

THIS IS NOT A LOVE STORY

a thesis novel

by

Kathryn Koromilas

BA English Literature and Philosophy (University of Sydney)

Graduate Diploma in Education English and TESOL (University of Sydney)

submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Philosophy in Creative Writing

Discipline of English and Creative Writing

School of Humanities

The University of Adelaide

June 2016

CONTENTS

THIS IS NOT A LOVE STORY	1
CONTENTS	2
DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY.....	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
KEY TERMS	7
PRÉCIS	8
THIS IS NOT A LOVE STORY	10
DEDICATION	12
MULTIPLICITY	13
CALVINO’S INVITATION TO “MULTIPLICITY”	14
AUTHOR	16
PROFESSOR.....	28
CRITIC	33
AUTHOR	38
DOCTOR.....	39
AUTHOR	48
VISIBILITY	57
CALVINO’S INVITATION TO “VISIBILITY”	58
AUTHOR	61
CRITIC	68
NOVELIST	70
WOMAN	75
NOVELIST	76
WOMAN	80

MAN	84
AUTHOR	87
CRITIC	88
WOMAN AND MAN	92
EXACTITUDE	104
CALVINO’S INVITATION TO “EXACTITUDE”	105
CRITIC	107
WOMAN	109
DOCTOR.....	115
PROFESSOR.....	121
MAN	125
AN EXEGESIS	127
THE USE OF CALVINO’S <i>MEMOS</i>	127
UNDERSTANDING LOVE	133
The essential relationship between form and content	133
The ancient quarrel between literature and philosophy	135
The autobiographical in the philosophic experiment	138
The literary philosophical attitude and the reader’s problem	141
THE WORK AS <i>POIOUMENON</i>	143
CONCLUSION	145
WORKS CITED	147

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

There will be a one-year embargo on the work, after which I will give consent that this copy of the thesis be made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

30/06/16.....

Signed

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful to my principal supervisor Professor Brian Castro whose feedback and support was absolutely essential to the improvement and completion of my thesis. In addition, I am grateful to Dr Susan Hosking, Jill Jones, Dr Heather Kerr, Professor Nicholas Jose, Dr Mandy Treagus and Dr Philip Butters for their early interest and ongoing encouragement.

I am grateful to the University of Adelaide's Discipline of English and Creative Writing for providing financial support towards my attendance at conferences where I presented early drafts of creative and exegetical work. I am extremely grateful to the Australian Government for the provision of financial support via the Australian Postgraduate Award.

My personal thanks go to all my fellow students and friends on campus and beyond who supported me along the way and who were kind enough to sit through my readings and presentations at symposia and conferences. In particular, I thank Carol Lefevre and Gillian Dooley. I also thank Gay Lynch, Amy Matthews, Shannon Burns, Chelsea Avard, Jonny Zweck, Kelli Rowe, Patrick Allington, Rebekah Clarkson, Sean Williams, Heather Taylor Johnson and Annabel Evitts.

I would like to thank Jane Camens for organising the 2012 Asia Pacific Writers and Translators "Reaching the World" Conference in Bangkok and for giving me the opportunity to speak about my project and to read my early drafts of what emerged as the dialogue chapters of *Man and Woman*. Thank you to M KJ Miner for reading the part of *Man* and turning the flat character on the page into an engaging leading man.

I would like to thank Dr Miles Leeson who was so gracious and encouraging about my work when I presented a paper, right at the very beginning of this project, at the Sixth Iris Murdoch Conference, Kingston University, London.

I would like to thank Nena Bierbaum, for organising the 2012 Border Crossings Conference on Kangaroo Island where I spent two days and nights writing what emerged as the chapters belonging to *Novelist*. In addition, I would like to thank everyone in attendance on the day of my reading. The early encouragement and feedback was incredible.

I would like to thank Mario Perez, Deva Eveland, Emilie Cherlet, Jacques Qu, and Shirley White who joined me in a staged reading of parts of the novel at the Bookworm Café, Beijing.

I would like to thank Stephen Carnell, Courtney Farrow, Script-in-Hand, Actors Anonymous and The World Bar, Kings Cross, for staging two productions of what is now the middle section of the work, “*Visibility*.” Additionally, many thanks to all the actors: Edric Hong, Jay Duncan, Michael Faustmann, Sally Williams, and Eliza St John.

On the home front, I thank my mother and father, Alexandra and Christos Koromilas—my greatest fans. I also thank my nephew, Sebastian, and niece, Alexia, who know that the phrase “presents from Aunty K” means “books.” I hope they’ll like mine when they grow up.

Finally, I thank, but really, there are no words, my husband Laurence Heron, who in the final manic weeks, transformed into the perfect coach. And here I am, at the end.

KEY TERMS

poioumenon

fabulation, fiction, metafiction

modernism, postmodernism

experimental fiction, philosophical fiction

self-conscious, self-reflective, self-restraint

Coetzee, Calvino, Gadda, Beckett, Kundera, Gaddis, Robbe-Grillet, Pécoc,

Scholes, Barthes, Eco, Musil, Wittgenstein, Strawson, George Eliot, Iris

Murdoch,

Simone de Beauvoir

thesis novel, dialogue novel, unfinished novel, novel-in-progress

novel in letters, novel in performance

author, novelist, novelising

creative writing degree, exegesis, thesis

philosophy of love, falling in love, falling out of love, attentiveness, habit, illusion

Plato, Irving Singer, Harry Frankfurt, Simon May, Alain de Botton, Tony

Milligan

PRÉCIS

The work is a thesis novel combining a creative and exegetical exploration into the viability of beginning a fictional exploration into the nature of love. The work explores the potential for the novel form itself to help interrogate what love is and what love means. As the work is a *poioumenon*, a work about the production of itself, it also documents the author's thinking about producing the work, the author's experimenting with forms and voices for writing the work, and the author's exploration of the dialogue between fiction and criticism.

The current incarnation of *This is Not a Love Story* is that of an unfinished novel, a novel-in-progress, where the author (the autobiographical author and the fictional author) begins writing stories about love through which she hopes to discover some new philosophical understanding. The project begins ambitiously, however, the author is quickly overwhelmed by the task and, unable to find a form or voice, can only *think about* writing a novel about love. She therefore crosses over into the novel to become Author, the chief conceptual architect behind the novel, "the great prose form in which [is explored], by means of experimental selves (characters), some themes of existence" (Kundera, *The Art* 143). The novel is then also narrated by these "experimental selves." Novelist, who is a retired philosopher, helps with the imaginative process. Woman and Man are ending their marriage and their exchanges (dialogic and epistolary) are the literary vehicles through which the investigation of love is executed. Professor offers philosophical counselling on the problem of love. Doctor offers psychological insights. Finally, Critic punctuates the text with the exegetical work in fictive form.

The work is executed in three parts named after three “memos” (of the five written by Italo Calvino) on the qualities a writer should embrace. Each part is framed by a summary of the memo and a brief exegetical response to guide the reader. In “Multiplicity,” the project of discovery is introduced, but Author, overwhelmed, cannot write the story. In “Visibility,” Novelist arrives to help Author write the couple’s dialogue and get the story going. In “Exactitude,” Woman and Man, now estranged, write letters contemplating love’s nature from their own particular perspective.

The fictive exegesis occurs in Critic’s commentary and Author’s reflections and functions as the metafictional voice on structure, form, content, creative process and experimental goals. Because the entire work is a discovery there is exegetical work throughout and all “experimental selves” participate in the event. The intermingling of the exegetical with the fictive thus makes this a *poioumenon* (Fowler 372)—a novel that is also about the production of itself.

In conclusion, the work explores the viability of doing philosophy and literary theory in fictional form. Because of its intrusion into and disruption of the narrative, this requires a form that allows for more *telling* than *showing*, a form that undermines complex character creation and plot, something that contemporary theorists and the reading public often reject as exhausting and unsatisfying. This is certainly a problem for a writer producing a literary work of this sort. However, I argue that late modernist and postmodernist writers like Calvino, Kundera, Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, and Coetzee embed allegorical thinking in their work while demonstrating that such novels can be both intellectually and emotionally engaging for a reader. Finally, this hybrid form is important because it aligns itself with a growing excitement about how the humanities can bridge gaps between abstract philosophical or scientific knowledge and concrete anthropomorphic knowledge.

THIS IS NOT A LOVE STORY

by

Kathryn Koromilas

This book is not about me. This book is me.

Who said this? I don't know.

DEDICATION

For Me.

For you.

For Author, Novelist, Man, Woman and the others who have come.

Actually, for no one.

MULTIPLICITY

This book is about everything I know about love.

What do you know?

Nothing at all.

Ah!

CALVINO'S INVITATION TO "MULTIPLICITY"

In his fifth memo, "Multiplicity" (101), Calvino discusses the literary quality of multiplicity, one of the fundamental qualities of the modernist novel. For Calvino, modernist writing seeks to represent all the connections between all sorts of knowledge available to us. As such, the modernist novel is an encyclopaedia, "a method of knowledge, [...] a network of connections between the events, the people and things of the world" (104). Thus, the modernist novel includes connections between the philosophical, the scientific, the historical, the cultural; connections between everything knowable in the universe. Modernist writers who have attempted to write encyclopaedic novels include Carlo Emilio Gadda. His *That Awful Mess on the Via Meraluna*, from which Calvino quotes a large chunk of text to demonstrate how its author aims not just to write a story, a crime story, but to examine the robustness of a philosophical theory — that there is never a single cause for an act (in this case, a crime) but a multiplicity of causes; a tangled *mess*, a *pasticcio* of causes. Gadda's novel is also a mess of facts and fictions. The novel is never finished, the crime is never solved, the story cannot be completed because no literary form or structure or narrative could ever contain the mess of our world. The modernist novel is an *open* encyclopaedia and is marked by works which are fragmented, endless and often unfinished. Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*, for example, could never be complete given the basic premise of the novel which was that ideas and knowledge (in a world subject to change and to our individual aspirations to claim centrality and authority within it) are always superseded by new ideas and knowledge depending on context or new scientific discoveries or further

philosophical ruminations. Similarly, Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, is a novel consisting of a series of beginnings of novels which never get to their ends, while readers read on hoping, as all readers do, that the end will come. Calvino imposes this fragmented, circular and repetitive form (later scenes are repeated or rewritten from earlier scenes) "to give the essence of what a novel is by providing it in concentrated form" (120). Modernist novels are ambitious in their reach for this multiplicity of knowledge in a fragmented, incomplete world. Calvino invited writers to set such ambitious goals.

Thus, in the first part of the work, "Multiplicity," I accept Calvino's invitation to explore the literary quality of *multiplicity* and I set out my ambitious plan to write a philosophical novel that will produce some new philosophical understanding about love. Overwhelmed by the project and my goals, however, I cannot write the story. I cross over onto the pages of the novel and transform into Author, my experimental self who, similarly, struggles to find a form that might sustain the philosophic discovery. To inspire creative output, Author experiments with writing different beginnings of stories, often in pastiche or rather plagiarism of Beckett, Gadda, and Coetzee but cannot produce any original creative output. For Coetzee, the question might be how to write after Beckett (Hayes ii). For Author, the question is how to write after Coetzee and after all the others in the modernist tradition. Just as Coetzee's essaying on Beckett was a "conscious process of absorption ... attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett's that [he] wanted to make [his] own" (Coetzee and Attwell 25), "Multiplicity" becomes the sandbox for Author (and for me with/via Author) to study Coetzee's and Beckett's and the others' fiction and to discover the "secret" of their style that she (I) wants to make her (my) own.

AUTHOR

I should soon be quite finished with this story in spite of everything. In spite of me. Maybe by next month. Or the month after that. By then it will be the end of the year and the university and the Dean and my supervisor and the examiner, well

I am expected to have this finished by then, expected to have this full-stopped and final-lined and encircled and front-covered and end-noted and just plain finished, finished and edited and printed and bounded and be dunned with. Done with. And then, at the end of it all, submitted. Submitted! When nothing can be added or changed or improved or renounced. The horror! They might even believe I have finished it, that it is finished. I've already lied about it to them. I've emailed an Intention to Submit, with capitals for auspicious effect, and I have given them a date, actually, they gave it to me, how kind, though, really, they gave me a date long past the date—the Dean has approved your request for an extension of time and looks forward to hearing of your submission before

And after that there will be no more time

And indeed there'll be no time. No more time for more of my solitary company with the machine by the window in this room. For more of the black characters that appear and roll in across the screen and make up words and scenes. For more of those other characters who have finally appeared here and now really seem to want to play. There'll be no time, there'll be no more time to destroy and create. And there'll be no more time for me and no more time for you and no more time for a hundred confusions, for a hundred indecisions and extensions

I love that poem

but perhaps, I won't get to the end. Perhaps I won't ever get to the end of this at all.

And to be fair, not everyone finishes...Proust, Musil, Perec. Not next month. Not even the month after. Not even before the day when the Dean looks forward to hearing about this. Perhaps I'll still be banging away at this machine—I wouldn't put it past me—banging away way way past the date any supervisor or Dean can remain patient and way way past the time that any university can dole out yet another extension because even though this little project, this novelising of mine, is important and could very seriously go on forever, which is why deadlines and dates are simply not helpful at all, in fact, quite wrong, worse, absurdly false, for how can any exploration into the nature of our own personal existence ever end, that is, until we ourselves end, even though this novelising is essential to everything I am, even though it is me, all of me, and all of everything outside of me, personal and more, important, central, it is, to be fair, to be quite fair, just another thesis, just another thesis. So

let us go on then, let us go then you and I

I really love that line. I wish I'd written it myself.

Well, you just did.

This time I know where I am going. Now it is an experiment, now it is a game, a game I will play. We will play. You and I. That is why you are here. That is why I am here. I didn't always know how to play, I didn't always know how to novelise, though I often tried and tried. The players did not come easily. They were not pleased that I was interested in the potential of their plots and that I wanted to play with them. You'd think they would want nothing more than to play with stories. Anyway

I shall go ahead and play. I shall tell us some stories. There will be a story about a man. And a story about a woman. And a story about a novelist. Each story will be about

the same theme. Love. This is what we want to understand. Though some stories might not say much at all about the theme of love because it is difficult to write about. I may even put the man, the woman, and the novelist in the same story. They are such similar characters. I may even put myself in the story. I am a lot like the others. There is little difference between the four of us. We are all similarly concerned with love.

Specifically, with that initial event, that initial encounter, is that Badiou?, the spontaneous thing, that totally spontaneous, now that's Žižek, contingent dramatic encounter, the event of falling in love. We've all fixated on that event, we've fetishised it, the lot of us, and once that event occurs, nothing else compares. As soon as we fall in love we start falling out of it. There's only so much romanticism we can live up to, only so many romantic acts we can perform before we must return to normal life. We've become pragmatists about everything else except love. So we fall in love and then fall out of it and we all have our stories about it. We all have stories about that first encounter, and we all have stories about what comes after that, the loss of it. And we've told these stories or parts of them, at least, we've told them, spluttered and sniffled hysterically through them over drinks with friends or long-distance phone calls or Skypes with mothers, trying to make sense of it all, to make a story, because stories give us an arc, a familiar pattern: the beginning extraordinary event, the ensuing problem, and the hope of a resolution, an end, before we pick up the next story. We tell these stories and when we tell them we tell them again and again and each time we tell them they sound different, we are making sense of them. We are changing them. But when people like me, writers, novelists, when we try to write them, these stories about love, well, it's hard to write about love. Writing about love means confronting the muck of language.

I am blatantly plagiarising here. Not as skilfully as Perec who was, and I quote from page 43 from a fine little tome on the Oulipo movement by Elkin and Esposito, so

adept at weaving plagiarised segments into his own stories that one hardly noticed. You want something original? I understand the economics of paying for imitations, but seriously, which novels today are original? There are so few. Coetzee, yes. But even Coetzee mimics Beckett. What can I possibly do after Coetzee? Stay, wait. I'm working on it. I'll get there.

What was I talking about?

