me

couleur... brilliance... transparence... viscosité...

He examined my juice like a wine:

Arômes: primaires, secondaires, tertiares (also known as *bouquet*)... Analysing wine in the mouth means determining its *attaque*, its *équilibre*, its *évolution* and its *longueur*

What's *attaque*?

The first feeling, sensation, impression, you have after ingesting the wine.

And *longueur*?

That's the *persistence aromatique intense* (PAI), the number of seconds – or *caudalies* – the aroma stays in your mouth after you've swallowed the wine or spat it out. *Not* to be confused with *arrière-goût*, aftertaste.

And am I a good wine?

Of the very best kind. *Très rond*.

He splayed my thighs till my hips cracked. Cupped a single hand beneath me, lifted my buttocks to his face.

Grunting.

Did she at least come along?

Who? What? What are you talking about?

Your mother. Did she at least attend your weddings?

The first one.

Well you have one up on me there. Mine didn't. Or at least she didn't want to. You Know had to beg her to come. In the end she said, Oh alright then, I'll come for your sake, she said, but not for *her*. Turned up on the day with her husband, they looked like the Two Ronnies. Could hardly bear to look me in the eye.

What did they give you?

What?

Turn up empty-handed, did they?

D'you know, I can't remember.

lots to learn (to let go of); it's All Right Really.

when we were kids we called poo doo doo.

notions of immediate pleasure are not always appropriate
they're supposed to be dead but I just saw one flit past me

the greatest danger for most of us is not–

however...

↩

mais... (Fr)

dennoch... (Ger)

It's in there somewhere

I think I'm ready.

That's a good feeling: a nice one to go to bed with and to wake up with.

JOSEPH 4:16
THOSE THAT HAVE SHALL GET

The only decent money is money
you've worked hard for.

There was a time I had going on for
30 apartments to my name. Those days are
over. I'm not poor, but I reckon I'm living
on a budget of 30% of what I used to have.
Lost most of my property through divorces.
My pension hardly covers my cigarettes. I
used to go out for a meal at least 2-3 times
a week so I could enjoy other things than

the things I cooked all the time. I don't do
that so much now. I don't drink excessively,
either, or anymore, which is where all the
dough goes. You've got those guys who
always stop off at the bistro after work for
a drink or two before they go home to their
wives. Me? Never. I have maybe 150 shirts
in my wardrobe, but they're all designer
articles and they won't age. I've even still
got the shoes from my first marriage at the
end of the 60s.

One new franc is the same as one hundred old francs.

Mademoiselle Angélique's 1914 catalogue of prices for love replaced all previous indicated prices.

a straightforward wank with a single hand (*branlette ordinaire*): .33c

little finger in the arse (*petit doigt dans le trou du cul*): .50c supplement

blow job with hand massage (*glougoutage du poireau avec pression de la main*): 3.50.– fr

blow job all the way/taking it down (*ne retirant pas, tout dans la bouche*): 4.– fr

69: 3.– fr

69 with tongue in the arse (*langue dans le trou du cul*): 1.– fr supplement

voyage en terre jaune... savonnette impériale russe... pissette sur la quequette... suçage à la menthe... Like Bernadette, she made sure the boy got a thorough education.

My children are the spitting image of me. No doubt where *they* come from. They looked exactly like I did in my baby photos, too. When Thibault was small, I used to sit with him on the canapé and the dog would be at my side. I could feel how my son literally drank all my energy. It'd always leave me exhausted!

the children sometimes lie to me but I let them believe I believe them
trust is more important than honesty

and I do
have faith in them
tho I'm no fool

in my case it's not my little finger it's my skin that'll jangle: lie, lie, liar!
but I'll keep my mouth shut
send them shovel-loads of willingness instead, good conversion rate
the children are happy: 'we are loved'

it's a stable currency
head faith
tails love

now take that money and make it work
could be it's all I'll ever have to give you

innocent, mauve
two petals curling back to reveal a quivering bud
I wonder what these flowers are called
they line my path
spectators of a race I imagine I will win

He spoke in the present tense of his female encounters. (I don't like big-titted women. That's for slob. The real connoisseur likes small breasts. *Klein aber fein!* And I don't try to chat up women over 60kg anymore. My back. I can't lift them any more.) I corrected him to the simple past.

An exchange of glances.

A smile.

A touch.

I cuddled closer and let him talk on.

Till today he was full of threats should I two-time him. Till today he had threatened to kill me, to shoot me in the knees. He opened his eyes wide as he spoke, as the corners of his mouth pinched the words cruelly on their backs as they tumbled out. Till today. Today we spent the whole morning in bed. Just caressing. Just confessing passion with the satisfied entanglement of our frolicking limbs. Today, he confessed:

There will be others. You will find men who are better lovers than I am. They will swarm around you. Just be careful. Make sure you use protection. And come back and tell me everything. Everything!

(if) i (can('t)) imagine your head between my legs i do ((not) want it (in my arms))

I once had a fight after school with a girl called Lorna. No idea, now, why it started. Word had spread and a crowd was ready and waiting. We did our best to rip each other apart. One of the male teachers split it up and gave us detention.

Nice girls don't fight,
he said,

Nice girls don't *need to* fight.

I see,
she said,
how did it feel, to rip... Lorna?... apart?
It felt... great!

It felt nice to be angry?
Yes!
To let yourself go?
Yes!
When was the last time you felt that good?

When I touch myself it never feels that good

Sitting by the window. There goes the milkman

You're not going to get me. You're not going to get me you're not going to get me

You don't have to answer right now
she said

Think about it. Write something down if that helps. Maybe we can bring it up again
next time.

Someone persecuted my doorbell till I threw the door open, enraged, ready to kill whoever was standing there. How dare they. At that time of night?

It was my neighbour. One look. I pulled her in and closed the door.

At the local hospital they gave her some sedatives. Take some photos, I insisted. The nurse shot me a glance as though I had just said something indecent. My neighbour's bruises were not bad enough for her to be able to make a reasonable claim of conjugal violence. Seems she would need to let him beat her up more. More bruises. Bigger ones. Ones that last more than a few hours. Can you return home? Can you go to a relative? Your mother?

He knew what he was doing alright. Live at a friend's yet declare himself homeless; won't have to pay alimony that way. Work for another friend. Get paid cash. Beat up the wife. Just the right amount. Had it all worked out. Was working out for him this time as well, wasn't it? He laughed in my face the next time we met. Keep your black nose out of my business or do you want me to blacken it even more for you. He made as if he was coming to rough me up. She, whimpering a few steps behind me. Just you try it, I spat. Real spit flying, too. Get out of my house, he ordered. It's not your house, it's hers. Just you try mistaking me for her. Just you try it. He laughed as though he couldn't be bothered. Slam.

She was shivering all over. I suppressed the urge to say, Don't. Hugged her instead. Her nails dug in like there was a ten-foot drop an inch from her heels. I manoeuvred our woman-cluster to an armchair. No hankies around? Oh well, a sleeve'll do.

Why don't you poison him?

I couldn't do that. He's the father of my child, after all. She loves him even if I no longer do. I couldn't do that. Why don't you poison yours?

Father taught me to read. He always said I would be going places. I'd sit on his lap and we would read Green Eggs & Ham. Once mother shouted

Get down from there!

I slid down, feeling that she expected me to feel guilty. No idea why.

I could only sit on his lap from then on when she was out.

Know what I love about art?

What?

You can't talk about it and about progress, about some notion of progress towards an absolute good – in the same breath. Art can't get *better*. It shows us for what we are: constantly plagued by

abdominal nervous

the same Old Question. Would you agree with me that the Image is subordinate to the Idea? A sign of *the* Sign, with Man (I mean you as well of course)

of course

desperately clutching to some semiotic turf or another for fear of slipping off into that unbearable place?

(she can't follow me, can she? And there I was thinking she was the expert at broom-up-me-arse-ish)

mother, the lying bitch:

you can stand on any book you like to reach something from the higher shelves but
never on the Bible!

Dear Mme X,

When I first expressed the desire to return to work so that, I too, may enjoy earning a good salary and make the most of my intellectual capacity, this wish was met with great resistance. I remember the first time I wanted to attend a one-week training course, which would mean that Mr X would have to take a week's leave to look after our child. Mr X categorically refused, dismissing the matter with the dry comment: 'you're a mother now'.

I trust that you will find the right words to present this argument in my favour at our next court appearance.

Best wishes,

a perfect stranger walks up to me

du, neger!

and spits in my face

i walk on by

i lose (too) many tears

i wipe my face

i put that hand in my pocket

by the time i get home my hand is dry

my face is dry

Off she went with a trumpety-trump.

He had sent me to get some cigarettes: I was dressed, he, still in his dressing gown. As I prepared to dash off, he called me back: the money.

Later, in bed:

You know what?

What?

Once you had gone and I watched you marching to the tobacconist, eager to please, I felt ashamed.

What?

I felt ashamed. It was as if you were my slave. I send all my women to buy my cigarettes, but with you, I felt ashamed. See how far my thoughts go?

AIDS was fabricated by Americans as a contraceptive measure in Africa, only it's got out of control now and it's biting them in their own backside. Everyone else's, too. If ever there was an Untermensch, then it would be the Americans. My opinion.

I don't see why I should write. Everything's been said already. Anything I say would be mere reiteration. Brel, Brassens, they've already said what I ever wanted to. I couldn't put it any more elegantly. Been too influenced by them to be able to find my own words now. At the age of 12, I had my first Brassens LP. Understood exactly what he was saying. Every single word. There was a time I knew all his poems off by heart. Once you've been that influenced, words fail you. I don't like to write cos I can't stand making mistakes. I'll use my thesaurus, or my dictionary. It's got to be right. I can talk like a book so you wouldn't understand a word I'm saying if I want to, but I express myself best by speaking, not by writing. I need the spontaneity. Bang! Out right.

Daddy SurReal

Carnevalesque of colours slotted around my silhouette into a jigsaw, edges brimming

Germans're so bloody full of themselves! There I was, in my garden minding my own business, burning a small pile of leaves and twigs. This couple walks past, all skinny and vegan. Let's call him Gunther the Great, with his hairy-arpitted, droopy-titted Brunhilde who'll have breastfed their boy till he turned three and made sure he only played with wooden toys, not plastic. Such kids turn out to be brats, for all their parents' good intentions. Bruni and Gunther (their kids're allowed to call them by their first names) 'll always have some pseudo-psychological hogwash ready to explain away their brat's every misdemeanour. Germans are so bloody good at always being right. Anyway, what was I saying? Yeah, my garden.

Gosh, that stinks, she says.

Unbelievable what these lot do, he says. Environmental pollution is what it is. He'd never get away with that in Germany, that's for sure.

Never you mind, I says. At least I'm not burning Jews.

They scuttled off, double quick!

i would like a belly button you can fit a ruby into.

i haven't got a ruby. have you?

won't make a lick of difference

I think it's time for another orgasm

Women think I'm charming cos I'm house-trained, but I'm a difficult man to live with. I keep myself clean, do my own shopping, cooking, and won't let you lift a finger when you come to my place. Some women get up and want to do the washing up after I've made them a meal. You can't do that! Sit down! Rest assured, if you invite me, my arse is staying planted on that chair and I'm not gonna lift a finger. I'm house-trained, but that doesn't make it easy for a woman to live with me. I think She'll be the first to leave me. No woman has ever left me before.

on overweight, over-rated self-congratulatory would-be gurus, reducing their wisdom (so-called) to one-line pellets they either pelt at you or feed you from their fingertips till you eventually realize you're actually one step ahead of them, which fact they can neither anticipate, accept or forgive, leaving you no other option but to

it was not silence

too many too too

on drumrolllllllllllllllllllllllllllllllll

cymbals

I remember: grandmother's kitchen window. Grandmother's stories, shared like cake as she washed the tin foil, rubbed it dry and packed it away for later. I remember that one evening when we were all gathered, the house to ourselves for once, four generations of women, one clan and a bottle of sherry.

The energy. There were more.

Four generations of the living and all the others, all those before, were there, I sensed them.

And those to come; our ovaries cradling our children, our children's children.
In our children's children the potential of our future, the judges of our motherly wisdom.

It was a magical evening. We could have performed wonders if we had wanted to and maybe we did.

Old male feet, old male weight, old male odour on the doorstep.

The others fled.

Four generations had to? remain. We turned the telly back on.

The others no like electricity, yu know. Duppy no like 'lectricity at all at all at all.

as in some
things
are
better
left-

In those days, I was into blondes.

I don't have a lot of cash,

I said.

She said,

Sshh, we'll sort that out later.

Back in her room, she went down on me. Gave me the most fantastic blowjob you could imagine, massaged my balls. Heaven! I played with her little tiddies and worked my way down. Put my hand inside her knickers... to find a cock.

You're a bloke!

Does that bother you, she said in that creamy voice.

And you know what, I was already so excited by then that this last surprise did it for me. Mount Etna? No comparison.

I don't happen to believe that there are two souls in the universe that are the same
so it is illusory to expect someone to share my feelings

what I do believe we can do is to bring about some form of resonance
something that will 'speak' to the other

it is less a question of words, more a spiritual thing

No. It's not. Piece a cake! Anyone can, Nick. I missed out on all those carefree years which are the prerogative of adolescence. I went from being a boy to being a man. At fifteen I left home. I was working. I took my own room, paid my own rent. I gave money to my mother. I bought my own clothes. If I needed to go to the dentist nobody drove me there. Nobody accompanied me as I do my own son today. I would have to find him out myself and go there on my own. I went from being a child straight to being a man. And that's not good. You have to live your age. That's why I broke out later, not that I'm saying you can turn back the hands of time, cos of course you can't. You just shouldn't aim to grow up too quickly, that's all. I tell my son,

Make an effort at school. You're young. You don't want to do back-breaking work and live in a burnt-out body like I have to. Don't leave school too soon. You want girls? You can have all the girls you want. Bring them home and close your bedroom door. But the play comes after the work. You got to earn your play. Stop fooling around at school and buckle down. I'm serious.

He says to me,

You quit school and you're not doing too badly.

Take a good look, son. Take a long, slow look. These are different times. I had to work my arse off to pay for the upkeep of four families plus make sure there's something for you when I go. You don't want to be like me. You don't even want to be average. You've got to be better than the rest to get ahead these days. Anyhow, if I see you turning into a lazy lout, I might just change my mind; spend what little I have to enjoy my life now and leave you all to fend for yourselves once I'm gone.

Eight. Eight-thirty. When I arrive he is slow; somewhat disoriented, with his cock dangling out through the folds of his dressing gown. He can't find what he is looking for.

I don't like you to see me like this. It takes me a long time to get into shape in the mornings. All my joints ache. I'm just an old man. I prefer when I am all washed, shaved and have that light spring in my footstep when you walk up the stairs.

Doesn't matter. This is also you, isn't it?

Mmm.

We breakfast on the baguette I have brought along tho I have breakfasted already. He prepares his diet of cheese.

Germans stuff themselves with ham and salami and all sorts in the morning. Eggs! Disgusting. It makes me sick just to watch them. I saw one barge to the front of the queue and pick all the scampi out the paella on holiday once. Every one of them's got a bloody gold medal for being a loud-mouthed cretin hanging round his neck.

Kiss. Touch. No overt show of sexual arousal.

You impress me today, do you know that?

Why?

I don't want to say why, but you do.

Fear could have served a purpose. Then.

JOSEPH 6:18
ABANDONING THE FIG

Most men have a complex about their dicks. I don't. I've been to nudist camps and there you get to see everything. You learn to love your body; to accept it the way it is.

The first time I went, I kept my trunks on. I was so afraid of getting a hard-on that the opposite came true: my dick ran to hide inside my belly so that it looked as though I only had balls on me!

My wife was all stripped off and at ease on the beach but I was lying there in my trunks, working out how I could get into the water without anyone seeing me.

I slipped my trunks off as I was lying down – not standing up and parading myself to the whole world – covered my bits n pieces then made a dash for the water. Then I swam a good bit out so that I could observe the happenings on the shore. Nobody was gawping at anybody else. People were just walking, or playing, reading, relaxing. Perfectly natural. After a while I felt less conspicuous. Felt even brave enough to stroll out off the water upright with my arms by my side. Nobody took the slightest bit of notice of me.

After that, it was plain sailing.

I have a mate with a real chopper. We would share girls between the two of us. He'd be over and done with in no time and that's where I got to step in, cos I could keep going for hours. The girls'd get attached to me, not to chopper boy. Another mate had this whopping great dick, but every time a girl saw it, she ran for her life, haaa-ha-haaa! Those fellas with their donkey dick if a woman screams of course she screams cos it bloody hurts! That doesn't mean that he knows what he's doing. My mate really had problems finding someone. When you hear someone bragging about the size of his dick, believe me, mostly, he's not getting it.

here's a shot of my anus & labia (held apart) taken by holding a camera between my legs
much like when you want to put a tampon in
the dip in the heart is my arsehole, no, it's true!!!
left buttock, arsehole, right buttock
the 'break' is the flesh behind my labia. Get it?
that's why this shot's called Broken Hearted
it's unintentionally out of focus & looks as tho I've gone at my arse with a brillo pad
but in reality it's quite quite smooth, silky even

didn't want to photograph my clitoris

JOSEPH 4:10
PARADISE FOUND 1-2

When I was working for the bank and already collecting antiques, I visited an old woman; said she had some antiques. I looked them over; a piano and a few other items, but of no real worth. She mentioned that she had been trying to sell the property for a long while – restaurant, a string of apartments on the 25 acre plot – but to no avail. I looked it over. Once she opened the barn for me to inspect, it was love at first sight.

Listen, how much are you asking?

Well, at the outset I wanted 700,000,00 FRF, but now I'm down to 400,000,00 FRF.

H-hm,
I said.

I don't think it's worth more than 150,000,00 FRF, but I'll bring you a buyer within the hour.

So-so! You want to bring me a buyer within the hour? Well, if anyone can, from what I've heard, you can.

And what's my piece of the pie, I wanted to know.

I'll give you 10,000,00 FRF commission.

10,000,00 FRF? You're on.
She shook her head as I drove away.

I dashed home and told the wife;
Change of plan. That house we were about to construct? Forget it. I've found something else. Get dressed and come along!

When we turned up an hour later:
Where's this client, then?
She wanted to know.

He is standing right in front of you, Madame. That makes 140,000,00 FRF.

140,000,00 FRF for that prime property: a giveaway. We agreed to 40,000,00 FRF under the table and 100,000,00 FRF officially, with a down payment of 1,000,00 FRF. Only I didn't have 1,000,00 FRF did I? I wrote the cheque anyway, knowing it would take the bank at least eight days to process it.

Shall I take it to the bank for you and pay it in? That would be the quickest way.

Oh, that's very kind of you, young man. What a charming young man! I took the cheque and promptly stashed it away in one of the drawers in my office then went to see my boss to renegotiate my credit agreement. Once this was sorted, I paid in the cheque and took four months' paid leave.

I hadn't taken a single holiday for a number of years, nor had I ever been

absent due to sickness. My annual holiday entitlement was 4 weeks, with an extra 8 days bonus for zero absence.

I used this time to renovate and open the restaurant, which I then also ran. With the restaurant, the bed-sheets, the antique business, wine selling, and the bank, I was putting in some 20 hours a day.

After three months, I collapsed. I left the bank. They didn't want to let me go, but they had no legal right to keep me. They upped my interest rate from 1% to 4%, but what the hell. I concentrated on the antique business. Which grew and grew, till all my free space was filled with antiques. A friend who had introduced me to the branch was getting jealous so he tipped off the Tax Office, as I later discovered. This very same friend pretended to have my interest at heart, advising me to go legal cos the Tax Office would be onto me soon.

At times they tell us: think (i.e.: reason), at times: believe (i.e.: don't think). Most of the time we only believe we're thinking, or think we believe... and behind it all the permanent attempt to mask the mere finger puppets we all are, hungry for reasons to believe anything at all...

God is a 24/7 deli

yum yum yum **yum** yum yum yum yum TM

yum

✓ alcohol-free yum

light ® serving suggestions :

® TM ✓ no added sugar yum ✓ salt-free

bio yum yum

✓ no added preservatives ® 0%

because you're worth it

✓ gluten-free ✓ no added fat ✓ gelatine-free

once defrosted do not re-freeze

® **yum** best before :

TM yum ✓ lactose-free TM

do not re-heat

store in a cool place

Working every hour God sent, I didn't see my children grow up. Came home one day to find a young lady with breasts there. Well well well; my daughter, I thought as I looked across at her and her pathetic new lumps. Well well well, she must have thought for her part; I suppose you must be my dad...

I feel grand today I won't eat.

I keep reading the same passage but can't seem to get any further.

I might be more guarded about how things are interpreted when they are not in the context of the many conversations you & I have had.

I have never had a woman who can cook.
Those who can tend to be big Berthas and I don't like them that big.
My German wife served me bacon and eggs every day for a week
until I stood up and said, ok, the kitchen's my domain from now on.

I don't mind not succeeding I do mind not trying.

Caught my son with a girl of thirteen.

How old is he?

15.

Is he a virgin?

Course he's not! There are no more 15-year-old virgins unless to go to countries where they chop off your hands for stealing. He's fifteen.

He's only fifteen.

He's a man. He can have as many girls as he likes. I want him, and my grandson, to be good lovers. There are too many lousy lays out there and you know it otherwise you wouldn't be here.

You're in your way and you know it.

My son was over for the weekend. We talked about sex all the time; about pussies and sucking and fucking, cumming, sticking it here, sticking it there. We talked about other things as well, of course, but I think it's great that I can have these conversations with my son. Why all the taboo? It's the most natural, wonderful thing and I want it to remain that way for him. What's the point of being scurried with hang-ups? I'd rather he watched porno films than war movies any day.

Was clowning around with my son last night. I said, off the top of my head: I've had 3411 women so far, and when you're my age, I want you to have had at least 200 more. He replied,

Well then, I have 3409 to go.

See, he's 15, and he's already started. Thank goodness! Then I turn to my 13-year-old grandson;

What about you?

Oh, not yet...

he murmurs.

Well, get your skates on!

If my son were gay, that'd be something I must accept, but I'd do everything possible to let him discover the pleasure of a woman, the pleasure she can give. I'd get you to sleep with him. And you would. If you loved me.

All I needed now was for father to look at his watch and say *drink up!* and I'd gulp down the squash I didn't really want because they had been too stingy with the cordial, then pull up my socks and follow him out.

When was the last time you saw him
she asked

How did it feel?

If you want a decent steak, you have to dry it off first. Get rid of the extra moisture by wrapping it in kitchen roll before you put it in the pan. Make sure the oil is real hot. Oil, not butter.

You won't eat rare meat? Close your eyes!

He puts a slither of his steak between my hesitantly parted lips. I chew. Warm. Spicy. I open my eyes. He is watching my lips as I chew.

You'll never get a decent fuck out of a vegetarian. I promise you. You need a man who eats red meat and drinks wine.

I had my first French kiss when I was eight. It was in a bus going can't remember where and the girl who sat down next to me must've been four years older. Of course I'd seen French kisses on TV, but till then I had never tried it. Till then, a tongue was just for licking pussy. Anyway, she came and sat down next to me and instead of the kiss that ended where your lips meet, she stuck her tongue in my mouth and twirled it around. In an instant, everything down there was warm with wet. See, she started it. It's always been that way. I'm a timid guy by nature, but once I get going, I go!

When I was thirteen, fourteen, I was already having such success with the girls that the older boys who had cars and money would take me with them to the village balls. I'd always attract enough girls so that there'd be some left over for the others. As soon as I entered a room, I could pick out who they'd be: this one, and that one over there, her, and her... and her.

Carmina? No.

I'm old, my tits are	not a hair does he have white
hanging down, look at 'em.	rat's nose/nipples <u>not like made</u>
He wollops his tits a few	me cum in <u>fountains. we had a</u>
times in the cups of his hand.	secret number. 26. an ass <u>like</u>
I've got grey hair.	<u>all the rest. got a soft spot</u>
<i>I adore your grey hair.</i>	for him though. he'll do.
And I'm not even	
educated.	

Love is...

not only a story or am I would that be disastrous?
store read

Confines are liberating. They are there to be defied. Who said?

It's not his fault, or even his fault. It isn't anyone's fault but my fault. That bastard! and staring greedily into the mirror, she jammed her fingers inside herself and rubbed her clitoris with a furious impatience.

Come, you bitch, come on...

No. I'm not going to tell her that

Tell her instead

I remember my head in her lap. Her stroking my hair

No, I am *not*

I can't fuck with a condom on. Look, even the thought of it makes my hard-on shrivel up. What're you afraid of?

Why do you insist on pretending not to understand?

Are you afraid of passing me on something?

How dare you!!

Either it's without the rubber, or it's without me. You decide.

He rolled over on to his back. Sighed.

Come back this evening. I'll have a surprise for you.

Sssh!

he had threatened, holding her wrist so tightly she couldn't get away.

I've always wanted to do that.

He said he hadn't meant to hurt her, but he had always wanted to do that

Come on

He said

He said she should rub her cunt (that's what he called it) against him, there

afterwards he was always kind to me. Said he loved me truly

Fidelity's an illusion. I've always cheated on my wives and they've all cheated on me. I am very faithful, but not as far as sex goes. Sex is like drinking wine, nothing more. But if I catch my wife cheating on me, then she's out the door in five minutes. It's my house. My first wife, she came home around five to twelve and by five past, she was out the door, her child included. She had her suitcase, her child, and – out! I went on holiday for a week. Told her,

Take what you like, but get the hell out of my life.

My house is 500m². I thought, she can't possibly take the lot. When I came back, oh yes she had! Sold valuable antiques for a pittance just to get at the money. Wouldn't know quality if it shat on her face. My wardrobe from 1780, the one I kept my champagne in. Gone. Thirty years later, I still won't shake hands with her although we bump into each other almost every day. I cried for a few months, then moved on. Every single woman I have taken for a wife didn't even own a toothbrush when they came to me, and they've all left in a Mercedes and with a string of apartments. Do you know how many apartments I had in my heyday? What the hell. I'm not a money-grabber, but now I'm getting old. What I would have as a pension, I had already worked out at the age of twenty-three. I am rich no more. But at peace.

I haven't seen her, Nick, I tell you!

A fool doing some stupid thing a second time is like a dog going back to its vomit.
(Proverbs 26: 11)

After a period, one of my wives said, No. Pas touche. Verboten. Don't know why. So I didn't touch. For two years, I didn't touch her. She'd come smooching up to me or rubbing herself against me in bed. I'd just turn over on my side or get up and make myself a drink. Sooner or later, well, she took a lover. Once I got suspicious I set her a trap. And when I caught her, I threw her out. Zack, zack. Within three months we were divorced. That's me.

No, they've never caught me at it and even if they did, I wouldn't give a shit. There'll be others. Give them the keys to the place so they feel comfortable. Anyway, one of Her daughters's already started making eyes at me and the day I'm no longer with her mum – or even before – I'm gonna take her up on it. How's the separation coming along?

I remember:

I ran away laughing, with Danny as my witness that I could carry out a dare

Everyone should be a silly bastard from time to time!

I remember: sherbet

I wanted to send you this poem last night. I got the book down and guess what?

What?

Precisely these pages have been torn out. It can't be anyone I lent the book to. Must've been one of the women I've lived with. I can just imagine which one. Never mind. I've ordered the book for you. Mon bébé.

if you think long
and hard enough about someone
or secure a valuable item belonging to them
they'll feel it and come to you

I remember: his eyes on me behind the curtain
he thought I didn't know he was there staring at my arse as I swept the courtyard he might as
well have had his nose between my buttocks that's how close I felt him
I turn suddenly curtains twitch

from knowledge of God love does not necessarily f(ol)low

wrapped up in a £5 note

You talk about doubts & fear & I want to say Shut up, I'd love to be you...

To go in search of company. Male company. And find it. My turn at flippancy.

Take me home

I said with what seemed a mixture of submission and resentment.

My back to him. I , shrug on my coat

fancy I heard something sticky, like him licking his lips.

Turn. I witness him trying to catch a glimpse of himself in the mirror behind the bar.

Our eyes meet. Fear did not serve a purpose.

He smiled. And followed.

I'm an Epicurean.

I stopped work so I can live for pleasure.

I want to read? I read.

I want to eat? I eat.

I want to make love? I make love.

If I can't wait till you get here or till my girlfriend gets back,

I'll call someone else.

They always come.

No woman has ever said no to me.

If she says 'no, but', it's not really a no cos she's leaving the back door open.

If she says 'yes, but', that's when you got to be careful!

Well
What's it to you
What has happened to me

Yes, I did love someone
Did this someone love me?

You know, it's boring. sex. talk. boring. For those who're bald on the inside, as a French poet once said, but if that's all they want that's all they'll get: Bread n Games. Who wants to bother switching their brains on nowadays anyway. All we want is to feel. And yet I can't even say for sure if any of them ever really loved me. Stupid ol' git thinking himself into knots instead of having a good ol' wank, where's it got me? I'm alone. She's alone. Who isn't?

too many too too

too too

too

too

cheep cheep cheep

One wife, or rather a girlfriend if you like, I had to throw out cos she was ruining me. I had 400,000 put aside for my old age and she blew the lot in a couple of years. On clothes. On jewels. She drove me crazy, too. Drove me to the point of putting a pistol to my temple a couple of times. I swear, I wanted to blow my brains out. So she had to go or else I'd end up killing one of us. She got a fist in the face and she was out the door. When it's over, there's no point mincing your words. Just get it behind you. Basta! Makes no difference if you're legally married. No, Nick, it doesn't make it more complicated. My first wife, I threw her out in less than 5 minutes although we had spent 18 years together. No difference.

Sure. I know someone who can waggle that for you. It'll cost you a bit though. No, I haven't seen her. Not my type anyway.

Aznavour: les petits pains au chocolat

I could be your pimp. Get the guys to line up just to take a peek at your beauty of a pussy. Oh yes, I 've always taken a good look at a woman's privates so I know what I'm talking about. They could get real close, I'd gently hold your lips apart, explain to them the exquisiteness of what they are beholding, and for the pleasure of this view, they'll have to lay €10,000 on the table. €15,000 for Americans.

My last best mate shot himself.

Mine? She said she was a friend. Grande soeur. She lied. She sent her husband over with the things of mine that were still at her place. He came strutting up to the house on his skinny legs and his bony arse in badly ironed trousers that were flabby where his balls should be. Showing off now, cos they had a bit more money than most. Brought a friend along to see the show or was he afraid I might beat him up?

He dumped the stuff in the drive, refusing to carry it into the garage.

I could've said:

You think you're a man but I know you're not like I know your wife won't let you fuck her.

I could've said:

I know you've never liked me.

I could've said:

She's stealing money from you and sending it to her family back home little do you know.

I could've said

But I carried my things back into the house. Although she didn't love me I still love her. That hurts.

0000000110000000
011111001111110
111111001110111
011111001111110
0000000110000000

let's call this one Gambol

1111000011110000
0000111100001111
1111000011110000
0110111001010110
0010010110010010

let's call this one Upswirl

0000000000000000
0000000000000000
0000000000000000
0000000000000000
0000000000000000

if we *imagine* that someone enjoys a thing only s/he may possess
we'll do everything in our power to prevent him/her from possessing it

statement of the problem:

Guilt derivative

what's inside an egg apart from an egg?

what do you call an egg?

Oh, I see what you mean...

as if I know you don't want to trust your senses

as if words could ever touch the trembling gods

JOSEPH 4:19

PERSEVERANCE

I met this girl once at carnival in Germany. A long time ago. We got to flirting. You know. We had a bite to eat and a bit (too much) to drink.

At the end of the evening, we ended up in her BMW. She started to ride me, but I was so tired by then that I fell asleep. She didn't even notice cos I still had a hard-on.

I woke up a couple of hours later and there she still was, humping up and down on me. I think she thought I was superman or something cos I could keep going for so long.

Wrote to me for ages afterwards she did. On my birthday. At Easter. At

Christmas. Said she had to see me. So I agreed to meet her one more time.

When I turned up, she opened the door to me and stood there in this flimsy *négligée* thing.

I'm sooooo glad to see you, she exclaimed.

Well, I said,

don't get too pleased. I'm here with my wife.

You'd think she'd've backed off, wouldn't you? No chance! She kept pushing and pushing. Until. Well...

Lisa and Patricia are bored. Again. The holidays are long. I suggest a walk in the forest. They both groan. Oh no, not the forest. Not again. Now now, I put my cheeriest voice on and pack some sweets. The last time I said 'we won't be gone for long', I got lost and it had taken us over three hours to find our way back. It was as hot a day as today, and because it really had started out as just another little walk, what I would often call 'walkies', like the ones they adored in the winter when it was dark outside and they could get to swing the lamps they had made, singing *Laterne, Laterne, Sonne, Mond und Sterne*, because it was something like that I had originally had in mind that last time – one song they had sung then was *Bonjour bonjour gib mir dinni Hand. Rechts Hand, links Hand alli zwei mitnand* – I hadn't thought to take along anything to drink. Three hours later we had all dragged ourselves back through the front door, grateful yet grumpy. And extremely thirsty. So I can understand why they were groaning now, although I hope that the bag of sweets along with the provision of drink will win them over. They change their shoes without too much of a fuss. Bless them.

JOSEPH 4:12

TALENT

As a well-dressed bank clerk, my hair cut weekly, my nails and shoes polished, of course every door was always open. I would explain the procedures to the peasants, most of whom didn't even know how to fill out a cheque, or what VAT was. Up to 50 tax declaration forms I would fill out for them a day, asking nothing in return. They thanked me with eggs, with chicken, with fruit from their orchards. I ended up spending less and less money on food.

Around this time, I got to know a florist who had a nice little side-line in antiques. As I was always going into people's houses anyway, I could see if they had any old furniture they didn't want. When they wanted to show their gratitude for my services, I would drop in passing:

I saw that old chair in the barn, how much do you want for it?
They would give it to me for free and more besides! Then I would sell the item to my

florist friend. Until the day, when doing business elsewhere, I saw in antique shops how much the stuff was really worth! Chairs and furniture I had flogged for 10 francs or so were being sold for thousands!

Well, anything he could do, I could do better. Anything he could do, I could do too. Right? I began to build up a network of dealers. And learned on the job.

Sometimes the hard way. Once I bought furniture for 5000 francs that wasn't even worth 1000. I learned from books and from observation. I could have done a five-year course to learn all about the theory, but I couldn't be bothered with that. Those kind of numbers don't mean shit. Have they got a solid, reliable theory which will show you how to reproduce my charm? No they haven't. A course in psychology would be more useful than all that economic theory, I suppose, but still not near enough. I am the reality. The original. The rest is a cheap fake.

On Her night table there's a book. On his too. I had no idea who: Jacques Vergès, was.

I'd like to meet him one day, he said. That man must have a brain on him. And style! And charm! You won't find many like that around. That's the kind of thing I'd spend my money on nowadays if I had enough to afford a private audience with such people. What d'you think such an audience would cost? €10,000? Maybe he'd give me my money back after an hour with me. Maybe he'd double his fee, who knows!

When I was younger, I signed up with a friend to do an undergraduate degree in law. We thought we would motivate each other. He had to explain quite a bit to me at first, as I hadn't spent as long at school as he had, but I soon cottoned on. It was very interesting. But bloody hard work cos we were doing it alongside full-time employment. It's bloody hard, when you've got the kids around you all the time, and all the other things too. We missed one meeting we had agreed on, then another, then after a couple of months, it petered out altogether and we dropped the idea. Rather, he dropped out and I followed suit. But it was interesting, that's for sure. I quite fancied myself as a lawyer when I was younger.

What haven't you fancied yourself as!

Ordinary.

Love is...

filthy in here

Don't ask me why I did it

What did she want from me?

I don't know. Help me. Please...

I went to see the doctor and he said I'm clean. That means you either picked it up from someone else or from dirty instruments at the gynaecologist.

I swear I haven't been with any one else. I swear!

An ex-wife of mine went to see her gynaecologist. She went there in perfect health and picked up something that made her as sick as a dog for at least eight days afterwards. That caused havoc with our marriage cos she thought I had passed it on to her from some slut but it wasn't me.

Once I was with this lovely young country girl. She must have been around 22. When I went down on her she was all swollen and there was pus everywhere it made me want to throw up. I said to her,

You must must must go and see a doctor.

She answered in her dumb voice:

Yeah, it's been itching me down there for a while now.

Just thinking about it now turns my stomach. The thought of her put me out of action for weeks.

There was another time; I'd picked up something that I couldn't get rid of for two whole years. I was so angry that I deliberately went out and slept with loads of women just to get my own back. That was in, let's see, 1983, 84, when I'd be doing at least half a dozen women a day. I must have contaminated half the region. Haa!

Then in the 1980s AIDS came along. That shook me up, you can bet on that. I realized that I had probably slept with at least a dozen women who had AIDS but I was fortunate enough not to catch it. That's when I got married. To put an end to all that womanizing. Scary shit like that makes you faithful, believe me! I was faithful for a couple of years, but then...

I'm ashamed of what I did before I got married. Ashamed of my conscious recklessness. Today I don't take chances. See? You can trust me. Maybe you should get your own bag of gynaecological tools so when you have to spread your legs you can say,

Please, use these, if you don't mind. At least I'll know where they've been.

All my teeth are real apart from this one.

I love your little tiddies. Your magnificent behind. Your skin... You're an extremely beautiful woman, you know that. But you have to let go.

We've been making love since eleven this morning. It is now after three.

Don't sleep with You Know if you don't want to. That turns you into a whore. If he does that, let him pay you every time. Say you want one thousand a go and if he says ok, then you up it to five.

Do you think we are all the same, at heart, that people are all the same?

Could've. Should've.

Don't.

on working out some of
the difficult issues before

we share them, on
revulsion, on exposing

what is going on in our
collective pysche

run run run!

I thought my wife was cheating. When we were on holiday she kept taking my cellphone to make calls. I acted like I didn't notice. Later, when I was off in east Europe with my biker mates, I took it into my head one night to ride home to spy on her. Eight hours non-stop in the pouring rain till I got back. To find she wasn't at home. I called her number I don't know how many times. When she finally got in, she claimed she hadn't heard her phone ring cos she was in the garden. Only she wasn't, was she, and I knew that cos I was already home, what she didn't know. The next day, I threw her out.

I pull on my coat and grab a kiss. His phone rings. It's Her.

What? Oh no, darling, I was in the garden and the phone was in the house, that's how I managed to miss your call,
he winks at me as I wave through the banisters on my way out.

is that a gun in-

it looks better when you're not looking

what I think are my own tastes

as in ExtraFresh

tongued but I farted neither of us knew which way to look

Don't fret about it, Nick. Sooner or later it's over. Even before then you can start having a good time. Stick around with me for a while. You won't regret it.

Once, when I was in a disco, I had these new boots on that were really close-fitting. I could hardly get the damn things on or off. I was 85kg of pure muscle. A real good looking. I met a girl there, she was a medical student, around four years older than I was. She said,

I'm gonna take you home and fuck you. Come on!

Hey, I said, I'm a young married man, I can't do that!

We went to her little studio and she rolled herself the longest joint I've ever seen. I took a puff or two and that was it! She literally raped me. Dragged my trousers down and worked me until 5 in the morning.

How am I going to explain that to my wife? I asked.

That, chéri, is your problem.

We were at it all night, me with my trousers down around my ankles and over these boots I couldn't get out of. I'll be making love till the day I drop and d'you know why? Because I've never been out of practice. I've got a friend, a retired doctor, over eighty years old, and he makes love every day. He's been married at least 7 times, and had to work until he was almost eighty in order to be able to pay for all his ex-wives. He's had really young women too. One was in her thirties. He's always said to me, never stop. Never, ever stop making love.

don't you ever think: *so what?*

Bienvenue en Alsace!

When the men are talking, the women ought to know to keep their mouths shut.

Ding Dong.

Hello, my car's jammed in the snow, can you ask your husband to give me hand, won't take five minutes.

We're eating.

She closes the door.

Rebonjour!

Her across the road, dressed up for church every Sunday. Won't give me the time of day now that I'm single. Maybe I ought to tell her: emancipation isn't contagious, dearie, you got to fight bloody hard to get it. She's got what she wants; house, 3 kids, nice car, a hubby who won't run off afraid he's gonna come knocking on my door?. What was that about loving thy neighbour? Must've been a different religion.

Mr le president de la fête de la rue. He's the only one with a brain cell on him. Got a face like Benny Hill, but his eyes: his eyes give his intelligence away. What he could have been in another life but who am I to say, he seems happy enough. Neither he nor his wife have ever been openly rude to me. We have our street party every year in their garage, reckon we're not good enough for the living room. 'When the men are talking, the women ought to know to keep their mouths shut' – him, not *Mr le president*, walks like a battery-operated scarecrow – bores us all night with anecdotes we've all heard before. I try not to stare at his brown horse teeth. When I take my wife to bed, he brags, she's got half a dozen wires sticking out of her. I suppose that's the Alsatian version of a sex bomb.

Mr. white-collar worker is sitting opposite, always as far away from his wife as possible I've been told he beats her, his face vacant, waiting for when it wouldn't be rude to go home.

And the others. She votes *Front National* because her boyfriend does though they're both super nice to me. Ok, he did set a pack of jobs onto her later – something to do with money – got caught and ended up hanging himself in jail. Other than that, really nice people.

And who would have thought, them over there their two daughters made it to university. At least they don't want to become beauticians like all the others. There's hope yet.

There's a woman - I've never seen her in anything other than an apron - the only one who is never invited. Her husband ran off before we moved in. Her son blasts reggae from his room in the cellar after midnight. She's not one of us, I'm told. But she's a localer, an Alsatian, like them. Am I now one like her? I wonder if they're waiting for me to stop coming to the *fête de la rue*.

When I first came here and my French was still rotten, the woman next to me on the train, saying,

I don't like Alsatians. They're two-faced. *Ils sont faux*. And that ring you're wearing, she said,

its former owner's dead. I would take it off if I were you or she could do you harm. You have one particular neighbour, she lives across from you, and she hates you something terrible. Nothing to do with your skin colour, though. It's because she fancies herself as a good catch. She isn't. You're more attractive than she ever was. That's the source of the problem. Throw salt over your shoulders when you pass her house or do as if, that works too. And there are people in your family - I see a sister, and someone else, female - who can't stand your guts. You are like me.

I know.

in other cases damned

and in so doing...