Muck. That is Barthes, by the way. Writing about love means confronting the *muck* of language. Muck. Don't you love that word? Say it! Go on. Say it out loud. Don't worry if there's someone about who will hear you, don't worry if you're on the train to work or in a café, just open your mouth wide and say it out loud! Muck. Muck. Muck. That's what I need here, if I'm going to write about love. What did he, what did Barthes mean by muck? Probably something about it being that region of hysteria where language is both too much and too little, excessive and impoverished. Muck. Hysteria. There are no other words either one of us should prefer here. Thus we plagiarise.

I once heard a story about love, about a couple, lovers, spouses actually, no longer lovers, to be precise. Or maybe that story was my story, I forget now. All love stories seem much the same. It was a sad story. There was a fair bit of confusion and suffering in it. And all because of love. I do not know what I mean by that. This is why I am here. Why you are here, too. Actually, it was a story about the end of love, and it was a really sad story, a story about a problem with love. It was not a nice story at all. You couldn't call it entertainment, but I bet you'd love to read that story here, you want diversion, don't you? Well, you're not going to get it here. Telling a story to divert is a waste of time, I say. Actually, Robbe-Grillet wrote that, and possibly also said that out loud, and quite a few too many times, I imagine. That was back in 1963. He ruined the novel back then and I am ruining it all over again. The avant-garde is making a comeback! I mean,

sort of. No, not to do anything avant-garde—what can one seriously do after Robbe-Grillet and the others, I've already made that point—no, not to lead forward, but to return, to reclaim the novel, to save it from the diversionary devices of plot and description and, well, to just bring it back to what it should be. Take that James Wood!

I should now probably essay a comparison between Robbe-Grillet and James Wood—

—The love story? Okay, right. Yes, back to that, I suppose. It did not have a happy ending. It didn't have an ending at all. My fault. I couldn't get to it; couldn't write it. Look, I tried to write it as I had heard it, or as I, myself, remembered it having happened, I tried to be a proper novelist and to write about the characters who belonged to the story, and to write about them in a way you might care about, and I tried to make it all quite natural, and I tried to remove myself from the story, but the more I wrote the more I convinced myself that writing, on the contrary, is an intervention and that I'd have to jump back in, I'd have to intervene! Yes. Robbe-Grillet, again. I stopped expecting, stopped believing, that the novel, the novel!, would have to translate reality for your reading pleasure. A novel doesn't *express*—it does not press out a representation, a resemblance, a novel *explores*—it searches, searches for something not previously known. Robbe-Grillet? Yes, you got it. I am writing myself into the story. I am the story. I am this story which really isn't a story at all just yet, it's a thinking about writing a story. And what am I thinking about when I'm thinking about writing this story? Maybe I'm thinking about how fashionable it is these days to see oneself at the centre of stories, quite a natural human thing to make sense of things by telling stories or a series of stories, quite a good and healthy thing to identify oneself as the protagonist of a coherent, integrative unfolding narrative. Am I the narrative type? Am I a story-telling animal? I am quoting from someone, but I can't remember if it's

Gardner or James or that philosopher Dennett. Or is it rather that neuroscientist, Sacks?

I should probably Google it—

Well, well, well. Galen Strawson has written a *fascinating* bit of philosophical opinion on non-narrative types, on those who *don't* naturally see coherent narratives, which *completely* defines me because just look at this thing in your hands, there is no sense of a story in it, or even a series of stories, there is no sense of any coherent character self at the centre of an unfolding tale. I don't know why I write novels

You want a few words about the man and the woman?

But an exegesis of the Strawson paper might help you better prepare for the shambles that follows—

A few words about the man and the woman, then. I guess that cannot be avoided.

The man's name is Man. The woman's name is Woman. They're not going to need proper Christian names here. Man and Woman have been in a—at times happy, at times content—marriage for seventeen years. They own a house in a city. Which city? It does not matter. They have no children. Why not? Well that doesn't matter either! They are academics. They work at the same university. He is English Literature. She is Philosophy. Was. She's left philosophy now. As a boy, he was serious and studious. He was good at school and good at university. He was good at tennis and good at golf. He is still good at what he does, which is teaching books, writing poems, baking bread, and running around the university oval. As a girl, she was argumentative and inquisitive.

What tedium.

Beckett does this in *Malone Dies*. I've been copying, channelling, plagiarising Beckett since the beginning of this chapter? I'll also do it later with Gadda and Coetzee. Julian Barnes (Moss para 6) once said that when Brahms wrote his First Symphony, he was accused of having used a big theme from Beethoven's Ninth. Brahms' reply? That any fool could see that.

Story.

As a wife, she is a good wife. Was. In the beginning, at least, I mean before this story began. She was a good wife. There was a time when she was a proper thing for any man to have by his side at a public event where what a man had by his side expressed a part of what he was without him needing to say anything at all. And also, there was a time when she was the proper thing for any man to have by his side in a private event, in his bed, his marital bed, performing his desires, or in his kitchen, brewing his coffee, or in his dining room, serving his meals, or in his lounge room, acting as interlocutor to his musings on the things that sometimes concerned his mind so much so that he pursued them in dialogue—what would have been monologue had it not been for her innocuous and infrequent interrogations. She was a good thing to have by his side in good times and in bad times, in sick times and in healthy times, in rich and poor times, and in all other times that men choose to have women by their sides.

We go on.

She was a good thing, but not because she looked like a good thing. For the most part men could not see anything good at all—no pleasant, pretty features—and because they could see no beauty they could not, for the most part, see her at all. It was only the more thoughtful of men who might have paused to find something interesting. Only did the thoughtful and ponderous man linger on her heavy and firm physique held up on caballine thighs and calves and flat-hooved soles.

I am not sure why I see her as horse-like, but I hope you like the images here. I just spent an hour researching the words for different horse body parts. I even drew a pretty picture. I see her coursing and dis-coursing through the story here.

More.

Only did the thoughtful and ponderous men linger on her ample hips and fleshy flanks and loins. Only did these men loaf about her long-spined torso poised, slender

and small breasted, collar-boned and crest-necked and jawed and cheeked and, only did these men linger on her archaic muzzle built up into the geometric forehead and, linger, linger on her frizzy mane of chestnut and blonde—traits inherited from a tribe of mountain-dwelling zealous-in-spirit women; traits she had refined over the years in the antipodean sandstone halls of learning—her hooves high-heeled, her gait ambling and steady, her intellect cautious, her spirit domestic—and after she had refined these traits, she corrupted them, and what had been good, turned bad.

This is shit.

But before that, she did philosophy.

One would first need to consider the moral relevance of marriage before one could seriously consider it, she said. To her husband. Before he was her husband. Before she became his wife.

On the evening of his proposal, this towering male—in physique and in intellect—relinquished all limitations normally imposed on his behaviour by philosophy and stood tall up off his dinner chair as if he were about to excuse himself and retreat to the men’s room as dinner was between courses but instead bent down on his knee, his left knee, not an important fact but a fact nonetheless as he’d sustained an injury to his right knee from years of jogging round the same track around the same campus oval and could thus only bend down on his left knee, and from way down there on his left knee he looked up and paused, and reached out to her and paused, and smiled and took her hand and placed in it a black box in the typical velvet which made no attempt to conceal its meaning and he spoke to her and articulated her name, in full, first and last, and then paused, and asked the question, and paused and she cocked her head to the right, which she did when something unexpected caused her to pose a question and she frowned and she said, One would first need to consider the moral relevance of marriage before one could seriously consider it. Don’t you think?

And he stood up off his knee and sat down again, sat across from her with the dinner table between them and said, yes, quite right, one would.

I stop. That's all I've written about that. I do wonder how that scene in the restaurant went, the conversation. I imagine it would have been quite guarded, quite clever, full of plagiarised ideas from the ongoing philosophical controversy regarding the moral status of marriage. But that debate is already being played out in the philosophical arena and we don't need to echo it here. We don't wish to write after philosophy, but before philosophy. Thus, we skip.

Coetzee does this. He skips. In *Elizabeth Costello*. Kundera would call this ellipsis, omission, condensation. He talks about the method of omitting and condensing much of the work of realism. Kundera argues that in order to understand the “complexity of human existence” one needs to master the art of ellipsis, which requires to “always go directly to the heart of things.”

You want more about Man? Here.

There was a time—before this story began—when he believed in everything. He had faith. Everything was believable. He believed in her and in marriage and in love. It had become quite fashionable for people to say that love did not exist, that it was an illusion. But Man was not fashionable. He believed.

Are you rolling your eyes? Are you skipping this part? Don't. Stay. We shall skip only what I say we shall skip. Look, it doesn't matter if there is no such man in reality, because we are not doing reality here. We are doing something else. Stay with me.

What are we doing?

This by way of explanation. Sort of.

A friend of mine chose to stay in a marriage, though she had long ceased to be in love with her husband, though she had long ceased to be happy in that union, though that union had long ceased to hold any meaning for her. Now, when we value individual

happiness and achievement above all else, it seemed a remarkable thing for her to do. But she chose to stay in her marriage after reading a persuasive argument. This argument did not come from a marriage counsellor. It did not come from a religious figure. It did not come from a scientist, nor did it come from a philosopher. It did not even come from a real person. The argument came from an ageing Australian writer. Though her being Australian isn't really the point at all. Actually, she was character in a novel. A novel by J. M. Coetzee. Actually, that's a lie, he didn't write that novel at all, but he wrote another one that had similar effects on readers, though on different themes, not love. Animal lives and such things. A string of *Elizabeth Costello* readers converted to vegetarianism after reading the book. And it wasn't just the character's argument that had the persuasive push, it was the character herself—so devastated by the cruelty in animal factory farms—Elizabeth Costello had become not just mentally tortured by the knowledge, but physically and emotionally ill. Characters in novels persuade us because they are emotionally and intellectually committed to an argument.

Anyway, my point here, the thing I want you to know about what we are doing here. Well, isn't it just sublime that novels have such power over us? They really do. As readers, novels transform us. Novels help us to understand things and our place in things, novels influence our beliefs and opinions about ourselves and the world, novels persuade us to do things we might not otherwise do.

Man?

There was a time when Man believed in the absolutely good and that absolutely good was her. Woman. Woman, and then Wife. Man believed in Woman the very moment he saw her. This belief came to him so spontaneously, in so basic a form, that no evidence and no argument was required to substantiate the belief. It was as unnecessary to argue for Woman's absolute goodness as it was to argue that Man possessed his own arm. At that moment, the moment during which he saw her and

during which his belief came to him, Man and Woman (though, of course, at that moment there was only the potential for them to be spoken of in a conjunctive sense for they were, in any normal sense, quite separate individuals) at that moment they had already arrived and had already been present for a number of moments or minutes, there in the mess of a university conference dinner. Earlier, Man had presented what he thought to be an orderly paper, which somehow, quite unexpectedly earned him a mess of punishing questions, a firing squad of questions, which lasted for what really seemed to be much, much more than the allocated ten minutes post-paper for polite clarifications and polite concerns, but it was all stubborn persistence without politeness and from the very group Man was hoping to set free from illogic. At the end of that ordeal, having survived it, though bruised and exhausted, and then later at the moment of his arrival at the dinner, still unrecovered, his heart rate still not reduced, his forehead still moist, his hands still trembling, he fronted his opponent with equal stubborn persistence and with one single desire, a desire to win—for Man was better at one-to-one combat—the debate. The subject of which is hardly important here, but for the curious reader, should it help them to better frame Man, to understand something about him, the subject of his paper was on misidentifying the good with the concept of the good in Iris Murdoch’s philosophical thought.

What am I going on about here?

Man.

Who is he? Why doesn’t he have a name? Does he have a name? I won’t give it to him even if he does. This is my story.

Woman. Man sees Woman. Woman. Woman. Woman.

Man stops. Man sighs. Man stares. Something has changed for him. Something has begun.

Woman had the tallest comportment in the room. Poised on long thin shafts of heel, she moved across the space like a ballerina *en pointe*. She was divine. Oh, mercy. Beatific.

Boring.

Stop it.

Go on.

No. This is depressing.

PROFESSOR

Let us, rather, begin here. Let us begin with the following passage. Let us begin with Professor. This is where the novel *This is Not a Love Story* by Kathryn Koromilas begins—

In his seriousness and in his philosophic wisdom, Professor, who seemed, to this author at least, to Author, to ferment his thoughts into the sarcoid crevices at his forehead and there, in the parallel and vertical creases, enclose them, his thoughts, conceal them, for as long as it takes them, his thoughts, to develop and to mature and to be ordered and to be grouped, and there to cohere as systems of logic and import and truth and there to connect to other systems of logic and import and truth there where he could then unclose them, unconceal and disclose them, in the way an *anthropos* does, an *anthropos* in this world, our world, in words, of course, with them, with the use of words, whatever he thinks of them, whatever he thinks of words and sentences and paragraphs, with the use of words his thoughts, that is, the thoughts, the, the pronoun now replaced with the article because they, the thoughts, are about to be uttered, to communicate, to connect, to transmit—how difficult to get to the best word—to communicate beyond him, uttered, the thoughts now bigger than him, once uttered now become beyond him, bigger than him, about something more than him, about to be shared and transformed by cohering with thoughts that came before him and will come after him, where do his thoughts begin and end, and even when they do come, even then Professor's words come as if he is still concerned about them at the very moment he is choosing them and enunciating them and articulating the ideas they were chosen to convey, how can ideas seriously be rendered accurately in words, well, Wittgenstein did say we should shut up about the whole thing, and yet we persist, we do, we persist,

when we should really just say nothing at all, but they would come to him, to Professor, slowly but certainly as if he were still scanning a dictionary for the single best word of the entire possible choices of words for a thought or idea or premise, well, Wittgenstein did say that philosophy cannot be done slowly enough, and Professor was slow, more, he was *lento* with his task of thinking, and *lento* with his task of disclosure, and to think, to think!, that, almost daily, fellow persons, embodied characters confounded by some unarticulated anxiety, confounded in their very own personal existential nightmares, sit across from him in a blank room—not the study of the Professor of Traditional and Modern Philosophy and not the study of the Professor of Modern Literature but now the study of the retired Professor seeing students as Professor, Philosophical Counsellor—these characters sit across from him in the blank study and wait to receive answers that would make theory practice so that they could exit the blank study and enter the busy world and function as real persons in a real society ought to function, these characters sit across from him waiting for the answers and solutions to their urgent, urgent questions and their confusions, some knowledge to help, but the designated consultatory hour passes, *lento, lento*, with long, silent silences, as if they, the embodied characters, ought to be expected to understand the silences, ought to be able to see the work occurring there, while all their questions waiting in silence, for whatever was happening in silence, questions, questions, and confusions, Professor, do I still love him, Professor, does he still love me, Professor, ought I still love him, Professor, has he stopped loving me, Professor, will I ever fall in love again, Professor, is it wrong to want to fall in love again, Professor, ought I just tell him I don't love him anymore and leave him and the lot of them, Professor, I am so very narcissistic in love, is that wrong, Professor, I have fallen out of love, is this wrong, Professor, Professor, Professor? Professor, I want to have an affair, is this wrong, Professor, well, you see, I have fallen in love again, Professor, is that wrong, is that right, what ought I to do,

Professor, should I just have an affair and see, and Professor, Professor, well Professor, then, it is then that Professor, in his seriousness and in his philosophic wisdom, in his philosophical wisdom and in his seriousness, Professor then, finally, releases the tension there at the sarcoid crevices of his forehead and there relaxes the muscles frowning his head and arching his brows and, instead, now tenses other muscles, those of the vocal chords and, thus, interrupts his silent fermenting of thoughts, and everything begins to move, his cheeks, thinning red-tinged skin blow up over the bone, his mouth, cracking pink lips stretch wide, his teeth, jutting and jaundiced, release their grip, his jaw, relaxes to allow the thoughts, now words enunciating a complete theoretical idea, potent and authoritative, the clear, to all, result of a mysterious but significant process that must have occurred in the silent moments in which Professor seemed, to this author at least, to Author, to ferment his thoughts in fleshy, frowny crevices, and then, now, releases them, uncloses and unconceals them, in statements which, at first, seem banal, of course they seem banal because psychology is so unfashionable these days, which is why he now removes the pronouns before he speaks to questions about love, with clarifying propositions, abstract and precise, such as Love probably does not exist, only to have the damned embodied characters interrupt his elucidatory activity to participate in a two-way movement of philosophical activity, to swing with him on the pendulum from the abstract to the embodied, from the general to the particular, from the ideal to the real—Love, probably, does not exist—But, Professor, I am in love!—Love is a helpful illusion—Professor, I know I am in love!—Love is the relief of ontological rootedness—And that’s bad? Professor, listen, back to me again, am I a bad person for wanting to fall in love again?, you see, I love the feeling of falling in love again with L., but I hate the feeling, let’s call it guilt, that comes with falling out of love with G., it grunges my erotic high, you know, so, that’s what I’d like you to help me cure, I want to walk out of your study feeling good about

this, feeling right, about myself, I want to forgive myself, you see, I want to feel that I am doing the right thing, there must be some philosophers out there who'd give me the moral okay, so to speak, I mean, there must be some philosophers who say I have a right to, I deserve, that is, yeah, I deserve to fall in love again, even if that means betraying the one I'm supposed to be in love with now, but things change, see, a philosopher said that, look, I don't know if he was talking about love, but why not, I don't want to be a bad person, Professor, I don't think I am, am I a bad person—I, I, I, I, I, I, I! "l'io, io! ...il più lurido di tutti I pronomi! ... I pronomi! Sono I pidocchi del pensiero. Quando il pensiero ha I pidocchi, si gratta come tutti quelli che hanno I pidocchi ... e nelle unghie, allora ... ci ritrova I pronomi I pronomi di persona!"—

bombasts Professor with Gadda—one of his favourite scenes from the modernist canon: in English I, I!...the filthiest of all the pronouns! ... The pronouns! They are the lice of thought—but the embodied characters in the study insist on talking about their I, insist on that dammed personal pronoun, and wait for the enunciation of some theoretical idea that will appeal to their personal pronoun's psychological needs—psychology, psychology, such banality!—and so he enunciates his theoretical ideas on the affairs of men and women and love and then, finally, the embodied characters in question ignites, That's right, Professor, that's exactly right!, and the embodied characters ride the pendulum right out of the study and re-enunciate the ideas so that all the other personal pronouns around the campus and all the personal pronouns beyond the campus—this tangle of personal pronouns—attend, even quite seriously attend, to the ideas and, thus attentive, make some sort of sense of the moral significance of the ideas elucidated in the propositions which now interrelate to all the other propositions about the affairs of men and women and love and Professor turns inward again and, most likely it seems to this author, to Author, turns to the abstract thoughts that frown at his head and arches his brows and ponders, now, ponders on how, without the embodied character in his

study and without her context and her psychology and her personal pronouns, how the story has now changed, and he stays there with the abstracting thoughts, the pendulum now static, and he knows that the subject has changed.

CRITIC

I began with the above passage from Koromilas because it is a good introduction to the thematic focus of this first chapter of my exegetical work on said novel. My focus here, which is Koromilas's, is the philosophical novel, the novel as a "method of knowledge" (Calvino 105). Koromilas modelled her passage on the passage—from the opening pages of the novel *That Awful Mess on the Via Meraluna* by Carlo Emilio Gadda—quoted by Calvino (105) in a lecture he called "Multiplicity," a meditation on the novel as encyclopaedia, as a "system of systems," "as a knot, a tangled skein of yarn, in which is present, simultaneously, "the most disparate elements" (105). Koromilas might have used other exemplars from the modernist canon— Maurice Blanchot, Hermann Broch, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Robert Musil—but Gadda appears in Calvino's "Multiplicity" upon which the exegetical component of this work is also patterned. By modelling her first chapter in the style of Gadda, Koromilas places herself within and alerts her reader to a literary context, a context in which the novel has the potential to constitute a multiplicity of forms and knowledge—personal, biographical, anecdotal, historical, mathematical, psychological, scientific, and especially, philosophical. This is what seems to draw Koromilas to this "cannibalistic" and "anarchic" anti-genre (Hirsh 820). The passion to know, the need to discover, necessarily brings Koromilas to the novel form in its modernist incarnation for it is in this incarnation that the "passion to know ... seized the novel" (Kundera, *The Art* 5). According to Kundera, the modern novel (he begins with Cervantes) "unveiled, displayed, illuminated" all the existential concerns that Heidegger analysed in *Being and Time* because he thought that European philosophy had forgotten about them. The modern novel then, with its own logic, inquires into the nature of being and time and the modern novelist drives this inquiry.

Writing, novelising, this is the novelist's existential mode. More than that. This passion for inquiry, this attention to knowledge is a moral stance, a judgement about what is good, about what makes life worth living. Knowledge, Kundera repeats Broch, "is the novel's only morality" and its sole purpose is "to discover what only the novel can discover. A novel that does not discover a hitherto unknown segment of existence is immoral" (Kundera, *The Art* 5-6). Koromilas sees no value in writing unless it is a writing towards something new, a new view of the world, a new understanding for her, for her fictional characters, and for the future reader.

Thus, just as Gadda informs the reader that his intention is to write not just a crime novel but a novel in which he aims to examine the robustness of a philosophical theory, Koromilas communicates that hers is not just a love story or even an anti-love story, but a philosophical exploration of the nature and experience of love. By modelling herself on the Gadda passage (in the first instance, for later she samples others) and by having a character passionately quote Gadda, she signals that she is writing within the modernist tradition with a similar macaronic investigation into the theory of the novel. Koromilas also alerts the reader to the philosophical focus of her novel. She imagines that her reader, inclined to favour the psychological realism inherited from Henry James et al., might arrive at the pages of the creative work with the same astonishment experienced by the fictional Marcel Proust, in Jean-Louis Curtis' *À la recherche du temps posthume*, who arrives at Gilbert Swann's salon expecting to discuss *the psychological* only to hear that, today, psychology is "out of style, obsolete, no longer possible" (Morissette 1) and that the novel is asked to do something quite different. What this is becomes clear when Marcel is introduced to Alain Robbe-Grillet and to his theory for the New Novel.

Theory, however, is not a "pre-existing mould" into which Koromilas pours her story, for theory is the process itself, a process of discovering the novel's form, ethos,

and voice and a novelist and a novel “must invent its own form” and create “its own rules for itself, and for itself alone”(Robbe-Grillet and Howard 12). Theory, therefore, is a part of the creative process and a part of the creative work itself, *which is why I have been given the role of a character, Critic, and asked to perform some exegesis of this creative work from within its own pages*. Placing my theoretical exegesis outside of the creative work or, as Koromilas had originally intended, below the creative work in footnote territory, is to suggest that the exegesis is performing a different role to the rest of the novel. But the modernist writer, the modernist novel, can and does complete its task with any and all the forms—essayistic, dialogic, epistolary, poetic—required and the exegesis, in so far as it is a reflective and self-reflective text properly belongs within this work, contributing necessarily to the text, helping to complete the text. In fact, Koromilas, like Calvino, is surely aiming to be the kind of writer who “hold[s] the mirror up to nature and then write[s] about the mirror” (Maddocks para 1). In fact, to bring it closer to home (geographically, chronologically, and even personally) we might talk about Coetzee’s performance which “simultaneously cultivate[s] ‘the realist illusion’ while reflecting self-consciously upon it” (Head xi).

Writing about the mirror is not a task allocated just to me, Critic, in my more obviously scholarly tone. All the characters in *This is Not a Love Story* are tasked with interrogating the creative process, the literary forms, the formation of knowledge, and that tension between philosophy and literature, the tension between knowing and feeling, between the human need for certainty, rationality and exactitude, and the human experience of uncertainty, irrationality and chaos. We have already seen this tension play out between the Professor and his students in the above passage. Next we will encounter Author, who orchestrates this entire experiment, as it were, who is most likely Koromilas herself speaking to the reader directly about her intention in writing this story which is motivated by her own personal philosophical confusions and is a

journey towards a clarification and a new understanding. Koromilas also makes it clear that she has an expectation that the reader, too, will join her on this journey and stay attentive to the task at hand. Modernist novelists, like Markson (Sims 61), expect “attentive resourcefulness” from their readers and Kundera makes the point that, because the spirit of the novel is one of complexity, “every novel says to the reader, things are not as simple as you think” (*The Art* 18). *This is why Koromilas has Author interjecting with literary and philosophical theory*—at times contributing to what others characters say or do, at times correcting them. In this way, Author keeps the reader alert to the fact that this is work, not entertainment. Author is the one who, like David Foster Wallace, believes that theory separates the “serious novelist from the others,” that “without it writers were just entertainers” (Max 75).

Author invites Novelist to the pages of the novel and Novelist is also tasked with a modernist role, with talking about the imaginative problems that come with writing a novel of this sort, problems that he must solve before the novel can even get written. Like William Gaddis, Novelist cannot work without having a problem to solve and he has one. Author wants him to write about love, fiction’s greatest cliché, and to make it work, to bring the cliché to life. So, he is given Man and Woman who are in an at-times happy, at-times content marriage of seventeen years, and to that mix he must add that Woman has fallen out of love with Man but has started to feel the emotions of falling in love for Other Man. To make this cliché work, Novelist needs to find the appropriate narrative voice, the appropriate literary form, and the appropriate novelistic ethos.

Philosophers have written philosophy in numerous ways, both literary and formally: Platonic and Humean dialogue, Enlightenment fables, Kierkegaardian narratives, Nietzschean parables and aphorisms, Russellian mathematics, logical positivist scientific papers, the Wittgensteinian form, “so eccentric...it remains without a name” (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1). But when it comes to talking about love, so banal,

so clichéd, what language to use? Novelist must find the appropriate words. Strawson provides some guidance when, in his famous essay on human reactive values and emotions, he says: “What I have to say consists largely of commonplaces, so my language, like that of commonplaces generally, will be quite unscientific and imprecise” (1). Strawson uses the language of “commonplaces” to keep in mind what philosophers forget when philosophising in their “cool, contemporary style.” What is forgotten is the sense of what it actually feels like to be in “ordinary interpersonal relationships.”

Echoing Strawson, Mulhall (Mulhall 27) also challenges the assumption that philosophy offers clearer insights into moral problems “by abstracting [them] from the complex web of interrelated matters of fact and valuation.” He suggests that abstracting an issue from its context is actually asking us to reflect on something completely different. Abstraction changes the subject. And this brings me to the character of Professor, who appears in this first part of the novel as the philosophical counsellor who embodies the tension we have hitherto discussed, the tension between the human need for certainty and precision and the human experience of uncertainty and chaos. His theoretical ideas mean what they mean to the characters, and obtain moral significance for them, because they are repeated throughout and cohere within the “complex web” of interrelated persons and facts and experiences. Beyond the role as philosophical counsellor, Coetzee is a recurring motif in the novel—talked about, quoted from, sampled and channelled. It could be that Coetzee bridges the gap between the European modernists and the modernist project in the antipodes to which Koromilas hopes to add nothing more than a mere footnote. In the footsteps of Perec, she plays with the idea of originality and undermines her own ability to produce anything original after Coetzee. She is thus happy to “play in the sandbox” (Elkin and Esposito 44) made by Perec and Calvino and Gadda and Beckett and Coetzee.

AUTHOR

The novel actually begins at the front door of a suburban home. Does it? Yes. The novel begins here because the author has written the first line of the novel and that is a statement about a couple standing at the front door of a suburban home. Said (xxi) thinks that a beginning is a “kind of action.” But not only. Said thinks that a beginning is also “a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness.”

The novel begins outside a suburban home. A doorbell announces the arrival of the couple—we know them as Man and Woman. There is the distinct smell of jasmine. Woman picks a flower and presses it against her nose. Man presses his lips together and looks down as they wait for the door to be opened by the person they’ve been appointed to see. The barking of dogs drowns out their dialogue and the next few lines of the chapter. No matter. We do not care what they say while they off stage. The door is opened by—

DOCTOR

Doctor's first impression of Man was that he was blessed with ignorance. In the weeks before Man discovered the affair, and even for some time after he did, Man lived on as if nothing in his world had changed, as if he were still Woman's husband and she were still his wife, just as they promised they would be, always.

Man knew a thing or two about affairs. He had been married to his first wife when he met Woman and he was married to his first wife when he seduced Woman. He was married when he took Woman to bed and still married for the month or so he continued taking Woman to bed before his wife found him out.

On the morning of her discovery, all those years ago, Man's first wife awoke with a feeling she'd never had before. Later, she identified the feeling as *suspicion*. Suspicion guided her directly to her husband's computer and his busy email application. Suspicion then guided her to the trash folder where the unfaithful evidence was stored: scores of emails to "my love, my mate, my other half, my darling, my Woman." Before she discovered the affair, Man's first wife had exhibited the same blessed ignorance that Man exhibited before he discovered Woman's.

To tell the truth, Woman's was not a proper affair. There had been no sexual intercourse of the sort that occurs in beds in real homes or hotels. What Man discovered – when suspicion woke him up late one night and when suspicion guided him to the back room of their home – was a fully-clothed Woman passionately typing at her computer, just as she did for the most part of each and every day. She was a philosopher, after all, and manipulating words via keyboards was what she did.

But suspicion urged him forward and forward he went, silently. There was more to see. There on the computer screen—in the few moments he had before Woman became aware of him and bounced up off her seat and shrieked, Fuck, you scared the

shit out of me, and pressed the power button, turning everything black, even the room, for she'd been typing by the light of the screen—there, he saw Woman's new lover.

Not a proper lover. Not a real man. But real enough, he thought. As Man went to bed that night and lay back alone and in his mind replayed again and again the animated male and female cyborgs—that's the word he used—reclining and gesticulating in stylised animations and as Man conversed silently with the suspicion that had now manifested itself in the part of the brain where such terrors always lie dormant until aroused, he could not be at all sure what to make of the evening's discovery. Betrayal comes in many forms, Man thought, but what of this? Woman's act was one of two things: a betrayal that could be forgiven, or not a betrayal at all.

It's just a game, isn't it? He asked Woman that night as she escorted him back to their bedroom, which of late seemed more his than theirs, and tucked him in, kissing his forehead, telling him she loved him, just as a mother might do with her children after a nightmare disturbs their sleep. Is it real? Man asked. No, it's not real. Is it just a game? Woman sat beside him on the bed and just nodded and nodded and smiled a closed-lipped smile and handed him the book he kept on his bedside table and instructed him to read it until sleep came again.

Man looked at his second wife as if for the first time in years. It is a fact of the human condition that even the most passionately loved will become invisible, unseen though not necessarily unloved, if they remain forever present. It is only when they become lost, or when loss is threatened, that they become visible again. After seventeen years of an at times happy, at times content marriage, Man now saw the metamorphosis that had taken place in Woman. It must have occurred slowly, this change, over the course of the past few months. He'd paid only the vaguest of interest in the changes, but now they seemed very important. He saw the way Woman had begun to wear her hair, noticed the blackening of the roots, the altered way she clothed herself, the tighter

clothing replacing the loose, long dresses, the body now thinner, tauter, stronger, the louder way she walked about the house, the way she used the make-up for her face, her eyes darker and rounder and her lips redder and fatter. But what struck him now more than anything—though maybe it had something to do with the shock of discovery — what struck him as he watched her nod and grin, was how closely she resembled the cyborg female he saw only minutes before on the computer screen.

Cyborg is not really the right word. That animated female form had a remarkable humanity about her, something more akin to the flawlessly made-up human forms in fashion magazines, not a machine at all. He was quite sure, even though he had only glimpsed the thing for a few moments, that the female in the computer was a clone, a near exact replica of the real Woman sitting beside him on the bed.

It's not real, is it? He's not real, is he? He said, referring to the male cyborg. It's all just a game, right? Man asked the same questions over and over and but Woman shook her head and offered her answer, Shush, she said, Shh, shh. Nothing more. She kissed his forehead again, and left the room.

This went on night after night for two whole weeks before Man finally confided in Doctor.