If what I say were reinterpreted as fine art and hanging on a wall in the Tate, the Guggenheim or the Musée d'Orsay, crowds would be gathering to view it, to hear talks about it, to buy the post-card, poster, T-shirt or blimmin cloth bag version of it. But if I, Tatar, I Jean-Joseph Léon, stand here and tell it like it is, was and always will be, I'm a brute. You know Courbet's *Origin of the World*, don't you? Don't tell me that's only art. If Courbet said he didn't jack off I don't know how many times whilst painting that I'd tell him to his face You're a liar. Staring right up into her privates, getting so close he can smell her, 'let me separate your labia somewhat so as to capture the different textures, the different tones of skin, s'il te plaît', or maybe it'll turn him on more if she does it herself, she'll be creaming, either way, but we're to believe he's only studying the detail so he can paint her pubic hair right and mix the right shade of pinky-red for her clit? Don't make me laugh. Maybe he didn't even, or only, jack off behind his easel but right in her face, we'll never know. Won't change the fact that Courbet's considered the artist and I? The brute.

He thought I would understand;

I thought you'd understand, you lot're hot, at it like rabbits, 8-year-olds, 9-year-olds and already mothers younger than any other race I know and it's not even shocking back on your little island though it's scandalous over here. What I'm saying is: we're no different, other than we're a bunch of hypocrites and you're not.

all of this is real all of my senses are cuntional

DeepSatisfaction

not in the park, mind you!

off she went with a trumpety-trump

this
could

hurt

Sorry for the state of this place I wasn't expecting company. I was living it up these last four days. Too much drink. Too many cigarettes. Reckon I must've put on 3 kilos in that space of time. My two ex-wives and some friends were round for dinner. I know they still love me a little but no way would I go back to either of them. Anyway, my good friends, both of them violinists – one has a Stradivari – entertained us with some Bach. And even I got up and sang! Four days in a row like that does me in nowadays. I just can't anymore.

Jesus, look how messy the place is today. I've done fuck all since yesterday, the dishes haven't been washed, the cooker's all greasy. I've become a real lout. A woman who lived with me two years ago wouldn't recognize me today. She'd think an earthquake must have trashed the place or something! This is a side of me that is new; the LAP side: little as possible.

Listen, I'm planning a trip for a couple of days. Men only. You know what I mean. Fancy coming along?

And I've got a groupie planned for next week. Be here.

And whilst we're at it, let's take another look at my website. Cheers!

He grabbed a handful of breast & bit me.

I've always wanted to do that. Just like Al Pacino.

onward onward Christian soldiers!

O lovely!!

JOSEPH 2:8
BELLYACHE

As a 12-year-old, I was in my room
with my 13-year-old girlfriend. Kissing
touching licking, ready to go all the way.

We're gonna do it, okay?

Okay.

Both virgins. Both willing. They tasted so
nice. So salty. So fleshy. So young and
musky, so innocent and horny. And we
were gonna do it. Right now. Right-

Jean-Joseph? Why's the door
locked? Open up right now! I know what
you're up to. At your age! Open the door
this instant!

The shock of her vicious rapping at the
door couldn't've been worse if she had
kicked me in the guts or booted me in the

balls. We children scrambled to our feet
and into our clothes.

Had a bellyache for weeks.

She gave her virginity to someone
else later and had to marry him. They're
still together even now, tho that says
nothing about sod all.

Still pretty. Turned into a handsome
woman. A woman whose greedy innocence
had earned me a bellyache for weeks.

The deal is

We:

feed you, keep you clean and presentable,
run the hotel, replace your mothers,
smile in the right places

You:

fuck us

O.... head, shoulders knees and toes knees and toes

head, shoulders knees and toes knees and toes
and arse and ears and a dick like a hose

we'd sing on the way to school although most of the others had never even seen one

and me? I beg your pardon?

I lie on Her bed when She's not there.

The business of pardon is a tricky one, since a large part of the problem might be one's inability to recognize the need to pardon oneself.

as if Can: I can... I can not look at you.

but I'll leave you a message. Against my better judgement.

You fuck my daughter I'll fuck your wife and your daughter too to get my own back.
You call yourself a friend? Well, you can stick your friendship where it hurts if ever you lay hands on my daughter.

You fuck their wives to get your own back? I thought you respected women?

I do. Those who deserve it.

it's not right but does that make it wrong?

No(t too) safe: words

no-one could get in or out

Getting this done in the morning for a change in case tonight doesn't come.

Woke up feeling: today I will die or woke up today feeling: I will die. Heart saying: Don't rely on me. Skipping beats. Slowing down as I pasted myself onto my True Love, no longer reproaching him for not having shown himself in this life, simply grateful that he was here now as I waited for destiny to catch up with me after yet another hard night on the floor of this enormous house that has no room for who I am.

Yesterday. I could have written about so many things but which did I? Silly girl! This will get into the wrong hands and He'll say I told you, we're better off without her as he ushers my children into the unresponsive white arms of a woman he doesn't love she doesn't love him either because despite what he says he still loves me but why waste heartbeats with thoughts on them, I will have to wake the children in a minute.

Salmon & soja farandole.

Don't get fat. It won't suit you. Your tits are too small for that.

I remember that forest walk where they first encountered death in the form of a field mouse. Look, I said, and they looked at the crescent of a field mouse that refused to budge or return their gaze. It's dead, I said. Dead was a new word that needed more words to make it come alive. It's dead, I said. Its heart's not beating any more. Yours is. I pressed the hand of each child to her heart so her fingers could listen. They were not impressed. Can you hear the b-boom-b-boom. Somehow I wasn't doing it right, wasn't getting the reaction I wanted. Never mind, they'd work it out sooner or later. The youngest one was still in nappies so what did she care. The older one's eyes sank out of reach, finding their own pathways to the new phenomenon, then they resurfaced, seeking mine. Dead, she said, in a pitch suspended between statement and question this is the closest I can get... We walked on. She looked back every now and then. Dead, she said in a new pitch every time. And I said to myself, Why on earth did you even think it fitting to teach a toddler such a word in the first place, there's more to life than your heartbeat, you of all people. Best take a different route back home.

You didn't come and I said I wasn't angry, but I was. In a way. I ignored your messages till you ran back to me in a panic. You need me more than you care to admit. Can't do without me now, can you.

You stood sheepishly on my doorstep wanted to explain, you said. So, the power doesn't lie with you, it's held by me. And I never let go.

Such a sad expression on your childlike face, you'd been worrying about me since you thought you had the might to send me away.

I looked beyond you. Now you're back. To explain. But the words won't come, because what you intended to say was only part of the message and my ears are already tuned into the More.

gaining balance means losing non-balance?

before during &/or after

There is fat that makes me puke. There is fat that doesn't.

There are muscles that make me puke: what was his...? Whatever. Him.

We could ~~make love~~ fuck but he would not let me kiss him he would turn his face away.

Figure it out.

The boner rarely achieves the size displayed that very first time it knows it's just about to bore into you.

One was so blue it looked green. All head and no stave. I thought: arrow.

too many too too too too too too

When he opened the door, *si tu savais combien je t'aime* was on in the background and him, right up in my face, grinning in – out of? – his black biker's t-shirt tucked into his boxer shorts at the front, not at the back. Was it Mickey or Donald? Whatever; Disney.

Well,

he said, his body constantly moving, lifting to the music (I'd heard the song before but couldn't recall the artist. Like I'd seen Tatar abandoned to a rhythm, though I had never seen him dance; not properly. No, I had never seen it/him all I was thinking as he continued, rubbing his chin)

I just had enough time for a quick wash. I haven't even shaved, and I thought, what's the point of getting dressed when the clothes'll be in a pile on the floor in a few minutes afterwards anyway.

The grin got wider.

God, I love looking into your deep brown eyes!

without you all my days are pale...

he sang.

Pale... get it? Ah, monsieur Christian Adam,

he said, an invisible dame in his arms though I was standing right there in front of him,
you sing almost as well as I do!

Between you and me I think he's a bit of a fairy

So you think so too

Loads of gay guys married to women. He's Catholic, too, isn't he? Could be why he's in denial

When he kisses me it feels wrong

I'm going to set him up with someone, Not so as you'd notice. Set him up and see how long it'll take him to suck dick. He will. Bet? How much?

swimming, I thought Equinox and wondered why

changes begin & happen fast

thought isn't made in the mouth

Trottoir-sweeping Fridays, geraniumed summer, candles at Christmas, Sundays *entre famille*; café-schnapps, croissants. Raspberries plucked from the forest, still wet with dawn, plopped in the pot, clucking as they boil; gelée.

The smell of warm bodies resisting the compulsion to start the day.

The smell of sweat as the day packed its things together and called it just that.

The odour of local life lifted itself like the steaming dung of the fields all around.

JOSEPH 1:27
WIND & WEATHER

I'm never cold. You'll never catch me in a jumper or in a vest under my shirt like the wimps do; a vest, then a shirt, then a jumper on top.

When I was a boy, I was out in all weather. The winters were cold. The only room that was heated was the kitchen. There, the stove was fed with wood. The living room would be heated on Sundays. After school we'd huddle around the wood

burner. And when it was biting cold, mother would put hot water in a plastic bottle we would take to bed. Problem is, it was biting cold. So cold that the bottle would freeze then burst. We'd jump up in the middle of the night, grab the sheets, shake those frozen nuggets out the window, hop back into bed again.

I never have the heating on in my bedroom till this day. Never. And often I leave the window wide open all morning.

AFFIDAVIT #1

in conformity with articles 200 - 203 NCPC

Recommendations:

in order to be valid, the affidavit must comply with the following:

- be written, dated and signed by the witness him/herself
- be accompanied by a photocopy (recto verso) of all official documents confirming the identity of the witness and bearing his/her signature (identity card, driver's license, passport etc.)
- include the following formula, written by the hand of the witness him/herself: 'the present has been established with a view to being produced in a court of law and I am aware that any false testimony on my part may lead to penal sanctions.'

I the undersigned

NAME:

MAIDEN NAME (if applicable):

FORENAMES:

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH:

PROFESSION:

ADDRESS:

RELATIONSHIP TO THE PERSON CONCERNED:

Have the honour to relate the following events:

Having children's the beginning of the end of the life of a couple. D'you know one reason why we have such great sex? Cos there are no children between us. You've got kids, I've got kids but we don't have any and that makes all the difference.

AFFIDAVIT #1 cont'd

I the undersigned (name, forename, date & place of birth), declare that I have known Mme_____ (name, forename, marital name) for approaching twenty years. We met within the framework of her professional activities and went on to become friends.

I confirm that Mme_____ has always been a dedicated mother, putting the children before her own interests. Mme _____ and I have undertaken many activities with our children, during which time she also sought my consolation when things were particularly bad in her marriage. I was aware of the numerous humiliations she had to suffer in the interest of her children. I have felt compelled, by friendship, to come to her aid at the material level also, bringing her a mattress when she could no longer bear having to sleep on the floor in her own house. When she no longer had the strength to, I looked after her children and have even accompanied her to an appointment with her lawyer.

The present has been established with a view to being produced in a court of law and I am aware that any false testimony on my part may lead to penal sanctions.

fait à (place)_____, *le* (date)_____. Signature_____

there's poetry in there, somewhere

In the end you cannot but betray one thing or other, just be mindful about which you choose.

Sometimes I look at my life and I just want to drive my car into a tree

I see. And why don't you?

Because you're not worth it

Why doesn't this get any better? Is it me?

having sent my stronger self ahead to mow down all contenders

Château La Gaffelière 1^{ère} grand cru classé, St-Emilion Grand Cru, Comte de Malet Roquefort (appellation saint-émilion grand cru contrôlée) (2009), accompanied by Belgian chocolate: *noir au gingembre frais*.

His eyes roll in delight, all the way up to the top and back again, pulling his shoulders along with them.

They wouldn't buy the jewelry off me. I was fuming.

Course they won't,
he said.

You're black. You must have stolen it. And the fur coat on your back and all the rest. You're black and you're a witch and you make mistakes when you speak French and how dare you have more than they, of course they won't buy it off you. What you got? Give it to me,
he said,

I'll sell it in Strasbourg for you. How much do you want for it? You don't trust me do you? You could come along if you like and wait in the car and you'd see I'd be in and out in less than half an hour and you'd have the sum you wanted. Nope? Up to you, chérie,
he said,

but when the kitty's empty don't think you can come running to me. Not a penny will I give you.

JOSEPH 2:33
HERE COMES THE GROOM

Once I ran off with my mates to Paris instead of attending my own wedding. In Paris I was taken ill and admitted to hospital. My pancreas. Only mother knew that I was there.

When I opened my eyes, who did I see but my future wife, standing by my bedside, insisting,

We are going to get married!
I didn't have the strength to refuse.

At the altar, I wept. All the guests found it touching to see the man so moved. Only it wasn't love that moved me so but my own rage at having given in.

From the very first day I had known it wasn't love. Maybe that's why I worked so much, found every reason good enough not to hurry home. And whenever she hurt me in whichever way, I'd two-time her.

I should never've married. The only woman I really should've married and had a child with, I didn't. Again, out of vengeance. I regret that today. Evéline...

I am vengeful. I will always get you back. Always.

Friend of mine with a motel and a secret nightclub - did time for illegal prostitution.
Meeting-point for the wealthy. Once, I saw this big brunette.

She's been coming here every day for weeks and she always goes home alone. If you manage to bag her, I'll give you a bottle of whisky every night for a month.

You're on!

I spat in my hands.

She laughed. And she shouldn't've done.

What's that? What can that be good for? I'm used to 32cm.

It's not the size that counts. Just you wait and see.

The very night of the bet she was in my bed and I bet that 32cm had never given her a better rogering than the one she was getting right then. But I was angry. I finished her off with the position they call the crank. Six stitches they gave her that night at the local hospital.

You'll wait for me, won't you,
she'd pleaded as they wheeled her away. Madame Stuck-Up, torn to shreds.

Course I will, chérie.

I got in my car and drove home. Vrrrrrrrrum. Rrrrrrrrrache sau.

flipping through my scrawlings, there is a reference that no longer makes any sense to me. Its worth sunken, like a penny at the bottom of a well. When I die and the water is gone (where?) I will for the first time ever be a wise woman

I once had a girlfriend who was really masochistic. I mean, like, really. We started off innocently with biting and spanking. Then we moved on to the belt,
I suddenly knew it was the same belt...

then I turned the belt around and beat her with the buckle. That turned her on something crazy. Well, through stages I won't go into, we got to the point where I'd made a cord out of barbed wire and would beat her with it. She was all covered in blood and I woke up out of my stupor thinking: what the *fuck* are you *doing*?! I dropped the blasted thing to the floor and ran away in tears. She kept phoning me after that, asking me to see her. To come back. But I wouldn't. Later she was in the papers. She had been strangled. Found in her bedroom. No sign of break and enter. They said it was murder. But it's not true. It was an accident.

You didn't kill her, did you?

No. Not I.

I looked him straight in the eye. He took a long drag from his cigarette. Exhaled into my face.

I know you think you'll always win a stare-down, like I know you can look a person straight in the eye and lie to their face. Did you or didn't you?

You decide.

in so doing ...

Get it down, they say. Get it done.

To write in 3D (or more).

To make of the printed page the legitimate siblings of paintings,
of dancers and symphonies, but no–

In between and off my head. They say?

At least the meals are nice here.

Paroles d'amour: il parle à Clito.

He said
Your hair would look good if it were red
I said
I don't think so

He said
Would your grandmother have liked me
I said
How am I supposed to know
I said
Would your mother have liked me
He said
I don't think so
I said
Why not
He said
Stop playing silly buggers

God gave us reason, right? God created us. Right? We have simply re-membered God. Right?

Right?

a member of the family showed me his
thing in the toilet once. I'm not saying who
I can't remember what it looked like.

a friend of the family showed me her thing
at the bottom of the garden. Hers was far
bushier than mine

JOSEPH 4:19
THE FORCE BE WITH ME 1-3

I don't have any friends in the police force. I thought.

I smashed a bar to pieces once when I was completely plastered. Turned over their grand piano and trashed the place. All the whores ran outside and shivered in the cold in their flimsy gear. About 4 in the morning, the police came. Seventeen of them. Bang bang bang, they knocked:

It's the police! Open up!

I looked through the peephole and said:

We're closed!

The only reason why I let them in was because the girls were outside freezing to death.

They wrenched my hands behind me and carried me off to the hospital for blood tests. My alcohol level, I reckon. Anyways, this young wimp of a doctor came along and meant he could take some blood from me.

If you touch me, I'll bloody kill you, I roared, and he didn't dare to take another step. Not a single one.

Take these fucking handcuffs off me or I'll kill you as well! I'll behave, I'll go with you, but take these damned things off me!

So they take them off and take me back to the station. First they wanted to put me in a cell with other drunkards but it stank of piss and sick in there.

I'm not going in there,
I protested.

Oh yes you are, sunny boy,
they meant.

I tell you, I am not going in there!
I said,

Take me elsewhere.
The only other cell with room was with a guy who had just killed two people that night.

I don't care,
I said.

Put me in.
So they put me in, and I said to the guy:
You, fuck, you move over there, and you leave me alone, or I swear, I'll kill you!
Move it!

He scrambled over to the other corner of the cell and I went to sleep.

JOSEPH 4:19
THE FORCE BE WITH ME 4-6

In the morning, the commissar came
to interrogate me.

I know you,
he proclaimed.

Can't be,
I assured him,

I have no friends at the police.

No, I definitely know you. You fly,
don't you?

Yeah... how would you know that?

You took me for a spin once, and
when I wanted to pay you, you refused.
That spin was one of the best moments of
my life. I'll never forget it. Now,

he asked, getting down to business,

What's this here all about?

He listened to the story.

There's only one way out of this for
you, you have to file charges against them
for selling you too much alcohol, it's their
responsibility. If you don't file charges,
they will, and that'll cost you a fortune. You
busted up their joint, don't forget.

So I filed charges and their place was
closed down for a fortnight. After that, they
dropped their charges against me and not a
word more was said about the matter.

Now, tell me, how else could I have
got out of a pickle like that if I wasn't God?

He holds his mouth to the brim and drinks.

I was afraid that I would do something,

I confess as we lay breathless with our legs plaited.

What? Afraid of peeing, maybe?

Yes...

Well, so what if you did, I would have drunk it, why not?

He laughs at my aghast face.

Ah, mon bébé,

he kisses my forehead.

My first wife was embarrassed at first when I told her not to wash in the evening. Like you, she came into my life believing she was frigid. I soon taught her otherwise. She ejaculated as much as a litre.

Where does it come from?

What do you mean?

Where does it come from? From her vagina, like periods, or from where we pee?

It comes from inside. It has a strange taste. Like... well, a taste all of its own.

on sincere, arguably enlightened insanity

on right here right now

as in: Click

Did you play with yourself like I taught you to? Why not? There's no guilt in it.

ladies have been known to love beneath them!

I said I was afraid.

Don't be, bébé. I'm careful. I always withdraw before I cum. I know what I'm doing.

Ssshhh. I know what I'm doing. Relax...

You will leave Him. It will hurt.

Let go.

What are all these women like, in bed?

They are whoever or whatever I do to them. You are my darling, adorable puppets.

Her father died when She was two years old. Two or three, can't remember. Mining accident. She remembered her mother saying with relief more than once: he'd just finished paying for the furniture. Her mother never remarried. Imagine that. Such a young woman with two toddlers and no fuck in sight for the rest of her life. That's Catholics for you. That must be why she was so good at doing without by the time she met me. Following in mother's footsteps.

He said a whole lot more but I was only half listening.

Too many other things to work out, like, why doctors ask Do you have a known allergy against x,y,z, and there's something about the way they say it, you know all they want is to make sure their neck is out the noose.

And what if I have an unknown allergy?

It came out more aggressively that I had wished.

Oh là là, who's touchy!

She could get away with speaking to me like that because I'd been her patient for ages and I had told her stuff that wasn't merely medical.

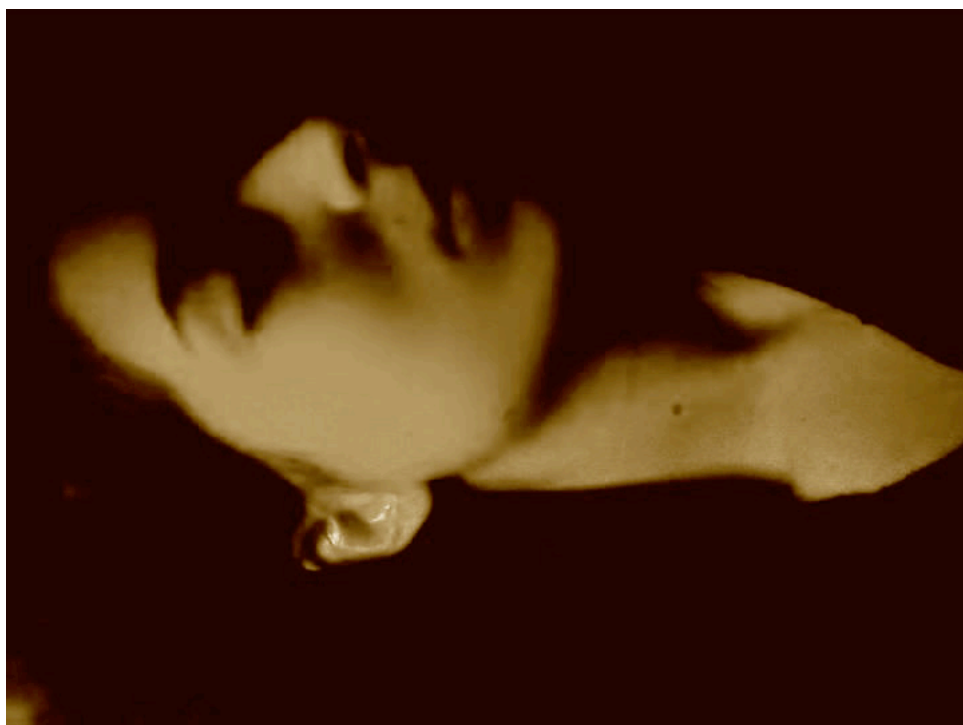
If in doubt, about your partner I mean, then don't. Never heard of protection?

I hate suppositories!

If we spend too much time contemplating God this life becomes unbearable.
We'd never be able to forgive ourselves
and get on with life.
And because God knows we can't bear the sight of him,
He shows himself in a roundabout way.

I am God. Sure I am! Jesus was just a good man in a bad world. So am I. I could start a
sect right now, found a new church, a new religion: the Tatarists. I'd have millions of followers
overnight cos people are just too stupid and need something to believe in.

I wish I were really God. I wouldn't let all of this shit happen.



Évéline
si tu savais...

I need to earn money to pay my taxes.

her way is clear

why are you so sure you're a feminist? I ain't so sure I'm not one

bear hug
bone snap
he let go sprang back, more like

neither of us said a word

I would kill someone if you paid me enough. Someone, anyone, even if they'd never done anything to harm me. I know I would. No-one's incorruptible. Luckily, no-one can pay me enough either! That's why I steer clear of politics too, in a way. The temptation would be too great, when what they should be doing is helping their community and fulfilling the promises they stole your vote with. Who knows, maybe one day I'll submit my candidature for the local mayor after all. They do so much shit. I could do better with my eyes closed.

That's a gun by my bed. Just in case.

as in can we crush the -cracy

Do you think I need to be blacker?

Sorry?

Do you think my 'racial profile needs to be more pronounced'?

Who said that?

Doesn't matter. There are too many of them. And they always say it so kindly...

Won't do to have you too much like them, now will it? They need you other, to stay in your place so things are as they should be. Who was it?

Too many, too, too... too too too

They want you other cos the alternative's too frightening. Now, me? I want you just the way you are

He looked down at that swollen blue part of himself and was pleased.

I'm gonna fuck your arse and you know it.

He lifted me to my knees, folding my lightness down the middle like a wafer of smoked paper.

I wore that look of fear I had on every time I couldn't see his face.

Relax, he soothed.

Too tense.

Relax.

He ordered, guiding my head down to the mattress, to my knees, as in prayer.

Relax!

Muscles clamped in panic.

Strength got the upper hand. The door yielded.

I screamed.

And he was in.

I ask myself whether I'm killing your fantasy by telling you all these things from my past. Blotting out your imagination with my reality.

Let's fly together, and if we die, it'll be together. You Know once bragged: you'll never get my wife to fly with you.

He said that because I refuse to fly with him.

Will you fly with me?

Yes.

Blondes sweat too much when they're making love. Their skin goes all clammy. No woman on earth has skin like a black woman. It's pure silk.

There's another fucking wasp in here. They're the only animals I'll always kill. Who gives them the right to invade my property? I'm the one paying the bills.

I almost wrote to you yesterday, but I was afraid You Know might anticipate the mail.

He can't, I have a password he doesn't know.

On both addresses?

Yep.

OK, I'll write.

A ruthless man, am I?

Do you like opera?

I do.

One of my favourite operas is Puccini's *La Bohème*.

Seen it? I've seen it on three separate occasions.

The first time I saw it,

when it got to the part where the heroine is killed,

I was so taken in by the plot that I just keeled over and fainted.

Bam!

The second time I went to see it I thought I was better prepared.

Thought I'd brace myself in time.

When it got to that part of the plot,

I dunno,

I just felt myself sliding off my chair;

slowly, slowly, till I crumbled to the floor.

Out again!

The next time I went to see *La Bohème*, I thought I'd be immune.

I knew what was coming, and when, so I was in complete control.

Right?

My auntie's fanny was I.

They carried me out on a stretcher.

There will, alas, be no fourth encounter between myself and Puccini,

for I am everything but the ruthless man I am said to be.

on chattering about whose boxes

look more closely & you will be obliged to rename

there is a void I seem unable to navigate
days are not lived, simply survived

how am I ever going to put all of this back together again?

Some people think I'm stuck up; think I think I'm clever. Well, I am. I'm exceptional. I'll leave the rest of you to be ordinary.

I adore your *schneckerle*: your lips look like a little snail turned upside down. You're just like a baby; you don't know a thing. My first wife was the same. She'd only ever had one man in her life, her first husband. And a lousy fuck he was too. I had to teach her all sorts: how to suck dick, what a good cunt lick feels like, anal sex, group sex. Gave her a thorough education, haaa-ha-haaa! You're the same. We fit well together. You're a bit masochistic and I'm a bit sadistic. I love to watch you shoot when I bite you or pinch your nipples till they blister.

Stop whimpering with shame, there's nothing wrong with masturbating. Whoever told you it's wrong, don't listen. Religion has a lot to answer for, They should stick to teaching good and bad and not meddle in areas that don't concern them. Your body's designed for pleasure; for eating, drinking, and sex is the greatest pleasure of all. You must wank off regularly. Promise me. Wank until you're pissing all over the place. You'll feel free and more balanced afterwards. C'mon, let's do it together.

Dream: Bag over his head. Hang him. Sucking off the erection he had as the cord jerked the last breaths out of him like (???)

And then?

And then what?

What happened next?

You die.

And then?

And then what?!

Do you cut off my dick, my balls and carry them around with you?

No!!

Would be logical. You want to hang me? You can hang me. You can put a bag over my head and hang me. You can suck me off and cut off my balls, but that won't kill me. To kill me, all you have to do is turn your back on me.

He that is without sin among you... (John 8: 7)

I'm not dead yet!

JOSEPH 1:17
LITTLE LORD NOTTINGHAM

As a child playing in the nearby woods with other children, it was always I, Tatar, the chief. Even if the playmates were older.

In one game, where I was the Red Indian chieftain, they hung me from a tree. The only reason I survived was because the cord was not strong enough to bear my weight. Down I crashed with a splutter and a rubbing of my throat and the game went on.

On another occasion, they tied my hands behind my back and plonked my face in an anthill. I screamed so much that

they all ran away. I crawled over to a nearby puddle, broke the ice on the surface, and stuck my head in to wash off the ants.

Our weapons were all hand-made from the twigs and whatever else was lying around. We had steel-tipped arrows. I aimed at one boy and fired. The arrow flew straight through his earlobe. The boy's mother found me and gave him a thorough thrashing.

Yeah, I had a great childhood!

I can swear anything you want me to: on the head of my children or my mother or put my hand the bloody Bible if anyone asks me to swear to something, what do I care, I'm not a believer. But if I give you my word... ah! My word...

My little finger always tells me the truth!

He met his girlfriend when he was 16. She was 15. They moved in together.

Weren't you minors?

Yep. We rented a flat and lived together. In them days, you needed your parents' permission if you wanted to get married under the age of 21. Our parents implored us to marry, cos living together wasn't done in them days.

Juliette Greco; Mireille Matthieu; Jean Gabin; Guy Marchand; Hervé Villard; Monty; Zanini; Lucky Blondo; Christophe; Jeanne Moreau; Georges Moustaki; France Gall; Louis Mariano; André Verchuren. Cigarettes. Champagne.

You're in your peak. Slowly, but surely, your libido will diminish. When you're around let's say 60 that'll be it. You'll age nicely. You've got nice small tits so they won't end up sitting on your lap. You've got a great figure, which you'll keep. And that nice high backside only black women have. It'd be droopy by now if it was gonna droop so now it'll stay that way not like other races whose droopy arse turns square as well and as if that weren't bad enough they make the mistake of wearing trousers, you'd think they had pampers on underneath. I reckon some of them do. You'll still be a sexy lady when you get old. But you'll be an old lady all the same so men won't want you.

This house is too big to be lived in alone. I like company. I like to entertain, to hear children playing. I need all that. I like it when my girlfriend moves in, but it's my home. She'll never be able to put me on the street. She can bring along a few things, but not more than will fit in Her car when she goes. She brought along that machine the other day. I don't care if she finds out about you. She'll forgive me, cos she loves me. No, She won't tell You Know. She's not the vengeful kind. I like her, really. She's so sweet. So bloody chaotic, but I like her.

The difference between myself and a true worker? One: my hands. Two: I drink champagne, not beer. Three: I wash and pay attention to my appearance. Four: I work with my hands because I want to, not because I have to.

Love is...

an idea worth undoing

Did you know, the Bible's the best-selling book in the world. We all know that sex sells, but the sexiest bit in the Bible is Jesus getting his cheesy feet dried with virgin hair. Otherwise there are only circumventions: x *knew* y, and other such palaver... Eve's shame after she sunk her pearlies into that succulent golden delicious:

'Oh, my pussy hair!'

And though we claim to have evolved since those days, the fear remains. Like the sex. But fear, it seems, sells better. Now, on which side of this titillating see-saw would you, my dear, like to sit? Are you left-handed or right-handed? For the right are just and the left get *left* behind. Same goes for politics, by the way.

He rolls his eyes.

See, you inspire me.

Our eyes lock. I, eventually, look away.

Knew you'd back down first. But why? What did you see? In you? And in me?

Have you ever stuck a bottle up yourself?

Have I ever *what*

what about ideas that have never been written down ideas that have been forgotten

do they still exist?

Very few people have conquered my heart. Some've tried to get to know me, but've given up after a year or two. I've let some into the antechambers of my heart. They thought they were in the middle, but they were really only in the antechamber. I regret, now, the way I behaved by letting some think they were in, when they never really were. I regret that.

We'll go somewhere where no-one knows us. We'll go to a disco, you'll chat up a girl and take her home with you. You're a lady's lady, yes you are. We'll fuck her. Both of us.

I watched a video once where these gay guys, real good-looking blokes, were ramming baseball bats up each other and creaming each other's arse with shit. Spunk all over the place too. You've never seen the like.

Milk of Magnesia. Did it turn you on?

Course it didn't.

Did you watch till the end?

What for? After five minutes, you've seen it all.

But will a willy do once you're used to baseball bats?

Why the hell are you asking *me*?

Why don't they make films like this? We should be filming this: an old man in his bathrobe sitting on the edge of his bed getting a royal blowjob by a beautiful young thing.

just shuddup and lissen!

I the undersigned, Dr _____, certify to having examined this day Mme _____ born (date) and currently living at (address).

Mme _____ says that she has been the victim of conjugal violence. The aggressor grabbed her by the neck, using extreme force, and bashed her against a wardrobe before punching her several times on her left shoulder.

Mme _____ is in a state of shock and reports suffering from pain in the neck, the shoulders and stomach. After a thorough examination no subcutaneous hematoma damage has been detected.

Mme _____ has been put on sick leave for 48h.

Hand delivered for all due intents and purposes.

Signature _____

Stamp _____

JOSEPH 3:7
GOLDEN SHOWERS

500 franc note. I used to dream of seeing one of these. The nouveau riche were fanning them under their noses for all to see. They would throw my 5c tip onto the floor, knowing perfectly well that you leave your tip on the table, but no, onto the

floor they would toss it, just for the fun of watching me scramble after it. If you knew how much I despised you all! These cents made me rich in my own way, tho for them, it was nothing.

The coins showered, the garçon scrambled. Pride understood, so kept her mouth shut.

Does God love you?

How do you know?

Does he love you as much as, say, I do?

In the beginning there was Doubt.

Doubt led to Choice.

We've been taking wrong turns ever since.

When did I lose my faith? After my first fuck. When I was 13. Till then, I wanted to become a clergyman. But then I had my first fuck and knew I'd never be able to do without it again. They're not allowed to, of course, but they do it anyway, they fuck anything that moves so I got to thinking about the whole thing, started talking to people, reading up on it. And I came to the conclusion that it was a load of hogwash. There is no God. I am God. You are God.

as in if you are taught to reflect, where does independent thought begin

I've seen boredom I've seen yearning

nothing to distinguish me from the rest

A woman who's too clean's no good in bed.

He tied an elastic band to his balls to see the effect it would have on his ejaculation. His head became hard blue.

When you were giving me head back then, you scraped my stave with your teeth.

If I'm honest, I would've liked to bite it off.

Yes, I could tell. I'm not into pain, yet there was something delicious about this pain. I wanted to see if it would make me shoot. But it didn't.

He washes everything up. Tidies away without delay (destroying the evidence?). Once when I said,

there's lipstick on my cup,

he said,

don't worry, that'll be washed up and put away even before you've made it back to your car.

underline ways in which she - we - may - must???

Anything he can do I can do better. Anything he can do I can do too. Right?

I positioned a mirror between my legs. Held my lips apart. Took a good look.

It was not the same...

She said

how did it feel

and further

what did it remind you of

That's our bedroom,

I remember standing there, trying to make up my mind to open the door.

Yes, well, we no need to go in there, he helped me out with an unskilled laugh.

Meet Apollo. I never used to do all this housewifey stuff. Now I have to, I suppose. One wife always used to wash off the dishes before she put them in the dishwasher. What a waste of time and water, I kept telling her. If you've rinsed them already, then the plates are clean, aren't they? Now what do I do? I rinse the plates off before loading them into Apollo. And there's sense in it. If it takes you as long as it takes me to get the machine filled, if you don't rinse off the dishes beforehand, they start to stink. See, I keep telling you, women are so bloody intelligent!

But not all of you.

I like my toilet paper from Lidl. When I go, I pick up some rosé at the same time, really good rosé for a couple of euros. Take a look at this: my daughter bought some mozzarella, here, for... 1 euro 26. You can get exactly the same thing in Lidl for 45 cents. Having said that, they're conning us left right and centre wherever you go. Those *champignons de Paris* aren't from *gay paree* no more. 90% come from abroad, even from the States. *Moutarde de Dijon*? Wrong; the mustard seeds come from Canada. *Melon de charantais*'s no longer from the Cognac region; they come in from Spain, the Caribbean, from Africa and China. And guess who're the leading producers of *savon de Marseille* nowadays; the Chinese and the Turks! I'm telling you! And as for our beloved *camembert*, 30% of the milk comes from China and 50% from the rest of Europe. Milk from bloody China, like we ain't got cows right here at home.

did you know that the word *enfant* means *qui ne parle pas*?
the one who doesn't/can't speak

as if silence
is
the root
of all–

animals & children tend to like me I'm not so sure I like them

tear

drop

fall

In his night cabinet next to the good bottle of whisky he kept in case of a heart attack: a strong swig could unblock a clot. His bookmarkers had been on the same page for weeks. Hers hadn't.

'I can trace my family back to the seventeenth century.'

'Throughout my childhood I dreamed of getting a bike. Every Christmas, Easter and birthday I waited for the bike... that never came. By the time I was fifteen I'd saved up enough for a solex.'

He sang *le jardin d'amour*, chuckling at the end.

Our secret garden's so beautiful precisely because it's that. Secret. If you make it public, people'll trample all over it.

If I want to get my rocks off, I think about you when I'm fucking Her.

He raises his eyebrows innocently.

It's just that she's so huge inside.

I wish you lot would stop complaining, it's your children we're having, after all.

It's not that she doesn't excite me. She just doesn't excite me *that* much. You ejaculate like a man. When you came, I swallowed the whole lot.

shadow = what happens to hope when she closes her eyes, or looks the other way

Because if I suffer it won't help anyone, why should I?

You owe me, by the way. I won that bet.

Prove it.

You'll have to take my word for it

I wasn't so sure

Well, is not Brutus an honourable man?

I THINK
I THINK I think
I THINK I THINK I think
I THINK SHE THINKS
I THINK I think SHE thinks
I THINK she THINKS she thinks
I THINK she thinks she THINKS I think
I THINK she THOUGHT
I think she THOUGHT she thought
I think she thought she THOUGHT I thought
I think she thought she thought I thought I thought
I think I thought
I thought I knew
I thought anew I knew I thought
I thought I knew I knew
(((I)))
(think ((think ((think ∞) think)) think))

Love is...

source or symptom

'Dear Suzanne,

My partner says I smell bad down there. I've tried everything on the market. Then I read somewhere it could have something to do with hormonal changes relating to menopause. Any tips? I adore oral sex. My love life's not the same without it.

Marion'

'Hate your hair?'

With my first wife, I once had the whole hand up the front and the other up the back.
Can you believe that?

I'd like to put my hand in your wife's fanny. See what it feels like.

Why her?

You said she's so loose...

Just take any woman who's had her children naturally.

Well, how comes you get your hand up her backside?

If you've had a lot of anal sex, your muscles loosen.

I don't want you to do any of that with me.

I know you don't. And I won't.

I fear this story's going to end tragically, if you love me like I love you.

My wife's beginning to pull her hair out. She wants me to go and see a doctor because I can't get a hard-on. Not with her (smile...). I think about you day and night... Do me a favour, when you know that you're coming to see me, don't wash. Try not to, for at least two days. I like it that way; the smell of your *foufounette* nice and strong.

I'd like to see who's gonna turn up at my funeral. Then again, I might be sorely disappointed. Just as well that I won't be around. People either love me or hate me. I'm not the type who'll leave you indifferent. That'd be the worst thing for me: indifference. When I read the obituaries and spot the name of someone I hated because they wronged me at one point, I open a bottle of champagne, yes I do! My first wife always called me: du Rache Sau – you vengeful swine, and she had this glorious way of rolling and protracting her r: *rrrrrrrrrache sau!* Ja! That's me. I always forgive. But I never – forget.

When I was 15, 16, I was screwing women of 40. I was already a man. 1.80m tall, shoe size 43 like today, and 95kg.

You were still a boy.

I was a man, living away from home, earning my own keep. When you get older, you'll go for younger guys, ~~too~~.

Never!

That's what you say now.

I'll need a boy to mow my lawn, not fuck me.

He'll mow both your lawns, darling. Both of them, haaa-ha-haaa!

I like women who're young at heart. Take Her; she's more or less my age, but she's young at heart. You should see her sing and dance all over the place. Folksongs like *Le Moulin*, French hits. Her impersonation of Marlene Dietrich, or who was it sung *Für mich soll's rote Rosen regen*? What's her face? Hildegard Knef. Trouble is, she sings so miserably! That's what's so charming. She's the last woman of my age that I'll have, I reckon. I like them younger, 35-40ish. You, you're a fully grown woman, but when I look at you, I see the child.

Do you ever wear a scarf in winter, something like that?

Nope. No vests or that underwear crap, either. Can't stand it. Have a wardrobe full of jumpers that were given to me as presents from people who didn't know me and who have bad taste. I won't wear them. Even if I go ski-ing, I'm stark naked inside my ski suit. I do own a scarf, it's three metres long. I wear it when I'm out on my motorbike in Morocco. Other than that, I wear bandanas.

I'd like to have something personal of yours.

I can give you the briefs I was wearing yesterday. After you left I wanked off like crazy, now they're full of spunk.

Where am I supposed to stash something like that? Haven't you got anything else?

If you really want something personal, something really personal, then there's only one thing I can give you.

What?

A baby. What can I give you more than that?

You're not humorous in the least. Not even black humour!

Some things you just don't make jokes about.

Well, they'll send me to hell. We'll all meet up in hell, cos it's better there anyhow. That's where the party's at. Hang on.
He disappears into his bedroom and re-emerges with a necklace that immediately takes my fancy.

This is from my wild days. I had it on all the time. Suits you too. No kidding.

The sun sparkled coldly. I drank in the mentholized rays as I ran through the forest. Behind stones, behind glass, behind the cast iron and brass fashioned to make life make more comfortable, affluent limbs fold in on themselves like a smothered anger.

I've had three generations of women from one and the same family, me. There was Sabine, my bunny. She must've been bragging about my sexual prowess, cos her mum got interested. We all went out for a meal and she let me know that her mum would like to have a go. I decided to do her the favour. Sabine, when kissing me, kept turning my face towards hers when the three of us were in bed so I wouldn't have to take in the sight of her wrinkly old mother.

You said three generations...

I know. Years later, when I was in the neighbourhood, I called by just to find out how she was. My bunny. Or ex-bunny. She wasn't at home. But her daughter was.... Not something I'm particularly proud of, there you go.

There is no such thing as evil.

I've carried out all sorts of tests and the truth is; I'm the loyal type. Really I am. I've lived in the same house for decades. I've had the same bank account. If I'm satisfied, I don't change. I can't be bothered anymore to go around panting after women. A nice one to live with. And a maîtresse, that's all I need. I'm lucky enough to have two intelligent women; what more do you want?

What more can I say?

mai euh inglish euh ease not euh brokern, euh eates euh smashd

She knows how to take me. When to leave me alone. I need her if we are to continue. She peppers me with questions about you all the time.

I don't even want to know if you're playing around, or if she has someone else. What counts is that when you're here, you really are here, in your soul. And you are. If you weren't, I could tell.

JOSEPH 3:12
TRUE LOVE 1-3

Éveline. My first real wife: My true love. She couldn't marry me because she was living in separation. Her husband didn't want to divorce back then. When he finally did want to remarry, he filed for divorce. Now she wanted to me to marry her too but I refused: when I had wanted to, it didn't suit her, and now I would not.

Ours wasn't your everyday relationship. It was a violent love-hate one which had me wanting to commit suicide I don't know how many times. That's why I threw her out in the end, cos I'd've ended up killing one of us.

I stood there with the pistol in my mouth, told her:

You blink once, that means we'll separate tomorrow. If you don't blink once, and I mean blink in such a way to make it quite quite clear then I swear, I'll blow my brains out on the spot.