What is real? He asked Doctor one day and Doctor knew that the subject of their weekly sessions had changed from the ailments of the human body to problems of a higher nature. Doctor understood that Man's new dilemma concerned the nature of Woman's affair. In spite of Man's renewed suffering, Doctor was happy for the changed focus of their meetings.

What is real? Man's question seemed simple enough. It's a fiction, isn't it, this cyberspace? A fictional space. Even if she's having this sex or falling in love, he said, it's not real because in reality it's the cyborg having sex and falling in love. That's not my wife there.

Doctor understood that, despite the possibility of betrayal, Man wanted to preserve his marriage and would deliberate at length at the rational and intellectual level until a satisfactory conclusion came. Man was not a man of the passions. Oh, Doctor knew some stories, he knew men who'd smashed computers, mobile phones, and their wives' faces over lesser discoveries.

It was also in his interest, professionally, to preserve Man's marriage. Doctor knew, from some work on psychosis, how easy it was for even the best men and women to lose the ability to distinguish the real from the imagined. The world that Man had witnessed, the world Woman visited every day, seemed to be a prime environment for the emergence of delusional fantasies. Doctor suspected that Woman had already lost her place in the real world, that she had already withdrawn from real human contact, that she was no longer able to distinguish the boundaries of her physical body, and that she'd long begun identifying with the machine and its mysterious components—the tiny digital bytes and the metallic wires and chips. Doctor said none of this to Man.

Later, he learned that Woman would regularly go for three days without sleep, that when she did sleep it was on the couch in her office and not in the marital bed, that she'd stopped participating in her home duties, stopped the cooking and the cleaning, stopped feeding her two pets, stopped sharing her meals with Man, in fact, stopped eating properly altogether.

The computer controls my wife, Man said. He was agitated. Doctor hadn't seen his left eye twitch like that since his first few visits. Woman did not respond, did not even raise an eyebrow, did nothing at all to reveal she might be nervous or threatened as most clients are in such situations. She knew why she'd been invited here, knew that they were her two opponents, but she continued looking ahead, calm and steady.

Doctor agreed with Man, but did not say so. To be truthful, Doctor did harbour a negative bias against this whole Internet affair and he'd arrived at a conclusion about

Woman long before he met her, but he'd treated far too many families destroyed by the computers they brought into their homes. He'd witnessed the splitting that occurred in the human ego, the sad fragmented self, the psychosis and paranoia that fragmentation caused, the disintegration in the community. He'd seen how couples ignored their marital problems and sought out reinforcement on the net until it was too late and then they'd come to him, angry and bewildered, seeking redemption. He'd seen how frustrated men became infantile sex addicts, losing inhibition and restraint. And for what? For the big delusion. All of them, all of them lost in a psychotic delusional fantasy.

Okay, said Woman. Her voice was sombre and serious, the melody of her speech slow and assured. Let me begin with this then: if the computer controls me, if the machine dominates me, from within, then my ego is no longer mine.

That was not a question, but a premise. The premise she knew to be Doctor's and Man's. Doctor wondered what conclusions they would draw from it.

That's often the case with addiction, he said.

It is often the case with love, she said.

How do you mean?

Love, she said. Love. When we fall in love, we stop eating, we stop sleeping, we stop all the normal and mundane tasks and focus completely on the love, on being in love, on the object of our love. But this is no madness. It is merely the ecstasy that one feels upon discovering, quite rationally and logically, mind you, a very profound truth. Love exists! And more. One's own new lover has finally, all at once and spectacularly so, answered the riddle of one's existence!

She turned to Man. You'd once been that answer. Remember? You were so clear and so obvious. She was referring to the first months of their affair, which she described in such detail that Doctor could still conjure up the images of Woman and Man and a

bed during the summer of their affair seven years ago, the wrestling and the sweating and the commingling of all the human pleasures, the physical and the emotional, the spiritual and the intellectual.

Man raised his hand and opened his mouth, he wanted to say something, but he struggled with forming a response. He knew she was challenging him, but it was inhuman to expect a man to sustain that sort of behaviour seven years into a marriage. He wanted to defend himself, he was just a man, a married man, like all the other married men in the world, but Man had lost the ability to champion his case. Woman had an answer for everything, and a way of saying things that he could not match.

Doctor had already anticipated Woman's argument and responded before him. Are you saying that you are addicted, he said, or that you are in love?

What I'm saying is that I know my heart and I know my head, I know what is real and I know my destiny. I am bound and I am blinded and yet I know this and I struggle to overcome my bondage and to regain my sight. I transcend myself, I am re-born. I am not undecided about the boundaries of my natural body. I know I am physically situated and I can fix my coordinates in space and time and I know my place in relation to others. I know I am there in my home in front of a machine and I know I am not the machine and I know my husband is there in another room. But I have broken free, free of the substance and I have transcended to the spiritual level. It is what we all wish for, this transcendence. It is.

Woman's speech had become racy, her pitch higher than before, her eyes glazed, her smile enlarged. Man had told him that Woman would be a formidable intellectual opponent, her mastery of rhetoric, unsurpassable, but just as he had imagined, she was already exhibiting the classic symptoms of psychosis—the pressure of speech, for example, and the flight of ideas.

Yes, Man said. Good. Good. But, tell me, how is it exactly that you have transcended? Seems to me you are lost. You take time away from me, time you promised me, and you give it to this other man, if he really is a man.

Man had become animated in his delivery and he stood up now, surprised at himself. He did not normally play out angry episodes. He knew he had raised his voice but he could not lower it. Woman had been provoking him for weeks and now he finally felt provoked. Woman stood up, too, and stood there, stubborn, maintaining eye contact, not budging at all.

Doctor, Man said, without diverting his gaze from Woman. Tell her. Tell her what well all fear here. He was hysterical now. He did not know how it would all end, but he could not stop. Tell her it's a fiction, a fantasy, a delusion. We call this psychosis. Psychosis. You know the word? Greek. Means disease. Of the soul. This is not a matter to be taken lightly, or worse, poetically. Answer me this, if you will, answer me this. Could you give this all up? Could you give him up completely? To save your marriage? To save yourself? For me?

Woman smiled. Can I or will I? She moved close to Man and cupped his chin in her hand. He normally would have towered over her, but defeat had fallen heavy on his shoulders and he stood there, slumped into a much smaller man, and Woman, shorter than both of the men, stood tall and superior.

No, I will not give up this heroic endeavour, she said as if she were addressing a crowd much larger than this one of two.

I will not regress. She said, the weight of her entire being solid and balanced as she stood there, feet apart, arms by her side, chin up and proud. I will not remain a slave to custom and habit. In this world, which you call a fiction, you will encounter the sublime. To experience it is to experience the real. To know it is our true destiny. My life in this world, my digital representation, if you like, and my lover's, our home, the

land, the sky, the sea, so divinely beautiful, so real, no, I will not give this up, no. I love this beauty and what I love is true. And I am not the first to say this. *Beauty is truth, truth beauty*. My difficulties and my triumphs are grounded in beauty and truth. This is the real thing.

They had only just begun to argue the matter of the real, Man's first and most fundamental concern, but he knew he was lost.

Man fell to his knees. It was a terrible thing to see a man do. But more terrible than that was the sound, the weak-voiced way he said, Please, please, please, what about me? What about our marriage? I cannot live like this. I will not live like this. And then he was pulling on her skirt, as if the fabric there were the only real thing left. Woman was so slippery. Please, he said, please, please, stop. Are you leaving me? Come back to me.

But Woman was steadfast. She placed her hands on her husband's head and said, Shush now, shh, shh.

Doctor was completely unprepared for this. He had seen plenty of stubborn patients over the years. He'd seen the delusional monster in many family men and mothers and children. But he'd exorcised the evil. He excelled at his work. He knew what had to be done. But now, Doctor was mute. He could no more help Man up off his knees than he could stop this new feeling that had come to him. He recognised the feeling right away, though it had been years since he had felt it. If he had ever felt it.

Woman.

Woman.

Man got up off his knees and wiped his hands across his cheeks. Then he slapped Woman, hard and loud across the side of her head. For a moment, she found her balance again before she finally toppled over and crashed at Doctor's feet. Man. Man.

Man had turned his back to us and was shouting as he walked away. Fine, fine, fine, just you wait and see what will be left of your sublime lover and your real unreal and your false truths when you get home.

It pleased Doctor to see Woman at his feet. It pleased him that she was still woman enough to crumble at the hand of her husband. She was on all fours now, reorienting herself and gathering strength to rise again. Doctor helped her up, of course, though he wanted to step back and watch her instead. Just watch her. He wanted to look at her forever. He wanted to hear her speak about the sublime. He wanted to move with her, to follow her into it.

When she was finally upright, she adjusted her skirt, checked the buttons of her shirt, pressed her hands on top of her head and then at the sides to tidy her hair, and looked deep into Doctor's eyes before she said, And, yet, it is real.

AUTHOR

There is no one waiting at the gate when my flight comes in. I taxi to the hotel. I see little of the island, this island south of that continent, but it is enough to know that I have crossed a border into a place that has already begun to unsettle me. It is familiar enough, I know what islands ought to sound like and what islands ought to look like—

the shocking saturation of colour, the bragging blues and greens and the flaming browns and oranges and the glistering greys, and then the thalassic rippling, relentless, the arboreal rustling, the cheeping and the chirping, the motor-murmuring, the locally-accented narrating of self-chosen island-exile and the slow, simple happiness found here, over the border, the border which she crossed in only twenty minutes on a propeller craft

—I have arrived. I have arrived and I've got work to do. Should I begin by describing the room? The desk? But what does it matter about the room and the desk? I once read a review of a book. It went something like this: *a good story, but too little furniture*. I look at the room. I look at the furniture in the room. What would a description of this furniture add to the story? Nothing. Nothing. In any case, right now I am crouching over a typewriter, a typewriter I've placed on the floor. I am bent over the machine like a sprinter at the starting block. But the race does not begin. I stare ahead at the blank page. I stare at the page and then I type

I stare at the page

How boring.

I am writing about myself in the same story in which I will be writing about them, the characters you are really interested in, Man and Woman, and the story you are really interested in, their marriage, the end of it, the affair, the betrayal, the characters and the

story I describe on the back cover blurb for you, the blurb that enticed you to begin reading. I owe you their story. Yet, I write about myself. I should change that blurb. The real back cover blurb should be this one:

When a woman stops feeling the emotions we associate with being in love, she talks to her husband, but not until the novelist can get the dialogue written.

There. Now I am legitimately a part of the story.

Now.

The present. I have arrived. I am here. I am here on this island for a conference. I am conferencing about this thesis, this novel, this work. But this island is no place for academic discourse. Is it? I am convinced, immediately, no second thought required, convinced that no one will choose to sit in a dark room to give me an audience when that shameful sea blue baits just outside the window, there, not far away at all. Who could willingly turn their back to that and front me? I am sure that no one will.

I have chosen a seafront room, but there is a border between me and my seafront view. The border is fashioned of asphalt and it cuts black between my balcony and the sea.

Why am I writing all this?

Before J. M. Coetzee introduces Elizabeth Costello he talks about getting us from where we are, which is, as yet, nowhere, to the far bank. He calls this a simple bridging problem, a problem of knocking together a bridge. People, he writes, solve such problems every day. They solve them, and having solved them push on.

Coetzee is talking about beginning; how to begin *Elizabeth Costello*. When Coetzee writes his narrator's "simple bridging problem" (1) he uses the pronoun "we," suggesting that author, narrator, characters, and reader will journey into and through the fiction together. I'm hoping I won't have to solve my bridging problem all alone. I'm hoping we'll solve it so that we can all get to the other side, which is where we are all meant to be, where the story takes place.

I push up off the floor and am at the window. I look out the window and imagine knocking together a bridge to get me from where I am, which is on the balcony with a view, to the far bank, which is the rippling thalassic white-crested blue.

But I am here for a conference. Elizabeth Costello is of the opinion that until a certain threshold is crossed, one is caught in limbo, unable to grow. This is something Coetzee wrote for Paul Rayment to say about Elizabeth Costello; something I am reading now.

I am here for a conference. I am not prepared for it. I am in limbo.

Physically, of course, I have crossed the threshold. I am here. I will attend. I will present this paper and my voice will narrate it and I will engage with the audience. My body will work. But my mind. That is an entirely different matter. My mind is messy. This conference paper, or whatever this text is, or will become, that is, because it does not yet exist, not properly so, this story, is not ready. It is not ready, because I have yet to solve a fundamental problem. It is a problem that needs to be solved, before the problem of how to begin the paper can to be solved. This problem is a problem of form. How should this paper be written? How should it be given, delivered, I mean what attitude should I adopt? Which language to use? What words? How should I write this?

Every discourse ought to be a living creature, having a body of its own and a head and feet; there should be a middle, beginning, and end, adapted to one another and to the whole. This is something Plato, in around 370 BCE, wrote for Socrates to say to Phaedrus. Benjamin Jowett translated it, in 1892, and I am reading that now. But there is no beginning, no middle, no end here. There is no story. Only fragments. A series of false starts.

Out the window, across the asphalt, on a bench under a tree, a family of five sit and eat out of boxes. A single seagull. The youngest shares her meal with the bird. An ordinary afternoon on this island. I want to join the ordinary family on their ordinary

afternoon, but I cannot. I must stay inside and wrestle with his paper. But what do I want to say? What, exactly, is my thesis? I do not know. My mind is too messy. She should never have come. Thinks Elizabeth Costello. I should never have come here, thinks I. Conferences, writes Coetzee for Elizabeth Costello to think, conferences are for exchanging thoughts. At least that is the idea behind conferences. You cannot exchange thoughts when you do not know what you think.

I should never have come here, I think.

But my abstract is in the conference program. And the logical consequence of that is that I must now speak to the abstract, make it concrete, flesh it out with academic rhetoric. There is no escape. I must stay and wrestle the thing I have been trying to understand for months now. Without understanding I have been unable to write this paper, this thesis and, worse, unable to write the novel. But I don't tell anyone about that.

What was I thinking when I wrote the abstract? The thing sounds nothing like me.

Here it is. The Conference program. The title: The philosophical novel: Crossing (*out*) the border between logos and mythos. The abstract:

The border I cross (and cross *out*) is the one between philosophy and literature. It is a border between logos and mythos. I cross (and cross *out*) this border because I am writing a novel.

In my novel, I wish to explore a philosophical problem. My creative guide here is J. M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*; a contemporary philosophical novel *par excellence*. Coetzee's is a novel that is both intellectually rigorous and emotionally poignant. It is praised by both philosophers and philologists alike. It is both philosophy and literature. Coetzee's work not only crosses the borders between philosophy and literature, but crosses them *out* to produce a form of novel that is philosophical literature. This is what I want to accomplish.

What stupidity we write in abstracts of papers we hope to give. Of course, I've accomplished nothing of the sort. I've written nothing about the hostility of philosophy towards literature and I've written nothing at all about my writing a "philosophical

novel.” I just sit here thinking about writing the paper about writing a philosophical novel. I just sit here reading *Elizabeth Costello* over and over again as if there is some secret here that I want to make my own. Hah. And tomorrow they expect me to speak.

It is not quite true that I have not been writing. See all the words you’ve read so far. But I cannot go any further, I cannot properly begin, until this problem is sorted. Nothing will come. There will be no paper to give. I will appear before the others and give a blank paper, a silent presentation. And an apology. I am sorry, I will say, I am sorry, but I have nothing. Nothing at all.

I shouldn’t have come at all. I shouldn’t have come.

But I am here now and the abstract is in the Conference program. I wrote that thing months ago, so spontaneously; it seemed so precisely relevant to my research I thought the whole Conference might have been conceived just for me. But, I know nothing about any of that right now. I cannot speak to the abstract. I will appear before the others, with empty hands and beg forgiveness. This is why I am thinking about Elizabeth Costello. It has been over a decade since that old and tired woman in a blue raincoat confronted me in that first edition with the word *fiction* on its hard cover, as if a reader could have misread the fictive and metafictional devices employed by Coetzee for anything other than fiction, for *philosophy* or for *science*. Elizabeth Costello. Old and tired and inappropriate and emotional and inappropriately emotional. I am not as old as Elizabeth, and not as tired, yet, but I am emotional. And I won’t write unless I know I’ll get it right.

I want to find a way of speaking, wrote J. M. Coetzee for Elizabeth Costello to say. I want to find a way of speaking, I read, out loud to myself, in my seafront room—the others are downstairs where I should be listening to how they are crossing borders, but I’ve locked myself in this room; another border, a border between me doing this writing activity which can only be done in monologue and me doing the activity which

will inevitably follow this one which is the speaking, the performance, and which can only be done in dialogue with readers or hearers.

(A pub.)

What brings you to this city?

I need to write a book.

A writer...

A novelist.

A novel...

Not an ordinary novel.

Yeah? So, what's your novel about?

It is about love.

Love! I can tell you a few love stories—

It is not a love story.

No? So, what's the story about?

It is a story about falling out of love, or rather having fallen out of love, because one rarely consciously knows one is falling out of it, one has no intention of falling, falling out of it, but one day, one just realises that one has fallen out of it—

A tragedy! I can tell you a few tragic stories—

It's not a tragedy. It is a fact. It is the case. It is what it is. It is a story about the death of love. It is a problem. It is a problem I need to understand. People seem to avoid responsibility for having fallen out of love, for letting love die (if it really is a letting), but they hold onto their moral right to fall in love with someone else when they have fallen out of love with the one they are supposed to still be in love with. There is an ethical problem here and I want to explore it. This is an exploration of the ethics of falling out of love—

Ethics! I can tell you some stories—

It is a philosophical novel.

Philosophy.

—

Like the Greeks.

—

Like the French.

—

Well, I will tell you this, I would surely like to read your novel.

I'm not sure that you would. Not many readers enjoy reading novels like the one I am going to write. When I pick up a novel, said a reader of one of my novels once, when I pick up a novel, I actually would like to experience good character development and at least a little plot. Philosophy is well discussed in many novels. This isn't one of them.

Yeah. I can see why.

Which is another reason why my pages are still blank.

No one likes a lecture, especially not in a story. Are you sure you've got a novel here and not a debate?

—

Don't get me wrong. I know I'm going to love your book. But not everyone is like me or you. I would say that most people read stories to forget about reality and learning and stuff. But you, you seem to have a didactic purpose! Admirable.

A reviewer once said that I am a thoughtful writer, but I must leave the philosophical academy behind if I want to write authentic fiction.

A fair point.

But, listen. I don't want to leave the academy behind. I want the academy, in a totally informal way, don't get me wrong, I want the academy in the novel.

It is dangerous writing a philosophical novel. I mean, this is not a thing writers can easily get away with. To get yourself some readers, and to save yourself the bad reviews, just keep the two separate. Either do your philosophy or write your story.

No. Philosophy just won't do. Philosophers seem to think that we can only write clearly about these problems by abstracting them from the shambles of human existence. But that's just telling a different story. I'm not interested in that story.

No, philosophy proper won't do for me either. Not anymore. I gave it up. Gave it up when I moved here. Well, I fell in love first. A passionate love affair can change your entire understanding of the world without even one logical proposition being uttered. And anyway, the best philosophical agora is the modern pub. I am a bit Greek that way. Right here, me and you, over the bar, drink in hand. Not too many drinks, mind you, because one loses control of it, of the argument, loses structure. It must still be rigorous, philosophy, even if it does take place here – the Greeks never got lazy even after a big meal and a few drinks, but here, right here, this is where the truth happens. Right here, with people, noise, drink, sweat, spit. This is where I do philosophy now. My thing is—

What does philosophy know about love anyway? Neuroscience reveals the unseen mechanics behind my loving and then unloving. Psychology labels the process and either cures or medicates it. Theology accepts that it is a human foible and forgives it. Again. And Again. And Again. Philosophy expresses the problem as precisely as it can and then refuses to fix it! Don't you just feel a profound sense of dissatisfaction when you focus just on these disciplines? Of course you do. It's only the novel that fills you up to the brim; that feeds your heart and mind. To fully understand my problem of love, I need to write a novel about all of it, all the disciplines, I would have to know

everything. I would have to encyclopaedise! Put everything within it and encircle it within its covers. No, wrong. I contradict myself—wrong verb—I could never hope to encircle my knowledge, or enclose it between a front and back cover, it would have to be a book with only a front cover, signalling the beginning but no end ever, for an end would be to say something very false about the story—

A story without an end?

Don't you see, the story cannot end. Who am I to say where it should end?

Danger, danger, spoiler alert, this is a story that doesn't end!

Danger, danger, this is a story that might never begin.

Hasn't it already begun?

No. I need to find a way of—

Of?

I need to find a way of writing this, a way of speaking—

Novelist wants to find a way of speaking—

Novelist? Where did he come from? Novelist. Is this how a new character occurs?

Just like that? A blank line and there he is. I already like him! He is surely here to help.

Where are we heading? Towards the new territory.

Let's skip to the performance.

VISIBILITY

Let the characters speak.

Let me see them.

Make them do something.

Make something happen.

CALVINO'S INVITATION TO "VISIBILITY"

In his fourth memo, "Visibility," (82) Calvino discusses the imagination and the imaginative process. He begins his discussion with Dante who, in the *Purgatorio*, is "meditating on images that form directly in his mind" and wondering from where these visual images come (85). For Dante, they are "moved by a light that is formed in heaven" and are formed "either according to the intrinsic logic of the imaginary world or according to the will of God" (86). Calvino suggests that these images might arrive in a way reminiscent of "film projections or television images seen on a screen that is quite separate from the objective reality." The poet must visualise what his character sees and also visualise what he thinks his character sees and for Dante, this visual imagination arrives before or at the same time as the verbal imagination.

Calvino distinguishes between two imaginative processes: "the one that starts with the visual image and arrives at its verbal expression," as in the Dante scenario, and "the one that starts with the word and arrives at the visual image" (86). Dante claimed his inspiration came directly from above, from the divine. These days, writers claim inspiration from closer to earth: from real life stories they've read or heard, from general observations, from non-traditional narrative inspirations such as new scientific discoveries or philosophical conundrums. Referring to his own process, Calvino writes that it all begins with a mental image that is "charged with meaning" (92). Much like the way that Paul Rayment came to, "occurred to," Elizabeth Costello, "lift[ed] up off the bicycle ... tumbl[ing] through the air (Coetzee, *Slow Man* 81). A meaningful image provoking the question "Who is Paul Rayment to me" and the ensuing story around him. In fact, much like the way that Elizabeth Costello must have come to Coetzee in her "old blue raincoat" and "a face without personality" (*Elizabeth Costello* 3-4) but

meaningful and useful. For Calvino, once the image comes he tries to develop a story around the images and the images which form around them. At this point, he becomes deliberate, the process now becoming conceptual as well as visual, he gives “order and sense to the development of the story” (92) within a coherent “overall design” he has given the story. When he starts to put “black on white” what begins to matter more than the visual image is the “written word,” “first as a search for an equivalent of the visual image, then as a coherent development of the initial stylistic direction.” In the end, it is the written word that dominates and then the writing itself “guides the story toward the most felicitous verbal expression, and the visual imagination has no choice but to tag along” (93).

In Part II, *Visibility*, I accept Calvino’s invitation and focus on the process of imagining the visual images. I also take heed of his warning of the danger of losing “the power of bringing visions into focus with our eyes shut” and the ability to think “in terms of images” (92). For this is my major imaginative problem: writing visual scenes that bring characters to life. My work, having become so concerned with form and process and theory, is very image poor.

So, I focus on Calvino’s advice on visibility. In an age where we are bombarded with familiar images, we should either transform, he says, the familiar into something new or, like Beckett (though Calvino could easily have been talking about Coetzee), reduce “visual and linguistic elements to a minimum, as if in a world after the end of the world.” The second part of this novel, *Visibility*, is about embodying, visualising and hearing this project of understanding. After some experiments in writing the characters of *Man and Woman*, I literally took the work to the stage to have it performed by actors. It was a spontaneous act of curiosity and I wondered if it would help my creative process (for whenever I wrote in anticipation of an audience at a literary event or conference, my writing became something different, more aware of the

reader/hearer/audience, and more a public event that a reader might like to participate in). I will not be discussing the process or the results of preparing a novelistic text for the stage (I shall leave that for future research) but the results of that experiment follow.

AUTHOR

The present.

A hotel room.

Actually, a stage. A small new stage in a room in a nightclub in a city. There are five people on the stage. Two are seated. Three are standing. Opposite them, another group of real people. The audience. They are silent at the moment. On the stage, the people there are holding papers in their hands. I know what is written on those papers. I wrote the words. I am hoping these people help get the story moving. Now that we've reached the far territory, now that we are on stage, as it were, I am hoping they'll be less stubborn about performing the story than the flat and uninvolved characters that have so far appeared. Actors. Real life muses.

My novel is about to be read on a stage in a club in a city by actors. The story has changed again. I am not quite a part of this. I am no longer centre stage. No longer the grand author pushing and pushing for the characters to speak and do things. There are real people on the stage. And, already, they have very strong opinions about what I've written. Very strong opinions about whether it "works."

The present.

A hotel room.

A desk (downstage just right of centre). A typewriter on the desk. A ream of paper. Books. An unopened suitcase by the bed (upstage centre) and, above the bed, a hanging portrait of Nobel laureate J. M. Coetzee (downstage far right). A tall table and two bar stools for the pub scene (downstage far left). Meet the players. First. Author. That's the playwright. That's me. A fictional experimental self of the actual, real

playwright. The one who's written the script. Me. The one who is actually writing the novel from which the script is written so that the novel can be performed for some experimental purpose. Me. She thinks the drama, the performance, will help her see the characters, hear them. This playmaking right here on the stage is her way of making the novel—its characters—become visible. Something for the readers to see. Something more than ideas and my internal monologue. This is where a true novelist is different to a reader, and different to a playwright. A novelist is happy with ideas; a playwright is uncomfortable with ideas, they don't do anything on their own. A playwright needs action, drama. We all need a bit of this now.

But there's another writer on the stage. Now, meet Novelist. Male. In his Sixties now. Retired. The actor for Novelist is younger, mid-forties, probably, and does not really look like what the writer thought Novelist would look like. On the page, she had imagined Novelist as tall, thin, frowning in thought, intellectual. The actor who appears on the stage and who is playing Novelist is a famous child star now returning to the stage after years of absence due to mental illness. He's not used to talking in the abstract, unemotional way that Novelist ought to be talking, thus the actor reads his lines too slowly, as if reading a foreign language. In his mouth the whole thing sounds different. Slow. Depressed. Heavy. In rehearsal, the actor accounts for Novelist's frustrations and confusions by introducing his own psychology, explaining the Novelist's creative slump with psychology. This won't do. He's excited to play Novelist. Love your work, he'd written in a message on the theatre's Facebook page. Honoured to work with you. Although his lines are tediously long and heavy, he has a lot of them and is on stage for the entire page. This is great for his theatrical comeback and thus he'll do his best.

Next, Publican. A philosophy school dropout in her late twenties, running a pub with her boyfriend. This time she's been cast as a young blonde. The actress has printed

out only the pages in which she appears as Publican. Scene 3. She has not read anything before Scene 3 nor has she read anything after Scene 3. She must think the story begins and ends with Scene 3. That the story begins and ends with her. Well, she's got that wrong. The author (real) and Author (imaginary) will have to intervene and keep everyone on track.

Woman. Woman is the leading lady of this story, though she's the leading lady of all stories, or maybe all stories are this one story. Woman is a strong-willed, intelligent and attractive female in her late thirties or early forties. She is intelligent, intense, confident and even has a stylish-sexy dress sense. Or at least that is how I see her, on the page, that is, in words. I'm telling you. Before casting, the director asked me what she looked like and asked me to name a famous actress that she might resemble. I could not. I had no visual image of Woman. Just words on the page. But surely the actress here today is all wrong. She is short, chubby, wears an oversized shirt in stage black that is belted around the waist and has an accent that author had never, ever heard when writing her on the page. It's Spanish! This changes everything. Makes Spanishness a part of the story. But we don't want Spanishness to be a part of this story. Off track, again. Author will have to interject.

Or maybe I am wrong about the characters. Maybe I don't know them at all. Maybe this director and maybe these actors, maybe this little team of thespians know the characters better than I do. Anyway, Woman is married to Man who is a tall, scholarly forty-year-old. He is cautious and sceptical, but a good, sincere man. The actor is not very tall, but at least he is taller than the actress playing his wife. That seems to be quite important to right now; as important as his goodness and his sincerity.

It's all very intellectual. He (the actor playing Man) says at one of the rehearsals I am invited to attend. You write like Pinter. I mean, I read the lines silently and not understand where you are taking this and then read them out loud and whoa! it just

works and each time I read them everything changes. Just like Pinter. The stuff men say when they are in love. You're quite right. We do sound ridiculous. Mad. Manic. You are so like Pinter. I was totally thinking about *Betrayal*. I played Jerry just last year. *Look at the way you're looking at me. I can't wait for you. I'm bowled over, I'm totally knocked out, you dazzle me, you jewel, my jewel, I can't ever sleep again, no, listen, it's the truth, I won't walk, I'll be a cripple, I'll descend, I'll diminish, into total paralysis, my life is in your hands ... I love you. Your eyes kill me. I'm lost. You're wonderful.* Never forget those lines. They come to me at the oddest of moments. Well, your Man sounds a bit like that. Me. My character. I sound a lot like that when I'm talking about falling in love with Woman. I am destined to speak lines like that. I feel like this role was written for me. I am Man!

I think you write like Beckett. (The actor playing Novelist.) You're so like Beckett. We're all waiting around for something to happen, for a story to be told. We want lines to speak, we're actors for god's sake! But nothing happens. Just these long monologues filling in the void. On the one hand, at the creative level, it's like your Godot is the Story, or the Novel, or Play or whatever it is that is supposed to be happening here. At the thematic level, your Godot is Love. Novelist can't write about love, because love is dead. There's a real pessimism. We're all pessimists in love. Except for Man, but even then, what's he got? Habit. And we know what Beckett's Didi said about that. *Habit is a great deadener!*

For me, this whole thing reminds me of *Birdman*. (The actor playing Author). The movie. The whole thing reminds me of that movie, Birdman. You know the one about the down-and-out film star trying to put on a play adaptation of that Carver story. *The kind of love I'm talking about when I talk about love, the kind of love I'm talking about, you don't try to kill people ...* Whoa! Those lines are killers. And you, too, you've got some killer lines like that, but also, what I especially like is, you know, it's also the

way, like in *Birdman*, you make the writing of the story and the staging of the story part of the story. And thanks for telling us we can do anything with the lines in the script; I like how you're relinquishing control. I've got some ideas already about some changes you could make. I'll email.

And then, of course, the Roth. *Deception*. (The actress playing Woman). Your title echoes a line from that exchange. You know the one. *So, our story isn't a love story, really—it's a cultural story*. Sure, yours isn't a cultural story, it's a philosophical one, that's what interests you. But similar to Roth's character, your Woman's desire to fall in love again, to start thinking about an affair, is not the result of domestic disappointment or dissatisfaction or whatever he says. For Roth's character it is cultural displacement, for your Woman, it is the existential void.

I am invited to speak before the performance. The event is a script-in-hand reading and authors attend a Q&A session following the show. We are in a new space recently formed in a nightclub in the city's red light district. Capacity is sixty-five and we've a crowd of about forty.

The director directs me to lead the four actors to the stage as the MC introduces me and the actors—welcome them as they come to the stage—and the crowd applauds and I turn to them but cannot see them for the light. I've a prepared speech and I begin—

Sorry, um, I really shouldn't be here tonight. I shouldn't be here, on this stage, their stage, the actors' stage, talking to you all. You see, I am the writer. I am writing a novel. I am writing. Present continuous tense. It's not finished—

laughter!