She blinked once. I took the pistol out my mouth and said not another word.

The following day, first thing in the morning, I asked her:

Well, have you organized a lawyer? She hesitated.

Have you or haven't you? Yes, she said, she had.

Well, off we go.

Even though we weren't actually legally married we had lived several years together all the same so I gave her a flat as compensation. It still took her two years to move out! What an intolerant beauty she was. Our relationship broke up in the end because she couldn't accept that I had a girlfriend although I told her, I told her, she's just a toy, no danger at all to our love, but she wouldn't hear of it. I really did love her, so much so that the day we spilt up I threw my toy away as well.

Off she went with a trumpety trump.

I came dashing back up the stairs.

My handbag!

What d'you need your handbag for, you're just going across the road to fetch me some cigarettes, not meeting the bloody Queen. Leave it here.

I never go anywhere without my handbag. It's got all my personal things in it.

Leave it here.

Cold old man.

Fear could have served a purpose. Then.

JOSEPH 3:12
TRUE LOVE 4-6

Évéline. She wanted to open up a boutique so she sold the flat I had given her and invested in a small shop in the next town. We went to Paris to buy the clothes, drove back to Alsace, spent all day Sunday stocking the shop and opened on the Tuesday. By the Friday all the clothes had been sold. We continued like this, driving regularly up to Paris and buying clothes that were sold like hot cakes. The customers even came from Strasbourg to buy there.

I told her,

Buy only single items of clothes from now on. Spend what you save on buying rolls of material instead. I know a good seamstress.

The business took off so well that she moved it down to Strasbourg and when she took the train to Paris, she travelled first class, if you don't mind.

Within two years, she was rolling in it. Did fashion shows in discos, using young

village girls as models. Évéline would complain that she should have hired professionals instead of these two-legged sheep and the girls were so keen to be models for a night that they never asked for a penny. I got to screw all of them, which I did gladly; me a handsome man in my mid-thirties. One of these models, a beautiful girl of 18, once replied when a friend who saw us together asked:

Is that your new boyfriend?

No,

she answered,

it's my future husband.

I ditched her at the first opportunity. She hadn't understood a thing. Not a single thing.

We got an au-pair cos I wanted to learn English. The original plan was that she'd stay for 4 months. Her name was Karen. She came on the Saturday night. On the Sunday morning as she wandered through the house she heard the two of us making love and withdrew discreetly to her room. After Evéline had left, Karen turned up in the kitchen. Stark naked.

Good morning, she said.

Good morning, I replied.

Shall we go, she inquired.

We made love all day. I never made it to the shop to open up, as intended. Evéline caught wind of what was going on but she believed there were no feelings involved. Besides, she herself had developed a sexual interest in Karen, who refused to let her touch her. Evéline found a way to get rid of her in the end. And the letters Karen wrote to me after that, they were all intercepted, as I later learned.

She died in an accident outside this very front door. It was then that I discovered that she had four brothers, who all descended like a pack of vultures to carve up what she had left, even saying,

Is that all? I bet she had more.

I gave them everything, all the money, the property, her jewels from the 18th century, magnificent ruby colliers she'd got from that Mafiosi boyfriend of her student days, the one who had been liquidated. The only thing I kept?

He opened a drawer behind him and threw an item onto the table. A silver ice-cream spoon.

Evéline... She wouldn't have been half so successful without me. Her new loves would call me up to ask me what the hell it was that I would do to her that they couldn't: she would just laugh at their efforts so much that their dicks went into hiding.

After ten years my first legal marriage was in ruins. I went to my mother, who showed no compassion whatsoever cos she had never wanted me to marry in the first place.

I went to my brother, who called me

a silly bastard,

he said,

I should give you a beating like I always have done.

I said,

Ok, let's go outside. Right now.

He turned as white as a sheet.

Don't be silly, we're not kids anymore.

Let's settle this once and for all. Outside!

Nothing has he dared. I was furious; more than ready to do what I should've done ages ago.

But no. Just because he's a brute doesn't mean I have to be one too. He bloody better die before I do, tho, cos I've already set a bottle of champagne aside for the occasion.

Ok, once you had a brother. No longer. Adieu.

I was up to my eyeballs in debt but I knew I'd somehow manage to pull myself out. Always have always will. My consolation? Women. At least there would always be women. This is when I started screwing around big time.

Everyday I use this spoon of hers. Evéline. That way I think about her every day.

As for Her, I can't help it, I'm cooling off. I wish I hadn't asked her to come and live with me. I can't have orgasms with her; my mind's always on you. She can feel me cooling off so She's over me all the time, doing her best to pamper me. I guess she's really attached.

Holland; the Egypt of Europe, so Diderot. I read that in a brochure once and thought; that's nice. Let me take you there.

Paris on the way back.

Everyone should be a silly bastard from time to time!

He washes my hair as we sit in the tub. A bit too small for the two of us. Our knees form a moat around an islet of suds. Ducky bob-bobbing in the middle.

We were considered rich because both my parents were hairdressers. My dad won the national lottery once. He was the first in the village to build an indoor bathroom. You had a boiler to heat the water that would fill the tub. You heated the water with wood. Once the tub was full, all the family got in. When you pulled the plug, the water fled into the gutter, out into the street; gloog gloogloogloogl–

He soaps me up. Dries me off. Tries to dry his face with my hair.

See. Doesn't work.

He leaves the room. Comes back with a box. Opens it. It is full of trinkets.

These are some of the things I bought for Evéline...

He takes out an item or two, looks at them lovingly. Raises his eyes to meet mine.

Post-coital jovial talk.

A fuck with you is worth 100,000 euros. God's word!

Stop saying that! He's gonna get you back.

I am not the love of your life. Stay my mistress. Please. You will get the cream. Not the skimmed milk.

JOSEPH 2:9
BERNADETTE 1-3

Bernadette. My first sexual encounter. I was thirteen, she was forty and pregnant; in her fourth month, with her fourth child. A redheaded woman whose body was already exhausted.

She had called over to my mum to ask her, Hello, would you be so kind and send the boy over to help me out, thank you so much. Of course I didn't want to go. Word would get round that I was a good lad. I knew what that would mean; I'd be running errands for every old woman of the village and sitting out cups of tea and

mounds of stale biscuits instead of getting real money for my pains. No thanks! Mother sent me off with a clip on the ear. When I'm grown up, I thought, I'm gonna bash you lot back, you'll see how nice it is!

Hardly had I got through the door, Bernadette (I found her name out later) grabbed me and ripped my clothes off. Bloody Nora! That day, I ran over to her house at least 9 times. Mother didn't mind. One less mouth to feed this evening, she laughed, at least *my* children are proper Christians she said, a clothes' peg in her mouth.

JOSEPH 2:9
BERNADETTE 4-7

The next time I saw him I told the curate I no longer wanted to become a clergyman. Never.

Why not, my son?

Because.

Live without what Bernadette had opened my eyes to? I'd rather go to hell in a hand cart.

Lick my clit. No, not like that, not so hasty.

For a minute it bothered me that there was a baby up there, jiggling around and watching us. But only for a minute. The strongest muscle in the human body is the tongue. I didn't know that. Bernadette did. She knew a lot. Bernadette said,

He would 've taken your faith if he'd said you could fuck around on the sly and still remain pious. You can't have it all, my

dear, no-one can. Mmm, that's nice. Now stick your tongue in. Can you whistle? Oh my lord, he can!

He took my faith by not saying this, don't you see? Those hypocrites fuck anything that moves, every widow, widower and child.

Indeed they do,
Bernadette said.

Can you pop over tomorrow?
She kissed me on the forehead before pushing me towards her front door. I stuck my finger in her one last time on the way out. I got a clip on the ear, but she was all smiles.

I reckon Bernadette knows what she's talking about.

Don't see the point in painting just for painting's sake, do you? It's painted to be seen, it's an invitation to dialogue. Your goal should be to sell it. Right? I know a girl who writes and writes but never shows it to anyone. Or my one, the Tchech, what's-his-face, making his wife promise to give the lot to museums. She was starving. Had five kids to feed and was working as a cleaner. She should have sold a couple to have something to live off. Once he's dead he's dead, what difference does a promise make? I got a Tchech girlfriend to do the interpreting between me and his wife just after I had learned of his death, but I think she was jealous more than anything and didn't translate properly. His wife and I had never seen eye to eye. After his death she wouldn't sell a thing. The maximum a painter could ask there back in them days was 6000 kopek. One thousand francs. After the painter's death, they could ask a thousand times more, and here was one poor woman with a pack of hungry kids handing over a fortune for nothing, and another jealous one sabotaging my purchase with her lousy translations. You women are fucking complicated creatures! Constantly tripping up on your sentiments. If only we could send you to war, you'd all come back being more useful.

My favourites? Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus*. Delacroix *The Raft of the Medusa*. Caillebotte's *The Floor Scrapers*. And you.

If you cry after knowledge, lifting up your voice for understanding as for silver, you will meet the wrath of God. (Proverbs 2: 3-5)

if I think of myself as Queen B it becomes more bearable

I dreamed that I had left Him because of his arms outstretched like Jesus. He had stepped out of the shower, had stood there chin tilted, arms outstretched, and waited. I was stupid enough to run for a towel and drop to my knees to dry his feet.

If he is God, the Son Of, as he keeps saying, then he'll have no trouble getting me back, will he.

Love is...

a 'white dwarf of an agony'

The truth? As in: honest-to-God?

I'm sick and tired of old men. Old men behaving like young men. Ridiculous old men with no idea of just how ridiculous they are.

One ran up a flight of stairs at the top of which he said, Well come on. Ridiculous. I don't have a point to prove, old man!

One with a series of heart attacks to his name and a girlfriend. Giving me the come on.

One who couldn't even get a hard on. Like I want that mushy thing anywhere near me I've had a mushy one at home all these years why have two?

One at work and his best friend sniffing around me for Christ's sake.



Little bunny from the Sadna;
Yellow up the front, brown up the back. And a bag of sweets for later.

One who'd heard I was now living on my own so thought he'd stop by. Trousers at least 3cm too short and his hair all greasy. Had he learned his lines? Brushed his teeth extra? Put on his best briefs?

One who under the pretence of selling me wood on the cheap kept looking deep into my eyes, mouth watering (at the thought of his nose in my cracks (in.in.out.)). Had a stroke shortly afterwards, so I heard. Heaved himself around town on a tricycle cos he never fully regained his sense of balance. I drove past him once. Watched his pocked face shrink in my rear view mirror. I knew his wife, I knew his children. No. I did not.



La famille

If it's true what they say, the correlation between the size of a man's hand and his dick, then take a good look at him, front row left. That'll be his wife next to him. Daughters in the back? Bet he gives some of those ninnies a visit when he gets the chance. Especially her, the busty one, standing right behind him. Definitely something going on between those two. Then again, her, last one back row, god she looks stern. She's not had it for ages.

Oi, grandpa, dirty old git, hold the child around the waist like a decent man would. Get them fingers away from her privates!

One door-to-door salesman. Very polite, but let's face it, an old man eking out a living from the contents of his plastic bag. Of course I had noticed the longer nail on his little finger. No idea which century that was en vogue I only know my grand-dad had one. My grand-dad, for crying out loud. I mean: seriously?

On the rare occasion I was ~~bored~~ curious enough to find out more, then only with a rubber on. Keep your sour old juice to yourself. Do not stick your tongue in my mouth. Greedy grateful grunting. A few hot spurts to crown your 3-minute Best Of. God, your poor wife.

Old man, what is going through your mind?

my ding-a-ling, my ding-a-ling

'Wouldn't mind a piece of that before I go'?

I am not *that*. Do I look like *that*?

There are places and tariffs for all *that*!

What the hell is going through your mind, old man?

going... gone! big nose in 's a dustman, he wears a dustman's hat
big nose out
in out in out
shake it all about

simple Simon says:



You can't bury me looking like that, I'm ashamed of what you've become!

Someone said to mother, a neighbour who was jealous of her looks and lifestyle,

I saw your husband at the brothel the other day with a girl on each thigh.

Ah oui? said mother, then you must've been there yourself, now, mustn't you? Let's see if your wife likes the sound of that.

I didn't say I saw him myself, I said I heard he was there. Don't you go twisting my words, you-

Well, what a relief it is to me to know your ears've been de-waxed. That means you heard me loud and clear too, doesn't it?

He called her a name mother said she couldn't repeat in front of us children.

simple Simon says:

See, I'm not one of these 3-minute men. Stay with me.

Why did you say that?

What?

That precise expression: 3-minute men.

No idea. It just occurred to me. No big deal.

Like that? Out of the blue?

Yep. Got a problem with it?

She said our next meeting would be in a month. I had nodded at all her recommendations but hadn't written any of them down so who knows?

Anything could happen between now and then

Is this even working?

I'm not the type to pray, so I sat in my car, outside his house, his shrine, out of view. And thought.

And thought some more.

He was in there, I knew it. Alone? No idea.

I thought, I watched.

I started the engine quick look in the rear view mirror got up to third gear relatively quickly. They say home is where the heart is.

No one was waiting.

Love is... emptied

*'my agony shall not spread
through and get to know a bigger room
than
the one it has constantly dwelled in,
to his unknown.'*

deleted

BOOK THREE
When Completeness Comes

answers were hidden, look in the mirror,
one must be brave, brave...

(Laura Gentile, from *Platonic: Fruitlessness*)

I guess everyone can't say the same

I once had a lover who
said to me:
Eat my shit
He brought me some on a
saucer

Did you?

I remember our first car ride together. I drove you to the bank to deposit some money. Parked in a side street. As I watched you from the back, your gait, the swing of your hips. I heard I'm gonna fuck that one in my head.

Is that it? Is that all? 'That one'?

What more do you want? What more must I say?

JOSEPH 2:24
FAMILY FORTUNES

Three sisters lived across the road.
All of them were two years apart. All of
them lost their virginity with me. First the
one, then two years later the second, and
two years after, the third.

I reckon you girls must talk amongst
yourselves, cos the friends or sisters of
girls I'd had came strolling in.

I knew my neighbour was a virgin,
so I proceeded carefully. I sucked her and
licked her, putting her at her ease. This
went on for hours, cos it hurts when you're
penetrated the first time, see? In the end
she started crying;

When are you finally going to make
love to me?

Haaa-ha-haaa! For her making love simply
meant sticking it in.

Yeah, I reckon you girls must talk
amongst yourselves, cos in addition to
those three I had quite a few from the
neighbourhood coming by after that.

When I was selling bed-sheets I got
to have loads of skirt. I'd get them to tell
their mothers,

Maman, I'm just showing monsieur
the way to a friend's house so that he can
show them his merchandise,
(haaa-ha-haaa!)

I'll be back in a minute, maman!
and we'd stop off in the woods for a quick
poke. I don't suppose I was a good lay cos
we didn't have the time and I just wanted
to get my rocks off. C'est comme ça. What
more do you want. What more can I say?

I once had this beautiful brunette.
Had her a couple of times, to tell the truth.
Till I got to suspecting that she was playing
games with me. I gave her a love bite and
when I came back to see her a few days
later, the love bite had gone. In front of me
was not the girl I had given the love bite to.
It was her identical twin sister!

Well, it took you long enough to
cotton on!
they laughed, but I was really pissed off
with both of them now.

I say the truth but most people would rather hear lies.

Don't lie to me, bébé. I want you to always, always, tell me the truth.

I once dreamed there was a cave with a jungle inside my closet
and in that jungle was a burning man

He had fucked my arse like he meant to kill me, ignoring my screams, pinning down my hands that flailed around trying to reach him, to push him away. He had each of my ankles by each of his ears, and hammered. Then waited. Hammered. Waited. He didn't even say Ssssh anymore, but rammed till my head and arms hung off the bed and my buttocks tilted to the air. In again

C'est bon.... mmm, que c'est bon!

I had to squat-sit for almost a week, ashamed that I had let him do that to me.

You enjoyed it, yes you did!

I felt like a beaten dog.

I don't like to cum in a woman; that's boring. I find it much more exciting to ejaculate all over her. I don't need to cum when I have sex. You do. Four five six times and more.

God is heartless. He loves no-one. Hates no-one.

a dandelion a briar scrape brief he is
brief scrape?

You say I'm the one, but maybe I'm just a messenger, showing you which turning to take on that godforsaken roundabout. If anything should happen to me, today or tomorrow, don't be sad, just think of it that way. But I hope to be around for a lot longer!

He's coughing more and more these days. When I place my head on his chest, I can hear him wheezing.

Dear Mme X

I wish to stress that the main reason why I tolerated such humiliations is because I put my children, Lisa and Paricia, first. I have always taken their well-being seriously, making sure they have a rich and stimulating context for their personal growth. I have always taken them to playgrounds, to playgroups, and ensured that they profit from multicultural, linguistic, social and educational opportunities. One of my greatest concerns has always been the children's academic development. I have been present at every school meeting, whilst their father preferred to stay at home under the pretext that he could not speak French anyway, and I have always provided them with supplementary pedagogic materials and supervision so that they could consolidate their skills at home. My children, if I say so myself, are brilliant pupils. This is not merely an innate condition, but one which can be fostered, as I have taken every measure to. It is thanks to my encouragement and intensive support that, unlike most children faced with the breakdown of their family, my children's grades have not plummeted (see DOC), but have remained stabled and high. At no time since the beginning of their schooling did their father ever sit down with them and help them with their schoolwork. He was not even able to tell you which class they were in, the name of the teachers, or even the names of his own children's best friends. He was incapable of telling when the next vaccination was due, and he still cannot tell you the phone number of the school or indeed of the children's doctor. Not only did he fail to show any active interest in his children's academic progress but he refused to reward them when rewards were clearly due. When Lisa won a prize for being top of the class (see DOC) – an excellent achievement despite the undoubted emotional stress of having to adapt to a broken family – he categorically refused, and with the approbation of his lawyer, to contribute to the costs of the summer camp I wanted to reward her with. Despite my own financial difficulties, and not being put off by his unjustifiable lack of generosity, I found the means to send both children on the holiday they indisputably deserved (see DOC).

Best wishes,

Should He live?

Who?

Who, she says, like they're ten million people we both, ah, the penny's dropped at long last. Well, should he?

Why shouldn't he?

You're in the best position to answer that one now answer this one, why should he?

Would you?

Would you want me to?

If you want me to. Would it make you happy?

Would you do it yourself?

No. Would you want to watch?

I-

Think about it.

I put a curse on him
I don't believe in curses
you don't have to for it to work

Boys were trying it out amongst themselves as well course they were. I saw my brother get buggered by the big boy next door. He was a good bit older than us, and he'd often sleep at our place on a Saturday night. Once I heard these noises coming from my brother's bedroom. I went in and flicked on the light. My brother was on his knees, this other big boy had him by the hips and was giving him a royal humping. I think I said something like:

You dirty bastards. That's what girls are for!

I think I also grabbed something and beat my brother across the backside with it. He knows I saw him though we've never openly spoken about it. See, it was just like that and do you think things have changed? Are you saying I come from a family of mental cases?

Either it was mother or one of the many village girls who'd come round to lend a hand. They used to suck my willy, I can remember it precisely. They had this way of pushing back the skin so it wouldn't grow together and need operating. It wasn't sex. I was a baby. It was innocence. And practical. And delicious.

as if famished pale-reeking mechanism

as if means to end
as if ends too mean

it's all breakable: non/mis/ab/ref-use

I had a girlfriend whose tampon got lost inside her. I worked on her to the point where she relaxed enough for me to be able to put my hand inside and fish it out. What?! Don't look at me like that! The whole hand, of course! A gynaecologist wouldn't have done otherwise. Anyhow, two weeks later, apparently, apparently, she had another one stuck up her again. I couldn't do that with you, bébé. Your tight little *berlingose* wouldn't take it. I can hardly get my finger in God I love your pussy.

I do hope I don't end tragically. So many of my friends've died of AIDS I'm shit scared of that. I don't take risks anymore. I'm too old for playing around. I've got Her and I've got you. Ok, the odd ex-girlfriend comes by from time to time, but nothing regular. Don't worry about them. And don't worry about Her either. No, we don't need to go to my hideaway. I know when she comes and goes, and if I'm in doubt, I call her up and ask her. Don't worry about her.

And these others, you don't know where they've been in the meantime...

Bébé, don't worry, I keep telling you. I know what I'm doing.

generosity is a vice it's not altruism it's extreme egoism

Do you know what he said to me?

What?

He said: God is on my side

Well, if God is on his side, God'll make him a happy man, won't he?

We'll see

God is on *your* side, Carmina

We'll see

Well, look at me, right here beside you!

Now, spread those legs and give God what he wants

The English taught me how to make tea. You have to use fresh, cold water every time, which is why I throw away what doesn't fit in the cup. And you let it brew for three minutes precisely. You, you like your tea weak. In and out, in and out; ten seconds. Ready!

One of my little bunnies, she had the keys to my place. She'd let herself in and go to the guest room and wait for me. Well, one night, my first wife woke up and saw that I was not in my room as she walked past on her way to the loo. She knocked on the guest room door:

Open up! I know you're in there!

Yes, I know you know I'm in here, but I'm not opening up. Go back to bed!

She went back to bed.

What did she say?

What can she say?

Well, the next morning?

Well, of course, we talked about it. The point was, she wanted to join in, but my bunny wouldn't hear of it. I've been caught in all sorts of situations, believe me. So if my daughter, or my son comes in and sees you here, keep your cool. It's not a problem. They know me. And they know to keep their mouth shut.

saying yes yes yes follow me

is that why I'm attracted to art; its generous way with the truth

(attracted to *her*?)

I'm not racist.

No, course you're not: you just hate Tunisians, cos they're a bunch of sly, disrespectful gropers, and Germans are a bunch of Nazis, the worst race ever to scarify the planet you said, or at least they would be, were it not for the Americans...

Bull! Shit! I'm not racist. What I hate is ignorance. I hate stupid bastards, wherever they come from. I'm not racist, but I don't see the point in pussyfooting around with people's names. You're black, I'll call you black. You're a Jew, I'm gonna call you a Jew, goddamn, and not a flippin Israelite. People shouldn't be so touchy. And if you're a fat ugly bastard, there's no other term for it be you black, Jew, chink or from the planet Mars.

Yes, but you got to look at where certain terms come from; the pejorative connotations they harbour, I mean. That's why people are touchy. Take the word nigger...

I didn't say you were a nigger clean your ears out. Have I ever called you a nigger? I said you were black.

I know what you said, but just look where the word is coming from. In German if you're the fool in a situation, you're the Neger: are we more stupid than anyone else? People associate particular nationalities with negative social characteristics: stingy as a Jew. Or a Scotsman. In German, if something's bogus, we say it's been turked. In French, a ghost writer's called a nègre.

Come off it, nègre is just a professional description it's not slagging anyone off!

Maybe the word's been depoliticised, which I'm not sure that it has, but in the beginning... look where it's coming from...

The first thing She does when she gets in is to check the sheets. For stains. For ruffles. The first thing I do once my ladylove leaves is the sheets. Pull them straight, or at least her side, maybe leave the bed unmade so it looks as though I've just got up. I keep my ladylove on my side of the mattress. Get her not to wear any strong perfumes or creams and stuff. I want to smell you, not some high-tech lab that lines its pockets with all your female complexes. She'll check the sheets. I've been loving and lying for decades, so let her.

I think about her more than I ought to

I wonder what she is like

Friend of mine, his greatest fantasy is to shit into a woman's cunt; idea turns him on like crazy. I'm not into any of that. I was going to say: any of that *shit*! I'm an ordinary guy with ordinary tastes. You know what really turns me on? Watching you wank off.

All men are dogs. Including You Know. No need to heave him up onto a puritan pedestal. Given half the chance, he'll bark like every one of us.

I can't cum with Her anymore. I fake it, but I reckon she can tell by now. You've bewitched me, haven't you? Put a spell on me so my sperm won't flow for anyone but you.

You're afraid of me. I can tell. You're like a fly – circling – trying to decide if it should sit down on the rim of that glass full of sweet-smelling juice... you oscillate... you're afraid of me, like I was of you before.

cannot do with reason what reason does not permit

words on strike cos they're not getting paid enough (attention)

You don't believe in my altruism? I *am* altruistic. I'll come to the aid of anyone who asks me and even those who don't. Doesn't always go down well. It comes across as showing off, it seems. People'll invite me out, and I'll pick up the bill. I just want to be nice, but it doesn't always go down well.

You're being disrespectful of their gesture when you take over like that.

Seems so. But it's just my nature to give. I don't feel comfortable about you inviting me out for this meal, for example, but I'm going to let you pay. Santé!

What if...

JOSEPH 5:17
JACQUELINE

I loved a black woman once. Her name was Jacqueline. She was a hooker in a bar, had slept with hundreds of guys, but she was so beautiful. Dark as ebony and so so beautiful.

I was the first guy to sleep with her without protection or give her cunnilingus. She ejaculated buckets all over the place.

One day she said that she was pregnant and that the child was mine.

When the child was born, I asked her,

Well, Jacqueline, what does the child look like?

It was a son.

Is he mixed, or is he blackblack?

She said he was blackblack.

He can't be mine then, can he?

She insisted he was.

Ok then, here's what we'll do: let's get a blood test done. If he's mine, I'll acknowledge him.

That's when she bottled out.

Then one day Jacqueline just disappeared. Apparently she had committed suicide. Didn't want to grow old and lose her looks.

I love black women. Love the taste of them.

Because they do taste different.

Not with milk. Milk and semen are not equal adversaries.

It is to blood

to blood that I turn

You can buy your luck: 4-leaved clover for 50 cents. Four leaves guaranteed, and I've looked after mine, watered and snipped it so I've had at least a dozen offshoots of luck stretching to the sun on my windowsill for the past two months. Luck needs cultivating. That's the long and the short of it.

He couldn't get a hard-on so broke it off.

Why spoil everything just for a bit of a poke.

Every time I've ended up pouring my heart out to a woman, it's ruined everything. She wants to change me.

Practice makes...? I think I know one reason why blokes go for young girls. Because young girls are inexperienced. Not only have they had less chances of being poked by every Tom, Dick n Harry, but having few to compare you with, they won't realize you're such a lousy lay. The only advantage they've got as far as I'm concerned is their skin. Oh, and gravity hasn't taken hold of their tits yet. Now me? I'm not afraid of a mature woman. I can take her on and I even prefer a woman who's had loads of guys cos that way she appreciates all the more what I have to give. She'll think I'm God after all that lousy shagging she'll have had to put up with till I walked into her life and she'll worship the air I breathe. Without the squabble. Without a squeak.

So he calls me Her, does he? My name's Catherine, actually. Katell to those who know me well.
So, what's he been saying about me behind my back?

It was early in the morning but I could already smell alcohol on him.

Un p'tit café-schnapps, he said. Et alors? So what? Listen to this–
He put his glasses on,

‘According to a recent American study, fellatio may reduce the risk of breast cancer by 40%.’

I snorted.

‘A study conducted by North Carolina State University has proven-’

He looked over to me,

‘*proven* that women who practise fellatio once or twice a week reduce the risk of breast cancer by 40%.’ What else does it say? ‘15,000 took part’, six thousand n something in one group, nine thousand plus in the other. Why didn’t they have groups of equal size? Whatever. ‘Women from mid-twenty to mid-forty’, na-na-na.... erm... ‘ten-year period.’ Other men gave their lovers real presents. I got dirty jokes and/or newspaper articles of this calibre.

Group A sucked dick, group B didn’t. In group A, ‘less than 2% got breast cancer’. For group B, it was ‘more than 10%.’

You don’t expect me to comment on that, do you?

Give me a reason to stay...

What if...

People're too stingy with their feelings. They wait until you're dead to say how much they loved you. Say it whilst the person's still alive.

That's fine, coming from you, who never stops slagging everyone off.

I do not. I shower you with compliments only you don't return them.

That's your fault for telling me not to get attached. On my own, I have a whole battery of nicknames for you. Won't tell you any of them, though, because if you see I'm getting too attached, you'll send me away.

I will never send you away.

That's what you say now.

Women today, my daughter, Brigitte, included, they don't really need men like before. They've got a whole series of gadgets they can stick in themselves. If they feel like a bit of skin contact, they'll get some guy, screw him, then send him packing. You screw us, not the other way round

I don't screw you!

Oh, sure you do! And why not? I'll buy you some gadgets, if you like.

Where shall I hide them?

You can keep them here.

It was good.

Mhm...

Thank goodness you have dark skin otherwise we'd see all the bruises.

God yes!

on *je ne regrette rien* elsewhere

there are lines I need to cross I see you, think: Long Way To Go

You've not missed much if you don't have many friends, I'm telling you. Most people on this planet aren't worth knowing and how can they be when they don't even know themselves. All they do is breathe in and out and one day stop without ever having worked out what the hell it was all about in the first place and d'you know why? Cos they're too friggin lazy to. They prefer to hide behind what they've been told are God's words, or society's words. They never take the trouble to listen to their own words let alone *create* their own words. Infantry, that's what I call these people. In a sense we should be grateful for all the wars on earth, I reckon. You and I are different, Carmina. Everyone else we know is infantry. You know, for all his bla-bla-bla... infantry. He'll come and go and the world won't even've noticed. When I look at people, I can't help it, I see them dead and I think: so what, your petty little life never counted.

My children won't be infantry.

Time'll tell. Mine are, sorry to say. When my daughter was born and I held her in my arms for the first time I knew she'd amount to nothing and for a split second I thought I'd do her a service by smothering her right there and then; save her the trouble of going to school, learning nothing of use, spare her the crappy job, the lousy husband. Spare her the bitterness of growing old, losing her looks (if she ever gets any), growing frail, cold-hearted cos cheated, waiting for children, for grandchildren, to come, but then spoiling the visit with her endless moaning, knowing full well that visitors came unwillingly and the only thing they all wanted was for her to kick the bucket.

There're billions n billions of us. Why're so few of us happy, Carmina?

You're afraid of me, I can see it in your eyes, but I'm not a beast. I won't touch you again unless you give me the go-ahead. I'll show you just how much discipline I have.

If I could only keep one photo, a single photo, then I'd take the photo of my grandfather maternal side. Here, I'll show it to you. I look like him, don't I?

No you don't, look at his ears.

Yeah, the only reason my ears don't stick out anymore is because I used to press them down all the time till they stayed that way. Otherwise I look just like him. That was a real love story, between my grandparents, a real, real love story. I wouldn't even keep a picture of my kids and certainly not one of any of the women in my life. This is the photo I would take with me.

Sometimes when I arrived he would be on the sofa, his feet up on the coffee table. He got up less and less to greet me. There would be some war film on. He liked war films.

Documentaries. Black and white ones adorned with veterans' reminiscences these bits in colour. Facts about the Great War, in which he would seek traces of his grandfather, however faint. He even said Sssh to me once when I gave him my brightest Hello! as I entered the room.

Shhh. I'll be with you in a minute. You can go through to the bedroom already if you want. Hey, where you going? Don't be so bloody touchy! Carmina! Look, I've switched it off!

I've got a surprise for you.

You shaved your pubic hair.

It itches like hell. I cut my bloody balls n they were bleeding. I used the electric shaver but it pulled on my hairs like crazy so in the end I used shaving cream and a brush.

You Know says women fancy you. Have you ever slept with a woman? I'm sure you'd like it. You're so sensitive, you'd like it. Bring a woman over. We'll take her together. If she's a real lezzo she won't want to sleep with a man, so check out her willingness beforehand. Would you like to do that for me?

I don't ever, ever, want to be subjugated to sex in the misery position ever again

More dreams, please!

I will take you where you think you don't want to go. Along untrodden paths, we shall dance with our devils; elation and enlightenment inscribed on our victorious faces at the point of our arrival.

I don't know how guys cope who don't have it off regularly. Don't know how they manage to think straight. At the very least, you have to wank off to let off steam. You Know's been away all this time and if he said to me he didn't wank, I'd tell him to his face that he's a fucking liar and that I don't want to talk to him anymore. It's okay to masturbate, I do it all the time and even went through a phase where I was at it ten times a day. Hardly anything came out in the end and it hurt like hell. But, you know, it's not the same. There's no physical contact, and that's what we need. You've got to have someone for that. One hour of sex is worth ten wanks and when you've finished, you're fresh and can think straight.

I can feel the tension between you and You Know that you're not even able to retain behind the wall of your teeth when you talk about the two of you. It pours out of you like a gas. It's purely thanks to your decent upbringing that you two desist from bashing each other. And it's all to do with sex. Sex is the most destructive, the most creative force in the world. And I, I spread the good news, like Jesus. I say Love, but nobody wants to listen. I threaten them, their world order, their old established values that they blindly cling onto like a flea on the backside of some beast. People're so afraid of change I am amazed we've even made it so far. And in their fear, they will lash out and crucify me. Blot out my light with their broad reproachful shoulders, flagellate those whom I have redeemed till they bend, till they bow, unable to seek solace in a promised land, which is none other than this one. Right here. Right now. I must die. And you, you, too, will kill me. One day.

I sat naked on the stool. Felt it slip around beneath me.

When you've gone, I'm gonna lick off this stool like a randy old dog. I wish I didn't have to wash today. I could keep the smell of you on me all day long. It's so... mmmh!

He cupped his hands to his nose and sniffed.

Ah!

He sprang up, ran over to me, spread my legs. Buried his head.

Don't waste your time and money with these psychologists–

They're therapists.

and their bla bla bla. This is what you need.

I can't be bothered to run after life any more. Right up to my mid-fifties, I was panting after life like every one else. Now, I do what I want. Sleep when I want. Eat when I want. Drink when I want. I stand above life and its fretfulness; what's the point?

That's very wise, what you're saying...

I dunno 'bout that. There are very few things I need in life now. And one of them is you.

You think I'm the love of your life, but I'm not. He is still to come. Oh come on, spare me that soppy look; it's the truth and you know it. You'll meet someone ten times what I am. I'm too old for you and what a terrible past I have. I cannot be the man you want. I'd like to be able to say that I knew you. One day you'll travel the world and everyone will want to know you. One time you'll be in Morocco, you'll pass an old man begging in the streets. Cross-legged he will be, white hair, unshaved. But his eyes, his eyes will still be the same old eyes reminding you of someone, so you'll put some coins in his soft hand as you walk by. He'll look up at you and thank you:

'Thank you, Carmina...'

thoughts skip ahead and leap to a long-desired death

Many women fantasize about being raped. I know it cos more than one girlfriend has confessed this to me. One girl kept going on and on about it. This was at the time of, let me think... my second wife. She was coming to spend the weekend with me. The wife was off somewhere. So, she wanted to be raped? The minute she got through the door, I whacked her full in the face; me a strapping bloke who'd lift 300kg just like that. She spun through the room and fell to the floor. I grabbed her by the hair and dragged her through to the bedroom. She was screaming and crying by now, not knowing what the hell was going on. I beat her up, tied her to the bed, tore her clothes off her. She was screaming and pleading, and got a few more fistfuls for her trouble. I got a cucumber and rammed it up her arse as hard as I could, then I left her there. Walked out of the house and came back a few hours later. She had pissed herself and shat all over the bed. I gave her a second going over then ditched her there, still tied up like an animal. This went on for 24 hours. She wanted to be raped, didn't she? Don't you, but what you imagine is some kind of friendly rape, where you say no a few times and he forces you just a little bit, cos really you want to after all. That's not rape. Being raped is not nice. It's not nice at all, and I bet I drummed that one fantasy out of her. When you asked me if I had ever raped a woman, you let on that this is one of your fantasies as well. Well, there's no such thing as a nice rape. And now I can tell from your eyes that you regret having asked me that and now you're afraid I might drum this out of you, too. Aren't you?

Did it turn you on?

that knot just evaporated though neither of us touched it
things are so much better between us now

on mar.tree.money
on future-future
on future-present
on getting into the box
on getting out
on liminal

on wanting to be her'd

JOSEPH 2:18
THE LONG WALK TO KAUFHAUS
SCHNEIDER & THE SHORT WALK BACK

My first guitar I bought in Rastatt,
Germany. I had saved my money five years
long, then walked all the way from my
village to Rastatt, setting off at six in the
morning and getting there around three.

When I got there, I learned that I
didn't have enough money to buy the
guitar.

Where are you from,
asked the shop assistant in Kaufhaus
Schneider.

From Alsace,
I said.

What, all the way from Alsace? How
did you get here?

On foot,
I replied.

And how will you get back?

On foot,
I replied.

We were in the middle of winter
and the snow lay thick on the ground.

Listen,
he said.

It's snowing outside. It's wet. If you
walk all the way back home, your guitar
will be ruined.

I stood and stared up at him.

Don't you have a bag or anything to
put your guitar in?

I shook my head.

He stared long and hard at me.

Ok, listen. Take this.

He gave me a cover to protect my new
guitar. An article he should have sold, but it
he gave it to me. I, Tatar Jean-Joseph Léon,
was at that moment the happiest boy in the
world. What did I care how long I would
have to walk home, I had time.

I have owned several guitars since,
but I always hung onto my first one. Till the
day I met a missionary who was working in
Togo. He told me about a boy who so
wanted to have a guitar.

I've been thinking about how best to manage this thing we have, Tatar...

Oh, no, here we go. Don't you know that, One, you can't manage it, and Two, the minute you think you can or have to, it's downhill from then on. Don't.

AFFIDAVIT #2

in conformity with articles 200 - 203 NCPC

Recommendations:

in order to be valid, the affidavit must be comply with the following:

- be written, dated and signed by the witness him/herself
- be accompanied by a photocopy (recto verso) of all official documents confirming the identity of the witness and bearing his/her signature (identity card, driver's license, passport etc.)
- include the following formula, written by the hand of the witness him/herself: 'the present has been established with a view to being produced in a court of law and I am aware that any false testimony on my part may lead to penal sanctions.'

I the undersigned

NAME:

MAIDEN NAME (if applicable):

FORENAMES:

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH:

PROFESSION:

ADDRESS:

RELATIONSHIP TO THE PERSON CONCERNED):

Have the honour to relate the following events:

AFFIDAVIT #2 cont'd

I the undersigned (name, forename, date & place of birth), declare that I have known Mme (name, forename, marital name) for over twenty years. We met whilst taking driving lessons at the same school. Two English women in a foreign country with few occasions to speak our native language. We became friends.

I confirm that Mme_____ has always been a dedicated mother, putting the children before her own interests. She also sought my consolation when things were particularly bad in her marriage. I was aware of certain humiliations she has had to suffer. I knew that she had been smacked in the face when pregnant with her second child and that she had wanted to file for a divorce back then. Sometimes she visited me with her husband, sometimes alone with the children. She would confide in me that their marriage was going downhill fast and that the day-to-day with her husband was unbearable. I was particularly shocked to learn that, in the winter of (year) when the heating was broken, her husband remained indifferent to her plea for help, knowing full well it was not only Mme _____ living in the house but his children as well. All slept on the floor in the living room, huddled before the few logs of wood in the chimney. -17°C outside. I'm glad the holidays haven't started yet, Mme _____ told me. At least it's warm at school.

The present has been established with a view to being produced in a court of law and I am aware that any false testimony on my part may lead to penal sanctions.

fait à (place)_____, *le* (date)_____. Signature_____

our Father
who art in heaven

& I here, dying

seeking divinity in my proper features

what if it can't be found where it's 'sposed to be?

What if we don't need to be punished, don't need to walk with ache in our shoulders for something other than death awaits us in the end?

Free. To roam.

All *he* may do is die...

he's only a man
hommelette ostinato

Free!

(spread my legs, stuff two fingers into me)

soft hard facts of purposeful becoming

Free!

(into my anus)

married to the wound

Free!

(put the same fingers in my mouth. Lick them off slowly, smell them, put them back in my mouth, suckling like a child)

whitewash 60°

free... to roam
because his hands are nailed.

repair.destroy down behind constant

Or are his hands nailed because mine are free to roam?
(I stop suckling. Look closer at my unfamiliar fingers. Jump up, grab the crucifix from the wall.
Ram it in, lick it off. Ram it in. Lick it off. Blood-smeared, shrieking)

Die! Die! Die! Die!

who am I to–

thick broth silence

I wake up. Appear disturbed, looking around as if in a strange place. I see the cross above,
behind my head on the wall. Turn around. Take it down. Hug it to my chest. Kissing it.

if this were memory it would be different

at some point there was a breach...

somefink's missing I can't be arsed to find it

free indeed... dependent independence. *He* said.

an exchange which has yet to be brought to a conclusion

statement of the problem:

when is Enough enough? I was asked Must an idea be easily understood or may we be invited to struggle with an idea, to work for our (joy of) understanding?

more to the point:

Is she really being oppressed? She has the luxury of the mirror and the hairbrush to keep the harsh reality of the world out.

observed reaction:

womenlaughter

in.in.out

spring of a patriarch

as in: now?

conclusion:

tba

You haven't quite picked up my angle. You're going too fast for me, Tatar. I don't want to sleep around or have group sex. I want a lover. I want to discover. Be discovered. I want sex. Good sex. Safe sex. I should always tell you the truth? I have come to say goodbye. I can't come here anymore because I'm not strong enough to be myself in your presence. Goodbye. Goodbye, goodbye... kiss me... I can't. I can't! I believe you, I believe you love me, but I can't... I just can't... why do you want to change me?

I haven't changed you! How can you change someone as quickly as that? One day you won't need me anymore, Carmina.

The words crumbled from his lips.

I'm just a palliative. You will move on. And I? Will die. On the inside.

JOSEPH 6:31
AU REVOIR PISSOIR

Toilets. Tricky subject. Now, women? Women don't like to sit on other people's toilets, if they sit on their own at all. They squat and piss and splash all over the place. They don't have it as easy as we do when it comes to doing your business in the open air!

One of my wives never used the toilet at all she'd always piss in the bidet then rinse herself afterwards.

I don't piss in the toilet I piss in the sink. Well, it's practical, isn't it? I just hang him over the edge and I can wash myself off, I mean, water is water, isn't it?

I hate these loos with the flat basin and a pool of water in them. When you shit, the water splashes all up onto your backside!

I don't like using public loos or other people's loos either as a matter of fact and let me give you a tip: have your loo in the bathroom. That way you can give yourself a proper wash afterwards.

It's another one of those taboo things isn't it but I don't see why.

Now, you see me? Even though I have a real nice bathroom, sometimes I go out into the garden for a pee. Fresh air. Slight breeze... yep!

I promised not to count the days but...

I am as I am
I'm made that way
what more do you want?
what more must I say?

if you're not up to scratch
get the hell of my back

I'll never subdue to man's sway
for I have my own:
you can't take it away

You Know never really got over the trauma of coming onto this earth on his own, you know. All his life he's negated solitude; fixed his sight on that other person for his sustenance. I'm sorry, but I cannot be that breast anymore. When I said Get used to the fact that we are alone because, shit, we come and leave this earth on our own he said,

No, even there, there's someone to help.

God, what am I to do with a man like that, knowing he will never let me breathe without his shadow stalking me?

I like my men with guts and balls. You have to have yours so you'll let me have mine. Nick? Nothing has he dared.

He dared you and look how that backfired.

He'll trot back to a safe Catholic life till it's time to slide underground with his flowers. Things are so much better now, with my white wife and my white son. Things are just as they should be!

he'd said. Someone told me. I had to laugh. I'm glad he's found what he's been looking for!

My current girlfriend? She's more than I ever hoped to find in a woman. She's the sweetest woman I know and I want her to come and live with me. But I don't love her. I like her a lot, of course. And if I ever find out that she's two-timing me, I'll ditch her. Never a bad word has passed between the two of us. Normally, my relationships work well for a short time, then we start tearing each other to bits. She's everything I've ever wanted. If it doesn't work out, I might as well turn over and die, for what else do we live for? When I come home late at night, she doesn't reproach me, she just massages my back for a good hour before going back to sleep.

What more do you want?

What more must I say?

My teeth seem to be spacing out. It's age, my dentist says.

All of them are real apart from this one.

Has he already stopped shaving when She comes around? Ah, then he'll have another one lined up already. Has he had her over for the whole night yet? I'm not surprised. He doesn't want her to see him take his pills and play tarot till they kick in. Or hear him fart cos he'd locked them up all day but they'll find a way out somehow. If you love me, that's his answer to everything. I bottled them up for two years before I'd let off in front of my husband. Ex-husband. That's the way it is. Sooner or later you spare yourself the trouble. That day will always come.

A lovely woman. A sweet woman. But she doesn't turn me on... I'm teaching her how to pay more attention to her appearance. It's not just because you're fifty or over that you no longer need to make an effort. The ripped jeans I bought her, she didn't want at first. They're the sort of jeans my daughters wear, she protested. Anyhow, I bought them. And guess what she puts on more than anything else nowadays, haaa-ha-haaa!

It's never their fault, is it, always ours. My ex lost interest. Said I was always there but have you noticed how quick they are to get jealous when you go out for a change? Where're you going all dressed up like that, he'd grumble, or else pretend not to be interested, hoping I'd change my mind and stay in after all. And when they ditch you for someone else and she moves in, isn't she suddenly always there too? You think he's the catch of the century? Keep him. Let the two of us have that talk in a few years from now. If you're still around, that is. They can change us as often as they like, won't make no difference to *them*, will it?

Did he ever tell Her he once paid two guys from Lyon 10,000 francs to liquidate an enemy? He always had a lot of cash on 'im. Fifty thousand. Minimum. People'll sell things more readily if you pull out such a wad and start peeling off the notes, he said. A cheque doesn't have the same effect. No way near. No brandish.

He's a powerful, a power-hungry man. Steer clear.

I've heard said that all existence can be reduced to four things:
space energy force & time
I try to see where we would fix our coordinates in this scheme

Did you know: the criterion for deciding whether or not a language was a real language was whether or not the Bible could be translated into it, that is to say, whether the said language had the linguistic prerequisites to represent moral values.

Our moral values, you mean?

A man wants to be proud of the woman by his side. People can't look into her head and see if she's kind or a bitch, if she's intelligent or simple. They can only see what's on the outside. You have to take care of your appearance. Mother taught us as young boys:

if you're wearing a red shirt, wear red socks. If you're wearing black shoes, put on a black belt to go with it.

It doesn't take much, see, but you have to develop an eye.

My previous wife had a great sense of fashion but she cost me a bloody fortune! This one'll never compare but she can still make an effort. She was married for decades to some jerk who never managed to satisfy her in all that time. She must think she's in heaven now.

I don't know what women see in him. He's never done it for me but I'm sick and tired of peeling them off me and hating them all the way to the shower. He'll have to do.

Nor is he the most well-endowed of men as you've noticed. He keeps insisting that size's not important but he has to doesn't he, what with the worm he's got otherwise where would that leave him? *Wer nitt kànn, wie er will, müess welle, wie er kann*: if you can't do as you please you'll jolly well have to want what you know you can, right?

All his talk about our loose fannies and him not feeling a thing, the cheek of it! I fake my orgasms. He seems satisfied. I get to live here for free. He's a good cook, give him that. No, seriously, when I cum for real it's never with him on my mind it always works better when it's someone unattainable what about you? Bet it's the same for Her, bet?

Says he's going dancing. Asks me if I want to come. Knowing I won't. Forcing me to decline... to make sure I don't turn up tonight.

I am as I am
I'm made that way
If I desire to laugh
Then I'll laugh till I sway

If She laughs too much, though, she'll end up passing water. That's how loose her bladder is. And even if she doesn't laugh she's still got to watch herself. Just sitting on the loo once the job's been done, just sitting there a while longer and it'll start to trickle out again. It's another one of those unmentionable side-effects of childbirth, right? The minute I spot her in pampers for adults – they call it something else but basically that's what it is – I'm out of it.

Him across the road's rather dishy. And there's this young one who comes to read the meter, if I were a different woman he'd not be in and out so soon! Want to know what really gets me going gosh I can't believe I'm saying this if mother could see me now! Two guys down there doing what they're meant to, fighting over my clit, both tongues giving it a real going over and me bucking like nobody's business, thinking, Boys, boys, no need to fight, there's enough for everyone. Fibbing through my teeth I am; I just wanted to see if you were listening. Haaa-ha-haaa!

On his last birthday there were all these women hanging around when it was clear that the party was over. I asked myself whether he'd organized something; He was always talking about group sex, trying to convince me I was a lady's lady when I knew perfectly well I was not. They left in the end.

she had a clarity of vision as if she needed to have stripped all
the dirty meat away in order to get to some purer place

we met each other in a good place

There was a change of tone, he looked puzzled.

Somehow, I dunno, I can't ejaculate with Her. I fake my passion and she can't tell the difference cos I always manage to satisfy her. Every time. But because she doesn't do it for me, I'll always have someone else.

Enough talk. What shall we try today, I know: let's start off with the lynx.

So,
he says,

you want to make love to a stranger in a frequented place? Shall I fuck you in your kitchen whilst the men are working upstairs, You Know amongst them?

You're not a stranger. Not any more. Besides, what'll you do if you hear footsteps on the stairs,

I had to laugh. His teeth are too small. I do like his hair and the way he looks at me, this man who claims he will never again fall in love and warns me not to get my hopes up.

You don't know how quickly I can pull my trousers on!

What if one of my children bursts into the kitchen and asks at the sight of us:

'Mummy, what are you doing?'

He kisses my ear,

Then,
he kisses the other ear,

You'll say,

'I'm fucking, as you can see. Please close the door.'

Please try to understand that you have the power to teach them wrong by being as many things as you have to offer when the time is right.

Have I got a good lawyer? Time will tell. The first one spent more time looking at my cleavage than at my case. The second one was too pricey and her assistant was a male, no use to me whatsoever, his sympathies were more with *him*, kept telling me the documents I provided were not admissible. I'm the one paying you, you little shit. Do something for the money I have to bleed for. Third time lucky? We'll see. Anyway, it's more important to know your adversary than your lawyer. Doesn't matter how things turn out, Nick will have lost. And he knows it.

I stretch him out on the bed to give him a massage.

I'm not so good at this.

Doesn't matter. All my women give me a massage and it's nice every time.

She left me a message. A harmless one. Slipped it into the book I was reading. I knew long before then she was around but what's it to me. He's happy and off my back. I get to live here for free. She's quite nice, actually. Now she puts my slippers under the bed instead of stepping on them.

on heart made bare, on agony, on suspense, on vertigo, on opposition, on innuendo, on *café-schnapps*, on the howl subsequent to the caress, on what if not as if, on obsession, on spirit, on the naked use of thought, on minding matters, on move-meant, on tear.her, on sauce.pence, on a gonnee, on maid (to) bear, on up.say.shun, on playgrounds, on but.her.flies, on a.noun's.meant, on hurry-came, on mist-eeries, on tie.her, on *on n'en parle plus*, on aura.tories, on be.you.to.fool, on nigga.she.ate, on plier.bull, on how I love you, on keep.hers, on heteronyms, on lie.sense, on love as idea, on mendacious morality stripped, whipped, on coupling like beasts, on Then What? on thought interfering with me, on when the blossom falls, on Quality, on I suppose I will see for myself, on *ne me quitte pas*, on why would I care about what you think? on harmony poised on the brink of secrets, on succulent warmwounds, on lassitude, on His Master's Voice.

on on on on on on on Word

Christian sol lol lol loldiers

marching

as to war

I have come here today as a victim of violence. This day, my husband came to my home (address _____). He came to pick up some paper and I let him enter the house. The children let him in, but I did not forbid it. However, and according to a *pacte familiale*, signed in the presence of a lawyer, my husband is supposed to give me two days' notice. Today he only sent me an sms in the morning to inform me of his imminent arrival. Whatever, I didn't want to make a mountain out of a molehill so I let him come. When he turned up, I went upstairs to my room in order to avoid him. As he didn't seem able to find what he was looking for, he came upstairs to ask me where it was. I was on the phone so I told him I couldn't talk to him right then and I asked him several times to leave me alone because he was in the doorway and interrupting my phonecall. I tried to close the door to my room but he used brute force to keep the door open. He's far heavier than I am so I stood no chance at all. I tried to push him away and told him that anything he was looking for would be in the house so he just had to go and find it. When I tried to leave, he grabbed me by the neck with one hand, I can't remember which. I tried to defend myself by lashing out at him, hitting him in the chest. He punched me in the face, the chest, on my back, and pushed me over to the wardrobe where I banged my back.

Q: was he still holding you by the neck?

A: no, he had let go of me whilst he was punching me, but I can't say when exactly. The fight was then over, at last, and I told him to get out of the house, immediately, and that I was going to call the gendarmes. He replied, "if you call them, it's war between you and me!" But then he left in the end.

Q: was he violent towards you again?

A: no. I went to see the doctor as soon as he had left and he issued me with a medical certificate. Here it is. He puts me on sick leave for 48h.

Q: are there any witnesses of this alleged act of aggression?

A: no, but the children heard the whole thing.

Q: is this the first time that he has been violent towards you?

A: no, but I don't want to talk about all that.

Q: why do you not wish to talk about it?

A: because I came here for what has happened today. I'm lodging a complaint for the incident today.

Q: is it the first time you have lodged a complaint against him?

A: yes.

I confirm having been informed of my right to compensation and of the option to make use of service offered to victims of aggression. I renounce this right for the moment but reserve the right to change my mind later.

Date, time (hour/minutes). Read through by myself, I adhere to my statement, have changed nothing, added nothing and hidden nothing.

signature of the person heard _____ signature of the police agent _____

Normality? Normality?

What's that when it's at home if I may ask?

Normality's always presumed to be elsewhere. But take a good look around you.

No-one is normal.

There is no such thing.

No-one is normal.

Every family a putrefying slop of violence and beastliness in subtle, or less so, forms.

How can it be otherwise, when families are made up of individuals like us?

I said individuals like *us*, not individuals like me...

How can our societies be otherwise, when they are made up of families like ours?

I said families like *ours*, not families like mine...

How can the world be otherwise, being home to the societies we breed?

I said the societies we *breed*, not the societies we need...

Normality is elsewhere, and you know what?

Not a fucking soul lives there.

§15

My Loneliness is rich in the nature of its unique constellation of heliotroped humanized projections no-one other than myself can appreciate. It is this world of intangibles of which I spoke.

And yet...

Sometimes I fear I will implode. I thirst for the banal, to be in the crowd, to be flesh, not mind(ed), lapping to my fill, gleaming, heaving, satiated.

I swear, I'll get him back.

If you ask me most men don't really love women as I do. They're afraid of I don't know what. They're afraid to taste you. To do the things you need to feel sublime. I'll do anything you want; I'll do you both ways, from the front, from behind, I'll lick you, eat you, even if you're on, cos I know, that's when you like it most. I'll do anything, anything, to please you, because I love you, all.

I think most guys, let's say eighty per cent, are gay. They don't really like women at all, most men. You know, the real odour of a woman. They prefer to slap each other on the arse, call it sportsman's behaviour, and peek at each other in the shower but they'll never admit that it turns them on. I reckon there're very few men indeed who really love women. Like me. Very few who admit to the true nature of their body's yearnings. And that's why there are so many of you out there whose bodies are secretly weeping. Like you.

He's not going to stay with her, though. Why does she even deign to go down on an old man like him if she's all she's cracked up to be why not someone younger. Bet she will in the end. He's not going to stay with any of them. Margot, Jacqueline, Josiane, Virginie, whatever they're called. Not with you. Not with your daughters. I'll be the one wiping his bum, shaving him badly and mopping up his spittle when the time comes. *Alles will àlt werre, àwwer niemes will àlt sinn.* N'est-ce pas? We all want to grow old but no-one wants to be old, how the hell's that supposed to work? He'll be through with her by the time I've finished the book I'm reading as for the Vergès, he'll never finish it, mark my words!

JOSEPH 5:18
SEX, LIES & CLOSE SHAVES 1-5

Me and a mate on holiday once shared a whore between us. It was important for her to be a virgin when she married so we had to go up the back door.

He pulled a rubber on. I didn't. In we went. First one, then the other, then both of us at the same time; him on his back, her in the middle, me squatting over her haunches. But then his rubber split and he got shit scared. Spoiled the rest of our holiday by fretting about having picked up the lurgies.

He hadn't. I could've told him that. Contrary to what a lot of us think, these women are super clean. I bet her arse was cleanest place he'd ever been to; cleaner than his living room in any case. I don't know what the fuck his wife does all day

but she's not on best terms with a duster, know what I mean?

Yeah, I've slept with a man. Course I have. In my younger days. Was okay, but I prefer women.

I've had threesomes and group sex. I've shared a girl with a mate, or my wife with a girlfriend. There were seven of us at it once. If two men are going to share a woman they'll have to like each other not only because of the trust but also because there's bound to be some form of physical contact between the two. Doesn't mean you're gay, though. And a woman, I reckon she'll have to have some latent lesbian tendencies if she'll sleep with another woman. Sometimes they say they do, and that they will, but they're just lying. Women lie. Men lie. That's life.

JOSEPH 5:18
SEX, LIES & CLOSE SHAVES 6-11

One of my wives wanted to try a threesome with another woman but I couldn't find anyone who'd fit the bill so in the end I took her on holiday abroad and we paid a beautiful whore to go with the two of us.

First she took us to a bar. Fair enough, we thought. But then she dragged us to another one and another one. And another one... It got to 3 in the morning and I was plastered, and my wife tired, which was probably what the crafty bitch was after anyway, so we paid her and told her to go home. She had the cheek to get greedy:

What do you think this is,
she shouted at the money we'd given her.

I could've had a whole load of other clients during this time instead of wasting my time in bars with you two!

Well, if there's one thing I can't stand it's when a person gets ungrateful.

Now you listen to me, you greedy conniving bitch, you're the one who dragged us off into all these bars so take your money and fuck off!

That's the way you have to speak to these people. Think we're sitting ducks? Well, she got the message and backed off.

So I didn't manage to arrange this thing for my wife, who is now my ex-ex-wife, but that's another story. She might've had her experiences in that direction in the meantime. Or maybe she too was just lying all along.

I don't know if I can make it tonight. I don't feel so comfortable sneaking off at night.

No, it's right that you should have some scruple. If you didn't, I would wonder. That'd be inhuman. Come, if you can. And dare. But whatever, don't feel guilty if you decide not to.

Ok.

The three of us slept in the same room last night: First-born, Second-born and I. We tend only to do this when we need extra emotional security, like in the worst phases of my separation. Their breathing in the dark was like the call of the sea beyond the horizon. I hardly slept at all, but listened, feeling guilty for what they have had to suffer because of my drive for freedom, knowing I would do it all again, for I cannot be other than myself. Most of the time I can handle the guilt. Banish it. I'm fine just the way I am, doing what I do, thinking what I think, wanting what I want, growing my own way, but the children's quiet, faithful trusting breathing was too much for me last night and counter-rhythm to my own.

In the end, I couldn't bear it. Got up, went outside. Waited for the dawn. I bared my breasts, my sex, to the night, inhaling deeply as they howled at my lack of means to pacify them. I am so hungry I could kill.

JOSEPH 4:14
THE BEGINNING OF THE END 1-4

Having children's the beginning of the end of the life of a couple. As a man you take the back seat from then on. As long as you know this, I suppose it's alright.

Having children massacres a woman's body. That's another cause for the beginning of the end. Childbirth pulls her all out of shape and leaves a gaping hole that nobody ever talks about. Muscular re-education classes: what a load of crap! Did your midwife ever say to you:

After childbirth, your tight little pussy'll turn into a bloody tunnel n when he's up there, he won't feel a thing? Oh, didn't she? I wonder why. D'you know any woman who'll ever admit that her fanny feels different after childbirth? Yeah, yeah, it supposedly creaks back into place like an old church door. You can feel the contractions of it and then everything's hunky-dory.

Bull. Shit.

Friend of mine paid a humongous amount to a doctor to make sure his wife delivered by Caesarian...

She'll only tighten up again when she's pregnant once more. It gets nice and tight and it's great for a man to be in there. Don't know why so many women feel it's wrong to have sex when you're pregnant. It's great! I've treated myself to a couple of pregnant women. Marvellous! Won't find anything better. I got onto the womanising track when my first wife fell pregnant. Didn't want me to touch her anymore. Pas touche? Her loss, not mine. Plenty more fish in the sea, n'est-ce pas? But then the child gets born, and it's flappity flap all over again.

I'll be his heiress. I'll be able to handle it when his children get ugly which they will cos their slice'll get smaller when he marries me and he *will* marry me. Don't you worry about me. I can already imagine the house, sold, renovated, filled with the colourful life of young souls with new dreams of tomorrows. God, I sound like Her, don't I, guess it's rubbing off. A new start is what this house needs. Not pampers for adults. Crumbs in the cupboards. Pills. Lies. Old man's cum. I'm not going anywhere and if I've turned a blind eye this long it's not because I'm a fool so don't you worry about me.

When we became a couple, his shirts were starched in a way I don't have time for, I don't have time for that I told him, Take them to the *pressing*. Dry cleaner's you'd say. Pleats so sharp you could chop wood with them, where on earth did she find the time ?

Men are a mistake we need to make said mother the night before my wedding when she poured me a sherry for the first time and I somehow picked up it was more than just a joke she was cracking. I remember how she pushed my hair into place. Her sigh. That should-I-say-more-no-better-not look of hers. Don't worry about me. Let them think we need them. Stupid old gits who refuse to accept we're no longer genuinely interested, who do they think they are, Robert Redford? Have you seen the way his balls contract just before he cums, a few grey hairs clinging to them and the rest of the skin looking more like an oven-ready chicken than anything else for God's sake. Men's balls look ridiculous, don't they? Is it really *that* they think we're after? And that big belly? And their sweaty feet? What's You Know like? Go on, let's bitch a bit. What's She been saying about him? I know a thing or two about those two. I'd rather not say. Later. Maybe.

JOSEPH 4:14
THE BEGINING OF THE END 5-8

You see those young mums with their great figures; narrow hips, perky backsides? All well and good, but if they birthed naturally, I don't give a toss how narrow their hips are, there's a whacking great hole in the middle you could land an aircraft carrier on. And their lips hang like two raw steaks on their inner thighs. Those girls, children you almost have to say; thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, who're already mums, what a shame. You can write them off for life.

Why do you think husbands drift towards anal sex? Cos they want to *feel* something! Problem with anal sex, though, is that the women take a liking to it then don't want it any other way. Yeah, and why do they take a liking to it, hey? Hey?

Me? I go the anal way with women who've had their children naturally, cos some of them've got a fanny on em that's so loose you can fit your whole hand inside. Two even. And clap. Same goes for some backsides, sorry to say.

Men shouldn't assist at childbirth if you ask me. She'll be screaming, farting, crapping, saying vile things to and about you and you, idiot, are supposed to just stand there saying, Yes darling, as you squeeze her hand or mop her friggin brow? Then there's the pushing and gushing and out it plops as from a sewer. Puts a man off for life. You'll never really want to be in there again, but we're not allowed to say that about wifey, are we?

I'll listen to those cassettes he keeps recording on his dictaphone, Au Revoir Pissier and God knows what else they're all called, marching up and down to the sound of his own voice, willy hanging out; cassettes so the world won't forget him. I keep telling him, Who cares?
He keeps telling me back,

My Words to you are spirit and they are alive. Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my Words shall not pass away.

I keep telling him,

Who d'you think will even know what these cassettes are twenty years from now?
Who'll have a machine that can play them?
but d'you think he'd listen?

You say; I'm Tatar, I'm like this. Basta! Well, I'm saying; This is me. I don't want to change and I'm afraid I might.

When I go home, I want to do the wildest things. I could throw all my things in a suitcase and run away.

Well, don't come running over here, we wouldn't last three weeks. I'm a difficult person to live with. It's easier to live with someone you don't love than with someone you do.

I call him to tell him

I'm not feeling well,
that

it's psychological as much as physical.
cook him up some excuse instead of telling him I cannot go on.

I was hoping that he would offer to console me invite me over make me some tea maybe give me a massage, but no. He was Tatar; if I came round, then for one thing only.

I can't help you,
he had said.

Something in my throat plummeted till it hit the floorboards of my stomach. Maybe this was just what I needed to hear to make my final resolve.

I think about you all the time,
He had said. What would make him happy would be to spend each night with me not his life
with me, just each night... Everything else was bla-bla-bla:

Why should you come round and we bla-bla-bla for hours, me with a hard-on so hard
my dick feels as if it's gonna snap and you with your cream running down your thighs so that
we both end up wanking ourselves off crazy when the other's gone. It's ludicrous. We're both
consenting adults. And in the best of health. Ludicrous, that's what it is.

At my last birthday there were five women present. Each thought she was my only lover. I wanted to see how they would behave; which one would be the conqueror. I didn't actually care who, but I knew only one would win. As the night drew to a close, you could see that each wanted to stay. One after the other, their courage left them. Only one failed to doubt her prerogative. The one I'm with now.

Are you still seeing all the others?

Nope.

Don't believe you.

Think what you like.

She's not the winner. She's the loser. I feel sorry for her.

Don't.

He's even recorded one about Her. What did he say? Something about some dinner party or other where her husband, Nick isn't it, said,

My wife's not romantic,
and she said,

Not with you, *darling*.

He said he'd given her leg a squeeze under the table. She wrote:

That's not true, he wasn't even there.

Nick kept coming round, giving us the details of their break-up. Apparently he'd beaten her up. When my one said,

They want to be independent, right?

I got up and left the room. They asked me to bring them a cheese platter, shouted the order through to me from where they were sitting, hatching out plans to cheat the wife out of her due. The problem with cheese platters: you can't cover up the spit. I brought them a cheese platter *and* a salad, good wife and hostess that I am. And there's not only vinegar in that vinaigrette, either.

Me? I'm looking forward to the next decade. See what's in store for me.

Me? Ten years on – three divorces, 12 apartments, one dead best friend, financial disaster, one serious operation... I don't want to know what the next decade will bring. I don't even want to know if I'll be alive. You, you haven't yet reached your crisis because you're still too full of optimism. Once you realize there's no turning back and that your every action, your every breath, propels you nearer to your grave, then – then – you will have your crisis.

He put his finger to my arsehole. Sniffed it. Disappointed:

You smell like nothing.

JOSEPH 6:2
REDDE M'R NIMM DEVON 1-4

I'm from Alsace in North East France, as you know, meaning: as I've told you, even if some of you've never heard of the place before.

We've been pushed around a lot: A typical citizen in their late 80s at the end of WW2 was born French, became German in 1870, French between the two wars, German again in 1940 and French once more at the end of his life. By the end of WW2 most people didn't speak French, but were suddenly forced to. Propaganda machine on full blast: c'est chic de parler français. Chic. And Mandatory. The same teachers who had taught in German during the occupation now obliged all the pupils

to speak French. No wonder we've got a complex. Many just refuse to talk about it. In Alsatian, we'd say: *redde m'r nimm devon*. There's a term for this kind of large-scale cover-up, I read the word somewhere: obscurantism.

I suppose we all develop our own strategies for dealing with a tricky situation, don't we?

At the end of the war, some used the Nazi flag to make their local costumes. Very nice cotton. Excellent quality...
redde m'r nimm devon...

I the undersigned, Doctor _____, certify that

Mme (surname, forename, maiden name) _____

born (dd/mm/yyyy) ____ / ____ / _____

resident at _____

social security number _____

a patient in my care since ____ / ____ / _____ is afflicted with a serious evolving illness
(_____).

The symptoms are as follows:

Mme _____ currently weighs 47kg, her normal weight before illness being 60kg.

Mme _____'s illness requires a treatment which provokes numerous side effects.
This treatment is one she must take for life.

This certificate has been issued at the demand of the patient and has been delivered by hand
for all intents and purposes.

Signature _____ Stamp _____

JOSEPH 6:2
REDDE M'R NIMM DEVON 5-9

The good old days? The clogs of our childhood were the poor man's shoes: village roads were made of dirt and often littered with the manure of the cattle on their way down to the fields. Clogs were robust. Clogs were cheap. The wealthier wore leather shoes. And of course there were still those who had no shoes at all...
Ach, redde m'r nimm devon.

French mums, they'd go to work (still do!) and think there's something wrong with you if you didn't. German mums, then and now, tend to stay at home and think you're a bad mum if you don't. It's their Nazi past. Or should I say: nasty? Keeping women in their place, under control and their pockets empty.
Ach, redde m'r nimm devon!

It's easy to say what to do when you don't have to. Easy to judge. I like to think

I'd've been one of the nice guys. Guess I'll never know.

Did you know that one of the devil's grandmother's Alsatian? So the saying goes.

By the way: in the 1990s 70% of the French avowed to being racist. Does that make being racist a defining characteristic of being French? Course not! It can only be a characteristic of those who were asked, can't it? But Alsace, my dear Alsace; one of the 'brownest' regions in France, I'm told. 'Browner than your arsehole!' someone once said to me. And I know a fairly well-known local painter whose name actually only contained one S, but he added another, to show his admiration for that ranting little man with the moustache and only one ball, the man he loving called Uncle Adolf. He had Parkinson's, didn't he?
Ach, redde m'r nimm devon!

I am Tatar, Tatar is my name

I am as I am
I'm made that way
If I desire to laugh
Then I'll laugh till I sway
I love those who love me
Though it's no fault of mine
If it's not the same person
I love every time

I am as I am
I'm made that way
What more do you want
What more must I say?

I'm here to give pleasure
Not a thing may I change
My heels are too high
My stature too arched
My breasts are too tough
Round my eyes are too parched
But anyhow
What's it to you, all of these
I am as I am
I please whom I please

What's it to you
What has happened to me
Yes, I did love someone
Yes, this someone loved me
As young kids love each other
Knowing
Innocently
How to love one another
And that with such glee

Why all of these questions
I'm here but to please you
Not a thing may I change
Nor do I feel the need to

(from the French, *Je Suis Comme Je Suis*, by Jacques Prévert)

Dust

You can't prove a thing unless I want to believe you.

Desire. Desire. We do not desire a thing because we deem it good, but deem it good because we desire it (said another wise man. Screwed his life up, though, didn't he).

For a while I thought he was carrying on with her. I asked him no end of questions about her but when I saw him ganging up with Nick to spite her I thought I must've got it wrong. Poor woman. I said to him then,

I pity her.

He said,

Don't.

Oh, I'll listen to those cassettes, alright, then toss them into the open fire. And if he asks where they are I'll say,

Where did you put them, how'm I s'posed to know? Have you hidden them somewhere and now forgotten where? I'll have a look. Where'd you be without me.

He's not listening. Too busy shuffling across the room with a song in his throat. He thinks he's Tony Bennett.

Luck stills seems to have this way of evading me; the type of luck that lasts a lifetime. I'd like the luck I share with you to last forever, but I know it won't. One day you'll two-time me and I'll throw you out, or else you will fall in love with someone else and leave me. Please, Carmina, don't leave me too soon.

Every time I say
I'm afraid,
he says,
I'll make sure you don't get pregnant.
It's not even that I'm afraid of.
What else then?

Someone I don't like too much said at least one thing that stuck:
civilization is built up on a renunciation of instinct.

Someone else I dislike less said:

where there's desire, the power relation is already present.

To which I'll add:

where there's power, there's struggle.

And I'll second someone else who saw sexuality as:
a dense transfer point (of power).

Not that I'm trying to join the league of great thinkers, mind, I'm just saying honest reflection'll take you to interesting places. Whether we focus on what's done or desired, there can be nothing reproachable in my search for love and knowledge of myself. We even have the green light from the bloody Bible! And as for God's forgiveness, course He'll forgive. He has to. Forgive us our trespasses and all that.

I had some money in a drawer with the silver cutlery. The day after a dinner party, there was 50,00 FRF less in there. About two months later it came back.

What's the point in saying *je regrette*. You mostly don't. Not really. I reckon, confronted with the same situation, we'd do it all over again and the only reason we claim to be full of regrets as we grow older, dragging our bony arse towards the grave, is cos we don't know what comes after, but one thing we do know: we're gonna find out sooner than we want.

What if they're right after all?

Getting that blood test done after all.

She could be no older than myself, yet everything about her told another story; a story of resignation: *it* didn't matter anymore, *it* being *being a woman*. It did not have the endurance to match the journey. *It* had bowed to routine; the routine of the relationship, the family, the work, the minor satisfaction that remained when she looked at her (minor?) achievements. Security – a physiotherapist gently correcting her posture – pressed her shoulders tenderly forward, rounded her back for her a little. Happiness, so-called, had filled out her waistline and etched an expression on her face. At least her nails are clean.

Suddenly I am glad that not all my wishes have come true

we pay women always pay

Getting smashed. Three glasses ought to do it, to stop me from violating my mattress. Ought to be enough so neighbour's dog's out of danger. None of them have a dog. They're the dog. You disgust me!

JOSEPH 4:7

EVÉLINE: JE REGRETTE

Évéline was beginning to get a complex about her age. She would die her pubic hair in secret. One day I walked into the bathroom and caught her with her leg up on a stool, applying the dye.

What are you doing in here?

She shouted at me.

Get out!

I got the hairdryer and turned it on full blast between her legs.

What're you doing?

she asked, half laughing, half scowling.

What does it look like,

I said without looking up,

I'm warming up my dinner.

I wanted to marry her, but she already was, and he didn't want to get a divorce. Five years later, though, when it suited him to divorce, and once it had gone through, she sallied up to me and said,

now we can get married.

Only, I didn't want to anymore, did I?

You kept me waiting five years, well, now I don't want to marry you at all. How's that?

All good things do come to an end, don't they, and one fine day, even Évéline and I split up. I married someone much younger. Just to get my own back.

The love of my life, Évéline was. She was always afraid that I would leave her for someone younger, but I would never have left her. So what if I did have my playthings, that's all they ever were: playthings. *She* was the love of my life, but I only fully took this fact in after she had died.

All the hurt I had caused her. All the things I wanted to, should have told her whilst she was still alive... the pain... the years... of pain... of memory... of regret... the years... and years...

We are never more human than when we are not

I've only ever worn my wedding ring on the day of the marriage itself. The same ring every time.

A harmless message, it was.

We've exchanged countless messages since then and I think she's stopped reading my book cos I can't smell her perfume after p37. Reckon she'll've bought her own copy by now if she likes it that much. She would like us to meet.

Do you think we could meet?

She has the posh handwriting of an educated woman but there's more than one way to be smart. I can talk like that. Anyone can talk like that if they have a mind to.

You know what I like?

What?

Your mid-drift. I like to scoop it up in my hands. It's warm and soft and comforting. I like a man to have a certain weight. When you fuck me I like to feel the weight of you crashing down on me. I'd like to cut out a kilo of your flesh and keep it in my fridge to play with.

Haaa-ha-haaaa! I'll give you a kilo gladly. Where from? No, not my balls. Don't weigh a kilo anyway.

if you're happy and you know it-

I'm whacked! You're indefatigable!

I've got some catching up to do. Shall I let you in on a secret?

Out with it.

I like the idea of you and another man.

I can arrange that. I know just the man. Good-looking. Discreet.

I want him blindfolded. This place is too small and we'd probably bump into each other somewhere really stupid and he'll be able to say: oh, I know her, we- no, I don't want to be seen.

Nonsense.

No, forget the whole thing. My slag of a neighbour, her across the road, once we had some visitors and the man said to me, I know her, I saw her at a swinger's club last week. Next time I saw her I asked her if she knew the man who was over at my place that time, I know she watches everything from behind her curtain, and she said, No. Well he knows you, I said. He saw you at a swinger's club last week. Couldn't've been, she said, but she went bright red. I know which of the two of them was telling the truth. One of the first things I learned when I moved into this place was that she had fucked the village idiot. Oh, you're so-and-so's new neighbour? Did you know... and I don't know how many people told me she had fucked the village idiot. He climbed out the window and down the drainpipe when they heard her husband's key turn in the front door. She ran down the stairs screaming, claiming there had been a burglar in the house but it was just to keep hubby at that side of the house so that dumbo had enough time to escape the back way. No, let's just drop the whole idea.

My biker cronies weren't interested in art all they wanted to do on our weekends was to get away from the wife and fuck whores. I'd drag them through museums that I considered interesting and in return I'd have to spend the evening in brothels. I wanted to go to the biennale in Venice but they wouldn't hear of it. French whores were good enough, they said. I haven't been near a museum for ages now, and that whole circle of friends has more or less died out. Overload.

I've got no time for feminists. They've got it all wrong and they're wrecking things for women to come. My wife started reading some of their stuff then she put it into her head to re-educate me. So-&-so said such-n-such. And so-&-so said such-n-such. She seemed to like the sound of herself suddenly talking all clever and that. Listen, I said, that stuff's not politics, it's not theory and it certainly isn't great literature. They've got no humour. Guilt breeders, that's all. Just a bunch of women wailing. Going to all that effort and what for? To be our equals? If they were half as smart as they thought they were they wouldn't settle with being our equals, they'd want to be better, but they can't, can they? Look, are you happy with me or aren't you? Cos if you aren't, the answer's easy.

We go through a lot, don't we? Women!

They told her, Get your ideas down on paper. Called it, what was it again: a therapeutic measure. I'd've just made it up and made it sound nice. Those therapists are all so bloody full of themselves they haven't got a clue. They think A + B, you'll end up with C. In this case maybe, or something approaching, but what, say, what if you end up with a letter of the alphabet you've never even heard of, then what? Are you gonna lie to me?

Analyse (what they think are) our thoughts. Proclaim or suggest (depending); *you are*. Turn the mirror to face me. Their: You Are becomes my: Am I? You take a good look, touch your cheeks, unbelieving. What is it they say: you say pig but it comes out sausage?

Monsieur, Madame, bonjour.

I order turkey. He, kidneys. They serve them with chips, but he won't touch em. No salad, either,

I've been living off salad for the past two days and am beginning to feel like a goat, he says.

We get embroiled in a conversation the start of which I can't retrace.

Anyhow. The vast majority are blockheads, which is the only reason why this crappy system continues to survive.

I say,

How can you make such a categorical statement?

He's always so declarative.

Do you, or don't you agree, he wants to know of me,

that the masses consist of blockheads, who're always wrong. Yes, or no?

You'd have to make reference to a particular situation...

Yes, or no?

Ok, let's say yes.

Because they're too bloody thick to see what's really going on, so politicians can lead them by the nose, and they're stupid enough to think their interests are being represented, whereas in truth, power only ever has one goal: self-preservation.

Reason's making us all stupid, have you noticed? We'll have to do something about that sooner or later.

Ding dong.

I open the door. Some red-nosed John-Boy on my doorstep peddling his wares. Tea-cloths and other items I already have by the dozen.

Bonjour. Can you ask the owner to come, there's a good girl. *Va chercher la propriétaire.*

He uses the familiar form; *va chercher la propriétaire*. Cos I've got to be the maid, haven't I, a black woman in a whacking great house like this. Probably already too full to notice the half a carat on my finger.

I *am* the propriétaire. What do *you* want?

I use the familiar form.

Oooops. Excusez-moi. Bonjour Madame, or rather *rebonjour*, I'd like to—
I shut the door.

‘What does my mother see when she sees me? She sees me not... herself is what she sees, her redoubtable past thrown back at her is why she does *not* want to see me, never looks //straight// at me but through me //I’m a ghost!//, around me, a stone parting the maternal shame *Schamhaar* : German; *pubic hair* of her regrets I am but a bad memory cursed mirror to un-suspend, face-to-back in a cupboard in a room no-one uses; mirrored darkness, secrets ad infinitum. Un-born. Borne.

Where were the stories the laughter that were my birthright if They were right? The laughter of communion? Comme (Fr: *as*) union... There were only sighs, mother breathing out, out, out... I had to practise laughter like a fiddle, an accordeon, pull it apart, make it wheeze like my mother’s sighs, pluck at it, slide across the gut of its strange melody that clung to the crevices of my mouth, fearful of the drop. But because I *had* been robbed of my birthright, because this right-turned-foreigner was naught to me how easy then to shove it in the back and watch it tumble with a anguished squeal, a noise, unnameable, untraceable to an origin beyond my birth and her own. //M//other... all achievement but a quest for the origin of the //M//other, and being //m//other, frustrating our self-appointed imperative to control, to name – we call her //m//other, but never by her true name – we make do with surrogates and are reared to keep that secret: *I miss you, what is your name, in truth I have never wished to be weaned, ever...* the original, perpetual cry of all sons... to live //what we call Life// but to long for that other unnameable by which I may see you as you are. Only when these two unnameables meet will there be light will there be honesty.’

So this is what his handwriting looks like. I take a few photos. This is the man he does not wish me to see. I slip him back between the pages of Vergès. Next to the whisky. And the gun.

I have a little surprise for you...

You've shaved your balls!

It looks ridiculous!

Like a snail who's lost his shell.

But I thought you'd like it.

I do.

And that way, that way, you don't get hairs all in your mouth when you play with me.

Itches like crazy.

You just have to do it every day. Like I do.

JOSEPH 2:10
(BRIDGE OVER) TROUBLED WATERS 1-4

I was always punished at school because I refused to obey. Every Thursday when the others were at home I had to go to school to sit out my detention. I'd take books along and read them. Everything you needed to know was written in books. Teachers were a mere appendage; an extra wheel on the cart that didn't help in the least for that cart to go one jot faster.

By the time I was twelve I was already a strapping lad. When I was in detention I'd traffic goods: cigarettes, condoms, the wares the older boys didn't have the guts to buy, which permitted me,

Tatar, to sell them at twice the price. What did I care? I had no qualms about going to the chemists and buying condoms, so let them pay for my courage.

The 17 centimes for the bus from my village to the school in town I would sometimes save and walk 3 hours to school instead.

With the minimum work, I was a grade-A pupil. I learned to read by the age of four. My brother would come home, get a cartoon, one from the many father sold in his hairdresser-cum-grocery store. The two of us would sit side by side, the one reading, the other, repeating. Within a couple of months, I could read all on my own. School? Piece a cake.

JOSEPH 2:10
(BRIDGE OVER) TROUBLED WATERS 5-9

They threw me out three weeks before my finals at the age of 15, the sods. I took my guitar and took to the streets for three quarters of a year. When I made a lot, I'd dine at the best hotels. When not, I'd content myself with a chunk of bread and a bed under the bridge.

Then the winter came. The days grew short. The nights, colder. Snow settled in a hush on the ground like a brooding hen. It was time to go home; to relinquish the den under the bridge in Besançon. Thumbs up, lips down, curled against the cold, I stood by the roadside in wait of grace. All I had with me was my

guitar. The suitcase I had left in the hotel, along with the bill I couldn't pay.

I will die of cold before I reach home...

An overloaded 2CV slows down. Reverses through the snow, backtracking like fingers through wet sand. I huddled in, the third passenger in the front passenger seat. Four young girls giggling in the back. I heeled off my soiled, frozen shoes. Stuck my toes directly in front of the heater...

In Strasbourg, hours later, they woke me up. With still 10 francs to my name, I could take public transport to my home village. Or... that would be nice. For my niece a cuddly toy for Xmas, How much was it? She still writes to me today.

Every woman is a *femme fontaine*. I just haven't worked out yet how best to take you there. Somehow you always hold back. Let yourself go. Just let yourself go...

Look at me, how can you want to be face-to-face with a gob like mine? Not even shaved. I must look like a savage.

I like it, I swear, especially when you bristle over my nipples or my backside.

You see. There's still so much more in me to discover. So much more sexuality. I'm afraid of when my body starts to let me down. This morning my joints were as stiff as ever. If I don't have my health and strength so that I may continue to love, what is the point in living? My perfect death would be in the throes of an orgasm.

And what about the poor woman in your bed?

That's her problem. I'm out of it by then!

Some women knew the man was infected, with syphilis it was more likely to be in those days, but they still slept with him and ended up paying with their lives. Can you explain that? Was he really that good?

There is not a single passion which is not also a virtue.

The theoretical complement to a primarily aesthetic reality.

I think you're right.

I know I am. Would rather not be, though.

Shit. Life; I don't think we were destined for it.

I kind of miss her. Once she left a dried flower in my book so I know she's got nothing against me so I left her a message in my blue sequined slipper in return, do I think we could meet?

Yes.

Oh, I'll have to go, I'm in the devil's pond, there'll be the broken mirror in my orchid past midnight.

They're all special. The guy leaning over his shovel all day making sure his mate digs up the road right's special. The king of the Ham & Cheese counter's special. And if you're one who gets to wear a shirt & tie, boy you're special. We're all special. Special in our own meaningless worlds.

Dear Mme X,

With reference to the case at hand, I contest the allegations that have been made by Mr X. We sought marriage guidance with two specialists. One, Dr X (see DOC), advised Mr X to tackle his aggression, his sexuality and his sense of masculinity. He invited Mr X to return for further counselling. He never went. Another specialist declared our marriage 'dead', upon which we sought a lawyer (see DOC) to draft a *pacte familiale*. It is, therefore, untrue that I threw him out. He left after we had mutually agreed that our marriage was over. Good riddance, I'd say.

Best wishes,

PS, may I pay your last bill in three instalments?