—I can't seem to finish it; I am having problems. I'm writing a novel about love. Actually, I'm writing a novel about not love, about the end of love, about falling out of it. And, I'm writing about a couple. A married couple. Man. Woman. They're falling

out of love. They need to have a conversation. As a novelist, I think it is my right to get them on the page to start having the conversation about why their marriage is ending. But I can't write the dialogue. I read it on the page, it's flat. The characters, they don't even come to help me write the dialogue for them to speak. So, I'm here, seeking the help of the dramatists, directorial advice and actor's bodies and voices, real people, and you all of you here tonight, to help me write this dialogue to make it interesting, at least, for Man and Woman to join me and to speak it and for you, dear readers of my future novel, I hope to entice you to keep turning that page and reading about these guys because what is happening to them is really important.

I'm writing about love because I want to know about love. I have some very urgent questions about the nature of love. About what it means to fall in love and what it means to fall out of love. Is it a choice? Can we be praised for it? If so, should we be punished when we fall out of love? What are the ethics of falling out of love with someone when we promised we'd love them until death...

Now, philosophers have been thinking about love for over two thousand years, but their arguments fail to properly persuade us, because they use language that is abstracted from us. It is language, for the most part, designed to make us think, but not feel. But moral decisions are not always based on how we think about things, they are also based on how we feel about things. Only novels can make us do both, only novels, by virtue of immersing us in human stories and engaging both our mental and emotional faculties, only novels make us both think and feel.

In the play you will meet a couple of characters who I've invited here to help me write this thing. Author. He's me. I'm him. We don't look much the same—

laughter

—(a young scruffy thin bearded male has been cast in the Author role) but we are motivated by the same urgent questions about love. Authors put themselves into novels

all the time and I don't mean factually or autobiographically but the same motivations are there to be explored in the fictional event. But Author's got the same problems. Those characters are silent for him. So, he's seeking some more imaginative help, in Novelist. He's me, too. We don't look much the same—

laughter

—(a tall bulky male with a black moustache and cap has been cast in the Novelist role) but we are engaged in the same sort of activity. He's the guy who's sitting there banging out the words on the page. He's the one charged with making dialogue that will sound like real speakable meaningful dialogue. They are both trying to get this novel written.

Whatever happens tonight, and that includes your questions and feedback at the end of the performance, will go back into the novel. And you are a part of it all. You are part of the event of this novelising experiment of mine.

I'm going to stop now and go hide out the back, where all writers should be. Novelist and Author will hopefully come up with something that will get Woman and Man talking about why their marriage is ending. Let's see how this little experiment goes—

applause.

CRITIC

Koromilas began referring to her project as an *experiment* after reading a snippet from a letter, written by George Eliot, in which Eliot writes that she saw her novels as “a set of experiments in life ... an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of” (Gatens 39). The characters in Koromilas’s story are reluctant to participate. Elizabeth Costello, writer, has a similar problem with Paul Rayment, who is reluctant to participate in her experiment once he discovers the form she has chosen for her literary project. She too is interested in inappropriate desire and lust and he is the reluctant subject. But she persists. She taps her head and asks him to think about the dilemma he finds himself in. “You must think. You must think” (Coetzee 94). Later, he says, “she issues instructions, we follow (111). And when he follows, he realises that this is all “an experiment, that is what it amounts to, an idle, biológico-literary experiment (114) and Paul is the experimental rat in a cage while Elizabeth Costello observes, listens, takes notes and records his progress (122).

I guess that the main creative problem that occurs when one begins to write a novel in this experimental mode is that the characters might find the whole process uncomfortable at best and morally objectionable at worst. Paul to Elizabeth Costello:

You treat me like a puppet ... You treat everyone like a puppet. You make up stories and bully us into playing them out for you. You should open a puppet theatre, or a zoo. There must be plenty of old zoos for sale, now that they have fallen out of fashion. Buy one, and put us in cages with our names on them ... Rows and rows of cages holding the people who have, as you put it, come to you in the course of your career as a liar and fabulator. You could charge admission. You could make a living out of it ... Easier than writing books that no one reads. (117)

What happens in novels such as these is that there is a lot of “telling” going on and less “showing.” David Vann, novelist and creative writing academic, told *The Book Club*:

The 300 creative writing programs in the US for the last 40 years have been teaching students to not write *Middlemarch*. Because everything in the language is abstract and cerebral. We’re told everything, shown almost nothing. There’s almost no concrete physical descriptions. So we get Casaubon’s face, Rosamond’s face, we have a little bit of clothing, we have Dorothea’s room, occasionally the trees or something else in the yard, but for 850 pages, it’s shocking how little concrete physical detail there is. (*Middlemarch* 06:00 mins)

This abundance of telling over showing is also true in Coetzee’s work. All we get of a visual Elizabeth Costello is the blue coat, the greasy hair, the cold cream, the flabby flesh. Interestingly, Eliot and George Henry Lewes thought that, for all its brilliance in showing the external traits of the town population, “thought” and conceptions of life, as well as emotions were strangely absent from the work of one great novelist, Charles Dickens. And this, they claimed, lessened the contribution of his work.

NOVELIST

Novelist has arrived. At last, my novelist has arrived. He has seen little of the city, my city, my space, this room, his desk, but it is enough for him to know that he has crossed a border into a place that has already begun to unsettle him. My fault. I am also unsettled.

Novelist hasn't really arrived. No. I mean physically, yes, he is here, just there. And he is in good shape, too, for a retired academic. Years of jogging around the university campus oval has kept him both physically and intellectually agile.

I have invited Novelist here for an event and he has come, but he is not prepared for it. Mentally, that is. Emotionally, too. He has yet to cross the threshold. He doesn't quite understand why he is here and what I want from him and so he isn't very enthusiastic about "our experiment," as I call it and ask that he call it that too. Novelist is here to perform. Novelist is here to write the novel. My novel. That's the performance, you see. Novelist is here to perform, to write the novel, or whatever this text is, or will become, that is, because it does not yet exist, not properly so, this story, is not ready. Novelist is convinced, immediately, no second thought required, convinced that no serious reader will choose to sit through this and watch him perform a novel, especially when it is a novel about love. I tell him to leave the logistics to me. But Novelist is not prepared for any of this. He is not prepared to cross the threshold. He is here for my event, but he won't cross the threshold. He won't leave his seat to cross the threshold and to step up here, right here, right here at his desk with the typewriter I bought and repaired for him, right here before you, dear future reader, and to perform.

He should never have come. Thinks Novelist. He should never have started out. Too late. I think. He's here now and I will keep him. It is hard typing on a 1928 Remington. Painful. He can do the banging on the keys. Oh, listen to me. That's an

excuse. The novel, or whatever it is, is just not coming, which brings me back to Novelist and to why I have invited Novelist here. Novelist will help. Must help.

Before J. M. Coetzee opens *Elizabeth Costello*—the novel that is not quite fiction and not quite essay but both, the novel about the Australian writer who delivers strong opinions about animals and literature and evil, the only novel that is of any importance now (picks up the book off the desk), well that and *Slow Man* because it's Elizabeth Costello's; that and Markson's *This Is Not a Novel* and *The Last Novel*; those, and a couple of Kundera, and Calvino, and the Perec. That's it. Novelist needs to know the genre we are working in, the influences, my philosophy of the novel—that the novel is a performance, an experiment, a philosophical argument. To the point. Before J. M. Coetzee opens *Elizabeth Costello*, he talks about (reads from the book's prologue) the problem of getting us from where we are, which is, as yet, he writes, nowhere, to the far bank. I have the same problem here. I am repeating myself. I have the problem of getting Novelist from where he is, which is, still nowhere, to the far stage. Until Novelist steps up onto this stage and rolls that sheet of paper into the machine and starts banging on the machine, well, Novelist will stay nowhere. And I won't have a novel. Coetzee calls this a simple bridging problem, a problem of knocking together a bridge. People, he writes, solve such problems every day. They solve them, and having solved them push on. Well, if people solve such problems every day, then I guess I too will solve mine. So, here I am, knocking together my bridge, dear reader, and Novelist will, of course, finally get to the far stage. I will call for him. Again. And he will perform.

(Novelist reluctantly and very slow makes his way to the page, to the stage to sit at the desk and rolls a sheet of paper into the typewriter).

He will perform this novel, he will write it, that is, and up here his body will work—his hands will indite the novel, his fingers will type its sentences, his voice will speak them. Novelist is in full working condition. Physically, at least, he is quite a

capable character. But his mind is an entirely different matter. His mind is messy. The novel is far from anything that resembles a novel, because Novelist has yet to get started, properly started, because Novelist has his own problems to solve before the problem of how to perform this can be solved. His problem is a problem with the characters. The characters in the novel. They won't speak. Which is why he doesn't want to appear up here. He knows it won't work if he does this storytelling alone. There is nothing worse than a novel dominated by a single, distinct narrative voice. But that is all we have here right now. Only Novelist. The characters won't speak. They are silent. Novelist doesn't know how to make them speak. What language to use for them? What words? There is no one about who cares to step up to the microphone, so to speak, and speak them, the words, the words. Novelist has some urgent work to do here and he needs the characters to help him. Novelist has questions and they must be answered, and they must be answered urgently. Yes, these questions are also mine. I am the author here, the one whose name will appear on the cover of the book and no author starts novelising if there isn't some urgent motivation behind the task, if there isn't something that one needs to understand. But I've invited Novelist and the others to relieve you from my own distinctive narrative voice, which gets quite tyrannical, actually, just listen to me droning on and on now, or go read my first novel. And so, it is Novelist to whom I have gifted that urgent state of curiosity, the urgent need to understand things about love, that internal momentum that impels every new novel, every fresh experiment. Novelist is writing about love. No. That's wrong. He is writing about not love, he is writing about the end of love, he is writing about the falling out of love, not love. He is writing about the death of love. Which is, of course, his problem. None of the characters much appreciate being cast in roles that have them living through things they'd prefer to forget. And more than that. None of the characters want to talk about falling out of love, about the dwindling of love, about the death of it, at least not in the

way Novelist is trying to do it, with his difficult extended dialogues, investigative and philosophical in intent. He is overloading the characters with the responsibility of speaking dialogue that will somehow get to the point about love. And they won't have it. Woman won't, she refuses to talk. Woman, who has been called here to play the role of the woman who has fallen out of love and who should really start talking about it, because, well, it is important. She won't. And Man, he won't talk about it. He is stuck in the past, at the moment when he fell in love, years ago, but he won't talk about the present. He won't arrive here.

Novelist is trying to write about love, about not love, about falling out of love. But he cannot quite get the thing to the page. He cannot get it here. He cannot see it happening. The characters won't come. And until this problem is sorted, nothing will come. There will be no performance, and worse, much worse, there will be no novel. Novelist needs the characters to come up here, to come to the page, to the stage.

We've got work to do here.

Novelist tells the characters, these ill-formed silhouettes hovering around the room, refusing to take form, refusing to speak.

We have an experiment to execute, a hypothesis to prove, a story to write, we've got some truths to discover, you and me together, truths, urgent truths about love.

He says. But they do not come. Fictional characters are reluctant these days and wary, very wary, of being exploited by their author, especially within the pages of stories they consider banal, love stories.

This is not a love story.

Novelist tells them.

It is a philosophical novel.

But they do not come. Yes, fictional characters are always reluctant at first, but this group have remained so stubborn towards his project—they can't simply be

apathetic, can they? —it is as if they are jointly conspiring against him, sabotaging the whole thing. He does not know how the novel will come without them.

I should never have come.

WOMAN

NOVELIST

(At the desk. To Author.)

Has the novel begun?

The page is blank?

It has been blank for days. I have been waiting for more of the thing to come, but it won't.

Just you and your machine and the blank page rolled into the machine and set there at the beginning of the next chapter.

Days ago, I typed the word WOMAN and the top and centre of the page where all novelists write the titles of their chapters—

A kind of announcement, a call.

How else can I get her to come?

And now you are still waiting.

I've been waiting for days. All I have been doing is waiting. And watching. And waiting for something to happen. I've given her ideas, suggestions, hypotheses, I've shared my intuitions, I've proposed alternatives, but that woman, WOMAN, does nothing. I am trying to be sympathetic, trying to wait and let her start, let her freely start, after all, she's the one in this dilemma, not me, she's the one that's got some explaining to do, but she won't explain. I am trying to help. I am trying to think myself into this character, Woman. But she gives me nothing.

You didn't expect her to be so silent?

Why doesn't she want to speak for herself? Why won't she come? You know, I'm getting fed up. If she will not come then so be it.

But you cannot replace her now.

True.

Novelist likes her. He likes the Woman character. He doesn't yet know why he likes her, she's hardly appeared on the scene, she's barely more than a silhouette, a weak whisper of a character, a series of notes, bullet points, digital images of unknown faces and body types saved from a Google search to his project folder. But Novelist imagines that when she does appear, when he gets her here, that she will think in a likeable and helpful way. Helpful with our experiment, that is. Woman is one of Novelist's experimental selves and she'll help him explore this trouble with love. Just as Novelist is one of my experimental selves, here to help me find a way of writing this story about how to explore this trouble with love. We are all in it together. And you, too, dear future Reader, you, too, will have a part to play.

I am fed up. Says Novelist. I'm just going to start telling this story. Doesn't the reader need to be told?

Readers don't like to be told.

Oh, I know, I know readers, they like to be shown.

Characters don't like to be told either, they just want to be left alone to speak.

Well, that's all good in theory, but the experiment needs to begin and I can't wait anymore, I won't. So, I am telling the story for her, telling her what she should be doing, at least to start with. There's trouble here and she's got work to do.

Novelist pulls the blank page off the roller and places it on the desk next to the machine. He presses his palms down on it. He wants to straighten it, make it smooth, but it rolls back around its now invisible platen. It has been rolled around that platen for so many days, its kink must now be permanent.

He touches the capitalised word.

WOMAN. Woman.

He rolls the page back around the platen, pushes his forefingers firmly on the keys and types—

(Typing) There was a time—before this story began—when she was a good wife.

He stops.

(To himself) Has the novel begun?

(Typing) Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a woman and she came across a man or there was a man and he came across a woman and she became his wife and he became her husband and she was a very good wife and he a good, good husband.

(Novelist, a grin pulls up the sides of his mouth, pulls the paper off the platen and throws it on the floor. He adds a fresh page and begins typing again.)

It was love at first sight.

(Novelist, a grunt and left eyebrow raise, again, pulls paper off typewriter, throws to floor, adds a fresh page and begins again.)

For a long time, they went to bed early.

(Again)

Love? Love? You get love in the next world, in this world you have the illusion.

(Again)

She left today.

(Again)

This is the saddest love story I have ever heard.

(Again)

You are about to start reading a new novel by Kathryn—

(Again)

There was a time—before this story began—when she was a good wife. There was a time—before this story began—when he believed that. There was a time when she was a proper thing for any man to have by his side at a public event where what a man had by his side expressed a part of what he was without him needing to say

anything at all. There was a time when he believed in the absolutely good and that absolutely good was her. Woman.

Let the characters speak!

Well, here's a little thing for each of them to read.

WOMAN

There was a time—before this story began—when I was a good wife.

There was a time—before this story began—when I believed she was.

There was a time when I was a good thing for Man to have by his side at a public event where what he had by his side expressed a part of what he was without him needing to say anything at all.

There was a time when I believed in the absolutely good and that absolutely good was Woman.

There was a time when I was a good thing for Man to have by his side in a private event, in his bed, performing his desires, or in his kitchen, brewing his coffee, or in his dining room, serving his meals, or in his lounge room, acting as his interlocutor to the musings on the things that sometimes concerned his mind so much so that he pursued them in dialogue—what would have been monologue had it not been for my innocuous and infrequent interrogations.

I believed in her goodness the very moment I saw her. I believed that I ought to have complete faith and trust in her. This belief came to me so spontaneously, in so basic a form, that neither evidence nor argument was required to substantiate it. It was as unnecessary to argue for her absolute goodness as it was to argue that I possessed my own arm.

I was a good thing to have by his side in good times and in bad times, in sick times and in healthy times, in rich and poor times, and in all other times that men choose to have women by their sides.