Every river flows into the sea, but the sea is not yet full. (Ecclesiastes 1: 7)

I wasn't angry with you. I realized it was late and you were tired. You have your own life, who doesn't? And as such, a thousand and one reasons why it might not suit you to come by. Don't you worry about me. I am not a lonely man.

it was not silence, there was language, but can you speak it?

it said: yes, I can be accommodating, I, the ungiving

I can accommodate your need to have the last say

though this hardly generates dialogue

it said so many things that deserve elaboration

but as I am accommodating...

it is not silence

merely a language you do not speak

dreams & revolutions

Cows are holy creatures. Their horns are in direct contact with the cosmic energy. If you cut off their horns, you break the link and their milk is no good.

unfigurable floating

observed results:

every twinge, every tingle of my body – every folding of my organs every churn that burned from the deep, up, to leave an abrasive clang on my skin –

conclusion:

is feared as indication that I had gone one step too far.

They say priority is given to the primary mention in a dyad but I'm not so sure...
left/right... but then we also talk about having the last word... the right is always right...
So now you're going to say the last will be first, aren't you?
But the left is mentioned first.
Left's what's left. Left's the hand you wipe your bum with.

Yes, I look sad. I've been worrying about you all weekend, trying to interpret your gruffness towards me.

Is there always a reason?

'Kiss my spout'

tip me up and pour me out

JOSEPH 6:20
D.I.Y.

Hands are very important. I'd get mine done once a week, my arms stretched out on either of me and pampered for an hour!

My hands are my living. Thanks to these hands, I shall never be in want. I can go anywhere and find work. You can drop me in the middle of Africa and I'll find work, help others how to work. Repair things.

At a period in my life when I was really pissed off, I disappeared to Canada. Did the east coast to west coast. In Vancouver, I wandered into this immense antique shop. Must have been at least 200 metres long. Right at the back I spotted a painting I thought was a Henner. Couldn't be sure from that distance, of course, so I started walking towards it. Half way through the shop, the shop assistant came up to me and asked me if she could help in any way.

Excuse me, I said, but isn't that painting back there a Henner?

Yes, it is! Henner's a painter from Strasbourg, she went on to explain. So I was right.

Henner painted red-headed women. The owner of the shop, an old Jewish man, came up to me and we got talking. He discovered that I was into the antique business and he offered to take me on there and then. Would have paid me \$2000 a week and given me a flat. The works. I could've restored his furniture for him, but I said no. He couldn't pay me what I was worth. I had all my gear back home anyway, waiting to be taken care of. Furniture to strip, renovate, sell. Export...

My hands are my living. My second brain. Just because you're a craftsman doesn't mean you can't look after your hands. Mine are always creamed, my nails clipped weekly and taken care of, which I do myself nowadays...

Who needs knowledge. I need faith, in myself. In my dream. Enough faith to transform the dream from a wish to a certainty. Enough to summon the messengers and recognize them for whom they are. Enough not to bludgeon out that inner voice with (blind) reason. To leave those still caught in the inertia of fear there where they are, my respect/understanding uncoloured by judgement as I move on. Your dream is not mine. Mine is not yours. Know. Do. Don't regret.

Fancy a jog, but when's the right time? Lunch-time? I'm less likely to bump into anyone. All the proper households'll be eating what mother's been preparing all morning. Worried about before falling asleep. Rushed home from work to put on the table in/on time. Tick where appropriate. Only, with all the proper people well seated and feeding, who else might I bump into, the improper/vagrant type. Innit? And who'd be there to help? Another vagrant. Innit? They'd turn it into a gang bang leave me crumpled soiled shamed by the wayside alongside the rest of man's debris (tick where appropriate); plastic bags tin cans wrappers crackers the odd shoe the odd hat the odd this or that. The odd raped body, anybody's for a fistful of vicious minutes, for the rapist dissolving into anonymity/normality; not odd at all; that's what wimmin want. Innit? So, go in the afternoon instead, once proper people've been duly fed? More of them'd be around; out there walking pampered hounds. Nature lovers. Animal lovers. Naturalists. Misanthropists. Tick-

Nope. I'll take my jog at lunchtime. In my banana belt; a penknife a siren some tear gas to spray. Feels safer that way.

I can't I can't I can't!
let me go! let me *go*, Tatar!
you're hurting me!
let me go!
open that door
open that door right now! Right-

no! no, don't!

Don't!

BOOK OF PARABLES 1:6
DO AS THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE 1-4

A poor man who had lost all he had cherished set up home on the street not too far from a church. Every day the good people of the neighbourhood walked by. The priest walked by. The doctor walked by. The citizens with their secure salaries walked by the poor man who had lost all he had cherished and so had set up home on the street.

One day a newcomer, just moved in on the first floor across the road, saw the poor man who had lost all he had cherished. When she walked by, she said

Hello.

The poor man replied.

The next time she asked

How are you?

The poor man replied with a laugh.

Often when the newcomer came home, there he was the poor man, skin and bones rattling inside a threadbare coat pinned to a thick strip of cardboard by what was left of his rump.

His name, he said, was Jonny. He said

It's actually something else but you can't pronounce it, so everyone calls me Jonny.

Jonny was not from these parts. Through fate or malice he had ended up here far from his native land in Eastern Europe. Sometimes he would not be sitting there when she walked by and her thoughts would stretch out to him, wondering whether he were still alive.

BOOK OF PARABLES 1:6
DO AS THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE 5-9

One day it was so terribly cold she brought him a hat. On another it was so terribly windy she gave him two jumpers, of which he pulled on one and cushioned his arse with the other. One day Jonny was no longer there and she was worried indeed.

Relieved she was to see him the following morning as she stood on her balcony after checking the cupboards to see what was absolutely necessary, for she was but a poor student herself and every cent counted.

On her way to Iceland with a small knapsack for her groceries she said to Jonny

Hello.

Cold was the morning but the walk would do her good plus the bus-fare saved could be better spent.

Jonny was no longer there upon her return. Great was her disappointment. Three times she stepped onto her balcony, only to have to confirm: the spot across the road remained vacant.

Shortly before the good people of the town began to return to their ordered evenings, the poor man who had lost all he had cherished placed his cardboard, his jumper and his illegible plastic bag on their spot not too far from the church.

Hello Jonny, how are you?
Jonny looked up to see the newcomer stamping her feet to cheat the cold.

I bought you a frozen pizza. I'll bring it down in a bit.

Thanks. Kind of you. But
I'd rather a cup of coffee if it's alright.

A fistful of ideas clutched at and shoved upon you. Influencing the core and making its peace unbearable. Only by then it's monstrous. But who cares, right?

place _____, date _____

Re: last among equals

Dear maître _____,

In the case at hand I have permitted myself to compare the handling of my divorce to that of Mme X, who has been accorded a far higher compensation than I have despite the fact that her husband earns less. As mentioned previously, both men work for the same company, where each employer automatically receives an increase of around 3%p/a. It is out of the question, therefore, that Mr X salary has increased whereas my husband's, or so he claims, has decreased by €30,000,00 in comparison to the preceding year!

Please take a look at the following data:

Mme X

- married for 20 years
- two children

Mr X

- annual salary year X
(cf divorce convention)

Mme X

- entitlement to live in the house rent-free
- professionally active

- accorded €1500,00 p/m maintenance allowance by the court

- accorded €350,00 maintenance per child

- accorded €170,000,00 compensation by the court

- Mme X is white

My case

- married for 20 years
- two children

My husband

- annual salary year X
(cf pay slip)

My case

- entitlement to live in the house rent-free
- no longer professionally active due to medical conditions

- accorded €250,00 p/m maintenance allowance by the court (not paid since year/month/year)

- accorded €350,00 maintenance per child

- accorded €30,000,00 compensation by the court, despite the judge proclaiming my husband to be entirely and exclusively in the wrong

- I am black

May I ask you to add these observations to your conclusions and I remain, to be sure, at your disposal for any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Attachments:

No-one's right or wrong once the odds are set and I've found the next stone to jump onto.

the strongest pain I feel is just me

something like this but still not near enough

O I !!

well don't!

on lie.sense. on keep.hers finders losers weepers. on harmony poised on the brink of secrets. on
blank impossibility. on working out some of the difficult issues before we share them.

The Others become a border to be constantly overcome.

got no time to fall in love
nor the nerves, tell the truth
got bloody rotten taste in men
should know better
never do

know what, bugger the lot of you!

Yes Yes Yes. Very Very Very. More More Mort.

the show must–

you pays yer money after all

There is always room for more. (Proverbs 27: 20)



Bernadette

How does my hair look? Not too frizzy?

He can't keep his mouth shut even when he's off set, listen to him! Oi, Tatar, shut up for once, there's a love!

Anyone fancy pizza?



Later she was in the papers. She had been strangled. Found in her bedroom. No sign of break and enter. They said it was murder. But it's not true. It was an accident.

Carmina?

Yes?

That was fine, but could we, erm, try it again, maybe, a bit more... erm... sultry? Lay your arm more to the side this time so we get a more generous view of your chest. Tatar, when you grab her, grab her hard, real hard, so the pain she feels is real, okay?

If he grabs me too hard I'll slap him.

Then slap him.

If she slaps me I'll slap her back.

And: five... four... three... two...

'Dear Antoine,

My wife and I are getting divorced after years of tortuous miscommunication. We've both been vicious towards each other and in certain ways I went too far but the truth of the matter is I still love her and I want her back. She is and will always remain the love of my life, which is now grey without her. Is it really too late?

Anonymous'

He thinks he's got class they all do. Thought I'd be impressed by the four-star hotel we'd stolen away to, just goes to show how little He knows me. If you had so much class, how comes it was me forking out hundreds for a posh meal whereas all you could manage was to take me out to eat Greek, a 40€ evening all in all, plus a quick poke on the bridge, which I refused.

Don't know why the hell you all assume you're above me or why you're all so fucking tight-fisted, like the one I told to bring along a bottle of red (even if it came from the supermarket) but what did he do, he turned up empty handed, didn't he, reeking of onion (or was it garlic) as he laboured out of his clothes in the cheap hotel behind the Gare de l'Est. All we need is a big bed. His words. Tight-fisted. Mine. Greedy enough to want a second helping, tho, wasn't he. I said, No. Okay, he said. He only wanted to make love to women who appreciated it anyway.

why do we steep to this?

and then that cockiness in their voice afterwards
the tone – 'I've had you' –
which they believe entitles them to rights I will never grant them.
Ever.

Didn't even occur to him to offer to pay for my train ticket. Second helpings indeed!

I thought you had only ever known one other man. That's what He said.

Then there's all the talk about the wife, she's this, she's that, moan moan moan but you go back to her all the same don't you.

what you say about Peter
– or was it Paul –
tells me more about you than it does about Peter –
or was it Paul?

'it is his wound and it is rotting... suffocates his pseudo-hollowness with dick'

The trick is to appear to be listening, Nod in the right places but don't tell em what you really think.

I've only ever told one person that:
clean up your couple otherwise your wife is going to fall ill, I said

And did he listen?

did you see that in a dream, he wanted to know
no, but get it sorted

he was my favourite. I wanted to give him the chance to do something right.

And You Know? I mean, Him?

No.

call me a wound that never heals this is my life the familiar question it cannot be right
tell me something I don't want to get involved I'm not giving you any money if you ask me
most men don't feeling melancholic today whenever I'm happy and no, it doesn't wear off
with age did she at least come along? I've got no idea eight, eight thirty we talk about
doubt & fear & I well what's it to you? you didn't come I went to see the doctor, he said
did you play with yourself don't the lying bitch I can swear anything you want just
shuddup and lissen I can't help it if you cry don't see the point you say I'm the one but
maybe what if we don't need to be well what's it to you? how much do you want there
was a change of tone don't we all it was early in the morning she enters the room they
threw me out it cannot be right never more human ding dong I have a little surprise for
you this is my life because you're afraid of me as if I hadn't noticed in so doing please
try to understand I can't be bothered yes, I look sad you can't prove a thing all of this is
real please try to understand a wound that never heals sorry call me all my senses are
what happens to hope loose like I was always punished sorry dust no one's right or
wrong please try to we'll go somewhere no one understand that knot just evaporated
dreams and/or/(of??) rare volutions

(((∞)))

I wake up elsewhere

or

elsewhere I wake: Up!

motionless terrifying gargantuan instant

I remember the exact moment
vibrant in the here

in.volved

it's so easy

(je ne regrette) rien

a pebble of a doubt

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INDEX OF FIRST LINES

BOOK ONE

call me a wound that never heals	5	I've been bleeding for three weeks	36
in the beginning was the Word	7	sometimes the two of us sit down	37
in the beginning I thought	8	who said: I ignore Nick's	38
I had my first cunnilingus	9	o o o o o o o	39
whilst he was working out	10	why did you marry him	40
I so spent my childhood	11	o love painted a mouth about to	41
I am Carmina, Carmina is my name	12	don't	42
for we know in part	13	take the time to see my juice?	43
this is my life	14	I don't want to get involved in	44
statement of the problem: what is	15	thanks, Nick. I like to consider	45
I sent him a message	16	oh that?	46
I spent over ten years	17	I remember mother's home-made	47
it cannot be right	18	mother, the lying bitch	48
it's so easy to impress young girls	19	there are three of us altogether	49
statement of the problem: trying	20	and Brutus was	50
he is coarse	21	when I was a child, I	51
can I tell you something?	22	he lay in a manger	52
try not to be afraid of the hard time	23	everything came from the earth	53
I made the mistake of telling	24	I never had an old bike	54
they will insist n sniffing	25	just before he left he sang	55
tell me something	26	your joy is your own	56
I love women, I dunno	27	as if I had been slipped a pill	57
ping my earlobes from the back	28	her name is Dr Schonbaum	58
fidelity's an illusion, he said	29	we know she takes advantage	59
young girls like me cos I know how	30	she enters the room	60
o lovely pussy o pussy my love	31	all owed, hallow'd	61
I was at the disco once	32	experiment: marr-ied life?	62
there are three ways to have safe	33	pussy puss he pooh	63
statement of the problem: them	34	skim uninterrupted	64
ah, Nick, what a surprise	35		

don't we all need our	65	will you miss him?	95
so you think you're Cinderella?	66	the spirit is willing	96
he hadn't made the bed	67	I remember: I went with	97
all the sperm She	68	a clever but by no means	98
ambitious people have ears	69	I'm just full of ideas, me	99
women know who I am	70	who said: It's funny you should	100
who said: time can only be	71	there was this young woman	101
as if in.volved	72	how much do you want?	102
Dear Suzanne	73	I'm ashamed to be white	103
when I was 18	74	the purity of childhood	104
let him wait	75	Father, I no longer wish	105
your ears smell nice!	76	because:	106
then the LORD God placed	77	stay away from him	107
beauty fall	78	there's the me I know	108
repair.destroy	79	Ile de la Réunion	109
who said: if you're in a hurry	80	we had the papers drawn up	110
the familiar question	81	but my ideas never run out	111
am I a masterpiece	82	now you have two men	112
in the beginning was	83	beige shaggy pile	113
that shade of red	84	if you dream something	114
there's innocence and there's	85	make up (verb): to invent	115
journalism journal ism	86	10000000000000000	116
as if I hadn't noticed	87	who said: vibrant in the here-&-now	117
from this it necessarily	88	if everything God did	118
there are four things	89	angels & demons everywhere	119
our passion will abate	90	hot water?	120
as in	91	when mother died for some	121
I remember how much we	92	what do you write	122
there <i>are</i> angels in this	93	why are so many men	123
would love a holiday	94	who said: when I myself am afraid	124

I've got no idea what Thibault	125
what do men like?	126
on the train back	127
particularly fond of what was her	128
Dear Suzanne	129
tomorrow's Father's Day	130
the buffet has bad vibes	131
did you know: there are	132
you had to find the twins	133
the children and I swopped	134
my wife, the silly bitch	135
I'm so rich	136
I, Tatar, am faithful of the heart	137
I am not important enough	138
And: cut!	139

BOOK TWO

a beauty prepared for hours to say	143	your mistress is game	174
in the beginning was Desire...	145	I had to get down on all fours	175
I am Carmina	146	crawl up to my face...	176
love is...	147	your mistress is game	177
voulez-vous...	148	your mistress is game	178
you have to be in there	149	<i>then he got his tongue out</i>	179
no safe words here	150	he threw the sheets back	180
I remember the exact moment	151	<i>then he got his ...</i>	181
we went for a week to the	152	a woman's arse is looser than	182
feeling too melancholic today	153	and no, it doesn't wear off	183
watch me piss	154	love is...	184
if I tell you all my stories	155	I won't cry	185
memories sit loose; loose like	156	he had been holding back	186
when I was young, I used to	157	<i>2nd marriage, mid-30s:</i>	187
Dear Mme X	158	to throw back the sheets and	188
my son's mother's a real	159	<i>in the beginning is a lie</i>	189
father had been as pleased as ever	160	apparently You Know asks the	190
perhaps he would have loved	161	whenever I'm happy, it goes wrong	191
on my back, skinny and almost	162	everyone busy	192
when you ask, Do you want to	163	<i>those that have shall get</i>	193
if She suspects something	164	darling, this is Guillaume	194
you feel all oozy because	165	vicious joy	195
after my last wife, I decided	166	something unpleasant. Hostile.	196
I prefer not to comment	167	look past the words to the	197
your mistress' eyes will shine	168	cables everywhere	198
<i>me sick an tired of telling</i>	169	a.noun's.meant	199
when you say Darling to your	170	<i>statement of the problem:</i>	200
he had sat there with the	171	push	201
your mistress is game	172	mother was a beautiful, sensual	202
from now on he wanted me to	173	art is an honest man's	203

my biker period started when	204	my children are the	234
on: if my hair were silkysoft	205	innocent, mauve	235
love is...	206	he spoke in the present tense	236
my wife should be back any	207	(if) i (can('t)) imagine your	237
I'm not giving you any	208	I once had a fight after school	238
<i>statement of the problem:</i>	209	when I touch myself it never	239
haaa-ha-haaaa! was all he	210	you don't have to answer	240
darling, this is Anne-Marie	211	someone persecuted my doorbell	241
when I was younger	212	father taught me to read	242
Jack and Jill went up the	213	know what I love about art?	243
the space to write and to	214	mother, the lying bitch	244
Unterschied zwische Frau und	215	Dear Mme X	245
talk lots. And listen lots. And	216	a perfect stranger walks up to me	246
I play hard, sell myself as	217	off she went with a	247
women, it's an art	218	AIDS was fabricated by	248
<i>experiment:</i>	219	Germans're so bloody full of	249
cheaper than the cost of	220	I would like a belly button	250
I remember having to fetch	221	women think I'm charming cos	251
what the hell's <i>she</i> doing here?	222	on overweight, over-rated	252
he told me to keep my hands	223	I remember: grandmother's kitchen	253
King o the castle	224	it was a magical evening	254
I used to put wax crayons on	225	as in some	255
God, I hated mother at times	226	in those days, I was into	256
Stretch your arm. close your eyes	227	I don't happen to believe that	257
<i>couleur... brilliance... transparence...</i>	228	no. It's not. Piece a cake!	258
did she at least come along?	229	eight. Eight-thirty	259
lots to learn (to let go of)	230	most men have a complex about	260
however	231	I have a mate with a real	261
the only decent money is	232	when I was working for	262
one new franc is the same as	233	140,000,00 FRF for that	263

at times they tell us: think	264	if we <i>imagine</i> that someone	294
God is a 24/7 deli	265	<i>statement of the problem:</i>	295
working every hour God sent	266	I met this girl once at carnival in	296
caught my son with a girl of	267	Lisa and Patricia are bored	297
my son was over for the	268	As a well-dressed bank clerk	298
all I needed now was for	269	on Her night table there's a	299
if you want a decent steak	270	love is...	300
I had my first French kiss when	271	don't ask me why I did it	301
I'm old, my tits are	272	I went to see the doctor and	302
love is...	273	all my teeth are real apart from	303
confines are liberating	274	do you think we are all the same	304
<i>it's not his fault, or even</i>	275	on working out some of	305
I can't fuck with a condom on	276	I thought my wife was	306
ssshh!	277	is that a gun in-	307
fidelity's an illusion	278	don't fret about it, Nick	308
a fool doing some stupid thing	279	don't you ever think:	309
after a period, one of my wives	280	bienvenue en Alsace!	310
I remember	281	rebonjour!	311
everyone should be a silly bastard	282	when I first came here and	312
from knowledge of God	283	in other cases damned	313
you talk about doubts & fear &	284	if what I say were	314
to go in search of company	285	all of this is real all of my	315
I'm an Epicurean	286	off she went with a	316
well	287	sorry for the state of this	317
too many too too	288	he grabbed a handful of	318
one wife, or rather a	289	as a 12-year-old, I was in my	319
Aznavour: les petits pains	290	the deal is	320
I could be your pimp	291	o.... head, shoulders knees and	321
My last best mate shot himself	292	I lie on Her bed when	322
0000000110000000	293	you fuck my daughter I'll	323

it's not right but does that	324	on sincere, arguably enlightened	354
getting this done in the	325	did you play with yourself like I	355
Salmon & soja farandole	326	her father died when She was	356
you didn't come and I said	327	if we spend too much time	357
gaining balance means losing	328	Évéline	358
there is fat that makes me	329	I need to earn money to	359
when he opened the door	330	her way is clear	360
between you and me I think	331	bear hug	361
changes begin & happen fast	332	I would kill someone if you	362
trottoir-sweeping Fridays	333	as in can we crush the	363
I'm never cold	334	he looked down at that	364
AFFIDAVIT #1	335	I ask myself whether I'm	365
having children's the beginning of	336	blondes sweat too much when	366
AFFIDAVIT #1 cont'd	337	I almost wrote to you	367
in the end you cannot but	338	A ruthless man, am I?	368
having sent my stronger self	339	on chattering about whose	369
Château La Gaffelière	340	there is a void I seem unable to	370
once I ran off with my mates to	341	some people think I'm	371
I am vengeful	342	dream: Bag over his head	372
flipping through my scrawlings	343	he that is without sin among you	373
I once had a girlfriend who was	344	as a child playing in the	374
in so doing...	345	I can swear anything you want	375
get it down, they say	346	he met his girlfriend when	376
Paroles d'amour: il parle à Clito	347	this house is too big to be	377
God gave us reason, right?	348	love is...	378
a member of the family showed me	349	did you know, the Bible's the	379
I don't have any friends in	350	what about ideas that have	380
in the morning, the commissar	351	very few people have	381
he holds his mouth to the brim	352	we'll go somewhere where	382
my first wife was embarrassed	353	just shuddup and	383

I the undersigned, Dr	384	Bernadette. My first sexual	414
500 franc note	385	the next time I saw him I	415
does God love you?	386	don't see the point in	416
as in if you are taught to	387	if you cry after knowledge	417
a woman who's too clean's no	388	I dreamed that I had	418
anything he can do I can do	389	love is...	419
meet Apollo	390	The truth? As in: honest-to-God?	420
I like my toilet paper from	391	Little bunny from the Sadna	421
did you know that the	392	one who'd heard I was now	422
animals & children tend to	393	la famille	423
in his night cabinet next to	394	one door-to-door salesman	424
shadow = what happens to	395	simple Simon says:	425
because if I suffer it won't	396	you can't bury me looking like	426
I THINK	397	simple Simon says:	427
love is...	398	see, I'm not one of these	428
Dear Suzanne	399	she said our next meeting would	429
with my first wife, I once	400	I'm not the type to pray, so I	430
I'd like to see who's gonna	401	love is...	431
when I was 15, 16, I was	402		
do you ever wear a	403		
the sun sparkled coldly	404		
I've had three generations of	405		
I've carried out all sorts of	406		
Évéline. My first real wife	407		
off she went with a	408		
Évéline. She wanted to	409		
We got an au-pair cos I	410		
after ten years my first legal	411		
as for Her, I can't help it	412		
everyone should be a silly	413		

BOOK THREE

answers were hidden, look in	435	people're too stingy with their	466
I guess everyone can't say	437	<i>on je ne regrette rien</i>	467
I once had a lover who	438	you've not missed much if	468
I remember our first	439	you're afraid of me, I can see it	469
three sisters lived across the	440	if I could only keep one photo	470
I say the truth but	441	I've got a surprise for you	471
he had fucked my arse like	442	I don't ever, ever, want to	472
God is heartless	443	I will take you where you	473
you say I'm the one, but	444	I don't know how guys cope	474
Dear Mme X	445	I sat naked on the stool	475
should He live?	446	I can't be bothered to	476
I put a curse on him	447	many women fantasize about	477
boys were trying it out	448	that knot just evaporated though	478
either it was mother or one of	449	on mar.tree.money	479
I had a girlfriend whose	450	my first guitar I bought in	480
generosity is a vice	451	I've been thinking about	481
the English taught me how to	452	AFFIDAVIT #2	482
saying yes yes yes	453	AFFIDAVIT #2 cont'd	483
I'm not racist	454	our Father	484
the first thing She does when	455	what if we don't need to be	485
I think about her more than I	456	free!	486
friend of mine, his greatest fantasy	457	free... to roam	487
cannot do with reason what	458	I wake up	488
you don't believe in my	459	<i>statement of the problem:</i>	489
I loved a black woman once	460	you haven't quite picked up	490
not with milk	461	toilets. Tricky subject	491
you can buy your luck	462	I promised not to	492
practice makes...?	463	I am as I am	493
So he calls me Her, does he?	464	My current girlfriend?	494
it was early in the morning	465	Has he already stopped shaving	495

a lovely woman	496	he's even recorded one about	526
it's never their fault, is it	497	me? I'm looking forward to	527
I've heard said that all	498	I'm from Alsace in	528
a man wants to be proud of	499	I the undersigned, Doctor	529
I don't know what women	500	the good old days?	530
says he's going dancing	501	I am Tatar, Tatar is my name	531
I am as I am	502	dust	532
him across the road's rather	503	you can't prove a thing unless	533
she had a clarity of vision as if	504	for a while I thought he was	534
there was a change of tone	505	luck stills seems to have	535
please try to understand that you	506	someone I don't like too much	536
have I got a good lawyer?	507	I had some money in a	537
she left me a message	508	getting that blood test done after all	538
on heart made bare, on agony, on	509	Évéline was beginning to	539
Report 007--/20--	510	we are never more human	540
Report 007--/20-- cont'd	511	a harmless message, it was	541
normality?	512	you know what I like?	542
my Loneliness is rich	513	I'm whacked!	543
if you ask me most men don't	514	my biker cronies weren't	544
he's not going to stay with her	515	I've got no time for	545
me and a mate on holiday once	516	we go through a lot, don't we?	546
one of my wives wanted to	517	monsieur, madame, bonjour	547
I don't know if I can	518	reason's making us all stupid	548
having children's the beginning	519	ding dong	549
I'll be his heiress	520	what does my mother see	550
you see those young mums with	521	I have a little surprise for you...	551
I'll listen to those cassettes	522	I was always punished at school	552
you say; I'm Tatar, I'm like	523	they threw me out three weeks	553
I think about you all the time	524	every woman is a	554
at my last birthday	525	there is not a single passion	555

I kind of miss her	556	call me a wound that never	595
they're all special	557	motionless terrifying gargantuan	596
Dear Mme X	558	I remember the exact moment	597
every river flows into the sea	559	a pebble of a doubt	598
I wasn't angry with you	560	00 00 0 100 0 00	599
dreams & revolutions	561		
cows are holy creatures	562		
<i>observed results:</i>	563		
they say priority is given to	564		
yes, I look sad	565		
hands are very important	566		
who needs knowledge	567		
fancy a jog, but when's	568		
I can't I can't I can't!	569		
a poor man who had lost	570		
one day it was so terribly	571		
<i>Re: last among equals</i>	572		
no-one's right or wrong once	573		
the strongest pain I feel is just	574		
oi!!	575		
on lie.sense. on keep.hers	576		
Yes Yes Yes	577		
there is always room for more	581		
Bernadette	583		
How does my hair look?	585		
Later she was in the papers	587		
Carmina?	589		
Dear Antoine	591		
he thinks he's got class	592		
I thought you had only ever	593		

BOOK OF JOSEPH (in order of appearance)

JOSEPH 1:5 <i>Eden 1-2</i>	9	JOSEPH 7:3 <i>Old but true</i>	123
I had my first cunnilingus		Why are so many men lousy lays	
JOSEPH 1:5 <i>Eden 3-4</i>	10	JOSEPH 4:20 <i>Genesis 1-3</i>	151
Whilst he was working out		I remember the exact moment	
JOSEPH 1:5 <i>Eden 5-9</i>	11	JOSEPH 4:20 <i>Genesis 4-8</i>	152
I so spent my whole childhood		We went for a week to the	
JOSEPH 4:1 <i>Salut, salaud 1-4</i>	27	JOSEPH 2:5 <i>Mother</i>	202
I love women, I dunno		Mother was a beautiful, sensual	
JOSEPH 4:1 <i>Salut, salaud 5-6</i>	30	JOSEPH 5:5 <i>Sacrifice</i>	204
Young girls like me cos I know how		My biker period started when	
JOSEPH 4:1 <i>Salut, salaud 7-9</i>	32	JOSEPH 4:16 <i>Those that</i>	232
I was at the disco once		The only decent money	
JOSEPH 2:1 <i>Et tu, brute 1-2</i>	49	JOSEPH 6:18 <i>Abandoning the fig</i>	260
There are three of us altogether		Most men have a complex about	
JOSEPH 2:1 <i>Et tu, brute 3-5</i>	50	JOSEPH 4:10 <i>Paradise found 1-2</i>	262
And Brutus was an honourable		When I was working for the bank	
JOSEPH 1:10 <i>Hunger games 1-2</i>	53	JOSEPH 4:10 <i>Paradise found 3-6</i>	263
Everything came from the earth		140,000.–FRF for that prime	
JOSEPH 1:10 <i>Hunger games 3-4</i>	54	JOSEPH 4:9 <i>Perseverance</i>	295
I never had an old bike		I met this girl once at carnival	
JOSEPH 2:15 <i>For the records 1-2</i>	74	JOSEPH 4:12 <i>Talent</i>	298
When I was 18, it was time		As a well-dressed bank clerk	
JOSEPH 2:15 <i>For the records 3-4</i>	75	JOSEPH 2:8 <i>Bellyache</i>	319
Let him wait		as a 12-year-old, I was in my	
JOSEPH 4:3 <i>Phoenix</i>	99	JOSEPH 1:7 <i>Wind & weather</i>	334
I'm just full of ideas		I'm never cold	
JOSEPH 4:22 <i>Paradise lost 1-4</i>	109	JOSEPH 2:33 <i>Here comes the groom</i>	341
Ile de la Réunion		Once I ran off with my mates to	
JOSEPH 4:22 <i>Paradise lost 5-7</i>	110	JOSEPH 4:19 <i>The force be... 1-3</i>	350
we had the papers drawn up		I don't have any friends in the police	
		JOSEPH 4:19 <i>The force be... 4-6</i>	351
		In the morning, the commissar came	

JOSEPH 1:17 <i>Little lord Nottingham</i> As a child playing in the nearby	374	JOSEPH 4:14 <i>The beginning... 5-8</i> you see those young mums	521
JOSEPH 3:7 <i>Golden showers</i> 500 franc note	385	JOSEPH 6:2 <i>Redde m'r... 1-4</i> I'm from Alsace	528
JOSEPH 3:12 <i>True love 1-3</i> Évéline. My first real wife	407	JOSEPH 6:2 <i>Redde m'r... 5-9</i> The good old days?	530
JOSEPH 3:12 <i>True love 4-6</i> Évéline. She wanted to open up a	409	JOSEPH 4:7 <i>Évéline: je regrette</i> Évéline was beginning to get a	539
JOSEPH 2:9 <i>Bernadette 1-3</i> Bernadette. My first sexual	414	JOSEPH 2:10 <i>Troubled waters 1-4</i> I was always punished at school	552
JOSEPH 2:9 <i>Bernadette 4-7</i> The next time I saw him I	415	JOSEPH 2:10 <i>Troubled waters 5-9</i> They threw me out three	553
JOSEPH 2:24 <i>Family fortunes</i> Three sisters lived across the road	440	JOSEPH 6:20 <i>D.I.Y</i> Hands a re very important	567
JOSEPH 5:17 <i>Jacqueline</i> I loved a black woman once	460		
JOSPEH 2:18 <i>Kaufhaus Schneider</i> My first guitar I bought in Rastatt	480		
JOSEPH 6:31 <i>Au revoir pissoir</i> Toilets. tricky subject	491		
JOSEPH 5:18 <i>Sex, lies &... 1-5</i> Me and a mate on holiday once	516		
JOSEPH 5:18 <i>Sex, lies &... 6-11</i> One of my wives wanted to try a	517		
JOSEPH 4:14 <i>The beginning... 1-4</i> Having children's the beginning	519		

BOOK OF JOSEPH (in chronological order)

JOSEPH 1:5 <i>Eden 1-2</i>	9	JOSEPH 2:15 <i>For the records 1-2</i>	74
I had my first cunnilingus		When I was 18, it was time	
JOSEPH 1:5 <i>Eden 3-4</i>	10	JOSEPH 2:15 <i>For the records 3-4</i>	75
Whilst he was working out		Let him wait	
JOSEPH 1:5 <i>Eden 5-9</i>	11	JOSPEH 2:18 <i>Kaufhaus Schneider</i>	480
I so spent my whole childhood		My first guitar I bought in Rastatt	
JOSEPH 1:7 <i>Wind & weather</i>	334	JOSEPH 2:24 <i>Family fortunes</i>	440
I'm never cold		Three sisters lived across the road	
JOSEPH 1:10 <i>Hunger games 1-2</i>	53	JOSEPH 2:33 <i>Here comes the groom</i>	341
Everything came from the earth		Once I ran off with my mates to	
JOSEPH 1:10 <i>Hunger games 3-4</i>	54	JOSEPH 3:7 <i>Golden showers</i>	385
I never had an old bike		500 franc note	
JOSEPH 1:17 <i>Little lord Nottingham</i>	374	JOSEPH 3:12 <i>True love 1-3</i>	407
As a child playing in the nearby		Évéline. My first real wife	
JOSEPH 2:1 <i>Et tu, brute 1-2</i>	49	JOSEPH 3:12 <i>True love 4-6</i>	409
There are three of us altogether		Évéline. She wanted to open up a	
JOSEPH 2:1 <i>Et tu, brute 3-5</i>	50	JOSEPH 4:1 <i>Salut, salaud 1-4</i>	27
And Brutus was an honourable		I love women, I dunno	
JOSEPH 2:5 <i>Mother</i>	202	JOSEPH 4:1 <i>Salut, salaud 5-6</i>	30
Mother was a beautiful, sensual		Young girls like me cos I know how	
JOSEPH 2:8 <i>Bellyache</i>	319	JOSEPH 4:1 <i>Salut, salaud 7-9</i>	32
as a 12-year-old, I was in my		I was at the disco once	
JOSEPH 2:9 <i>Bernadette 1-3</i>	414	JOSEPH 4:3 <i>Phoenix</i>	99
Bernadette. My first sexual		I'm just full of ideas	
JOSEPH 2:9 <i>Bernadette 4-7</i>	415	JOSEPH 4:7 <i>Évéline: je regrette</i>	539
The next time I saw him I		Évéline was beginning to get a	
JOSEPH 2:10 <i>Troubled waters 1-4</i>	552	JOSEPH 4:9 <i>Perseverance</i>	295
I was always punished at school		I met this girl once at carnival	
JOSEPH 2:10 <i>Troubled waters 5-9</i>	553	JOSEPH 4:10 <i>Paradise found 1-2</i>	262
They threw me out three		When I was working for the bank	

JOSEPH 4:10 <i>Paradise found</i> 3-6 140,000.–FRF for that prime	263	JOSEPH 5:18 <i>Sex, lies &... 1-5</i> Me and a mate on holiday once	516
JOSEPH 4:12 <i>Talent</i> As a well-dressed bank clerk	298	JOSEPH 5:18 <i>Sex, lies &... 6-11</i> One of my wives wanted to try a	517
JOSEPH 4:14 <i>The beginning... 1-4</i> Having children's the beginning	519	JOSEPH 6:2 <i>Redde m'r... 1-4</i> I'm from Alsace	528
JOSEPH 4:14 <i>The beginning... 5-8</i> you see those young mums	521	JOSEPH 6:2 <i>Redde m'r... 5-9</i> The good old days?	530
JOSEPH 4:16 <i>Those that</i> The only decent money	232	JOSEPH 6:18 <i>Abandoning the fig</i> Most men have a complex about	260
JOSEPH 4:19 <i>The force be... 1-3</i> I don't have any friends in the police	350	JOSEPH 6:20 <i>D.I.Y</i> Hands a re very important	567
JOSEPH 4:19 <i>The force be... 4-6</i> In the morning, the commissar	351	JOSEPH 6:31 <i>Au revoir pissoir</i> Toilets. tricky subject	491
JOSEPH 4:20 <i>Genesis 1-3</i> I remember the exact moment	151	JOSEPH 7:3 <i>Old but true</i> Why are so many men lousy lays	123
JOSEPH 4:20 <i>Genesis 4-8</i> We went for a week to the	152		
JOSEPH 4:22 <i>Paradise lost</i> 1-4 Ile de la Réunion	109		
JOSEPH 4:22 <i>Paradise lost</i> 5-7 we had the papers drawn up	110		
JOSEPH 5:5 <i>Sacrifice</i> My biker period started when	204		
JOSEPH 5:17 <i>Jacqueline</i> I loved a black woman once	460		

BOOK OF PARABLES

BOOK OF PARABLES 1:3 <i>Manna</i>	97
I remember: I went with mother	
BOOK OF PARABLES 1:6	570
<i>Do as this and you will live 1-4</i>	
A poor man who had lost all he had	
BOOK OF PARABLES 1:6	571
<i>Do as this and you will live 5-9</i>	
one day it was so terribly cold	

Chapter One

The Artist as a Wound in Progress: Heterogeneity and Dialogism as Promise and Peril

Introduction

My longstanding interest in heterogeneity and dialogism constitutes the motivating force for this thesis, expressed in a central question: how can I write a novel in such a way that it remains true to my sense of form, my sense of language, to the limitations of both, and to my understanding of plural subjectivities? In this chapter, I retrace the measures taken at the level of praxis to provide an answer to this question, whereby I understand praxis as critical performative-based research in which I reflect upon my application of the art of writing. In the first part of the chapter, I provide concrete examples of how I create heterogeneity and attempt to establish how much the novel can take before it breaks. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss more generally how I grapple with various levels heterogeneity within the novel and how my praxis leads to new insights regarding the dialogical relationship between the author and her text.

Part One: The Search for Structure

1.1. The struggle with form: continuity and disruption

Novelizing isn't really trendy anymore. Today, one must document. Everything. People seem to want to consume things raw. Events, emotions, actions. Nothing reheated. Everything's got to be raw.¹

This observation made by Nicole Brossard, a Canadian poet and novelist, draws attention to a conflict. It suggests that to write novels is losing popularity because of the genre's inability to do something in particular, namely to satisfy a need in the reader today to have direct access to experience. The novel, in my opinion, does not merit this accusation. As Margaret Doody in *The True Story of the Novel* details, the novel has a long history which can be traced back to antiquity even though many still consider it a modern genre.² Scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin or Jacques Derrida also underline that the novel is a highly flexible genre

¹ Nicole Brossard, *Hotel Clarendon* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2006) p. 155.

² Margaret Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

consisting of a conflation of other genres.^{3,4} This internal structural flexibility is due to the fact that, for a long time, and unlike drama, no guidelines had been established to determine the novel's structure or function.⁵ Novelists made full use of this freedom, so that novels were not only written in prose but also in verse.⁶ Given the lack of a prescribed structure for the novel and given the hybrid texts which ensued, it could even be argued that the novel is less a genre than it is a anti-genre. Its rebellious nature permitted, among other things, a move away from idealized character depictions in favour of a more realistic presentation of real lives in everyday settings as early as in the eighteenth century as in Samuel Richardson's much cited *Pamela* (1740). The novel's rebellious nature also made it into a unorthodox genre, able to respond to dissatisfaction with the functions and themes the novel had been used to addressing in different epochs, as Terry Eagleton points out (see footnote 5). The novel, thus, grew; it evolved as a literary form able to voice the sentiments of a particular epoch and due to its rebellious character, the novel continued, across epochs, to be the ideal instrument for broaching sensitive issues. An evergreen, in this respect, is sexuality. *Verses Nature* enters – both consciously and unconsciously – the dialogue about the literary traditions of the novel, reanimating the discussion of what the novel can do.

Verses Nature, as a rebellious conglomerate of sub-genres, and telling, at the metanarrative level, a tale against the nature or notion of the novel as fixed genre, accommodates the observation made by Nicole Brossard in the opening quotation without conceding totally to it because it shows the novel as a highly elastic literary form, one in which the dichotomy between the characteristics of the novel on the one hand and the documentary on the other need not exist. The documentary, as a genre, may indeed be integrated into the novel. In *Verses Nature*, for example, documentation is not only present, but also split into further sub-categories: Carmina's diary, Tatar's recordings of his life story, pictures as historical 'proof', and letters to lawyers. Each of these may be regarded as genres in their own right. Each of these could easily be split into a number of further genres focusing on a

³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, transl. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Le Monologisme de l'Autre* (Paris: Gallilée, 1996).

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *The English Novel: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

⁶ Franco Moretti, 'The Novel: History and Theory', *New Left Review* (July-August, 2008), pp. 111-124.

particular aspect of that genre, thus reframing and redefining the over-arching genre from within.

Dina El-Hindi, in her article on Alice Walker's parody of Richardson's *Clarissa*, reminds us that the novel is frequently used as an instrument to address taboos.⁷ *Verses Nature* continues in this tradition. It addresses the taboo of child sexuality, of bestiality and of group sex. It addresses physical violence as insulting or exciting, depending on who the perpetrator is and who the subjugated; we have the case of Carmina, the indignant victim of conjugal violence, yet the willing participant in love games involving belts, barbed wire, bottles and other instruments which are never named, but which inflict bruises she takes home like trophies. The literary devices employed in *Verses Nature* and in conjunction with the plot, should, ideally, also seduce the reader into going against her own nature and rethinking various presumptions not only pertaining to the novel as genre, but to the sensitive topics expressed in this particular novel.

Verses Nature continues in the tradition of the novel to mirror the concerns of its epoch in that it is a postmodern text expressing the postmodern concerns about fragmentation and the loss of a sense of a constant, inviolable reality, even in something as seemingly evident as the 'I'.⁸ As a novel, however, *Verses Nature* does not only continue in the footsteps of its literary ancestors, but, placed as it is, and as I later argue, between the novel and some new, as yet undefined space, and given the metanarrative message of the work as a critique of our limited understanding of the genre's true potential, *Verses Nature* enters the dialogue with a mission: the mission is to disrupt and redefine the novel as a genre from the inside, which is something a writer, in her capacity as the one who produces a text, is perhaps better suited to do than a literary critic, whose role is to 'consume' (to stick with Brossard's words) the text. In this chapter I expose how such disruption is brought about in *Verses Nature*.

There are traditions I embrace. There are traditions from which I distance myself. When thinking about where to position myself on the literary map, the task was everything but easy because the comparative parameters which immediately came to mind were all ones

⁷ Dina M. El-Hindi, 'An Epistolary Novel Revisited: Alice Walker's Womanist parody of Richardson's *Clarissa*', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol.6, No.4 (April, 2016), pp. 158-161.

⁸ Henrik Skov Nielson, 'The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction', *Narrative*, Vol.12, No.2 (May, 2004), pp. 133-150.

which I could feel myself resisting. The terms 'black', 'British', 'woman', 'postcolonial' were at the top of the list. These are terms which I did not welcome, for they were how others saw me, not how I, in the first instance, saw myself. These were not terms to describe my conscious occupation of literary space. These were not things I *do*. Moreover, would not placing myself on the literary map of diasporic writing, with its focus on alienation (Carmina is a black woman alienated in France, it is true), only perpetuate the distinction between 'good', 'proper' English literature conserved in canonical texts, and the literature produced by (and for?) others, thus *my* literature? A former teacher once told me, after I had recommended a book by Toni Morrison, that she did not feel that, as a white woman, she needed to read black literature. It was self-explanatory, however, that I, as a pupil in a multicultural secondary school in London, would need to read Shakespeare, Austen, Woolf, Lawrence, to name but a few. The tags, therefore, marking me as black, postcolonial, British and female, cannot provide satisfactory parameters as far as I am concerned. To compare my work to black American writers such as Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, or to a British writer such as Zadie Smith, seemed to me to inch too much in the direction of a cliché. To compare myself to a white British writer such as Margaret Drabble, herself writing in the tradition of Virginia Woolf and, like myself, interested in the pressures faced by ambitious women, somehow still felt wrong in that it set up opposition and similarity based not exclusively on the text but on something none of us have influence over, notably our race. Although I feel sufficiently at home in French and German to think in both languages and although I have lived in both countries, I could hardly position myself according to these tags as *Verses Nature* is written in English. The only thing I consider myself as doing consciously is to write, although, of course, I cannot do so without the external social markers which delineate my identity. As a conscious writer, critical of over-simple typologies, I find it most fitting to locate my fiction within a general postmodern orientation rather than to pin myself down to a comparison based on social markers attributed to me. To locate myself within a general postmodern orientation is also preferential to limiting myself to seeking indicators of a specific style within the novel as genre, or to even to proffer a whole new category for my style of writing. I am a postmodern writer testing the boundaries of the novel and discovering new elements within the genre. I am a postmodern writer seeking to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the nature of the novel. I see myself, thus, a writer consciously occupying, or commuting between, two important zones: today and the future.

The 'today' Nicole Brossard refers to in her quote is already a decade old in the meantime and yet the urge to document, to 'consume things raw', seems to me to be no less

relentless. This is true of my own writing as much as of Brossard's writing, in which she has set herself the goal to 'impale the real', so that what at first may sound like a lament on her part – the desire to consume things raw – can also be understood as a challenge. It is in this latter sense that I also understand the remark and enter into dialogue with it as a characteristic of Brossard's style in Chapter Two.⁹

The form *Versus Nature* takes should also be raw yet rigorous. Above all, it should be diverse. I wanted to find out how much heterogeneity, how much internal diversity within and across the forms selected, the novel would bear before it breaks. I was to write a novel. I wished to write a *novel* novel, but was thinking, structurally, beyond a novel and beyond words. I was moving towards a space, towards a fullness beyond purely verbal language because in its purest state, my vision transcended both conventional verbal language and logic.

The novel is in the first person. Tatar, for example, only ever speaks. He rarely writes anything down. The strong oral nature of the novel moves it close to drama as a genre although there are no synoptic traces of this. Tatar's speech takes various forms. The Book of Joseph, presented in columns, is a cross between the journalistic and the biblical. It can also be read as a transcript of Tatar's speech, which he records using his dictaphone. Columns in *Verses Nature* must perform various functions. Like stakes driven into the ground, they mark off territory, identity, thoughts. More than once I catch myself thinking of the cucumbers Tatar rams into the women for pleasure or pain. There is something definitely phallic about columns.

Carmina uses columns differently:

o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o	o	o	o	o	o	o
o	o	O	o	o	o	o
o	o	o	o	o	o	o

⁹ Nicole Brossard, *Fences in Breathing*, trans. by Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood (Toronto: Coach House books, 2007) p. 8.

This text, ringing like a perpetual lament, may also be read as an orifice that refuses to be closed or be silenced.

Via Carmina, non-verbal potential is brought into the novel, allowing me to get closer to my vision of a realm beyond words:

0000000110001100
0111001111000000
000111010111100?
000011010000001?

hypo 1: passion

Judith Davidson, discussing two essays by Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel* and *The Problem With Speech Genres*, proposes both essays as a theory of reading and draws attention to two approaches into a text proposed by Louise Rosenblatt¹⁰. One approach is an aesthetic approach, involving a focus on the act of reading itself. The other is a non-aesthetic approach, where the focus is on reading as a means to an end. In the sample from *Verses Nature* presented above, both reading strategies need to be deployed. The sample, as a non-verbal proposition, will force the reader to take a second look, to work out something beyond words, and thus to concentrate on the act of reading itself and what this – the act of reading – means. The reader, having worked this out, will then be able to take a non-aesthetic approach to focus on the text as a semantic unit and on what the texts means, or what it is trying to express, in a general sense. These two strategies – the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic – are carried out in tandem, with one being foregrounded more than the other at different moments and according to the individual's reading strategy. To enter this realm beyond words, this sample must be read differently to a conventional text, where the act of reading at the aesthetic level is less pronounced in the absence of novel elements drawing attention to themselves. The sample above must be read differently because it positions the reader in a new zone of meaning making, one which smudges the border between two significant semiotic systems, for it replaces words with numbers and thereby challenges the reader to co-construct a new reality for herself. What at first sight appears binary – each number representing a word, with the number zero denoting absence and the number one denoting the presence of the word in

¹⁰ Judith Davidson, *Bakhtin as Theory of Reading*, Technical Report N.579 (University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. Centre for the Study of Reading, 1993), pp. 13-15. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

question – is in fact far more complex, for what is on the page is only a selection of the possible number of permutations. The full number would be sixteen to the power of sixteen permutations. This is a number so long I cannot even begin to grasp it let alone calculate it. This is not something we read but something we glean once the dizziness of the semiotic challenge gives way to clarity as we, via means of deduction and anticipation, try to make sense of this new text, a text we cannot read in the conventional sense in any case, but must view, like a poster. This dizziness created by the surprise and challenge of new semantic constellations will be taken up again in Chapter Two. To return to *Verses Nature* and the sample presented above, the reader, shifting between her roles as conventional reader, as mathematician and as spectator/viewer, will try to make sense of this text by comparing it to what she already has in her memory bank. She will try to determine where she has seen something like it before and she will use this knowledge to better understand the text before her, which is to say to make the text *mean*. As a mathematical reality, this sample has nothing to do with semantics, which is not to say that it is nonsense. On the contrary, it is part and parcel of the full potential of meaning, although we may never *express* this full potential. The fact that we can never fully *say*, as Derrida so eloquently states,¹¹ leaves me, as a writer, in a quandary, for whatever I do, it is in the knowledge that it is a compromise. To write, says Babette Babich, is to love and to fail.¹² I continue to write, to ‘love’ and to fail, at the back of my mind a thought I share with Carmina: ‘this is the closest I can get’. Somewhere, and sooner or later, I will, as a writer, have to learn to draw the line. I will never be able to fully say and I must learn to forgive myself for not being able to. I must not only forgive myself for not being able to say, but I must also distinguish this type of inability to say from those things I consciously choose not to disclose.

[illegible]

```

0 1 0 0 1 1 1 01
  0    001 00    00 0
    1 11 0 011 100 0 0
    00    001 000 1 1
      1 00001 11 00
    0 0 00 0101 01 10
      0 0 10 0 0 0 0 0
0 100 00 100 0 0

```

I have repurposed a familiar form (i.e. columns) and transposed forms familiar to us from other contexts (i.e. numbers) to create new reading possibilities requiring us to re-place ourselves in relation to the text. This technique is successful, I contend, because the text it produces cannot be read conventionally; we *must* engage with it differently, asking ourselves what it means to read a text, what it means to be a reader. This was not always the case regarding other techniques I experimented with. In the following section, I reveal techniques which were thwarted.

1.2. The struggle with synoptic limitations to the depiction of voice

I wanted both protagonists, Carmina and Tatar, to encounter each other – and for each to encounter their other selves – in columns, their thoughts set side by side, like a duet. I wanted to agonize the reader with the obligation to make the choice of which column to read first.

Against her better judgement.
 She sent him a message. A harmless
 one: she was having lunch with the
 children and would plough her way
 through some work in the afternoon. She
 was hoping he would invite her to come
 over. She was hoping and yet it was what
 she feared the most. She waited... but in
 the end she brought the girls back to
 school and drove home. Yes. It was
 better that way.

In her room, trying to resist the
 temptation to write to him, to contact him.
 She opened one, two bottles of wine and
 downed them. She wanted to live the
 feeling of being in love; that which makes
 the world go round. She wanted to love
 him; his freedom, his pride, this glorious
 and threatening man she orbited round as
 though warming up to a dare. She wanted
 to contaminate herself with the freedom
 he accorded, knew she was of a similar
 spirit, yet she fell short, guilt like a nail
 pushing up through her shoe.

(draft 1, 12-02-13)

*I am Carmina
 Carmina is my name
 I am as I am
 And it's right that way.
 I am here as a healer
 To kiss shielded wounds
 That recede with a swoon
 Once their truths have been yielded.
 I'm not in it for me
 But in it for you
 So you'll grow
 To know all of yourself
 It's your due.
 I am as I am
 I'm made that way
 What more do you want
 What more must I say:
 I am strong
 I am proud
 I am dark of hue
 So you think you can fathom me
 But I'll never subdue
 To Man's sway:
 For I have my own:
 You can't take it away.*

Against her better judgement.
 She sent him a message. A harmless
 one: she was having lunch with the
 children and would plough her way
 through some work in the afternoon. She
 was hoping he would invite her to come
 over. She was hoping and yet it was what
 she feared the most. She waited... but in
 the end she brought the girls back to
 school and drove home. Yes. It was
 better that way.

(draft2, 12-02-13)

I?
 Am Tatar
 Tatar is my name.
 I am as I am
 I'm made that way.
 What more do you want
 What more must I say?

I'm a democrat. Every one can have
 an opinion, but if you're working with me,
 you have to do as I say.

I discovered how limited our options are to depict (some of that) nation of selves and their inner speech. I was hoping that a column layout would provide the solution, only to discover that it could only do so periodically but not for an entire novel. Consequently, this option was not pursued. I was not prepared to sacrifice the readability of my novel for the philosophical principles I held regarding heterogeneity as a comment on form or regarding layout as a comment on space.

Alternatives, therefore, would need to be found. I experimented with stream of consciousness, using different fonts for each level of thought. The problem, however, remained: simultaneous thoughts cannot be read simultaneously, but must be read diachronically, i.e. sequentially. The reading became uncomfortable. Words on paper, I concluded, were not the ideal medium for what I was trying to achieve. Ideally, I would need a multi-modal text in the form of an e-book where I could insert audio passages. This option is not available to me, bound as I am by the conventional contingencies of academic, 'scientific' dissemination, even in a doctoral thesis in creative and critical writing.

1.3. From the depths where language fails: negotiating space

I had a list of forms that I tried to weave into the novel without leaving the impression of an author's heavy hand, shoe-horning in structural elements to bring off a particular effect. One such form is space. The novel should appear airy, light, even playful. It should present thought clusters suspended in an invisible solution. I think of alchemy, of honeycomb and of Peter Sloterdijk's philosophical move away from gravity.¹³ I wanted to do things which prose is not used to. I needed to shrug off the weight of Tatar's hagiographic presence and his overbearing, uncompromising talk. I quickly came to see that this could not be achieved with pages and pages of prose, walling us in. I therefore kept the entries short. I gave them space. I gave *us* space. The space is neither empty nor silent but essential for giving sense to what is seen.¹⁴

Space, as a property of the text, bears directly upon how the reader enters the text. In order to propose new constellations between the reader and the text, I need to deploy space not only consciously but unconventionally.

Space is co-determined by and is of equal value to its corollary, absence. Leslie Hill would have us know that Derrida sees absence not as reduction of but as interruption of presence, since its hypersemantic, polyphonic potential is so much more powerful than presence, this being so because it hasn't been said *yet*, hasn't been nailed down *yet*, hasn't

¹³ Peter Sloterdijk, 'Against Gravity: an Interview with Bettina Funcke', <http://www.bookforum.com/archive/feb_05/funcke.html> [accessed 5 May 2013].

¹⁴ Pierre Macherey, 'For a Theory of Literary Production', in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*, ed. by J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 703-711.

been made dead.¹⁵ My understanding of absence, which concurs with Hill and can be seen to overlap with the 'fertile void' Brossard speaks of in *Fences In Breathing* (p8), influences my writing in the sense that it conjures up the idea of the negative of a photo. In *Verses Nature*, absence and presence battle it out (*versus*). In the cracks, in the seams, those apparently empty though rich non-verbalised spaces I deploy to move the plot forward (spaces 'from the depths where language fails' and where the war over meaning is waged),¹⁶ we literally 'read' in between the lines.¹⁷ If we consider absence as the negative of a photo – we sense that there is a lot happening between the episodes depicted in *Verses Nature* and we know that Tatar has more recordings than those we discover during the course of the story – we may no longer skim over the empty, white spaces in between the words, the pages, the chapters, the characters or their deeds, but must entertain the idea of this space as being at least as full of meaning as the ink-filled zones. It is not quite the same as to say that we are reading two books at the same time. It does, however, mean that the reader must occupy multiple spaces, entering a different reading contract to one presented in a book that strives to present a seamless plot from start to finish.

1.4. Beyond a monochronic, linear depiction of time

There can be no satisfactory thematizing of space and absence without reference to time, the time-space cluster situated at the junction with plot. In *Verses Nature* the depiction of time gives evidence of my belief that time is more than a singular phenomenon. Time may be multi-axial. Time, to use a term Mikhail Bakhtin employs as a synonym for multiple, is

¹⁵ Leslie Hill, *The Cambridge Introduction to Jacques Derrida* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007) pp. 26-7. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

¹⁶ Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps On The Ladder Of Writing*, trans. by Sarah Cornell and Susan Sellers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 131. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1963, 1977), pp. 29-52, (p. 40).

multiplanar.¹⁸ I propose real time, dream time. I rewind, rotate and I pivot time. In the scenes with surrealist elements, when Carmina is shopping in Tesco's for example, one may possibly even speak of de-railing time, of flipping it off its customary gravitational axis. In any case, *Verses Nature* plays with the diachronic and synchronic characteristics of time, that is to say the novel plays with the historical or sequential properties of time on the one hand, and with its simultaneous properties on the other. The aim is to produce an overall polychronic effect.

The sample and explanation of selected instances of praxis provided in this section may only permit a cursory look at the artist at work. In the following section, I try to add to this picture by providing a more comprehensive explanation of my reflective writing and how, instead of searching for form, we may reconsider the extent to which we may step beyond it.

Part Two: The Flight from Structure: Dialogism

2.1. The multi-modal emergence of form

Tracking my writing processes sharpened my appreciation for my dialogical relationship with the structure of *Verses Nature*, for although some forms were clearly anticipated before I even started to write the work, others emerged as the result of reflexive and critical thought which accompanied the writing process itself. On such occasions, I could clearly see these ideas dancing in my head. Sometimes it was a dance I immediately recognized as a ballet. Sometimes it was something more akin to break-dance. Sometimes, however, the dance consisted of movements for which I had no name. I found it strange that although my main vehicle has always been words, whenever I wrote words, they would quickly veer off and cross-fertilize to become something else, mostly either dance, fine art, or a snippet of music, reminding me of Kandinsky, who painted yet 'saw' his paintings and wanted them to be interpreted as music. Words, then, for me, have always been a multimodal phenomenon and a springboard to new dimensions.

The challenge I had set myself in *Verses Nature* was to write a book in the first person. This book should reflect my pet concerns: sex, God, philosophy, family, using language to

¹⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. by C. Emerson and M Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 93. Future references to Bakhtin in this thesis relate to this volume and are in parentheses.

make statements about language, its function, but equally its limits. The work should also tackle what I consider a central challenge: the challenge of form(s). I do not believe in monolithic entities. Everything, when analysed closely, will break down endlessly into a multiple of (at times antagonistic) components. Like words and their echoes, genres cannot be totally pure, but, as Mikhail Bakhtin (p. 65, 105) and Jacques Derrida have already noted, they mingle, necessarily (Hill, p31). What I like to think of as the promiscuity of genres co-residing, and what Waid terms 'aesthetic miscegenation',¹⁹ a phenomenon inherent to the novel as genre, motivated a conscious selection of structures with direct or indirect links to particular genres. I selected prose and poetry, but also columns for their capacity to evoke journalistic texts as much as biblical verse. I also selected the diary as the form which grants its writer the maximum of freedom, for in it you may write however you like.

Long before the research question had become concrete, I knew that my ultimate goal was to erode generic literary boundaries, to cast aside that safety net in order to see what happens when all is set in motion. I sought to test a new border, our tolerance of no borders, no clear-cuts, only the game of the open, the permeable, the game of 'possibles' as I dismantled the novel as I understood it. I sought to pull away from and challenge the 'givens', in favour of entertaining new possibilities: possibilities to replace, re-place, displace, deconstruct and, ultimately, democratise what James Wertsch calls our narrative templates, that is, our genres, and the boundaries we draw between them.²⁰ Boundaries harbour the imperative for us to make a decision, to position ourselves, to act. I wanted to *straddle* these borderlines, to open them up and make them burst by neither attributing my work to a single genre nor to a blend of the Aristotelean triumvirate of drama, poetry and prose, but to free fall through the prism of possibilities as I practised the art and science of writing and as I shifted from the artist to the scientist, able to reflect critically, to appraise and clearly define my crafts(wo)manship. Above all, I wanted novelty not merely to be in the plot but equally in the work's mutating form. This is already hinted at in the work's title, *Verses Nature*, which solicits us to relinquish our comfortable, ready-made ideas in exchange for a new harmony (*nature*), a new order (*verses*) based on the inherent conflicts (*versus*) emerging from sustained, honest reflection.

¹⁹ C. Waid, 'Faulkner and the Southern Novel', in *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, ed. by Leonard Cassuto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 750-766, (p. 752).

²⁰ James Wertsch, 'Texts of Memory and Texts of History,' *L2 Journal*, Vol.4 (2002), pp. 9-20.

2.2. Mikhail Bakhtin: Dialogism as meaning in motion

Various fragments of ideas propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin and collected in *Speech Genres and Other Later Essays* proved highly useful for pinning down and articulating thoughts which I had already begun to foster. Bakhtin's writings made me even more aware of the importance of dialogism as a process for meaning making. In a neat summary of dialogism, Julia Davidson states that 'the posing of one voice against another, and the tension, resolutions, and reformulations of language and ideas under these conditions are the mechanisms Bakhtin proposes as central to representation and to interpretation' (Davidson, pp. 4-5). The transformatory character of a dialogical relationship and the central role played by an interpretive struggle in this relationship are aspects of reading and writing which I had not satisfactorily managed to articulate for myself prior to reading Bakhtin's work, and which now help me to understand how a reader may enter texts such as the non-verbal sample from *Verses Nature* presented in section 1.1.

Bakhtin underlined the relationship between the author and the reader (or addressee) and stressed the idea of the struggle over meaning, a struggle which takes place on the border between contending options. Borders constitute a highly creative zone. He notes: 'the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries of its individual areas and not in places where these areas have become enclosed in their specificity' (p. 2). This border zone is also dynamic in the sense that meaning, in the very act of being made or negotiated, is constantly in motion, constantly on the move. This, however, and whilst typical of and more pronounced at border zones, is not exclusive to them. Dialogism, as an inherent quality of meaning making in general, is thus also present in the countless interpretive opportunities of language right down to the individual word as the smallest item of speech. The infinite potential meanings, be it of a single word or of a novel as a single semantic unit, means that meaning can only ever be momentarily fixed or arrested. This is done by what surrounds the item being interpreted. In other words, contextual clues help to simplify the dialogical interpretive processes by helping to keep meaning, all be it momentarily, in place. It is for this reason that even genres may only be regarded as relatively stable. Formulating Bakhtin's idea in my own words, as I have just done, as a researcher-writer seeking to explain and define her own praxis and realizing even more acutely not only the dialogical relationship at both the external level (i.e. across borders) and the internal level (i.e. within borders), but also the idea of the impossibility of a final reading of any text or sign, I come to see how the

Bakhtinian philosophy of dialogism overlaps with the fragmentation characteristic of postmodernism.²¹ I see, too, how it overlaps with notions of deconstruction and slippage propounded by Jacques Derrida, whom I will refer to later in section 2.9.

Bakhtin divided speech into two categories, the primary, simple speech of oral language and the secondary, more complex speech typical of novels, drama, science and abstract thought. Of particular relevance to my concerns are his views about the novel and about style. The novel, for Bakhtin, is not only a genre but may be understood as a single utterance. The utterance, he states: 'is an exceptionally important node of problems' (p. 63). If I bear in mind the dialogic dynamism or struggle between and across borders, as described above, and apply this to the novel, I am able to better visualize the various levels at which dialogism enters the text. It enters not only between the individual genres at work within the novel, but also between the author and the reader. It enters not only at the level of individual words in the text, but also at the level of the text, the novel, as an individual 'word' in dialogue not only with other novels in the author's consciousness, but also with other novels in the reader's consciousness, and by comparison to which the current novel takes on meaning. This contextualization of meaning is an ongoing process, for whenever the reader or writer encounters something relevant to the contextualized text, this text becomes re-contextualized. This is the reason why unfinishedness, or *nezavershennost*, is so central to Bakhtinian thought. It is also for this reason that I have so many 'devils' to dance with in my attempt to portray heterogeneity and dialogism as promise and peril. As to style, Bakhtin believes that: 'the transfer of style from one genre to another not only alters the way the style sounds under conditions of a genre unnatural to it, but also violates and renews the given genre' (p. 66). In retrospect, I see that this is the perfect description for what I was aiming to achieve in *Verses Nature*, especially with the use of columns.

2.3. Reading realities: countersigning the text

Although it is I who sought to explore how many generic forms I could integrate into *Verses Nature* before the novel would break, who would be the legitimate judge of such a break? It could only be the reader, whom Bakhtin considers the second consciousness of the

²¹ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

text and the only truly creative force for it is the reader's endless interpretive possibilities that ultimately make the text 'speak' (p. 127). As an author, I have an ideal reader, or as Bakhtin describes this person, a superaddressee, in mind – someone who will understand the text exactly as I intended. This ideal reader, we know, does not exist. At the very most, she may, I believe, only be found within the author herself, who must content herself with entrusting her text to more ordinary, hypothetical readers, who will then read the text they have created in *their* mind. Although it is true that the structure and language of the text may invite a certain interpretation or reader position, it may not, in my opinion, fully command how the text is to be read. To write, is, to a certain extent, to take a risk, the risk of not being able to say it exactly as you want to. It is the risk of not being able to produce the ideal text you have in your mind, added to the risk of the text not being ideally received even if it has been understood. Parallel to the act of writing, I find myself in a dialogical relationship not only with an ideal reader (or the Bakhtinian superaddressee) but, and perhaps more importantly, in my view, with a hypothetical reader external to myself and whom, if I am brutally honest, I fear. Bakhtin makes no mention of this and it is a recognition I do not dwell upon for too much consideration for the reader can only restrict me in my endeavours to sound out new borders, these including my intention to go beyond verbal language, to go, even, occasionally, beyond reason. In this, I move more in the direction of feminist writing of Nicole Brossard, whom I present in the next chapter.

2.4. Gender

In this promiscuous dance with heterogeneity it will come as no surprise that my perception of gender, similarly, is not *one*. This point of view is far from original, it being reiterated within feminist thought.²² The implications of this for my writing may be detected.

Tatar speaks in prose. He 'speaks' in columns. The journalistic and biblical connotations of columns relate, for me, directly to the authoritarian nature of these two genres that write our 'history', both in a social and moral sense. I note, too, the strategy of these two genres which instrumentalize fear. Tatar is what we would call in the world of commercial fiction, an alpha man. He 'speaks' an alpha language. He literally (and physically) smothers Carmina with the sheer weight and volume of his words. For the reader, the novel

²² Denise Riley, 'Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History', *History Workshop*, No.29 (Spring, 1990), pp. 159-162.

will appear imbalanced. This is my intention. His words drill into you, brainwashing you. Seducing you. The title of the novel is fitting in this respect too, for we battle (versus) with Tatar's hold on us. We resist a fascination for his stories. To give equal weight to Carmina would be to destroy the aim of my depiction of Tatar, and by extension, my depiction of our phallogentric society as domineering. This is not to say that Carmina is left with no means of resistance or that Tatar is a caricature, for he, too, may be seen to exhibit qualities that are not exclusively or traditionally male. History is largely kept in written form and although the larger part of *Verses Nature* is consecrated to Tatar's story, his printed lines are predominantly oral. He speaks and speaks. And speaks. There is only one truly written text: Tatar's handwritten text about his relationship with his mother, a text which he keeps hidden, next to his gun. All of Tatar's other words are not written but told/spoken. The transcripts of his stories to the world, as a documentation of his grandeur, aren't really written but spoken into his dictaphone. These recordings reposition the transience of the oral, making it more like the hard, durable facts of history. He tells Carmina tale after tale, almost like a mother singing lullabies or narrating bedtime stories to lull her child into a sweet sleep.

Carmina takes up far less space in the novel, yet it is she who is the real scribe. In her diary she captures, she nails down, her experiences. She turns the flesh, the sighs, the joys, doubts and fears into hard facts, transforming her story to *history*. Her language sometimes takes on the roughness, the brutality we associate with Tatar: she wants a fag, she wants to fuck. Tatar reprimands: you don't want to be like me. He wants her soft and yielding, as soft as that exquisite black skin that no white woman will ever be able to boast, he says. She still resists too much, he accuses. It is not her role to resist, but to be one of the countless beautiful dolls, or puppets, he plays with.

The two mostly meet at his place. Tatar is never truly allowed to be in Carmina's real, physical world. He may only have as much of her as she permits. She gatekeeps her private space so that there is no contact between him and her family life. It is as if she constructs a particular version of herself, an edited version of herself, for his consumption. She offers him the woman he wants, which is less than the woman she is. Tatar loves paintings. He is an art collector. Carmina grafts selected aspects of herself into his world, into his collection of Woman. She offers him an image, a painting, that is impressionistic, not realistic. She offers him hints, to which his eyes must adjust in order to discern a bigger picture of her Woman. Whilst Tatar penetrates her body, Carmina penetrates his mind as much as his physical world, leaving the trace of her smell on his sheets long after she has gone: her smell as a sign, also in the Bakhtinian sense, with its tumultuous associations.

At the structural level, Carmina's styles of expression are more varied than Tatar's and because they are all of them written, it can be said that she uses this traditionally male mode of expression – writing – to chisel/wright out her own space, wrenching this right to herself. The precision of her thoughts also takes on a clinical quality, a scientific, if not pathological quality. All that is missing is the white coat. Carmina even goes as far as to analyse her analyst, documenting in a verbatim manner her exchanges with her therapists. In so doing, she provides the reader with a transcript of a different nature to Tatar's. She is analysing and coming to conclusions: *statement of the problem, anticipated results, observed results*. She depicts her life as an experiment with controllable variables. *Verses Nature* presents a female protagonist who is very much in her mind in the Cartesian sense: one who lives out the dualism between mind and body we deem typical of patriarchal thought. Carmina is sometimes not yielding enough for Tatar, although he relishes the challenge of taming her, of breaking her in like a filly. Nick isn't up to the challenge. To demonstrate how ineffective this man is, he is given no voice. He never speaks in his own right. Both Carmina and Tatar suggest that there is something effeminate about Nick ('between the two of us I've always thought he was a bit of a fairy'). In *Verses Nature*, no other character epitomizes the absence/presence dialogism better than Nick, who is effaced and whose voice comes to us by proxy, like an echo.

Catherine introduces new considerations for us to refine our expectations and understanding of depictions of gender. Is Catherine's voice more feminist than Carmina's? Tatar scoffs his girlfriend's reading of feminist literature and the way, or so he thinks, she likes the sound of herself 'talking all intelligent and that'. Catherine is the last main character to be introduced into the plot. She makes a late and short appearance, yet it is she, we could argue, who turns the distribution of power around. She cuts Tatar down to size. She throws away his recordings so that his voice will become as lost as the countless female narratives that have left no trace in the official versions of history. Catherine is direct. She has no time to mince her words. She not only understands Tatar, but speaks his language. Her direct, uncompromising manner makes it easy for us to say that she speaks like a man. She feels no need to create a new language to counter a hostile male environment. She gets inside this environment, unnoticed, because she uses the same key that men do: she knows the password. Once inside, she can upset the system. She plays men (and Tatar as their representative) at their own game and thereby paves the way for herself and for Carmina to have the last say.

Between Carmina and Tatar – and with Nick and Catherine setting additional accents – we see the tension between notions of gender played out between and within the individual borders of discrete individuals as reflected in the structural and linguistic devices they use to claim and tame their respective environments. Simplistic attributions of either/or cannot apply. As stated earlier, it is my conviction that everything, when analysed closely, will break down into a myriad of components. Gender is no exception. The last passage in *Verses Nature* releases the reader from words into a light, playful space where presence and absence float off into new directions, celebrating everything I wish to say with this novel. It is a statement made by Carmina yet it is gender-free. Its post-binary symbols swim gleefully in the warm amniotic fluid that fosters new lives.

The implications of a fluid, contextual and temporal notion of gender, further, motivated calculated ambiguity in *Verses Nature* as I, probing my way towards a maximum of heterogeneous structural and linguistic content, seek an answer to the question of how much we can bear (not) to know. To ask how much we may bear not to know is to ask how much we believe we need to know in order to understand, to make meaning. In my search for a satisfying answer, I identified and danced with the elements, or problems, which arose and I named these my ‘devils’. Inextricable from the structural devils, and indeed co-determining the nature of these, is my favourite and biggest devil: language.

2.5. Plain but not simple: reconceptualizing language

Plain language (no broom-up-me-arse-ish). Good story. Something surprising: ruthless and memorable.²³

What is ‘plain’ language? It is language which seems natural. It is language which is immediately understood, thus language we need not bother to question. It is also language at its most ideological. It is Tatar’s language: irresistible, seductive, but also ruthless in its intolerance. To make this idea explicit, Carmina speaks another language. The point I am trying to make is not that men and women *must* speak different languages, but that there *are* different languages, of which I merely present a few options and make them battle it out. The options are, in my opinion and experience as a writer and reader, not only endless, but they extend to every domain. In *Verses Nature*, I attempted to drive this point home by my focus on

²³ Joan Barbara Simon, *Verses Nature: The Making Of* (London: FeedARead, 2016), p. 14.

those domains that mean a lot to me as a writer. I traced alternative routes through notions of sexuality, for example. I proposed new interactions with the synoptics of the text via my use of space. Such praxis speaks its own language: it is saying that space is crucial in its co-determination of entity, of where something starts/stops, underlining the importance of space *in conjunction with* directionality and thus presenting space as a wide and dynamic interpretive border zone. Further reflection on the where, when, how, that and why a particular phenomenon starts and stops draws attention to a third interpretive variable in this cluster: time. This time-space-direction cluster propelled the plot forward in a non-linear fashion, both by what was said and what was left unsaid, the latter providing the reader a maximum of interpretive freedom. The challenge was to use simple language not only to direct the reader toward complex ideas but to sharpen her sensitivity for our opportunity to step beyond verbal language as we know it.

2.6. Reconceptualizing prose

Verses Nature is a mixed-genre work in which nothing has been left to chance. I experimented not only with the strategic placement of divergent generic forms, but also with their quantity. I discovered that the novel would not bear too many prose passages, since these would contradict the core statements I was attempting to make and about reality, or perception, as something essentially knotty, fleeting, shifting and fragmentary.

The novel, my novel novel, was not simply to be read, it was to be 'viewed'. The 1-liners, the spacing, invited this. I made sure that none of the entries in *Verses Nature* exceeded one page as this enabled the reader/viewer to take them in any order and shuffle them like playing cards. *Verses Nature* proposes notions, not mere sentences. Notions which were as much, if not more, visual than intellectual, thus making prose, by comparison, the dark, broody, overcrowded renaissance painting you would not necessarily want to have hanging in your living room.

Prior to writing this thesis, I feared that the story I wanted to write – a story which I resisted calling a novel for a very long time – would end up being too heavy, given all the concerns I wanted to express in it and given my belief that good prose had to be deeply philosophical. I feared that *Verses Nature* would fail, that I would run the risk of sacrificing its readability if I were to pursue this course. I feared that I would also make myself vulnerable for the accusation of allowing the novel to degenerate to a dumping ground of intellectual hubris. *Verses Nature* should be deep, yet somehow light. Strangely enough, it is Tatar, despite his overbearing nature, who brings a certain levity and humour into the story. Tatar is a prose

character. Poetry is not his thing. By deploying Tatar as a means of exploring the options along the simplicity-complexity continuum within a prose framework, I was able to overthrow my preconceptions about what prose could and could not do.

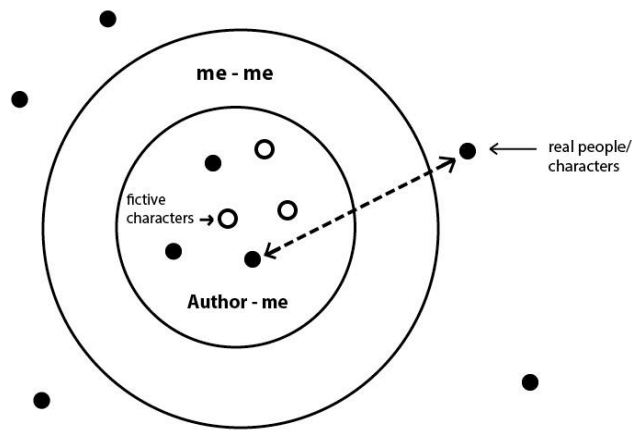
2.7. The dialogical author

Bakhtin's understanding of the dialogical author-reader relationship (e.g. p. 127) mapped largely unto views I had already held, which were now refined in the light of my re-engagement with his work and the conscious tracking of my praxis. I came to realize that Bakhtin had not given any thought to, or at least had not documented, the extent to which the author may be seen to enter a dialogical relationship not only with the reader but with herself and her work. I came to the conclusion that an author cannot but have a dialogical relationship with the creation of her work. There is what I shall term the Me-Me, that is, the civil person Joan Barbara Simon or in Bakhtinian terms, the primary author and depicting origin (pp. 109, 116). There is also the Author-Me, or Joan Barbara Simon Author (as I refer to myself on Facebook, for example). This Author-Me is what Bakhtin terms the secondary, or 'pure' author (p. 110). This Author-Me is a part of the civil me. It is a position I temporarily occupy or an action I perform. The Author-Me, being a part of the whole or civil me, is nested, concentrically, within the Me-Me, and is in a dialogical relationship not only with the Me-Me but with *itself*.

2.8. Dialogism between the author and her characters

The Author-Me enters a dialogical – and polychronic – relationship with the characters created.²⁴ Some of these characters have been inspired by Me-Me's life beyond the literary text whilst others are purely fictive although they should appear no less real. All orbit, or interact, according to an unseen force, an unseen order off the page, in my mind.

²⁴ See also Bakhtin, p. 149.



illustr.1. The dialogical author

Reflecting more and more about the nature of the relationship between the Author-Me and the novel's characters as semiotic subjects, I gradually came to see that there are, in fact, two semiotic subjects for each character: the hypothetical one born in the author's mind, and the final version fixed in print. I also realised that time references are even more fluid than often assumed. This may be exemplified by looking at how a protagonist is created.

The protagonist may have a long gestation period. She is created like a sculpture, layer upon layer, every time the Author-Me sits down to write or indeed comes up with new ideas for the protagonist's development. Some of these new ideas are kept, are documented as notes, some of which will make it into the final version of the novel. Other ideas, unable to survive the flash of the moment, are discarded. The growth of the character, we see, is situated in the author's dialogical self. This means the Author-Me has more than one protagonist. The author has the final character, that is, the one that became. The author also has the hypothetical one, that is, the one that could have been, in other words, the one that escaped the page. Both the final and the hypothetical characters exist in their own time and in a dialogical relationship to each other for the Author-Me alone, which explains why no other reader can read the book written by the Author-Me, who alone may stand in a dialogical relationship with the fleeting stages of the hypothetical character. This dialogical relationship between the final and the hypothetical character entails synchronic (i.e. fluid) and diachronic (i.e. fixed) processes in tandem. The reader, although presented a diachronic protagonist, that is to say, a protagonist who is historically fixed within the novel, nonetheless moves synchronically with him/her in the process of reading the novel and progressing from chapter to chapter, experiencing the protagonist's development 'live' as it were. Here we see how the time-space-direction cluster intersects with character depiction and my concerns with

language and form, each item in itself a highly complex, fluid concept, so that the heterogeneity and dialogism I am grappling with may rightly be described as devilish. Coincidentally, this notion of devils is echoed in a further scholar whose ideas have heightened my appreciation of how I address issues of form, of language and their limitations: the French post-structuralist philosopher and scholar, Jacques Derrida.

2.9. Jacques Derrida: *différance* and deconstruction as praxis

Jacques Derrida has, erroneously, been described as ‘the devil himself, a street-corner anarchist, a relativist or subjectivists, or nihilist, out to destroy our traditions and institutions’.²⁵ In truth, and in common with myself and Bakhtin, Derrida is an advocate of heterogeneity and hybridity. I find that Derrida, however abstruse, offers valid complements to the polysemy and con/intertextuality advocated by Bakhtin so that, together, they allow me to refine even further my critical understanding of my own praxis. I note, for example, that both scholars subscribe to the adjunctive nature of meaning, that is to say, they both believe that meaning is made in relation to what comes before and after the key interpretive element. Meaning cannot be made in isolation but is the result of a sequence of ideas in a dialogical relationship. I feel Derrida and I share a common ache and I find myself in the works of his that I have read so far. His notion of *différance*, the displacement it advocates, the back-tracking, seeking a source and finding none, concurs with my own conclusions. Another significant notion of his is that of deconstruction which, as I understand it, is itself a particular form of reading praxis more than it is a philosophy. John Caputo proffers a series of succinct explanations:

The aim is not to throw meaning to the four winds but to insist upon a more chastened sense of the contingency of sense, of everything that calls itself universal or necessary, transcendental or ontological, philosophical or scientific. (p. 184)

²⁵ John D. Caputo, *Deconstruction in a Nutshell: A Conversation with Jacques Derrida* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), p. 36. Future references to this volume are made in parentheses.

The very meaning and mission of deconstruction is to show that things – texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need – do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy. What is really going on in things, what is really happening, is always to come. Every time you try to stabilize the meaning of a thing, to fix it in its missionary position, the thing itself, if there is anything at all to it, slips away. (p. 32)

Deconstruction, as a responsible act, ‘reserves the *right* (droit) to ask any question, think any thought, to wonder aloud about any improbability, to impugn the veracity of any of the most venerable verities’ (Caputo, p. 51). In my own words, to deconstruct an idea, then, is to turn it inside out, to follow it, by means of *différance*, to its brutal conclusion, a conclusion which concedes that there can never be a conclusion, for meaning is open-ended. Derrida’s sensitivity to the violence of language, the violence of the act of naming and the rupture which this provokes, are all ideas that I too have held and which have become even more entrenched. Derrida’s reflections on the secret in and of the text overlap both with my understanding of the latent polysemy of the text, to be found as much in the text’s supposed empty spaces as in what is presented explicitly, as it does with the subtle dialogical relationship between the author, herself, her creative writing and the reader, as I detailed above. Like Derrida, I believe that there is nothing beyond the text (‘il n’y a pas d’hors texte’), which is another way of saying that everything is networked, or, as Hill clarifies, it means that nothing may remain ‘unaffected by *différance*, iterability and trace’ (p. 45), so that text and context, to return to my own words, reverberate in an endlessly dialogical relationship to each other as mediated by the decipherer. Derrida and I share the same pet devil: language. Can we speak of language in a single language, he asks in his work, *le Monolinguisme de l’Autre*? The question already tastes of the answer: no, we may not. We may not speak of language in a single language because of language’s quality, as Bakhtin before him noted, as a polysemic phenomenon engendering infinite interpretive options. Ideological, authoritarian language use – our everyday language use – gives the semblance of being a single, a monolingual, language but this is not true and it overlooks the countless shades and registers within individual linguistic codes. This point will be taken up again in the subsequent chapter, where I return to Nicole Brossard’s ‘fertile void’.

2.10. The dialogical nature of the socially constructed self

Why my preoccupation with heterodoxy, *différance* and struggle? Views come from somewhere. As the Irish novelist, Colm Toibin, says in his novel on the life of Henry James, *The Master*, we are not uncomplicated by history.²⁶ Scrutinizing my own history, I sense deeply that the borders of my own self have never been satisfactorily defined. I prioritise woman where many only see black. I am trilingual (English, French, German). My passport states that I am British. I have, however, lived abroad for almost thirty years, two decades of which I felt at home in France, where the immediate reaction of most was to allocate me to some African country I have never been to. For several years now I have lived in Luxembourg. I have recently become a Luxembourgish national, hence I now have two passports to choose from when the authorities demand that I show them who I 'am'. Luxembourg is a truly multicultural country, where people are nonetheless surprised that I do not speak Portuguese yet perfect German. Germans assume I am American. When I say I am British, or worse, English, they respond with an amused, confused, smile. I resist the urge to apologize for having broken the rule of constructing and living up to their comfortable expectations. The result of such a persistent lack of clarity, of such persistent *troubling* – and I note, in passing, that *trüb*, in German, means *murky* – is a permanent sense of struggle, if not transgression, but also a sense of being in limbo, intensified by the fear of disappearing down the cracks in the middle of multiple, at times simultaneous and occasionally antagonistic states of being.