At that moment, the moment during which I saw her and during which my belief came, I recognised her. I recognised her. I had never before seen her, but I recognised her. I recognised that she was already very familiar, already mine, though there was still

a mystery between us and while we could only be spoken of in a conjunctive sense for we were, in any normal sense quite separate individuals, I immediately understood that our union would be a kind of reunion and where we once were separate we would be one.

I was a very good thing, but not because I looked like a good thing. For the most part men could not see anything good at all—no particularly pleasant, pretty features—and because they could see no beauty they could not, for the most part, see me at all.

I saw her. She had the tallest comportment in the room. Poised on long thin shafts of heel, she moved across the space like a ballerina *en pointe*.

It was only the more thoughtful of men like him who might have paused to find something interesting in me. Only did the thoughtful and ponderous man linger on my heavy and firm physique held up on caballine thighs and calves and flat-hooved soles.

She mingled with other guests moving towards them and away from them with controlled motion, her weight pulled up and held over her legs. She was divine. Oh, mercy. Beatific. I knew her, I recognised her. Not in any intellectual way, my mind had not yet become involved in this, but in some other way, bodily, maybe. Can it be that a long time ago she and I, we, lived together within the same perfectly round body, happy as gods, our two faces and our two pairs of eyes and ears and everything else working together in perfect solidarity? Whatever possessed us to challenge the greater powers and to suffer the punishment of severance and separation and now, and forever since then, always wandering in search of each other? Had she been wandering in search of me, too? I had been wandering for so long, hardly knowing what I had been wandering about for, but always somehow hoping and longing, and now recognising that I'd found it. It was more than a desire for sex, more than love, more than friendship. It was her. It was Woman. It was the hope of once again being with her, whole, home. She belonged to me in the way that a lost possession, when found, returns to its rightful place. I

belonged to her. My identity, my place in the world, depended on being with her. I wanted her by my side, as close as possible to the side where she had previously connected, I wanted to see the world with her again, my eyes and hers, lost but now found, I wanted them to learn to see together again, and our ears to hear together again, and our legs to move together again in perfect syncopation as if we'd never been severed into two.

Only did the ponderous man like him linger on my ample hips and fleshy flanks and loins. Only did he loaf about my long-spined torso poised, slender and small breasted, collar-boned and crest-necked and jawed and cheeked and, only did these men, linger on my archaic muzzle built up into the geometric forehead and, linger, linger on my frizzy mane of chestnut and blonde.

I lingered. That very first day, I watched her busy with her interactions. I watched her approach others and I noticed how they changed, how their frowns softened, their lips relaxed, how their limbs uncrossed themselves and how their feet stepped forth towards her, as if they also knew about the hidden world of delight and meaning, a world to which she was gatekeeper, a world to which they all wanted admission.

These traits of mine, these traits he so liked, I had inherited from a tribe of mountain-dwelling zealous-in-spirit women and I refined them over the years in the antipodean sandstone halls of learning—my hooves high-heeled, my gait ambling and steady, my intellect cautious, my spirit domestic—and after I had refined these traits, I corrupted them, and what had been good, turned bad.

But before all that, long before any of that, she looked at me. And as in all such moments depicted in novelistic or cinematic form, each pair of our eyes, quite simply, caught hold of the other pair, and stopped glancing about and paused in focus, and time, in the way time is understood in those moments, had very really stopped, and I knew that this spontaneous gift, unwritten and uncaused, was about to be bestowed on my

humble self. And now she moved to me and I moved to her. There was a new purpose here. Her meandering had now become precise. She would reach her necessary end. She would reach me.

What do you think? Novelist asks me.

Two problems. One. They sound more like you than them. Let them speak. Two. There is no trouble here. Remember, this is not a love story. Let them get to the trouble.

MAN

You are the most beautiful woman in the world. Said Man. It was not that she was beautiful that he now loved her, but now that he had begun to love her, she was beautiful.

I have been watching you. I have been watching the way you move amongst everyone. You are like a perfectly round silver ball in that arcade machine only that whatever spring propelled you here and whatever flipper is meant to prolong your movement is powerless before you, you propel and control yourself and everyone around you. You are absolutely powerful and absolutely good. I stand humbled, and very much transformed by you, before you.

Man found that he was feeling the emotions we tend to associate with falling in love.

You're funny. Said Woman.

I wasn't meaning to be funny. I don't tend to be funny. Even when I attempt to be funny I seem not to ever be funny.

I don't mean in a ha-ha light-hearted sort of a way, but in another quite awkward way.

You are the most beautiful and most intelligent woman I have ever met.

I mean awkward because of the assumptions you are making. You sound like you are reading a script written for someone else. You sound corny, contrived.

It simply must be what a man says when he has been struck.

Struck?

Woman said.

Love struck. Struck with love. I believe that you, my love, you are supremely beautiful and good and clever.

Man believed that Woman was good and knowing and powerful in much the same way that a man who so desires believes his God exists and is a good and knowing and powerful God. This is a kind of belief that arrives so spontaneously and so intensely that nothing—no supporting evidence—could make it stronger and nothing—no contrary evidence—could vanquish it. Man did not believe in a god, but he believed in Woman.

That's a leap of faith. You've yet to hear me utter more than a sentence or two and not one sentence in which I uttered any cleverness at all. You should not be reaching such sloppy conclusions.

And yet, I do know you have a strong mind. I believe in you. I have no doubt. I quite simply have complete faith in you.

Ridiculous. This is a ridiculous exchange. I am not sure what you (to Novelist) are getting at here. I sound like a babbling idiot and Woman has given absolutely nothing at all to make believable that I could so spontaneously have fallen for her. No wonder she thinks I'm contrived. And look at her, she looks nothing like what you want me to say she looks like, and worse, she looks like nothing that would convince me that I am falling in love with her, that she is The One. You need to work harder at setting this up. I am not going to be able to convince your reader (or, in the first instance, this audience) with this. They've all fallen in love before and they all know what it sounds like, but I sound awkward. I sound odd. I need to convince them that Woman and I had really fallen in love, I need to show them the magnitude of that love and to convince them of it, that is if you want to me to convince them of what happened next. Let me know when you are done.

He's right. The scene is not working. No one is convinced here. A real conversation needs to take place.

He's lazy. This character is lazy! He doesn't want to do the hard work. He doesn't want to get to the problem. He really is in trouble here. I mean, as we speak his wife, Woman, has fallen out of love with him, is probably going to leave him, but all he can do is fixate on that moment, all those years ago, that single perfect moment when he fell in love. Big deal. We all do that, and it is hardly something we can take responsibility for or be congratulated for—it happens so spontaneously, it is hardly our choice. He sounds ridiculous because he was ridiculous, all men who fall in love sound ridiculous, in retrospect, and on paper, at least, it is not a thing that a writer can accurately render. But this is not a love story, I keep telling him. I can't write that part of the story and I won't write it. That was then, this is now and he needs to take responsibility and move forward to now. He is here now and WOMAN has fallen out of love with him and it is not going to be easy to talk about it, to perform the role I need him to perform here, but there's no helping him. He is just going have to think, think, think about what is happening now and to stop fixating on that single achievement. He really needs to think about the dilemma he is now in. I have played my part, I have issued the instructions that all novelists issue their characters, otherwise nothing would ever get done in novels, but what does he want now? He wants backstory? He wants me to write a believable narrative history for him to speak and share with the reader, with this audience? He wants me to set up the physical and geographical space for him to move about in? Choose a city? A neighbourhood? A street in which to build his house so that he can comfortably get to the point? Do I have to choose the room in which the conversation he wants to avoid will take place? Paint its walls, place its furniture, sit him on a sofa? Will that make the thing easier? I won't do it. I just want him and the others to get to the point. All we have is this room and this desk and this typewriter. And that is all we need.

AUTHOR

So, a conversation is about to take place. Some new way of doing this experiment is required. Some new way of letting the characters speak. A new device. A new strategy. A conversation is about to take place. There is no specific time or place. The setting will not be introduced. The characters' thoughts will not be shared. The characters will speak. That is all. Novelist will not interject with attribution. Novelist will not interject with description. Novelist will give no narrative direction. The conversation will fill the page. And the reader (to audience) will have to do some work.

CRITIC

Koromilas is referring to authorial intrusion, a device which drives this work; the author is present everywhere. The author, together with Author and Novelist, is the intrusive narrator who organises the story, signals narrative and creative choices, controls the reader's interaction with the text, reminds the reader to stay on task, alerts the reader to the difficulty of the task, in this case, the task of the philosophical exploration, which is about to begin now that Koromilas has all but solved the imaginative problems, the last of which is that of dialogue.

Koromilas has already suggested that only an intrusive and self-aware narrator could keep the reader attentive to the point of the work, creative and philosophic. But authorial intrusion seems to do less helpful work when dialogue is being written, at least in so far as this author's work is concerned. When the characters are called upon to articulate ideas that might help towards the understanding of the various problems of reasoning about love Author and Novelist only hear the one voice when there should be a range of voices when, after Bakhtin, truth is this thing that is generated between people and not something possessed by an individual and when, after Wittgenstein, logic (the vehicle which brings us to truth) is a "language game" played by multiple voices.

What results is that the characters have become a chorus of mouthpieces for Author's and Novelist's experiment and the author and novelist feel as if they are forcing the characters into telling their story, forcing motivations, inventing interior monologues, interpreting gestures, and worse, filling in silence with story. But the problem is not just that a dominant authorial and narrative voice might make puppets of its characters or that it might be too overbearing for its reader, and those are serious

problems, but worse, the problem of a dominant authorial and narrative voice is that it undermines the project of philosophical exploration because it sounds as if it already possesses “the truth.”

Thus, in an attempt to get the characters to speak for themselves, Koromilas experimented with writing unattributed dialogue, after having read Roth’s *Deception* who uses dialogue to drive the entire narrative of lovers talking about love and sex before and after sex. Dialogue is common to all fiction so there is nothing remarkable when authors use it (Kelly 269), but in examining the work of Roth (as well as some Gaddis and Wallace) Koromilas found some appealing solutions that dialogue might provide. For Wallace, dialogue provided him with two creative solutions: one—the potential relief from the dominance of his own distinctive narrative voice and, two —“a range of voices which create a forum for competing ideas which can then be explored in a dialogic context” (276). These insights are helpful to Koromilas’s creative project for two reasons.

One. Koromilas and her experimental selves, Author and Novelist, are very passionate about their task here, emotionally obsessed with the philosophical experiment they hope to embark on once they solve the imaginative problems of form and narration and ethos. When all characters are obsessed with the author’s project, the result is monological and rhetorical voice loud and clear and very contrary to the ethos of this exploratory project. So, by removing her voice the hope is that the truth-seeking process becomes an authentic part of the dialogue, opening it up to a true discovery.

Two. The device of unattributed dialogue arrests the reader’s attention and participation in the event. When the dialogue is unattributed, “the lack of contextual description forces the reader to imaginatively intervene in constructing a scene.” In her *New York Times* review of Roth’s *Deception*, Fay Weldon expresses her initial

“aggravation” at being invited to this “text without exposition et cetera,” with the characters being introduced and without the scene being set:

Oh, yes ... aggravated. Who is this Olina, who is referred to all of a sudden in the dialogue, with no introduction? Male, female? Who’s talking anyway? Do I have to go back yet again and count up - he, she, he, she – to find out? Why doesn’t this author turn up and help? (para. 3)

But the purpose of unattributed dialogue, explores Koromilas, is not to force the reader to do the creative work, or to disorient the reader, or to test the reader’s ability to accurately match the line of dialogue to the character, because all that is beside the point. The use of unattributed dialogue in this creative work aims to encourage the reader to shift their focus away from the “individual characteristics and motivations of those speaking towards the broader significance of the ideas themselves” (Kelly 277). That is to say that what is spoken in the ensuing dialogue is not important because it is spoken between Man and Woman, between two members of a married couple, that there are even two characters having the conversation is “beside the point” (277). Moreover, the unattributed dialogue has the effect of dissolving the binaries in any traditional exchange—he said, she said; for, against—for the reader, unless they backtrack and count the lines, loses track of who is saying what and focuses merely on what is being said. Thus the dialogue has a monologic feel to it. Although Woman dominates the ensuing dialogue, the presence of Man’s contribution, not as explicit binary opposite but as another voice that adds to her monologic approach to truth, broadens her reach. (This, of course, the exact opposite of what happened to the script on the stage, where Man and Woman, by virtue of being clearly allocated their lines, were very much in argument, thus the exchange seemed less exploratory, stubborn. The stage performance did change the subject, but again, that discussion cannot be adequately completed here and will wait for a future project). On the page, unattributed dialogue becomes a kind of chorus or extended meditation on the novel’s themes. The

presence of Man and Woman here is to assist in Author's exploration by way of having a conversation, which we discover later, introduces in a very vague and crude way (as most ideas first occur) some contemporary philosophical issues about love. Later, in "Exactitude," Koromilas tries to further explore these vague ideas in the longer, more contemplative form of thought, the letter.

A final comment on the following dialogue will focus on the "interruptions" by the Author character. Although the experiment here was to remove the authorial voice, Koromilas then added a number of philosophical interjections back into the dialogue after an experience with audience participation during one of the first performances. During the Q&A session following the performance, one audience member commented on the extreme narcissism of the woman character who was seen as simply being selfish when it came to her bemoaning the lack of lust and attention in the current relationship. Koromilas felt that the only way to keep the reader attentive to the philosophical exploration, and not to interpret psychological motivations (for that was a different story, one that Koromilas was not interested in telling), was to interject with philosophical comment. Originally, these comments were added as footnotes, but she came to see that creating a hierarchy of text, say above and below the footnote line suggested that some text was not essential to the overall whole. This is why readers will often skip footnotes. However, in this project the philosophical notes are essential to the story, not merely additional extras for the more attentive of readers.

WOMAN AND MAN

No, no just forget it. I really don't know why I said that. I don't seem to care much about that right now.

Yeah, but you did before.

Maybe. It's funny, you know. I don't remember what it was like to care about it. I don't even remember why I thought I should care about it.

Anyway, I still love you and I still want to be with you for the rest of my life.

I'm a habit you've formed.

No. No, you're not. Maybe. I don't know. I need to think about that.

And then you'll have an answer?

Yes. And I don't want it to be the wrong answer.

Well, either I am or I am not. A habit. Yours. Your habit. Simple.

No, it's not simple at all. I need to think about whether my admission of habit diminishes what I feel for you.

Ah, yes. So, does it?

I don't know. I mean, no. Of course not.

But you've never thought that through.

No. But I will now. If you want.

Yeah, I want. Go on. Tell me I'm not diminished.

Right. Okay. So. This will probably come off rather prosaic, but here I go. One could argue that we fall in love, and stay in love, because we know that's what we ought to do. We know that's all part of what it means to live good lives as human beings. I am a human being. I am a creature of habit. I know I want to be in love with

you because loving you is what makes life good. If my loving you is a habit, it's a habit that makes life worth living. There.

There.

But I really do love you.

Sure, I love... No, see, it doesn't come anymore. I can't say it anymore. It isn't a fact. Not a current fact. It's a fact about the past. If it ever was a fact, because I'm thinking it was more illusion than fact. And I wonder whether the fact that it is no longer a fact is why I can't say it anymore and why just trying, just then, to say it, or even trying to feel it, or believe it, well, I wonder if that is the reason why it no longer carries any weight, why it isn't important. Not anymore. Worse. Why it's not even morally significant.

Well, if love isn't morally significant, then what is!