The *troubling* I speak of is manifested in the moving in and out of various zones/depths of experience within and beyond the socially constructed borders of my self. Bearing in mind that *il n'y a pas d'hors texte*, the individual zones I speak of may be understood as texts in their own right, as semiotic areas, although, as I see it and show in *Verses Nature*, these need not be exclusively verbal. My socially constructed self has borders (e.g. the Me-Me and the Author-Me), for without borders, without some agreement about where something starts and stops, nothing may be defined or understood in relation to other objects. Corroborated by the ideas of Bakhtin and Derrida, my complicated history tells me, however, that there is no monolithic self, only an inherently contentious nation of selves, every experience feeding the incessant quest for definition and sense as we progress, regress and pivot through time. So I look more closely around me and what is it that I discover: I am not so exceptional after all. The borders we have erected in our attempts to tame the world

²⁶ Colm Toibin, *The Master* (London: Picador, 2004).

are appealing but do not reflect the shifting, messy, organic, frightening picture of a primal reality untainted by thought. Nor should we forget that all such borders, as dialogical frontiers, are porous. I, as a civic entity, am porous. The characters created by my Author-Me are porous. The plot is porous. The genres are porous. Reality, as the ultimate (or is it the penultimate?) text, is porous. Reality isn't real: reality is *written*. Moreover, it is written in (if not as) context. In the same way that sociocultural issues thrown up by the Russian revolution and its consequent degeneration to Stalinism have influenced Bakhtin's theory of language as reflective of the struggle between social structures,²⁷ or Derrida's exile bears upon his view of Other, and upon the splitting at the heart of deconstruction and *différance*, or indeed Marx's views on communism cannot be dissociated from his personal history (Marx, though from an educated background, was dirt poor when he arrived in the UK with his family), my reality is written in context. I find that my past – and yes, it has suddenly occurred to me, my self-appointed exile of thirty years to date, de-anchoring me from the security of family and my place/right of birth – has steered me relentlessly toward a theoretical and artistic fragile home within postmodernism as a cultural, intellectual orientation, characterised, as we see immediately in *Verses Nature*, by a loss of faith in certainty and reality, the celebration of fragmentation (although some, for example Guba & Lincoln, regard this as a crisis of representation),²⁸ the shifting nature of identities, and by the blending of cultural, linguistic registers in an attempt to challenge, if not overthrow, the current distinctions being made between them.²⁹ In keeping with the uneasy/uneasing/restless dynamics of a postmodern Zeitgeist, I must, however, add: for *now*. As Eco, citing Dante, remarks: 'Customs of mortals are like leaves on a branch, one goes and another comes'.³⁰

Conclusion

Verses Nature threw up many more problems than can ever be tackled within the scope of this commentary. For years it seemed as though I was indeed trying to dance with

²⁷ <http://www.iep.utm.edu/bakhtin/>.

²⁸ E. G. Guba, and Y. S. Lincoln, 'Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences', in *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Enquiry*, ed. by N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage, 2005), pp. 191-215, (p. 211).

²⁹ e.g. Jane Rivkin and Michael Ryan, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

³⁰ Umberto Eco, *The Search For The Perfect Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 47.

too many devils, so painfully was I aware of the myriad of options available. More than once I was on the verge of abandoning the whole idea. In the end I did not. I got as close as I could get.

I had a language. Language is a common good, thus it would never be my own. It would never be enough, for as Addie Bundren bemoans in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: 'words don't ever fit what they are trying to say at'³¹. My only option will always be to limit myself to what language and semiotic systems in general permit me to express although I know full well that there is more. So I, we, stack analogy upon analogy to construct a 'truth' with tools that are, ultimately, ill-suited to our ends for we are more than language, and language, particularly when it is consciously lived as praxis, will always draw me back to *more than* and *non-language*.

Words have their histories stitched to their feet and guardians who watch over the antics we permit ourselves with this common good. Given that language, as *text*, was all I had, I wanted to have it all my own way. I wanted to run away with language, to make it mine, to lose myself in it joyously and make it write, make it impale, my very own reality the best I could. I wanted to play with fire and catch on fire. I wanted to live the connection advocated by Derrida between writing and death which I did not want to be pardoned for meaning to say, for I did mean to say what I was saying *and not saying*. I meant to say it *differently*, for as Leslie Hill states, summarizing Derrida's point of view:

any mark can always be a re-mark, i.e. can be marked for a second time, remarked upon, brought to attention not only as a meaning but as a word, cited and put at a distance, or attributed to another, and its meaning qualified or modified – this in turn is the very reason literature is possible.
(p. 32)

The wish to dismantle borders, whether these relate to the novel's structure, its language or the subjectivities involved in reading and writing, may be achieved only if I concede to being able to do nothing more than to erode such borders. I will never be able to totally destroy them, for they cannot be destroyed or else we would be left without parameters for meaning making. *Verses Nature*, when read as an episteme of ambiguity,

³¹ William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 1963), p. 136.

redefines such borders in that it makes clear that these need not be where we have traditionally looked for them.

I am in a dialogical relationship with language-as-text/sign, so it is not simply a case of what I have done with/to language but of what language has done to me. I came to the conclusion that dialogism and heterogeneity can be taken a step further than I had hitherto ever encountered in relation to the novel. My very own praxis made clear that it is indeed possible for an author to produce an original text, which, I believe, comprises a delicate balance between unrepeatability and resourcing or re-animating already existing material. I concluded, further, that the limits of dialogism and heterogeneity, such as I experienced them in praxis, are totally arbitrary, for ultimately it is the reader who is to judge, and this reader brings her own dialogism, heterogeneity and responsibility into play.³² To cite Hill summarizing Derrida once again: 'Any coherent analysis would need to recognise the undecidability implicit in all textuality and take account of the specific relationship between literature and responsibility' (p. 101). Ultimately, the author enters a contractual relationship with the reader based wholly on trust. The text constitutes the interface between two trusting consciousnesses/consciences. This is (part of) the text's secret, its charm and its challenge.

³² Stanley Fish, 'Interpretive Communities', in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*, ed. by J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 217-221.

Chapter Two

Where Truth Lies Blind You Can't Do It Easily:
Engendering Genres by Writing in the Feminine with Nicole Brossard

Introduction

In the preceding chapter my principal concern was to explore how I could write a novel in such a way that it remained true to my sense of form and its limitations. I presented the challenges faced and some of the measures taken to resolve them. In the current chapter, I return to the issue from a slightly different angle, looking at how another author, the Canadian feminist, Nicole Brossard, appears to address and resolve similar problems to my own. My initial question is given a new tint as it now explores something more distinct within the realm of novel writing: How does body interact with generic structures to create/advocate new reading realities? The first task is to take a closer look at the notion of body.

Part One: Penning Pleasure

1.1. Understanding the body

Whereas the initial research question focused on matters of form, my sub-question takes a closer look at the correlation between genre and gender. More specifically, it looks at the multiple functions of the body from three perspectives: as the subject of writing, as the vehicle of writing and as the vehicle of reading.

As I understand it, to look at the body as the subject of writing is to make of the body the theme of the text, that is to say, the body is what is being written about:

It is always the story of the body we tell [...] the body is what recognizes, knows for sure when touching our real nature. Everything else can be disputed, since in large part, the body works without respite in the luxuriance of the imaginary [...] to pretend to a neutral body of writing only silences one gender: the feminine.³³

To look at the body as a vehicle of writing is to use the body as a tool for writing, that is, as a means through which a text is written: 'I conceive of writing as a function of the body,

³³ Nicole Brossard, *Fluid Arguments* (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2005), p. 68.

that is, how the body renders itself a formal element of the linguistic turf.³⁴ The body, according to this explanation, and as I understand it, becomes, via its use as a tool to accomplish the writing act, an integral part of the text itself. It becomes part of the text's language. This being so, we must also be able (or learn) to read the body *in* the text; as the subject of the text not at the thematic level, as above, but at the structural level connected with the creation of genre for it is one's style of language which gives indication of the genre. To properly read the text we, the reader, will also need our own body.

To look at the body as a vehicle of reading is to use the body as a means to understand the text, in other words, to gain meaning from the text in a manner extending beyond a purely verbal understanding. As Brossard states above: 'the body is what recognizes, knows for sure when touching our real nature. Everything else can be disputed' (see footnote 33). Although Nicole Brossard makes no specific reference to it, I cannot overlook the dialogical relationship between the author's body and the reader's body, the former being part of the text's linguistic turf which the reader, employing her own body, must make sense of. This, essentially, is, in my opinion, how gender, genre and body interact to create new reading subjectivities/realities in Brossard's work. They are created by the author's use of her body beyond the thematic level and in order to add new semantic (i.e. linguistic) and structural (i.e. generic) dimensions to the text which, in dialogue with the reader's body, invite, if not demand, that new interpretive spaces are entered into from which the reader may experience her selves in new ways. Why I say that new semantic and structural dimensions are added rather than simply saying that Brossard creates a totally new experience and language, distinct from patriarchal writing, will become clear when I re-evaluate her aerial vision and writing in the feminine in the last section of this chapter.

In her book, *The Newly Born Woman*, the French feminist Hélène Cixous, together with Christine Clement, asks a question which is absolutely pertinent here. "What does she want?" They conclude:

This question conceals the most immediate and most urgent question: "How do I pleasure?" – what is it – feminine *jouissance* – where does it happen, how

³⁴ Louise Forsyth, *Nicole Brossard, Essays on Her Works*, (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), p. 24. future references to this volume are in parentheses.

does it inscribe itself – on the level of her body or of her unconscious? And then, *how does it write itself?*³⁵ (my italics)

Basing my analysis on an extract from Brossard's novel *Fences in Breathing* (2007), I look for indications of Brossard's praxis in her depiction of the body, the eroticized lesbian body, celebrating, according to Cixous & Clement, its 'spacious singing flesh' (p. 88).

The current chapter focuses on writing in the feminine as opposed to novel writing in general for two reasons. Firstly, because for Brossard, the overtly political objectives of writing in the feminine are more important than mere classifications into poetry and/or prose, so important, in fact, that she, along with other Canadian feminists, modified Cixous' feminine writing (*écriture féminine*) to writing *in the feminine* (*écriture au féminin*) to underline the significance of agency. The second reason why I do not attempt a more global reference to novel writing is because Brossard makes clear in *Fluid Arguments* that she considers herself first and foremost a practitioner of, in her opinion, the highest literary form: poetry (p. 36). Nicole Brossard is a poet, one with an ambivalent attitude towards prose, although her early resistance to prose appears to have softened over the years and her technique of 'troubling' boundaries,³⁶ in any case, and as exemplified in the sample selected for analysis, quickly reveals the limits of simple genre attribution as poetry and prose. This is totally in keeping with writing in the feminine, which offers resistance to the characteristics of Western patriarchal thought, described by Bakhtin as 'suffering in the captivity of narrow and homogeneous interpretations' (p. xii), these being, according to Brooke-Rose, 'marked with zeroist authorship dressed in democracy clothed in cartesianism'.³⁷ Such resistance is, moreover, in keeping with the conclusions I arrive at regarding the inherently polyvalent, shifting nature of literary forms.

³⁵ Hélène Cixous and Christine Clement, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975/1986), p. 82. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

³⁶ Karen McPherson, 'Since Yesterday: Nicole Brossard's Writing after Loss', in *Nicole Brossard, Essays on Her Works*, ed. by Louise H. Forsyth (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), pp. 53-67. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

³⁷ Christine Brooke-Rose, *The Christine Brooke-Rose Omnibus* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006). p. 681.

Before addressing the question ‘what does she want?’, i.e. how does Nicole Brossard pleasure and how does she show this, for example gloriously ‘upended in ecstasy’ in *The Aerial Letter* (p. 44), it would be useful to introduce Nicole Brossard in more detail.

1.2. Nicole Brossard: identity ‘upended in ecstasy’

Nicole Brossard is a French Canadian lesbian feminist, poet, novelist and essayist, born in 1943 in Montréal, Quebec, where she still lives. On the back cover of her novel, *Fences In Breathing*, Brossard is referred to as ‘one of North America’s foremost practitioners of innovative writing’. Nicole Brossard is, then, a North American writer with the particularity that she writes in French. To emphasize the differences between so-called Anglo-American and French feminism, as outlined by scholars such as Christine Delphy,³⁸ Toril Moi,³⁹ or Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron⁴⁰, is to set up an arguably outdated dichotomy based on geographical allegiances which are not automatically given, for not every American feminist will or must adhere to the so-called American feminism. The same is true for French feminists. Nicole Brossard may be seen as a case in point. “Anglo-American” feminism is said to be more focused on disqualifying female cultural stereotypes, whereas the Francophone feminism is more militant, seeking to dismantle the binary yet univocal patriarchal system as a whole. Francophone feminism is also more theoretical in its approach than the Anglo-American variety, its theory being informed by a Derridean deconstructionist language philosophy⁴¹ and by Lacanian psychoanalysis. Brossard is not only well versed in both languages but in both feminist approaches so that it makes better sense, in my opinion, to view the totality of Brossard’s work as reflecting both strands of feminist thought and discourse. If Moi, in her review of 1970s feminist thought, does not even mention Brossard, I believe this is because Moi’s focus on English texts cannot easily accommodate a feminist writing in French. Simone

³⁸ Christine Delphy, ‘The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move’, in *Another Look, Another Woman: Retranslations of French Feminisms*, ed. by Lynne Huffer (Yale French Studies, No.87, 1995) pp. 190-221.

³⁹ Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁴⁰ Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, *New French Feminisms*, (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

⁴¹ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1981).

de Beauvoir, on the other hand, is mentioned in Moi's review, I suspect, because she was available in translation.

1.3. From feminine writing to writing in the feminine

The French feminist, Hélène Cixous, coined the phrase *écriture féminine*, or feminine writing, which, rather tellingly, is also translated as writing the body. Feminine writing, of which the manifesto, it has been said, is Cixous' *The Laugh of the Medusa*, is a form of writing which defies codification:

At the present time, *defining* a feminine practice of writing is impossible with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded, which does not mean that it does not exist. But it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallogentric system; it takes place and will take place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. (Cixous & Clement, p. 92).

Cixous could not know that, a decade later, an attempt would be made to define and theorize this type of writing, as indeed Nicole Brossard does in her aerial vision, presented in section 2.4 of this chapter. Writing in the feminine, as I understand it, takes the female body and its pleasure as the subject of writing. It should do so, writing from a different place and with a different voice. Later in this chapter, in section 2.6, I try to ascertain the extent to which Brossard's re-interpretation of feminine writing is distinct from classical discourse, i.e. whether it is truly a new, gyne-centric language.

Notwithstanding the generally undefinable nature of feminine writing, Cixous & Clement accept that some of its characteristics and objectives may nonetheless be partially identified:

woman doesn't 'speak', she throws her trembling body into the air, she lets herself go, she flies, she goes completely into her voice, she vitally defends the 'logic' of her discourse with her body; her flesh speaks true. (p. 92)

Here we have a case of the body as a vehicle of writing and a complement to one's voice. The body is thrown into the air – like a pen or arrow? – and it speaks a truth which extends

beyond mere words. This type of writing defends a new logic, the logic of woman's dialogical relationship with her body, and it does so in a manner which is foreign to men. The above citation makes it clear how women should appropriate man's best friends – words and logic – in order to give them new meaning and locations of/for meaning.

The political objectives of feminine writing are, therefore, clear. It releases women from the necessity to write from within man's discourse. It provides a means to subvert and explode such discourse. To engage in feminine writing is to write against men's grammar:

now it is time for her to displace this "within", explode it, overturn it, grab it, make it hers, take it in, take it into her women's mouth, bite its tongue with her women's teeth, make up her own tongue to get inside of it. And you will see how easily she will well up, from this "within" where she was hidden and dormant, to the lips where her foams will overflow. (Cixous & Clement, p. 95.)

I cite this passage for various reasons. It not only gives us a taste of the militant character of French feminism, but it also provides a fitting description for how Carmina and Catherine subvert men's grammar in *Verses Nature*, as explained in the previous chapter. The above citation is also noteworthy because it conjures up a number of images that resurface in Brossard's aerial vision, as I shall go on to demonstrate.

Feminine writing is to unerase, to unbury, to put woman back on the map (Cixous, p. 6). It is to find one's voice, to resist 'soundproof' male indifference, it is to find the primitive picture of who we were before we were put to sleep. This is a picture which frightens us, Cixous claims. A picture, I would add, which frightens them, the men. I hear this supplementary thought between Cixous' lines and encounter it even more explicitly in much of Brossard's work. According to its advocates, to engage in feminine writing cannot be done without violence, without a radical break from the 'opaque semantic space', black as night⁴², which governs phallogentric, 'excessively univocal'⁴³ language and thus our thought and the vehicles we use to say who we are. Here too, I cannot read such a description without thinking about its relevance to my depiction of Carmina: her break with phallogentric 'opaque

⁴² Brossard (2006), p. 95.

⁴³ Luce Irigaray, 'Women on the Market', in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*, ed. by J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 799-811, (p. 796).

semantic space', or her polyvocal representation. In fact much of what Cixous describes as the aims of feminine writing – or indeed what Brossard elaborates as writing in the feminine – may be seen to apply perfectly to what we witness Carmina doing via her diary.

Brossard regards herself more as a visionary than as a transgressional writer, the former going beyond the latter in that she, or so Brossard claims, brings forth new material,⁴⁴ although I fail to see why a transgressional stance should render one incapable of doing the like. The views and visions of feminine writing as expounded by Cixous and Irigaray are repeatedly echoed in Brossard's own writing, in which an increased sense of agency has compelled her to find a new name for what she does. Nicole Brossard goes beyond feminine writing to writing *in the* feminine. I deliberately say 'beyond' as it has become clear to me how important the notion of occupying new spaces is within feminist writing as within my own. It is from this space and by means of this new act, the act of writing in the feminine, that the hitherto invisible, silenced woman, and in particular the lesbian woman and urban Amazonian, the only two women not invented by man,⁴⁵ may finally be uncovered, unerased, thus remembered. It is within this space that the lesbian woman and her body may take to the stage, thereby destabilizing and eventually dismantling the patriarchal system of authoritative texts by wrighting a space for herself/selves with her unique body and voice, her 'spacious singing flesh' (Cixous & Clement, p. 88). I deliberately say 'wright' as I wish to accentuate the creative agency involved here as the body is deployed as a vehicle of writing and how this interacts with space. To wright a space, then, is to not only use your body to push men aside, figuratively, or strike them out. Underlining the connection between wright and playwright, to wright a space, for me, means to consciously occupy a role, as opposed to merely slipping into a role. It means to consciously live or play out the role of one's spacious singing flesh. This type of agency goes beyond the mere performance of a temporary subject who leaves once the curtains fall because this type of agency is a genuine political act and not a game, not mere play. This type of agency means materializing one's lesbianism, living it consciously, authentically and publicly. In *She Would Be The First Sentence of my Next Novel*, Nicole Brossard states her position quite clearly in a passage whose reference to deconstruction and slippage give further evidence of French feminism informed by Derrida:

⁴⁴ Brossard (2005), p. 36.

⁴⁵ Nicole Brossard, *She Would Be The First Sentence Of My Next Novel* (Toronto: Mercury, 1998), p. 141. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

I'm working to demystify patriarchal reality and to deconstruct heterosexism, writing in the feminine was made to rethink 'the truth' and thus to effect a fresh redistribution of reality and fiction. It is within this new distribution of the "surfaces of sense" that we must understand the border-crossings between genres, the slippage of genres it has promoted. [...] without which the feminine I could not have simultaneously expressed its sensibility, voiced its dissidence and explored the "blind spots" of an individual and plural memory. (p. 87)

Writing in the feminine means a bodily resistance to 'the knowing letter' or patriarchal language,⁴⁶ ridding oneself of patriarchal inflections and returning to the roots, whereby I understand roots as words (and thus related to the mouth as source), but also roots in the sense of radical action to reveal the urban amazonian/integral woman. Cixous' call to write against men's grammar has clearly been heard by Brossard. In *The Aerial Letter*, she, too, strives to remake/re-mark reality so as not to flounder in its fictive version or be submerged in sociological anecdote (p. 67). Instead, writing in the feminine must unsettle and displace opaque semantic structures or 'foreign semantic earth' (p. 105), where it is night in the sentence, 'In cr(y)sis, sinister and bloody patriarchy'.⁴⁷ Consciously eroticized writing in the feminine must 'rip their posters off our walls' (p. 135), cause a revolution (p. 110) via polyvalence and polysemy, for 'one-way thinking falters under a continuous onslaught of words going off in all directions' (p. 111).

For Brossard, writing is a trajectory of desire and consciousness.⁴⁸ In the eponymous essay in the collection *Fluid Arguments*, she says these four words represent 'everything that gives meaning to my life' (ibid.). To write in the feminine is to celebrate excess, plurality, to seek out the blind spots, the in-between. It is to say what has not been said. It avows the unavowable. Once again, direct parallels may be drawn between Brossardian expectations of writing in the feminine and the functions and styles present in Carmina's diary, the exception being that Carmina, unlike the Brossardian heroine, is a heterosexual woman. To write in the feminine is to embrace silences as a fertile void – or, as Kristeva reminds us, citing Mallarmé,

⁴⁶ Nicole Brossard, *The Aerial Letter*, trans. by Marlene Wildeman (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1988), p. 39. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

⁴⁷ Nicole Brossard, *Picture Theory* (Toronto: Guernica, 1982), p. 95.

⁴⁸ Brossard (2005), p. 101.

“the music in letters” – overflowing with meaning⁴⁹. It is to surf on the potential of words, far, into and beyond the fiery horizon. Writing in the feminine presumes, within the author, a concert of personalizations as a creative force (Cixous & Clement, p. 84) that has never ceased to hear what comes before language (p. 88).⁵⁰ It constitutes a dynamic form of telling as a means to survive one’s disappearance (McPherson, p. 64). It is also, in common with feminine writing more generally, as Cixous observes, a science of farewells (Cixous, p. 3). It is to move radically away from Man’s language and methods. Brossardian writing in the feminine demands of the authoress her willingness to ‘go too far’, even beyond language, to non-verbal truths, if possible. It demands abandonment and the capacity to *délire*, which is both an ecstatic state (delirium) and a writing strategy (to un-fix reading). To write in the feminine means to show ‘this is how I pleasure’. In order to show this, woman, Brossard’s integral woman, recruits new metaphors on the other side of the/ir (i.e. Man’s) Real. For Brossard, writing in the feminine is inextricably bound with the eroticized body as the subject of writing, the vehicle of writing and as a vehicle of reading, as explained in section one. Body is so important a theme for Brossard that it is the first word on her list of private vocabulary presented in *Fluid Arguments* (p. 85). Writing in the feminine is also inextricably bound with the performative aspect of words as bodies which do things.⁵¹ By the sheer volume of essays and lectures that Brossard has given over the decades, it becomes clear that she spends a lot of time thinking about what writing is and should achieve. ‘To write’, she says in *The Aerial Letter*, ‘is always to make the inadmissible emerge [...] It is to conceive of a link between mental space, body and reality’ (p. 98). To write, Brossard states elsewhere, in *Fluid Arguments*, is, notably, to ‘conduct sense well beyond the signified. Then all the words can become the never-ending theatre of a series of apparitions where she who writes displaces imperceptibly but radically the order of the world’ (p. 16). To write, then, is a radical, political act in which the body plays a central role.

The political goals of writing in the feminine and the emphasis it places on subverting male language and reason can be seen to follow on from an already existing critique of the

⁴⁹ Julia Kristeva, Kristeva, Julia, ‘Oscillation Between Power and Denial’, in *New French Feminisms*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 165-167, (p. 165).

⁵⁰ See also Caputo (1997).

⁵¹ Alice Parker, ‘Performativity in Hier’, in *Nicole Brossard, Essays on Her Works*, ed. by Louise H. Forsyth (Toronto: Guernica, 2005) pp. 68-83.

supremacy of a 'disembodied' reason. John Dewey, writing decades before Brossard, concludes that 'reason at its height cannot attain complete grasp and a self-contained assurance. It must fall back upon imagination – upon the embodiment of ideas in an emotionally charged sense'.⁵² Here I see a direct link to my explanation of the body as a vehicle of reading endowed with the capacity to think beyond words although I do not think Dewey has an eroticized body in mind.

Writing in the feminine's political mission should not mislead one to presume a generally negative or truculent frame of mind on the part of the authoress. On the contrary, Brossard's writing, she readily confesses in *Picture Theory* (pp. 81, 124) and *Fluid Arguments* (p. 95), has not only an inclination towards abstraction, but, and more importantly, Brossard's work has an inclination towards utopia and hope (p. 71), for lesbian writing results in:

books that put existential lumps in the throat, knots in the chest, and fireworks in the low belly of she who, having been there, lingers, reads and re-reads until the traditional meaning of the words is beaten out. (p. 249)

In what follows, I present my attempts to read such writing. Given the many parallels already established between Brossard's aims and my own, the goal is now to find out how her work may further inform my own ideas on heterogeneity, but also to discover where our convergence comes to an end.

Part Two: Nicole Brossard in Word and Deed: *Fences in Breathing*

2.1. The Plot

Fences in Breathing is ostensibly about Anne and her stay in a château run by her girlfriend, Tatiana. During her stay, Anne begins to write a novel in a foreign language. This foreign language is, as I see it, of symbolic character. There are at least three possibilities. The first is English as a foreign language. Although Brossard is bilingual and inserts English words strategically into her French texts (and vice versa) and even though she sometimes delivers lectures in English as opposed to French, she is a Francophone Canadian for whom English

⁵² John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1934), p. 33.

remains a foreign – an exophonic – language. Secondly, the foreign language Anne writes her novel in is a clear allusion to the patriarchal language, itself at the heart of The Patriot's Act which preoccupies a character in the novel Anne is writing, namely the lawyer, Laure. A third symbolic dimension to the novel as a foreign language relates to Brossard's ambivalent feelings towards the novel as a genre, one of those 'conditioned spaces' she speaks of in *Picture Theory* (p. 68) and in which she does not feel at home as with poetry (McPherson, p. 52). *Fences in Breathing* is, however, like so many of Brossard's texts, far more an attempt to reveal unknown dimensions of reality via a phenomenological exploration of writing praxis, described in *Fluid Arguments* as 'energy taking shape in language' (p27). In what follows, I present Nicole Brossard at work when writing in the feminine and how her 'collusion in the exploration of forms' reveals how body interacts with the structure of the text to create and advocate new reading realities and subjectivities.⁵³

2.2. *Fences in Breathing*: 'a collusion in the exploration of forms'

they were two sentences with wings and desire, one always ready to seduce the other into conceiving, beyond words, a moistness of life in the slightest splitting of sap and saliva, there where the mouth, caressing the dream's fine fabric, ventures all the way to the source [...] it was impossible to grab them out of the air in full flight or slow them down enough to grasp their meaning or their scope. (p. 99)

In the sample above, taken from the third section of the novel, 'The Water Level', with its telling opening sentence: 'They were two sentences with water and light' (p73), there is nothing coincidental whatsoever. Rather, it is an instance of the 'perfect synchronization between explosion and mastery'.⁵⁴ This, however, is not to say that Brossard is totally in command of what the text means, not even to herself. In *Fluid Arguments*, she confesses:

it is the nature of fictional writing to always escape our full comprehension [...] I know for sure as a writer that if I understood everything that I was writing, I wouldn't write anymore, for I need the enigma of writing to excite me (p. 23).

⁵³ Nicole Brossard, *Lovhers* (Montreal: Guernica, 1980/1986), p. 81.

⁵⁴ Brossard (1988), p. 70.

Brossard's confession comes as a relief, for I, too, have to admit that I do not always find it easy to enter her texts. In fact I often have to wrestle with them, but this is also one reason why I find them so attractive. Brossard's texts feel strange, far away, foreign, yet they do speak to me in a way I cannot pin down and in a way that draws me back to them again and again to attempt to unpick not only their meanings but their mechanics. Four sentences in particular in *Fences in Breathing*, have a magnetizing effect on me and led me to select a passage from this book for further analysis:

I am writing this book also as a way of not being soft and of seeing the horizon of fires heading our way. (p. 71)

I am everywhere I am. I am here to understand and to escape. (p. 71)

Impale the real. (p. 8)

My body is restless wild with words and strike-throughs not at all it is just bruised all over like a dream. (pp. 55-6)

What is it, then, that I see, me, a heterosexual woman aged fifty in 2016 and reading Nicole Brossard in a foreign language? What is it I see when invited to enter a world written in the feminine nearly a decade ago?

2.3. Meaning in view: entering the other side of the real

Meaning, says Brossard in *Picture Theory*, amplifies reality like a sonorous comet (p. 110). How? How does she achieve this and which meanings am I able to take from her writing? These are the questions answered in the following section. My understanding of feminine writing and writing in the feminine, as outlined in section 1.3, has primed my eyes, allowing me to enter the text. I saw how a new linguistic structure had been created, one that is fluid, dizzy, overflowing with meaning. I sensed what Brossard describes in *Fluid Arguments* as the 'luxuriance of the imaginary' (p. 168). I did indeed respond bodily to the text, not only in a heady manner, swirling, spiralling, surfing on the backs of words and the loud, slippery heteroglossic spaces in between, but also in an eroticized manner. It had never occurred to me before, and I had never experienced my body *in* a text in this way. Nicole Brossard insists on

the importance of being a lesbian for writing in the feminine although she permits herself the generous use of 'we' to address all women (e.g. pp. 11, 68, 106, 191). Such insistence only serves to exclude me from the text to a certain extent, especially when I read passages like the following, taken from *The Aerial Letter*: 'All women would like to believe in the "genius" of women but only lesbians believe in it, take inspiration from it, live it' (p. 122). I would disagree. Carmina would disagree. How can I read such a sentence and not be left wondering whether my heterosexuality hinders a *reading* 'in the feminine' of the type of *writing in the feminine* Brossard advocates? Undeterred by the fact that I am not a lesbian, not an urban Amazonian or the integral woman who is Brossard's heroine, yet encouraged by the many parallels I have nonetheless been able to establish between our aims and writing styles, I attempt a *reading* in the feminine of Brossard's *writing in the feminine*.

My first reading strategy was to establish intertextual links in the conventional, patriarchal manner, that is, as an exercise not of body but of mind. As my main concern is with how the body interacts with genre to create new reading realities, I will limit the analysis below to those sections of the excerpt which give concrete evidence of this.

Although Nicole Brossard mentions only wings and the mouth as concrete images in the passage selected for analysis presented at the beginning of section 2.2 above, she evokes so much more of the body as a subject of writing. We imagine the full body in movement, the bodies of two women, the body of newly conceived life and the body of words made material. The bodies of these two women have as their meeting point the 'fine fabric' of their skin – 'fine fabric', too, as the abstract utopian space made, in *Picture Theory*, 'concrete in the margin' (p. 67). This skin, especially the lesbian skin, laughing and saline,⁵⁵ a thinking, knowing organ with its own intelligence and language, provides an alternative, anti-Cartesian starting point of knowledge.

Action words and intensity of movement in conjunction with the body abound in this passage: 'grabs', 'grasp', 'caress', 'flight'. Alice Parker speaks of the Brossardian verb as a pivot (p. 71). I think there are many more options. We may not only pivot around verbs but around every single word, each with its own aura, cultural history and the personal history it has in the context of the reader's life, Bakhtin reminds us. This is not to say that we may read these words with the body. When I read, for example, 'the moistness of life' in the excerpt selected, my immediate thought is of water as a metaphor generally and as an essential component of the female body, along with tears, sweat, secretions, blood, and milk. I note, too, that Cixous

⁵⁵ Brossard (1998).

speaks of feminine writing as using white ink (to counter semen, I wonder?) and like Brossard, she sees writing as an imperative of the newly born woman.⁵⁶ Whilst 'moistness of life' conjures up images of the body, I do not feel these *in* my body or read these *with* my body. A bodily-driven dialogical relationship between myself and the author is not entered into, thus the passage remains abstract and disembodied.

It is a similar case with the word 'source'. I read the word in English, which provokes images arising from the word in French: *la source*. In French, it means both 'origin' in general, and, what is more interesting here, the origins of a river, which in English can be translated as 'spring'. Spring, as noun, in turn, brings me back to spring as a verb, thus alluding to movement in a way the purely French word *la source* does not. Reading 'source' as a synonym for 'origins', I also quickly establish a link to 'roots' (*racine*), which not only has mathematical connotations, bringing me back to the metaphor of the holograph so central in Brossard's work,⁵⁷ but it also has political connotations in the sense of radical transformation. At the psychological level, the source draws to (my) mind the unconscious, and thus Lacan, and, by extension, Derrida. At the level of body, my first thoughts are of the vagina and mouth as potent symbols of life; the vagina (whose fluids reinforce the word 'source'), representing biological/sexual life, and mouth (with its own fluids) representing verbal life (i.e. thought). The source can also be read as a metaphor for the preverbal/social knowledge as a particular form of communication, bonding and identity construction which women have forgotten and men do not share.⁵⁸ All of this is all very well and good, but it is also very much in/of the mind. Where am I able to get closer to a bodily reading in the excerpt provided?

I may get closer to a bodily reading when I read the word 'wings'. Over and above my recollection that Brossard writes to escape (p. 71), or my recollection of a passage in Cixous about birds, women and writing being unclean according to the Bible (Cixous, p. 111), the mention of wings conjures up flight in a phenomenological manner for me. Despite the fact

⁵⁶ Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), pp. 245-264.

⁵⁷ Susan Knutson, 'Feminist Legends of Natureculture: Brossard, Haraway, Science', in *Nicole Brossard, Essays on Her Works*, ed. by Louise H. Forsyth (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), pp. 161-174, (p. 165). See also Brossard (1982), p. 61; Brossard (1988), pp. 68, 100; Parker (2005), p. 73.

⁵⁸ Julia Kristeva, 'Reliance, or Maternal Eroticism', *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, Vol.62. No.1 (February, 2014), pp. 69-85.

that I remain seated whilst reading, I sense something in my body is set into motion as I become a performative constituent of the text.

I may get closer to a bodily reading when I read the words 'beyond words'. The idea of 'beyond' connects in my mind to the notion of an overflow of meaning, but also to entering a totally new unwritten language, the pre-verbal language and how this relates to the unconscious. I think of Kristeva's preverbal mother-child symbiosis, the *chora*⁵⁹ and how this links with my on-going reading. The mention of 'beyond', like the mention of wings, conjures up displacement, thus movement, which I similarly register in a bodily way.

I may get closer to a bodily reading when I read the words 'slightest splitting of sap and saliva'. Even in the slightest, the tiniest split, something new will emerge. This idea alludes, for me, to the plethora of possible meanings awaiting discovery. Such hypersemia, this potential fullness, is echoed in Bakhtin. The idea of an endless splitting reminds me of Derrida's *différance*.⁶⁰ When, in my mind, I try to split slightly and endlessly, I am neither left with an existential lump in the throat nor knots in the chest as Brossard promised, yet the sheer impossibility and interminability of the task – can one even split saliva? – does leave me with a sense of dizziness or *délire* which I associate with what Brossard calls the luxuriance of the imaginary in which words, and thus thoughts, we are told in *Picture Theory*, veer off in all directions (p. 111).

In the crevice, in this split, new life may be created: new images, movements and realities. In this fertile, as yet unnamed void, we go round in circles, we spiral, we 'faire le tour du mot' (*inter-dit*), of the fullness of what has been un/said/fixed (*délire*), of what cannot be said and of what hasn't be said yet (*inédit*).⁶¹ As with the other words of movement in the passage, I read the notion of spiral, or going around in circles, with my body as much as, if not more than, with my mind.

⁵⁹ Julia Kristeva, 'Revolution in Poetic Language', in *Identity: A Reader*, ed. by Paul du Gay and others (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 69-75. See also Kristeva (2014).

⁶⁰ See also W. Siemerling, *Discoveries of the Other: Alterity in the Work of Leonard Cohen, Hubert Aquin, Michale Ondaatje and Nicole Brossard* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), pp. 173-204.

⁶¹ Susan Rudy, 'Editor's Introduction: Nicole Brossard in English', in *Fluid Arguments*, (Toronto: The Mercury Press, 2005), pp. 9-16, (p. 11). Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

I may get closer to a bodily reading when I read the word 'mouth'. Three thoughts crowd my mind: his master's voice, the unsayable/illegible, and breathing as a symbol of life.

The thought of his master's voice makes me remember, or re-member, that is, put together again, a voice – something deep and oppressive – which I truly hear in my mind. The unsayable brings me back to my attempt to endlessly split saliva. I sense my lips more acutely than before and feel a stutter trembling in my throat. This is not an impulse but a consequence of reflection so that I ask myself whether it is truly reading with my body or more a memory. I do note, however, that the mention of breathing automatically makes me breathe more deeply, more consciously.

To read with the body should not, as I understand it, simply mean that the body executes actions activated by certain words in the text. This would reduce the body to a mere puppet. To use the body as a vehicle of reading should mean, more globally, the body being put to the service of the text as a way of making meaning. I am not sure that this is what is happening in my case. Could it be my heterosexuality which is standing in the way or my still unbroken allegiance to the patriarchal way of thinking? Could it even be that to read with the body in the manner I am attempting to is an impossible task?

These are but the first, impulsive associations I am able to establish upon a first reading of the passage selected. I read the passage again and again. I am aware of being somewhere else. I have left my world behind. I feel de-moored. It is sensual and frightening at once. Since my memory does not serve me well, it providing few references for me in this new territory, I have had to shift my comfortable referential picket fences and lunge with my thinking skin into the moment and the vastness of the unknown, or, as Brossard says in *Picture Theory*, 'to escape from all categories denying | Space itself and always fluid the unknown' (p. 51). Combined, these differing velocities, rhythms and directions of thought create a sense of vertigo. I know that I cannot make meaning without naming yet the names I have are impotent. I have here a prose passage on paper but not in the ear. I become highly sensitized to the in/significance of surfaces and to the fact that I am slipping between genres. I sense space, above all, the female body as a lost space, one she un/recovers/reclaims in abandonment and (for her) pleasure. As Brossard stated in *The Aerial Letter*: 'the female body will speak its reality, its images, the censure it has been subjected to, its body filled to bursting' (p. 73). I sense time: moving forward and backward, fast and slow, pivoting from the verbs which Brossard, as we learn in *Fluid Arguments*, has meticulously selected, 'digging in the dictionary as others turn the soil to unearth evidence of ancient lives' (p. 93). Backwards in time as we seek meaning but realize our reading histories and memories to date are of

limited use. Forward in time to new concepts/images as we are sucked into the text, slowing down even though we have been taught to read prose quickly, in contrast to poetry.⁶² I slow down in my attempt to snatch elusive meanings that drift, slip or even flee. I can no longer position myself in front of or before the word but must set off on a journey, a tour of the word's full potential. It is an attempt to encircle words and I know from the start, given the very nature of words as shifting polysemic entities, as Bakhtin and Derrida convincingly argue, that I will fail. I will fail, also, knowing full well that I am reading the text in a foreign language, in translation, and knowing that Brossard, as a bilingual writer, will have countless other images and words surfacing during the act of writing, images which (un)intentionally escape the page, just like the images she can never imagine that I may bring to the text as a heterosexual, trilingual woman in her fifties in the year 2016. To read Nicole Brossard in English is to enter a dialogical relationship with her on merely one of her several surfaces. I can never know the extent to which our surfaces truly touch.

In this section I have presented an excerpt of Brossard's work where the eroticized lesbian body is the subject, or theme, of writing in which the author's body, as a vehicle of writing, constitutes an integral part of the text. I then try to use my body as a vehicle for reading the text, or making it mean, and I discuss how Brossard's particular praxis of making the body interact with the structure of the text may or may not create new reading realities which I am able to enter into. In the following section, I take another look at the praxis of writing in the feminine from a graphical perspective, such as Brossard presents it in her aerial vision.

2.4. *Inter-dit* and *inédit*: Brossard's aerial vision and optics of praxis

What gives Nicole Brossard pleasure and how does she write this? The visceral sample of Brossard's writing in the feminine presented above is typical of her style and of her lovemaking scenes in particular. We return to the key words of trajectory, consciousness, desire. *Trajectory* sensitizes the reader to the co/m/motion of Brossard's style, to its rhythm and movement, above all those involved in generating the hologram and the spiral as new metaphors illuminating the act of transformation and via which she 'shakes syntax' in order to

⁶² Lynette Hunter, 'The Inédit in Writing by Nicole Brossard: Breathing the Skin of Language', in *Nicole Brossard, Essays on Her Works*, ed. by Louise H. Forsyth (Toronto: Guernica, 2005), pp. 209-38, (p. 235). Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

distance herself, she remarks in *Fluid Arguments*, from the linear approach to writing (pp. 33, 132). *Consciousness* pulls us out of our 'sleep' into unheard of, utopian dimensions of reality. *Desire* propels us into an intellectual, abstract and bodily dialogic relationship with our nation of selves and our body both as perspective (how we look at things) and posture or vehicle of reading (p. 24). Body – as a metaphor for energy, intensity, desire, pleasure, memory (the skin never forgets...) and awareness – is at once a word and a deed. Whilst Alice Parker (op. cit.) highlights the performative character of words in general, she nonetheless fails to explore the performative potential of the body and the Brossardian notion of *cortex*. Body is the first word in Brossard's private vocabulary. The other words, in order of appearance are: dawn, death, de/lire, desire, energy, eye, horizon, light, lucidity, mauve, montréal, shadow, sex, transgression, utopia, woman (pp. 85-87). I take note of the fact that *time* is not on the list. Body is a component of the fusion of body (*corps*), writing (*écriture*) and text (*texte*) in the Brossardian notion of the *cortex*, or *le cortex éxuberant* (p. 27). The *cortex*, as a novel form of consciousness, seeks the truth. Like Cixous' attempt to unearth the primitive picture, Brossard's *cortex* seeks to impale the real for the integral woman and it does so by spiralling off into new dimensions. How the body interacts with writing and text in its capacity as *cortex* to *délire*, give pleasure and engender new reading realities/subjectivities is depicted in Brossard's aerial vision presented in her book, *The Aerial Letter* (pp. 116-17).

Brossard's aerial vision comprises what I shall term six movements:

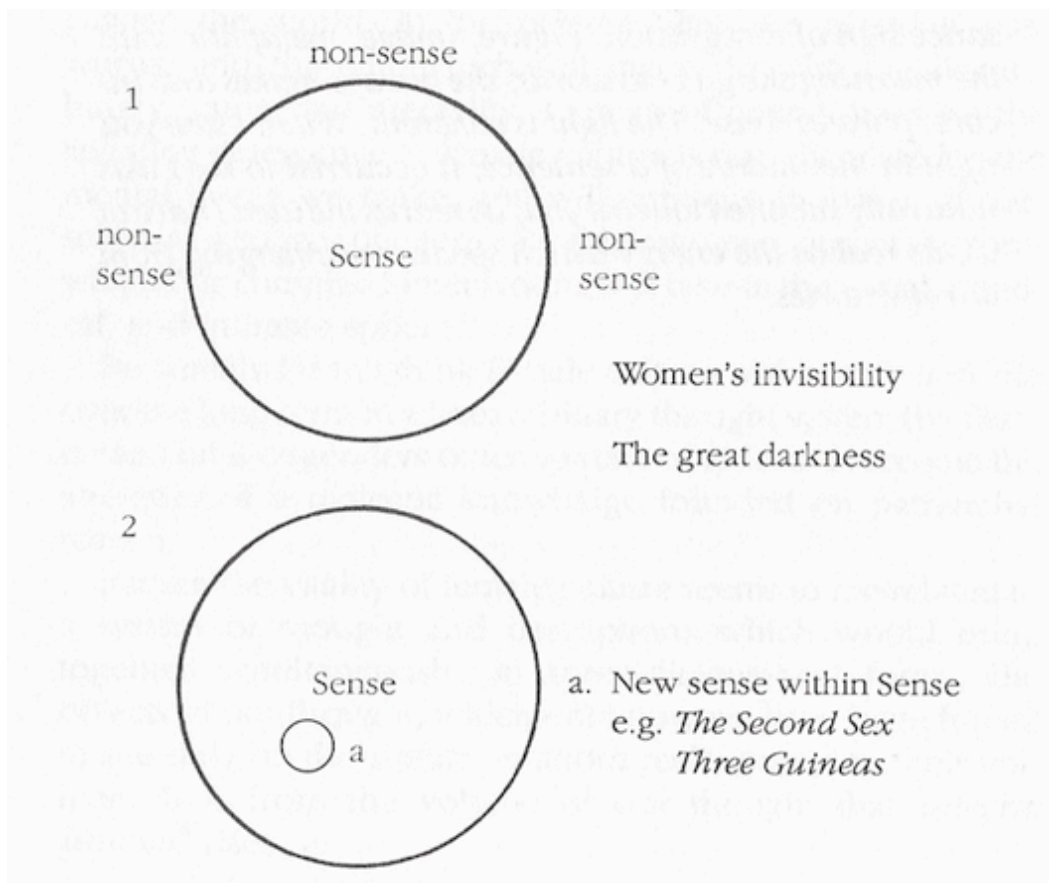


Illustration 2: Brossard's aerial vision, movements 1-2

(p. 116)

The first movement and level of consciousness depicts women as outside the dark, opaque, semantic sphere of phallographic language or 'speculation', the term used by the French philosopher Luce Irigaray for male thought and philosophy in general.⁶³ The system of male thought is one within which women, their thoughts and even more their desire, make no sense and thus remain unseen/unheard. Nicole Brossard, in *The Aerial Letter*, sums it up:

She knows by all means that she as a she is not even in the sentence, cannot get even with the sentence (p. 35).

Luce Irigaray, likewise:

⁶³ Luce Irigaray 'The Power of Discourse and the Subordination of the Féminine', in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*, ed. by J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 795-798. Future references to this volume are in parentheses.

Feminine pleasure has to remain inarticulate in language, in its own language, if it is not to threaten the underpinnings of logical operation. And so what is most strictly forbidden to women today is that they should attempt to express their own pleasure. (Irigaray, p. 796)

The second movement depicts an awakening. It is the point from which women dare to reclaim some of the semantic turf within the male-dominated system, the better to explode it from the inside. In order to do this, conventional language practice must be revolutionized, deprogrammed and radicalized: all is set into motion, as depicted in the third movement.

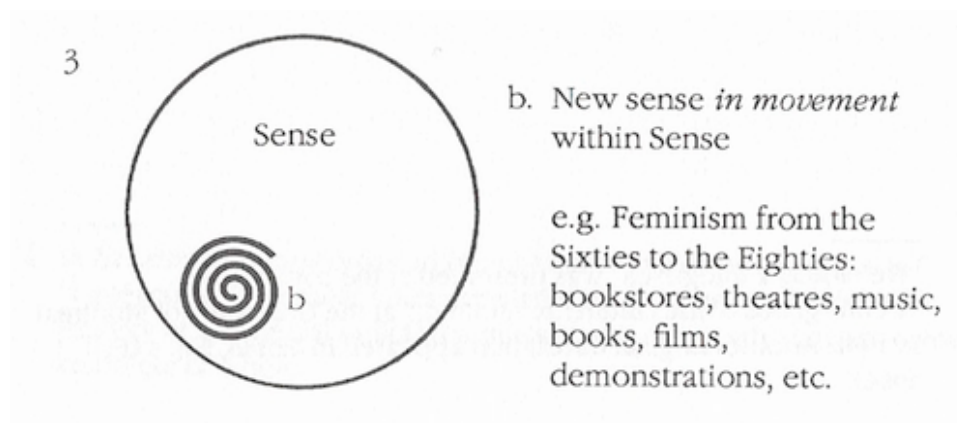


Illustration 3: Brossard's aerial vision, movement 3

(p. 116)

Whereas in the second movement of Brossard's aerial vision the 'newly born woman' appears to be but a subset within conventional phallographic (and heterosexual/centric) linguistic-cultural practice, in movement three it becomes clear that this is not the case, for women have created something totally new, something with its own, expanding dynamic. In *Fluid Arguments*, Nicole Brossard elaborates:

Somehow feminist consciousness and lesbian experience incite us to process reality and fiction in such a way that we have no choice but to reinvent language. The re-invented language would be a language in which there is space for the existence of the woman subject and her desire, space for anxiety attacks as well as a ecstasy, space for her singularity as well as for her plurality, space in which to trace the main lines of her identity and her relationships, space, finally, to change the connections, whether they be of love, syntax or grammar. The re-invented language is an exploratory language that permits

us to encounter the smallest as well as the greatest of hopes. It is a language in which *every* woman can recognize herself, find her dignity, hear the modulated sounds of her voice. But the re-invented language is above all an unedited space in which the un-thought of the world suddenly takes the form of evidence (p. 106. Italics added).

How this dynamic evolves is shown in the remaining three movements.

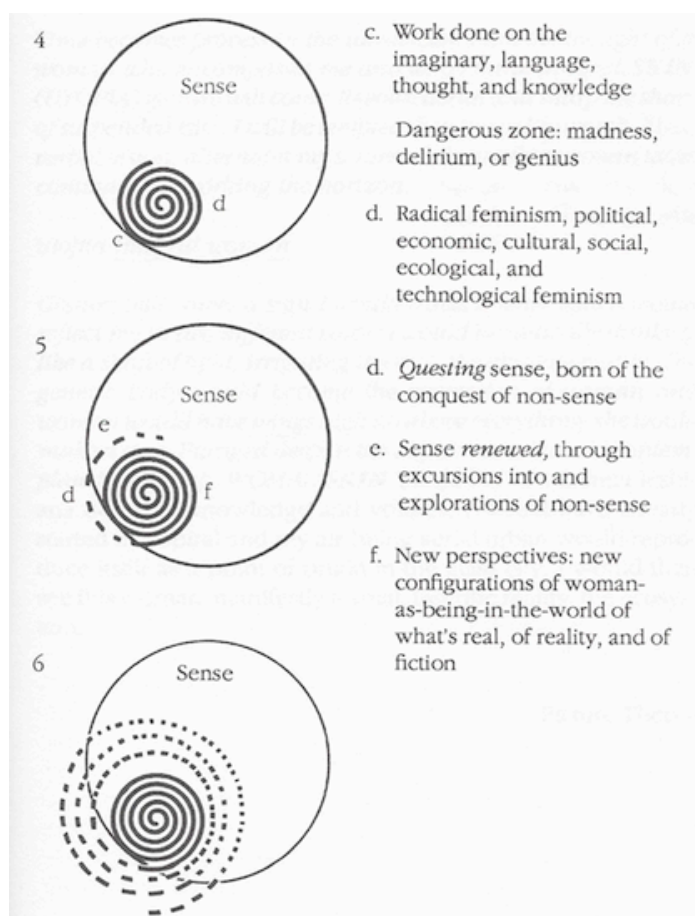


Illustration 4: Brossard's aerial vision, movements 4-6

(p. 117)

In movement four, Brossard's *cortex* works its way towards the very frontiers of conventional thoughts as it, forever expanding, challenges the rigid boundaries these have erected.

In movement five, woman has succeeded, partially, in freeing herself from linguistic (and bodily) subjugation, to enter a new sphere no longer characterized by her alleged non-sense. The harmony of the old system of sense – its closed borders or old crust – becomes deranged, unsettled, as the tight coil of this newly born woman, or Brossard's integral woman, takes on wings, takes flight. I note that the coil, as in the fourth movement, comprises four

twists from the centre as opposed to only three as in the third movement. I note, too, that the new dimension of the coil is porous, giving birth to new spaces and fertile voids, saying something that has never been said yet. At the graphical level, I understand the broken line as symbolic of presence and absence, thus also of 'un'-marking, or breaking the mark (and stigma) attached to woman as the counterpoint to man as the natural, 'unmarked' item.

In the final movement, movement six, I see how the spiral continues to conquer new ground, embracing more and more a move away from the concrete, the unbroken thread of awareness. This final spiral is exemplary, I believe, of the luxuriance of the imaginary, where tomorrow could be another language. Already as much in its own element as in the conventional one, the dynamics of this final movement allow us to anticipate the full eclipse of the old system resulting in a redefinition of (what makes) sense.

2.5. Reading realities/subjectivities

How does the aerial vision, as a non-verbal reconceptualization of the praxis of writing in the feminine, help me to read the excerpt from *Fences in Breathing* as a sample of writing in the feminine? How does it help me to rethink 'the truth' and thus effect the 'redistribution of reality and fiction' Brossard speaks of, for example, in *She Would Be The First Sentence of my Next Novel* (p. 87)? Does it bring me closer to the sensibility, dissidence and blind spots of a feminine I whom I ought to be able to relate to, and whose sense, hope and history, conducted beyond the signified by means of hypersemantic intertextuality, I ought to be able to recognize with my body in dialogue with writing in the feminine as textual matter? Does this new way of reading result in the lumps in the throat of which Brossard speaks, the knots in the chest and fireworks in the belly as it, escaping all (man-made) categories, impales the real, a new real, which, as it purportedly speaks of and to all women, must also be *my* real, as Brossard claims? In this section, I report positively of my experience of reading writing in the feminine. After that, in section 2.6, I outline what I consider to be the potential drawbacks of Brossard's endeavour.

The sample provided, as indicative not only of *Fences in Breathing* as a novel but of writing in the feminine in general, proposes a new way of being conscious and reading the world as a(n integral) woman. Just as to write is also to wright, to read, especially in the context of feminine writing and writing in the feminine, is also to re/read/w/rite. It is to un-read and re-read in a non-linear manner – semantically at least – one involving circling, surfing, vertigo, balance, excess and pleasure in the attempted return to the primitive picture.

This primitive picture is an organic one, the forgotten one, the frightening one, for which it befits a narrative technique that distances itself from convention, for convention, being ideological, is everything but natural. To read writing in the feminine is to read with the body, a body obliged, and determined, to make new paragraphs (Cixous, p. 23.) It is to encounter oneself not merely anew, but in a totally new dimension, one that, as it must become aware of the endless wealth of potential within the cortex, must also move beyond the dualistic straightjacket of Cartesianism. As to myself, I become aware, for example, that I am writing this commentary in the old 'scientific', 'speculative' language although ideally I ought not (need/have) to. Despite the acknowledgement of feminist objections and the growth of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Women's/Gender studies, the 'old' language still has a very strong hold on what is accepted as academic dissemination. Having professed feminists as tutors or examiners has done little to create a new expressive space that is just as accepted as the 'old semantic turf'. The right to a new dimension of expression, to feminine writing and writing in the feminine, thus, is still limited. It is not for public use. It is as if it must remain a secret language. The language of your diary, as in the case of Carmina. The language of fiction. It has the potential to be much more, to occupy a larger, more significant space, as we see in Brossard's aerial vision. It may allow its user to rewrite – and set right – who she is. Woman becomes a sea of potential. She overflows in her quest for identity, which is also a political quest for meaning, memory and solidarity.⁶⁴ This quest not only manifests itself linguistically but also structurally, that is to say, via the text as a political body. When I engage in writing and reading in the feminine, I become aware of myself as woman and as women, harbouring in me, like a hologram, fragments of the whole, some of which I have yet to discover, and which surface according to the dictates of movement and light. The hologram also becomes a fitting image for how Carmina expresses herself in *Verses Nature*. As I wrote the novel, images relating to artwork, to painting, were uppermost in my mind. I thought of cubism or of impressionism. Brossard's work has introduced a new metaphor, that of the hologram, which is equally pertinent to depict the differing elements of a reality that are foregrounded according to the angle from which they are viewed.

Reading Brossard's sample of writing in the feminine, I am conscious of occupying new spaces, discovering new aspects of myself so that it is fair to say that this engendered writing, with its subtle combination of explosion and mastery, its collusion of forms which write of, for and are to be read through the body, does indeed create new reading

⁶⁴ Brossard (1988), pp. 67, 73. See also Rudy, p. 34.

subjectivities. I am, however, also aware that the sample permits me to conjure up several ideas which remain in my mind and do not pass through (i.e. are not read with) the body. In fact only a handful of words associated with movement trigger a bodily reading of the sample, a bodily reading which feels more like a reaction to the text – much as a knee jerks if hit with a hammer – rather than a bodily reading of a female I in symbiosis with the text. For this reason I feel it is necessary to re-evaluate Brossard's aerial vision in an attempt to identify more closely why it at least partially fails.

2.6. Re-evaluating the aerial vision of writing in the feminine

Nicole Brossard's aerial vision is by no means prescriptive – it being in the nature of writing in the feminine to eschew the flat finality of definitions – but may be taken to map out how writing in the feminine as a model for agency *may* look in practice. As a vision, it has a strong utopian character, which may distract us from its shortcomings.

The spiral as an image, though dynamic and, as Brossard depicts it here, able to conjure up room for the unimaginable and yet unsaid, is nonetheless presented in an even, systematic manner which does not easily concur with Brossard's own wish for words to run off in all directions, 'fast like animals in the forest when they are escaping harm'.⁶⁵ The spiral moves downwards from movement two to movement three. Spirals do indeed *turn* downwards, and yet I was surprised to see the descent of the spiral in Brossard's illustration. Hélène Cixous, in her book *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, says that the writer must ascend down the ladder (p. 5), there, where paradise is to be found (and a pun which we cannot overlook). To ascend 'down' relates, for me at least, to the strong pull of gravity and thus to a prime example of the fruit of male thought, so that we may argue that Brossard is herself still slightly caught in the metaphysical web. Such descent, one could argue, stands in opposition to the utopian images of ascent (flying, soaring, dawn), which are prevalent in her work. When I think of hope, of a vision, it is an upward movement, not one of descent. The graphical representation of the aerial vision is, perhaps, not to be taken all too literally. Whilst it may give us cause to reflect upon Brossard's intention, and may seem to undermine such intention, the heart of Brossard's messages as to the nature and purpose of writing in the feminine remain quite clear.

⁶⁵ Brossard (2007), p. 71.

It is an almost impossible task to create something new that is able to make a clean, radical and durable break with the past. One could point out that it is incongruous to advocate a new style of writing, one which shies away from fully defining itself, and yet one in which old patriarchal labels such as poetry and prose circulate freely. It is Brossard, after all, who encourages us to rip their posters of our wall, to turn our backs on the old values. Structurally and linguistically, however, this is what she does. Despite her confession to be more at home in poetry than in prose, her writing erodes, 'troubles' the boundaries of these terms so that they lose their hold on our imagination.

Is writing in the feminine to create something new or is it to unbury, uncover, and remember? How can it be both? If I remember (or re-member), I return to something which already exists. I do not create something new. It has been said that the writer's first materials are memory, emotions and thoughts as they are measured by and through the body (Rudy, p. 11). This bodily reading stands in direct opposition to a conventional, anti-body/phenomenological ideological interaction with text. However, can ideology function without memory? Is not memory, rendered natural through repetition, the very basis for ideology itself? In Brossard's defence, there is a way in which we can both remember and create something new. The key to this is to *re*-member. Brossard would argue, I believe, and in the spirit of Cixous, that there is a woman lost within us, buried under the lung-crushing debris of patriarchal thought. We have lost touch with this woman to such an extent that we need a new language to excavate her, to rediscover her, to put her together again: to re-member her.

There is a degree of ambivalence regarding Brossard's essentialist register (Hunter, p. 220), which, it could be argued, potentially weakens her claims to sisterhood and solidarity. On the one hand Brossard concedes that woman is an invention. On the other, she speaks of a continent of women and frequently of some natural thing which joins all women in general and lesbians/urban Amazonians as the epitome of the integral woman in particular. Does not the very division, creating an *us* and *them*, bring with it a strong smack of the dualism Brossard is so keen to overthrow? Such insistence on the supremacy of the lesbian relationship makes me conscious of my exclusion despite several passages in *The Aerial Letter*, for example, where 'we' and 'us' are used liberally, although in them I still do not find myself (e.g. pp. 21, 103, 122, 145). It makes me also conscious of the exclusion of men, although, 'theoretically', writing in the feminine, in its validation of difference, as stated in *Fluid Arguments* (p. 232), embraces the Other and so 'offers an opening to masculine thought'. One could question the sincerity of such an opening: are we yet again confronted with a

discrepancy between theory and practice? Does opening, here, mean the same as to accept? Furthermore, the insistence on the lesbian heart of the (utopian) integral woman can be seen to raise the question of the degree of sense, and profit, to be gained for heterosexual women, gay men and heterosexual men, by their definition as such, unable to write in the feminine, thus how able are they to *read* in the feminine, which they ought to be able to, given the 'theoretically' inclusive nature of this style of writing? It seems to me that Brossard has possibly manoeuvred herself into a space that is fraught with unintentional contradiction. And yet the fact remains that there is a significant overlap between her aims and styles and my own, as presented in *Verses Nature*. We are both thinking along the same lines. Our only major point of divergence is with regard to our personal sexual orientation and those of our protagonists. In *Verses Nature* we have a heterosexual woman who is confronted with the same issues Brossard describes in her work. To limit the quest and the means for independence to the lesbian community is to deny the powerfulness of these means to speak to a much larger, more inclusive audience. Nicole Brossard is not necessarily the élue of black feminists, Muslim feminists or even working class feminists but she remains an eloquent, critical, sensitive and innovative woman whose opinion may or may not find resonance within us.

In the same way, although not necessarily to the same degree, that Nicole Brossard insists on her sexuality and her womanhood as integral to her identity as a writer, her social class also bears upon her writing in as much as it influences encounters she makes and what she makes of them. Brossard's consciously non-violent writing, for example, concords well with an intellectualized eroticism. It is a political-philosophical choice on the part of the author. It can by no means be considered representative of all lesbian relationships. Nicole Brossard knows this. One writer she admires, as we learn in her collection of essays, *Fluid Arguments* (2005), is Djuna Barnes. Barnes' novel, *Nightwood*, presents a totally different picture of lesbian love. Another writer, whom Nicole Brossard is perhaps unfamiliar with, is the British bisexual writer, Penny Goring. Goring's surrealist story *Deletia*, published in her collection of stories, *The Zoom Zoom* (2012), like Barnes' *Nightwood*, tells, in a desentimentalized manner, the tale of an unrequited lesbian love. There is violence of thought and in deed in Goring's fiction, be it in *Deletia* or elsewhere, where 'sex is an itch ripped raw', where the vagina is a 'dead gush fountain', 'plucked wobble' or 'my beggared stink claw' (p37). We are far from the euphoric tones of Brossardian writing in the feminine in *Deletia*, where the narrator's love for the protagonist, Deletia, degenerates, in its last conversations, to 'slabs of rock, monstrous monologues with stranded limbs poking out at awkward angles,

flailing, signalling in silence or frozen in 'Fuck Off' gestures' (p67). Where, in *Nightwood*, we may read the derisive 'for what do you know of me, man's meat? I am an angel on fours',⁶⁶ in Goring's *The Zoom Zoom*, we learn to 'savour the flavour of harm' and beware of honesty (the type of honesty Nicole Brossard aspires towards?), for 'honesty is a spicy condiment, can cause acid reflux'.⁶⁷ Brossard's depiction of female love, then, like her vision of the integral woman, the relationships this integral woman enters and how this integral woman writes about female love, is not meant to be realistic, but is characteristic of the utopianism which Brossard readily confesses to.

Re-evaluating Brossard's aerial vision as a non-verbal representation of writing in the feminine, I hope to have demonstrated some of the weaker points of this vision, but, ultimately, to confirm its relevance as a form of expression for critical women in search of their own voice. Writing in the feminine works in its capacity to make statements about the language of a woman consciously engaged in socio-political, semantic space 'on the graffiti side of the wall', Brossard asserts in *She Would Be The First Sentence of my Next Novel* (p. 61), thus from an anti-establishment, anti-patriarchal position. Its greatest weakness and where it potentially fails, in my opinion, is in its claim to offer a body-centred reading of feminine reality, a reality which I, as reader, must countersign with my own body. Part of the reason why writing in the feminine, as exemplified by the extract presented in this chapter, fails, is because it is destined to fail. It is destined not to be fully understood because a central aim is for it to remain open-ended. It is destined to fail, at least more in prose and despite the praxis of generic slippage, because to write in prose is to return more faithfully to patriarchal semantic structures. This would also explain Brossard's preference for poetry. It is in the nature of conventional prose (i.e. patriarchal) structures to speak to – and through – the mind. An appeal to the mind is necessarily more intellectualized than it is visceral. Writing in the feminine aims to give women a tool to express themselves. One could choose to see this tool as a purely literary tool, not a fully-fledged language with its recognized space in public life. Viewed from this perspective, writing in the feminine is, it could be argued, at the most a genre. Even if this is all one feels prepared to say it is, it is nonetheless true that writing in the feminine creates a new linguistic reality, one that is rich, laughing and saline and yes, one which may indeed spiral *down* through our consciousness to form the base of something new.

⁶⁶ Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber & Faber, 2007), p. 85.

⁶⁷ Penny Goring, *The Zoom Zoom* (Oxford: Eight Cuts Gallery Press, 2012), p. 105.

Conclusion

All great texts ask the same question: who is killing me? (Cixous, p. 15). Brossard's response to this question is clear. She is explicit about the measures to be taken to avoid such death. The solution, we learn in *Fluid Arguments*, is not simply feminine writing as political thought but writing in the feminine as a conscious act of elopement, agency and subversion, which she presents graphically as her aerial vision of a feminist discourse objectivizing women's subjectivity and politicizing the assertions of feminist thought (p. 233). Writing in the feminine, as an act of resistance and self-determination, one in which gender and genre as politically infused postures enter into dialogue, cannot be clearly defined for it entails the journey of one's selves, condensed into the *cortex* of body, writing and text, propelled into the unknown, the unsaid, which must be uncovered and re-membered:

Woman who has run her tongue ten thousand times seven times around her mouth before not speaking, either dies of it or knows her tongue better than anyone (Cixous & Clement, p. 95)

Whilst uncertainty and conscious, playful, dizzying, sensual ambiguity is courted at this level, that is to say, at the level of writing in the feminine as an act of resistance, there remain other ambiguous dimensions to Brossard's vision, as mentioned in section 3.5, which are less felicitous and which run the risk of weakening Brossard's clarion call. At the worst, the weak points discussed in section 3.5 may even justify speculations as to whether writing in the feminine is nothing but a new brand of patriarchal writing; a re-gendered writing whose hallmark consists of semantic and structural shifts with a certain body-added value. I come to the conclusion that this is not the case. There is no vision that is free of fault. It would be an exaggeration to regard Brossard's writing in the feminine as beset with contradiction. On the contrary, it has provided an excellent and alternative means of articulation for my very own concerns. There is indeed room for more than the urban Amazonian in Brossard's vision. I would have welcomed a more inclusive definition of writing in the feminine. In practice, however, and as I conclude from applying it to an evaluation of my own writing, the doors of Brossard's vision are open to anyone who has woken to her need to depart from patriarchal practice in search of her own voices.

Chapter Three

Concluding the Promises and Perils of Praxis

Introduction

In the right mood for
drawing mind on paper
EVERYSOOFTEEN
words are anything but strong enough
to describe feelings I always fight back like tough
keep them locked, otherwise exposed
they would (not) be taken for granted
and either way, ache and bleed
the wound.⁶⁸

Henry James it was who, in his pamphlet *The Art of Fiction* (1884), stated that how the artist works, how he achieves his effects, is a secret between his good angel and himself.⁶⁹ In this thesis, I attempt to shed light on this secret. The artist is a wound in progress, for she knows she will fail. She will fail because where truth lies blind, you can't do it easily. The artist who does not abandon her task, however, focuses not on the wound but on the process. She will be driven by the promise of the task she has set herself more than she will be daunted by its perils. Nicole Brossard and I are two such artists. In this concluding chapter, I summarize the dialogue of our praxes as authors presented in this thesis.

3.1. *Verses Nature*: a response to heterogeneity and dialogism

As part of this thesis, I produced a work of fiction, entitled *Verses Nature*, a literary response to the question: how can I write a novel in such a way that it remains true to my sense of form, my sense of language, to the limitations of both, and to my understanding of plural subjectivities?

⁶⁸ Federica Bianco, *A Night In Gale* (Raleigh, NC: Lulu, 2013). p. 23.

⁶⁹ Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction'

<<http://public.wsu.edu/~campbelld/amlit/artfiction.html>> [accessed 12 September 2014].

The work of fiction is then followed by a chapter (Chapter One), in which I reframe the response within a more academic context. I specify the routes and measures taken to expose what I consider the inherent structural heterogeneity of the novel and the extent to which I was able to put such heterogeneity to the test. Testing the novel's heterogeneity and attempting to sound out the breaking point of the novel not only enabled me to underline certain limits of the novel as a literary form, but it equally enabled me to explore how this particular literary form positions us as readers. I come to the conclusion that neither the potential heterogeneity of the novel nor the multiple reader stances it permits have been sufficiently recognised and that, in *Verses Nature*, I reinforce my claim that the novel, notwithstanding its highly elastic properties, still has room for considerable structural innovation.

3.2. The search for a comparative context

In the same chapter, I present my research as re-search, that is, to search again and again until a satisfactory conclusion is found. This re-search finally brought me to another author who appears to be grappling with the same linguistic and structural issues as myself. This author is the French Canadian feminist Nicole Brossard, whose novel, *Fences In Breathing*, provides the basis for an analysis of her praxis in Chapter Two. In Chapter Two, I seek to identify how Nicole Brossard resolves the problems we have in common. For the remainder of the current chapter, I recapitulate what Nicole Brossard and I have in common, but also where we diverge. In so doing, my aim here is to reinforce my claim to have produced a work of fiction that contributes to an ongoing discussion regarding heterogeneity and the properties of the novel.

3.3. Nicole Brossard

Nicole Brossard is a French Canadian feminist, lesbian and urban Amazonian. She is a poet, essayist and novelist with a vision of how writing in the feminine may liberate women from patriarchal hold. Born in Montréal in 1943, where she still lives, she openly confesses her love for writing in the dozens of essays she has written about what writing means to her and its potential to change women's lives. In Chapter Two, my initial question on how I could write a novel in a manner which remains true to my sense of form, my sense of language, to the limitations of both, and to my understanding of plural subjectivities, is modified to reflect

a more precise concern within the realm of novel writing. Given the characteristics of writing in the feminine and the focus it places on the (lesbian) body, the question posed in Chapter Two bows to this new orientation. It takes *Fences In Breathing* as a point of reference and it probes how the body interacts with generic structure to create/advocate new reading realities/subjectivities.

3.4. Setting new accents in form and language

Nicole Brossard and I have a number of points in common which warrants a comparison between our approaches even though we are quite different in other respects. Like Brossard, I find labeling in general inadequate and limiting. I am not keen to call myself a novelist in the same way that I resist describing myself as British or black or any other thing I do not consciously do. In this thesis, I present myself as a writer who is suspicious of the hegemonic forces at work in the identity, maintenance and reading of the novel in particular. Analyzing the work of Nicole Brossard has made it clear that I am part of a tradition and that I am not alone with my concerns.

How do I differ from Nicole Brossard in the exploration of form and language? Nicole Brossard, for example, is bilingual. She writes in French and occasionally has English words inserted into her texts. She also delivers lectures in English and has translated some of her own essays into English. I am trilingual. On a daily basis I speak German more than anything. I also speak and write in French. When it comes to creative writing, I return to my native language, English. Like Brossard, I make avail of my full linguistic repertoire. In *Verses Nature*, Carmina traces the vagaries of some of her thoughts in French and German. These are thoughts which surface multilingually *and* simultaneously but which may only be kept on paper *sequentially*. Tatar is a Frenchman. He is so French that it felt wrong to set the novel in England. He is so French that I even *think* his lines in French *then* translate them into English. Unlike English, which has an unpleasant colonialist aftertaste for Brossard, for me French is more than just a foreign language or the language of the oppressor. Like German, it is a positive part of me. My writing praxis makes the cohabitation of English, French and German in my linguistic repertoire explicit in that the layout of certain of Carmina's thoughts exposes how ideas differ from one language to the other. The layout also makes transparent how Carmina's linguistic choices defer between languages. Such difference and deferment is also coupled to a switch of genre from prose and what we would more readily associate with the novel to what we more immediately recognize as typical of dictionary entries.

A bilingual and a trilingual writer, both offering new perspectives on how language choices may intersect with generic structures to create new reading realities. Both Nicole Brossard and myself adopt a multi-genre approach, although Nicole Brossard, more clearly than myself, remains faithful to the distinction between (the potential of) poetry and prose and what this means to her as a writer. *Verses Nature* – the title having been chosen to draw attention to the inherent tension in things we deem natural – is not only a novel. It is more. How much more can not and need not be defined. *Verses Nature* is positioned on the border between novelistic writing and another space I have no name for. To state that I have written something groundbreaking may be too tall a claim. I will, however, assert that I can find no name for what it is. Writing in the feminine impresses upon us that we have less need for labels but should revel in our diversity, in our spacious, singing flesh. In retrospect, I would say that I have heard the call: it has been slumbering in me for decades. Discovering the work of Nicole Brossard, I find a woman who has woken and walked before me: a woman who inspires me to remain true to my selves and who proposes additional means for me to achieve this.

3.5. Writing about woman and writing about writing

Brossard's work, through its many specific references to the political implications of language practice and by its definition as writing in the feminine, can be regarded as more militant than my own. This is not surprising. She is a feminist and a lesbian, whose writing career began in the seventies, where she would have had to shout in order to be heard. For me, feminism has long been a tricky term to be skirted around. Like 'woman' and 'women', 'feminism' is an oversimplification, for there are many brands of feminism, as there are also different 'waves'. We should not, therefore, overlook the temporality and contingency of such terms. I have read a lot of Brossard's work. I have read, and enjoyed, Cixous, Irigaray, Badinter, Greer, Rich, Butler, Dworkin, Riley, etc. There are elements which I find attractive in almost everything I have read without my being able, or willing, to fully subscribe to a particular line of feminist thought. Nicole Brossard's feminist convictions have direct consequences for her writing in that they are the motivation for writing in the feminine. In my case, my writing is not motivated, in the first instance, by a particular notion or vision of myself as a woman consciously engaged in a sociopolitical space to make statements about myself as a woman. As stated at the outset of this chapter, my praxis finds its source in myself as a writer using language to make statements about language, not about myself. In this I am

similar to Nicole Brossard, whose work may be read as a phenomenology of writing. The fact that Brossard strives to create a totally new language, complete with its own name and objectives, demonstrates a far more evident political orientation than may be found in my own work.

3.6. Sexuality

With regard to sexuality and how the depiction of this is reflected in our work, both Nicole Brossard and myself write about relationships and *do* sexuality differently. Brossard writes from a lesbian perspective and I from a heterosexual perspective. The more visceral nature of my work, and its elements of humour, motivate me to see myself as having more in common with writers such as Djuna Barnes or Penny Goring. Like these two writers, I am willing to be violent, not only to use language violently but to thematize violence in relationships. In *Verses Nature* there is little space for utopia but much to show/share the body's stinking.

3.7. Between the promise and peril of praxis

In terms more specifically related to our respective philosophies of writing, my analysis reveals a number of discrepancies between Brossard's vision of writing in the feminine and its practice in the sample analysed. I come to the conclusion that Brossard does not, and cannot, in fact, remain totally true to her own objectives, but that this is not entirely her fault. Nicole Brossard infuses her language, her writing in the feminine, with new tones and structures in a manner which is unique to her. This, however, is not to say that she has successfully destroyed the 'old' language or thereby invented a new one. I am inclined to agree with Roland Barthes on the degree of innovation open to an author: we may play with a language, or code, but we cannot destroy it.⁷⁰ This could possibly account for why Brossard feels more at home in poetry, although this begs the question of why she should write novels at all. When writing *Verses Nature* as a demonstration, or phenomenology, of my writing philosophy, I became acutely aware of the larger semantic blocks entailed in prose writing and how the meaning of individual words, strung together to create greater units of meaning,

⁷⁰ Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*, transl. by Richard Howard, <<http://writing.upenn.edu/~taransky/Barthes.pdf>> [accessed 5 May 2013] (p. 3).

continually drew me back to that language's history. It is a history I share whether I want to or not. I can add meaning to a word, but may I detract meaning from it? May I tear a word's history or performativity away from it? Further, by limiting writing in the feminine to a form of creative writing (as opposed to a language for everyday use), and by giving it a name, one could argue that Brossard simply creates yet another genre and thereby participates in the normative practice of labelling despite her professed resistance to such practice. Why does she make an abstraction of her new language, presenting it in *The Aerial Letter* as her aerial vision and in the form of a diagram? Nicole Brossard is no doubt aware that to resort to this measure of abstraction is to make use of another typical strategy of male Western thought. Why does not language – her new language – suffice? Whilst these reservations are legitimate, I nonetheless come to the conclusion that the merits of Brossard's vision outweigh its shortcomings. Writing in the feminine is, in fact, a tool I had been using, a practice I was engaged in, without knowing its name. This is not to say that it is good because I am using it. I am not the measure of all things. Writing in the feminine is the articulation of resistance. It cannot wholly discard the old but refashions the old. The peril that this brings with it is that vestiges of the old will necessarily remain.

Both Nicole Brossard and myself, in search of the promise of heterogeneity in our own ways, are, further, immediately confronted with the peril of failure in that the infinite nature of heterogeneity, as thinkers such as Bakhtin and Derrida describe it, makes a mockery of our attempts to capture it. We may never adequately 'say' or 'impale' a dialogic, heterogeneous reality because it is in the nature of the phenomenon that it cannot be arrested, or at best, arrested for a brief moment only. It is also in the nature of the representational means at our disposal – language – to be incapable of capturing a reality which not only extends beyond language but beyond the strongly diachronic characteristic of language as a mode of meaning making.

Nicole Brossard's lovemaking scenes, for example, offer a fascinating, dizzying blend of the visceral and abstract that has us free-falling from the edge of our accustomed semantic realities, provoking a shift in our reader's posture, yet the female gaze on the female body is no less voyeuristic than the typical male gaze is accused of being and thus, arguably, not significantly different to the position(s) we occupy when reading writing which is *not* done in the feminine.⁷¹ By stretching words to their breaking point, by investing them with new

⁷¹ Audre Lorde, 'Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference', in *Literary Theory: an Anthology*, ed. by J. Rivkin and M. Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 854-860.

meanings and leaving the reader at the abyss of infinite meaning, Nicole Brossard's aerial vision speaks to my head. Yes, it makes me momentarily dizzy, yet it does not speak to my body, allow me to deploy my body as a vehicle of reading, as a whole. If anything, Brossard's style appears to have the tendency to intellectualize sex. In so doing, it effectuates an upward movement, not the downward movement she depicts in her diagram of her aerial vision. Nicole Brossard attempts something new and achieves this, by and large. The strategies she employs to depict love-making, however – strategies of explicitness and abstraction – are both hallmarks of the old language. One could argue that it would be more fruitful to analyse Brossard's poetry as an instance of writing in the feminine. She does not, however, state that writing in the feminine ought to be exclusive to poetry, hence one may equally expect it to be characteristic of her prose. The passage selected for analysis, for all its prose layout, as stated in Chapter Two, is more prose on the page than it is in the ear. It may be regarded as poised delicately between the two genres. The point of this critical appraisal of Brossard's techniques is not, primarily, to accuse her of being unable to live up to the objectives of writing in the feminine, but to show how hard it is to withdraw from the pull of tradition. This is as true of my writing as an instance of writing in the feminine as it is of Brossard's, or Cixous', or Penny Goring's. Part of the problem lies with the fact language is not totally yours to make.

We may nonetheless set new accents. Slide into new dimensions. These new dimensions – opportunities to be ecstatic (*délire*) and un/re-write (*de-lire*) – will require the reader to adopt a new stance to the text, to read/view anew, to call upon untapped reserves of knowledge and create new spheres of experience. Therein lies the surprise, a surprise that registers bodily in the form of an involuntary jolt, perhaps. The reader realizes, because this new writing has demonstrated, that there can be more to a text. She continues to read, on the alert.

3.8. Words and their breaking point

As part of our resistance to conventional genres, both Nicole Brossard and myself endeavour to make words do more than their usual jobs. We bend words. We stretch them. We play with the full semantic potential of words which are suggested but which remain, deliberately, just out of reach in the fertile void between concrete notions. This may be so even if the text reads conventionally, that is to say, from left to right and top to bottom.

A text may do more. Words may be set in new spatial relationships so that the page may be viewed as a single semiotic item where the reader may jump in from any point. This is

a technique I experiment with in *Verses Nature*. I bend and I stretch, but I also strive to break language. Carmina's final 'cry' (in my mind I side-step to the Norwegian painter Munch's famous *The Scream* and yes, to the cries of a woman during childbirth when I re-read that passage, but also to the myriad hues of the sighs of satisfaction... there are so many situations for which words are utterly useless) constitutes a new voice in a new space and space means as much to me as it does to Nicole Brossard. Space is something that is always shared and I have long been frustrated by the limits to how characters share linguistic space in a novel. A 'your turn, my turn' distribution of linguistic space is practical, it is reader-friendly, but it is not true to life. Within sociolinguistic circles the talk is of sharing the floor.⁷² I allow my protagonists to share the floor by sometimes setting their conversations side by side, as opposed to sequentially, on the page. It makes the reading more challenging, but not impossible. It makes us conscious of ourselves as readers having to make choices. It 'de'-naturalizes reading. In Brossardian terms, we *de-lire*.

To *de-lire* means to move beyond conventional writing, to rip it off our walls. The excessively univocal voice of patriarchal thought yields to diverse, multi-modal spaces. Carmina's final reflections transcend language – the old language – as we know it. It is so new, the reader may not quite know how to take or enter it, thus how to make it *mean*. This does not mean that it is nonsense. It means that there are so many ways to make sense which may still be discovered if we remain open to the proposition. Having read Nicole Brossard, I now see how this could be interpreted as a militant act or an instance of woman finding her voice, a voice other than the one society has compelled her to use. It could be interpreted as woman's true voice. Carmina was never intended to be the mouthpiece for anyone but herself, but such a reading of her would not be altogether illegitimate, either.

3.9. Meaning in view: metanarrative messages

At the metanarrative level, a number of observations have been made. Nicole Brossard's writing, one could argue, can be viewed as a pretext for airing political issues, that is to say, it would not be altogether unfounded to claim that her politics are given precedence over the narrative and its characters. The political messages in *Verses Nature*, on the other hand, are subdued, or subordinate. It is the characters who are given precedence and who may also be read symbolically, that is to say, as the (philosophical) story on top of the

⁷² Janet Holmes, *An Introduction To Sociolinguistics* (London: Longman, 1992).

(narrative) story. It is at this level that it becomes interesting to analyse Carmina and Tatar more closely. What is the point in taking a fictive psyche apart, of post-morteming a fictive character as though blood would flow when we cut them? It is at the level of a writer-philosopher that Nicole Brossard and I meet once again. It is at this level that I no longer strive to keep myself out of the text, as I did by writing *Verses Nature* in the first person. As a writer-philosopher, I am indirectly proposing a new, hybrid, transdisciplinary theory of mediation/reading. The new structures I propose oblige the reader, who must countersign them, to enter a new constructive contract. She will have to leave the comfort of what she thought reading was behind and learn to see things – learn that we can *mean* – in a new manner. There is, after all, indeed something transformatory behind my higher goals in *Verses Nature*. I take care not to make these goals become too intrusive. Let those who have eyes to see, see. In the end I see that I have, or must, embrace the straddling I lamented in Chapter One. Such living in between the cracks, then, has become a principle and a metaphor for interpreting texts, rather than a pariah with regard to how I (must) lead my life. By selecting a multi-modal/genre approach I am making a statement. I embrace my diversity. I am not saying: this is the world as it is. I propose, instead: this is the world as I see it. I dance with as many devils as I may, as I dare, and in so doing, I thematise, re-member, unerase, enact, the *what* and *how* of meaning making. A Ph.D. in creative and critical writing deals with the *how*, with the nuts and bolts of creative writing. It looks at how a text is crafted. It is not called upon to look at anything else. We should nonetheless not lose sight of the fact that an essential question integral to any serious reflections on literature production is not being addressed, namely the question of how we mean, not in the sense of what our intentions are, but in the sense of the psychological mechanics of generating meaning. As a writer who holds a Ph.D. in educational science, I am painfully aware of this lacuna within a purely literary approach to language production and use. I am aware of the strangeness of a purely literary approach to interpreting texts without ever seriously tackling what it means to *mean*. I do not answer this question explicitly in *Verses Nature*, but I hope that my praxis and the contract it places before the reader makes a modest contribution towards raising awareness of the matter in a digestible, pleasurable way.

Conclusion

As readers we are torn between the surface truth of the story-as-story, reading the words taking us in but also wanting to be taken in by the story, after all is this not the hallmark of a good story? Then, in sporadic moments of lucidity, or at the very latest once we have finished the story and put the book aside, we remember that it is *only* a story, vivid for the moment and that it will recede, soon to be usurped by its unreality, soon to become our dreams. This, essentially, is the problem with language; it is a lie with complete faith in itself. To use language is to lie and to want to be lied to. Nicole Brossard and I are liars. Good ones. We are also more. We are troublemakers. We trouble boundaries. We are explorers, who both make contributions to the ongoing development of fiction. In this concluding chapter, I specify such contributions to the ongoing development of the novel, a development which is endangered, I fear, if we patrol its borders too fervently, for this can only result in inhibiting the validation of innovative structures which force us to rethink what we are actually doing when we read and write. Such structures, however, are crucial in that they allow us to become sensitive to the fact that there are so many selves within us, patiently waiting to be seen, to be read and to mean.

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