I know! It should be, shouldn't it? We certainly have nothing else left to help us make sense of things and make sense of our place in things. We certainly have nothing at all left to show us how we ought to live with each other and how we ought to treat each other. But I guess I don't think that love can pull all that off anymore. At least, not where you and I are concerned—

Interruption. Novelist has done well to lead to the conversation here, to our expectations of love, but without his novelistic intrusions, without his guiding narrative voice, I fear you might miss the point. So, I will briefly interject and direct your attention to what is really going on here, which is an exploration, philosophical in intent, by me and my experimental selves, these characters, a philosophical exploration of some themes of existence. The theme of love. Love is the supreme moral virtue and has been ever since Hebrew scripture called upon us to love god with all our heart and soul and might and ever since St Paul pronounced that of all the greatest things love is the greatest. These Christian conceptions of love as the supreme moral virtue underpin

much of our thinking about love today, even while we have largely transformed into secular individuals. When Woman says that we have nothing else left to help us make sense of things she is referring to the decline of the role of religion in our lives, the decline in explaining natural events, the decline in setting and enforcing values, the decline in influence over our politics and education. We now depend more on our own powers as individuals and, according to some philosophers, the more individualistic we become the more we expect that love will be the ultimate source of meaning, the supreme standard of value, the fundamental key to our identity, and a solace in the face of rootlessness. In short, and in the words of philosopher Simon May, we have overburdened love.

— Yes, Yes, love cannot pull any of that off anymore. At least, not where you and I are concerned.

Wow. That's harsh.

—

So, you've broken the habit.

Yes.

Was it hard?

No. It wasn't. Not at all. You'd think it would have been hard to stop loving you or, okay, at least hard to accept that I'd stopped loving you, I mean given our early achievement, that singular, genuine and complete love—I sound all ironic now, I know, and I'm sorry—and then, of course, the ongoing contributions of our secrets, our thoughts, our fluids, our smells—our investment plan to sustain perfection. And then, all those arguments, debates at first, wholly absorbing, aphrodisiac, and then the fights, just fights, domestic, trivial and wholly averting, those damn fights had this terrible way of revealing stuff about us that we should have kept private, because now, at the end of it all, we can't take any of that with us. And then, all the compromises, the shrinking of

our individual selves as we tried to fit into the same space—not just the physical space of our little apartment, but the same emotional and mental space. And the body, the attachment of my body completely to yours, as if it had always originally been attached to yours, with the expectation of some form of profit, both somatic and spiritual, no not spiritual, that’s obviously not the right word, noetic, I mean, ontological. And there was so much profit in the beginning, in the early days. Remember? We couldn’t stop talking—all the big ideas we shared which we never did anything with because we shared them with each other as if we were the only audience that mattered in the world. And when we weren’t talking—

Sex.

Yeah. Sex.

Remember?

I remember.

Thirteen times.

In a single day.

In twenty-four hours. And we sustained that for a good while, I think. I mean, not like that. But still, it wasn’t just a one-off, a freak event. We had a habit of sex. We had a habit of lots of sex. I mean, that passion between us didn’t erupt and go dormant overnight. We kept it going. It was significant.

We did. But it wasn’t. Everyone does that. In the beginning. And things change. I was a different person then. I am not that person now. I loved you then. I don’t love you now. But, wow, I really, really loved you back then.

I loved you too. I still love you.

I mean, I loved you because you really used to notice me. You used to be so attentive to the fact that I existed—

Interruption. Woman is concerned with attentiveness. I need to make the point here—because Novelist won't, he doesn't want to interrupt your engagement with the story—I need to make a point about Woman lest you all accuse her of narcissism, as she was accused in previous incarnations of this story. I want to make the point that we are not interested in Woman's psychology here, we are not interested in any psychology at all. We are interested in philosophy. We are interested in the *isness*, the what-it-is about falling in love or falling out of love. Philosophers talk about attentiveness as a prerequisite for love because the lover's attentiveness gives the loved one a sense of having some significance, meaning, stability, security and purpose in the world. Previously, god provided us this, but in the centuries after the great pronouncement of god's death, love has filled the gap, but not just love, being loved, that is, being the object of someone's attention, that is what gives meaning and purpose. Some philosophers, like Simon May, argue that we only remain in love so long as our lover remains attentive, so long as we feel, what he calls, this 'ontological rootedness,' this grounding of our existence. But attentiveness, it seems here, easily surrenders to habit. And this is surely an important problem that we need to understand.

—I mean, I loved you because you really used to notice me. You used to be so attentive to the fact that I existed.

Past tense?

Yes. Past.

I'm not attentive anymore?

No. You're not. You've surrendered to habit. And that has changed you. And that has changed everything.

Nothing has changed. I am here and I am constant—

Hah! Now there's the sly genius of habit—it keeps you ignorant of your own self-delusions. Who said that? Proust? Beckett?

—and I very clearly and distinctly know that I love you.

Yeah?

Yeah.

(Novelist to self) That works. (To Author). That works!

Yes, yes, it does. The novel has begun! Do you have any more?

I miss you. Says Woman.

I am right here, darling. Says Man.

I miss you wanting me.

I still want you.

I miss knowing that you want me.

I am telling you that I want you.

I can't know I am wanted just by being told it. I miss feeling that you want me. I miss feeling that I know that you want me.

I tell you that I want you.

But you don't tell it like before.

I tell it the same.

Not like before.

What's different about the telling now?

Before, the words you used somehow corresponded with everything. The words, then, they just seemed to naturally correspond with your voice, they were rich, like a song's lyrics sung, you know, singing a word or a phrase just makes it sound more, like, well, just more, as if the music connects it to something bigger, something that cannot be said, connects it to everything else that is meaningful in the world that cannot be said. And because you spoke to me musically, let's say, because you were truly in

love—whatever that means—because—in love—you spoke to me musically, you made me sound different. I mean different to the way you make me sound now. Back then, your words made me beautiful. Yeah, beautiful. And, important. And, central. Everything you said about me made me sound so important and because you said things in that way, well, I became important. I became important to you and important in the world. And that's why you wanted me. You wanted me because I was this important thing in the world.

But I want you. I still want you. I'm not sure about this music thing, I don't have a musical bone in my body, you know that about me, so I don't know how I could have done that, how I could have sounded like that. But music or not, I want you. I still want you. I will always want you.

You don't say that like before.

Wait. I'll try something else. Hold on. Listen. I want you, darling.

And you don't show it.

Yes, I do, darling. I show it. Of course, I show it. There, I hold your hand like this every day. I touch you. I show it. Of course, I show it.

I mean, not like before. Your holding my hand, the way you are holding my hand now, it isn't like before. I need a cliché for your hand-holding. Yours is a cold fish hand hold. You know?

Well, that's not fair. You're just being difficult. You aren't even trying to hold mine back.

I can't hold your limp hand; it is too depressing. There is no strength in your holding my hand, no desire, no need, no urgency. No desire to get me, to hold on to me lest I run away forever. Limp. Limp. Limp. And, simply indifferent.

Hey. Stop it. Look at me. I love you. I want you. I want to hold you forever. Look at me. I am here. Look at me, look right at me. Nothing has changed, my darling.

And your eyes, they're different.

Now you are just being argumentative.

Your eyes. They don't focus on me. They somehow do not focus on me. As if they don't see me. Of course, they don't see me. I mean, I have become invisible. That's what your habit of love has done. I was so visible before. You could see me, you could really see me, I could feel your eyes on me, feel them. It was exhilarating to be so visible.

I see you. I see you. Of course, I see you.

Yeah, so, sometimes you look in my direction, true. But, but if I were to measure, say with a protractor or some other geometrical device, the angle made by your gaze and my body, I could show that you are off, your focus is off, your gaze focuses on something just beyond me or beside me or something in your imagination. It's happening now when I'm talking. You do it when we're having sex. But, before—

—I am really getting sick of this before and now business—

Interruption. Interruption! There is a recurrent nostalgic reference by Woman back to the past, to the beginning of the relationship when sex was passionate and plentiful, to when love was a very obvious fact and, more so, to when ideal and perfect love seemed to have been achieved. The philosopher John Armstrong states that because sexual passion is hard to fake, lust can be reassuring to the loved one, it is irrefutable proof that love is a fact, that two people are attracted to each other, want to join together in a perfection of one. Sex, says Armstrong, is direct, whereas love is diffuse. Sometimes we need love to be made obvious—otherwise we do not believe it is a fact—and sex is one of the most powerful ways in which this can happen. But for Woman love is no longer obvious because sexual urgency is no longer a fact in the relationship and she reasons that if sexual urgency is no longer a fact then love is no

longer a fact. Is this erroneous thinking on the part of Woman? If so, Man would have to come up with a counter-argument.

—I am really getting sick of this before and now business. I am really, really getting sick of this.

I know you are. And I'm sorry I keep bringing it up, but we simply don't have now what we had before. And this change, this loss, is what is essential here. Wait, please, wait. Don't go. Listen. Just listen. I remember something from before. I remember me and you in a bar, the one up the road from our place. I am wearing the white dress you bought me. Remember the white dress? All lace over satin. You thought it might once have been someone's wedding dress. I remember stepping out of the fitting room in the store and you looked at me as if I were your bride arrived beside you at the altar. Your look. It wasn't a look of love, no, not at that moment, it was something else. It was a look of admiration, I think. Yes, it was. It was admiration. Isn't that how love begins? With admiration? Yes. With admiration. I remember reading that somewhere. Voltaire? Stendhal? Anyway. I remember you standing there, so tall, proud, of yourself, maybe, or proud of me for being so damn admirable. So damn new and beautiful and interesting and all a mystery, so much to discover, so much to dismantle. You admired me for everything that I seemed I might be—you could not have known anything much about me and yet. Yet. Anyway, back to the bar and back to the dress. There we are, sitting on a lounge—conjoined. I have my legs over your knees and, underneath the dress, I have the corset, the stockings, and I am sitting in a way that gives you just the top of the stocking but none of my flesh. And there you are. All hands. Your hands. Your fucking hands are all over me. Remember? And you lift the dress just enough to see the flesh at the top of my thigh, and you are staring at it for the longest time, there, just above the end of the stocking, it transfixes you, and everything else ceases to exist. And everything else ceases to exist because of me, because of that

part of me, my thigh, or even less, the promise of my thigh. Everything ceases to be noticed, you notice nothing except for me, and you notice nothing else because of me. My existence is necessary. I am not just a diversion, I am the absolute centre of your world, I am your world, I am bigger than you, I am important, and I matter, my existence matters. Remember? Your attention was complete that night and you could only express it with one single word. The only word you seemed to know that night was 'fuck' and you knew it in all its versions. You knew its noun: fucking is what we should be doing now, baby. You knew its adverb: you look so fucking great, baby. You knew its verb: I need to fuck you right now, baby. All you could think of was fuck and fucking. And baby.

I wanted you. I still want you in the same way.

But you don't say fuck anymore.

But I still want you in that way.

Go on.

Go on what?

Say it. Say it, please, say it.

I want you.

Say it, god, please, say it.

I want to fuck you.

Say it.

I want to fuck you. I want to fuck you. I want to fuck you. There.

There.

But I really do want to fuck you.

You don't say it like before.

Fuck you.

I really miss being wanted in that way. I mean really, actually, truly in that way. In that fucking way. You can't even fucking say it like that anymore. I mean, somehow, now, the fuck word doesn't mean the same thing. What the fuck have you done with the fuck word? This is so tragic. So fucking tragic. You know why? Because I don't just fucking miss being wanted in that fucking way. So much more than that! So much more. And this is the tragedy here, this is what frightens me, you know, this is why I need to explain all this, because we don't know where this is going and I need to somehow explain this, get to the bottom of whatever it is that is going on here, this feeling of loss, this loss of feeling, the classic nostalgia, the classic disease, that terrible neurosis—is melancholia the opposite of love? I have a new longing now. This is what I want to tell you, I guess. This is where all this is leading, I think, that I long for someone—but not you, okay, not you—I want someone, someone else, to want me again like that, like you did that night. I want that so much. It's the only thing that makes sense lately. The only thing that is significant. I am invisible without it. Dead, even. I mean meaningless, I mean, as if, seriously, I might wake up one day and not be here at all.

(Long silence)

—

Anyway.

—

Anyway, look, let's just forget this. It's all very, very silly. I don't really know why I am saying all this. Sorry. So sorry. I actually don't really care about it at all.

But you did just before.

Maybe. Yes, maybe I did. But now that I've said it, I don't really care about it.

Anyway, darling, I still love you and I still want to be with you for the rest of my life.

I am a habit you've formed.

Maybe. Yeah, maybe you are. You're a lovely habit that makes life good.

EXACTITUDE

Philosophy is cold-blooded at times.

Sorry about that, but it's the only way.

The *only* way?

The only way to be exact.

Exact?

Exact, yes. With language. About the truth.

CALVINO'S INVITATION TO "EXACTITUDE"

In his third memo, "Exactitude," Calvino explores his concern for our tendency towards using language "in a random, approximate, careless manner" (55), which is why he "prefers writing to speaking." He describes his "discomfort" upon hearing himself speak and finds comfort in writing because he can "revise each sentence" until he becomes less and less dissatisfied with his words. But just as he begins following the path towards precision, as he focuses on a particular story he wishes to write, he realises that there is something else beyond the story, "not anything precise but everything that does not fit in with what [he] ought to write—the relationship between a given argument and all its possible variants and alternatives, everything that can happen in time and space" (68). It follows that writing in this way is a "devouring and destructive obsession" that "render[s] writing impossible." He quotes Musil on this paradox of the precise and the infinite:

If now the element under observation is exactitude itself, if one isolates it and allows it to develop, if one regards it as an intellectual habit and a way of living and lets it exert its exemplary influence on everything that comes into contact with it, the logical conclusion is a human being with the paradoxical combination of precision and indefiniteness. He possesses an incorruptible, deliberate cold-bloodedness, the temperament that goes with exactitude; but apart from and beyond this quality, all is indefinite. (63-2)

The mode of exactitude then is to concentrate on a precise story while at the same time recognising its entanglement with the infinite number of other stories which could be written. Calvino switches between two paths. One leads him into the abstract "mental space of bodiless rationality" and the other to the concrete physical and verbal space. For Calvino, these are two different, but essentially interdependent, paths towards exactitude. This is because, "natural languages always say something *more* than

formalised languages” because natural languages come with a “certain amount of noise that impinges upon the essentiality of the information,” but at the same time “language is revealed as defective and fragmentary, always saying something *less* with respect to the sum of what can be experienced” (74). The Hofmannsthal dilemma.

The mode of exactitude, the mode of switching back and forth between precision and indefiniteness reflects a cosmology (addressed also in “Multiplicity”); the world and everything in it is infinite and interrelated.

At the practical level, in writing towards *exactitude*, Calvino sets out three requirements: a clear plan for the work; clear visual images; and precise language “both in choice of words and in expression of the subtleties of thought and imagination.”

Thus, in Part III, “Exactitude,” I accept Calvino’s invitation and begin with placing a limitation on form: I chose the epistolary. Within this framework, I focus on clarifying my, and my characters, thoughts on love. Adopting a more “cold-blooded” (63) temperament while at the same time trying to resist the allure of definition and category which would undermine the project of discovery. I use the slow task of letter writing to give the characters time and opportunity to concentrate on their own love stories and love problems so that, when all stories are taken together, they might “lead to a general solution” (64) on the problem of love. That said, because I cannot hope to get anywhere near a general solution within the pages of this modest-in-length work, the final section of this novel remains unfinished. A further invitation to continue this exploration, indefinitely...

CRITIC

The final dialogue in “Visibility” ends where it begins. In this way, Koromilas shows the inadequacy of spontaneous dialogue for doing philosophy. It is raw, it lacks order, it is circular, and it is interrupted ambiguous emotional interjections. In addition, when we are speaking we utter all sorts of phrases that seem to go nowhere. Wittgenstein writes:

In the course of a scientific investigation we say all kinds of things; we make many utterances whose role in the investigation we do not understand. For it isn't as though everything we say has a conscious purpose; our tongues just keep going. Our thoughts run in established routines, we pass automatically from one thought to another according to the techniques we have learned.

(Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value* 64)

The dialogic form was initially appealing as a form for philosophical exploration, especially considering its pedigree—the Platonic dialogues. However, on closer inspection, the Platonic dialogues are not representative at all of real human dialogue. And, of course, the experiment in “Visibility” was to make the characters visible and audible in a way that would be, firstly, authentic to them and to the project and, secondly, also appealing to the reader. For the latter, it would mean dialogue that was not predetermined and not didactic, and characters who were speaking truthfully and not acting as mouthpieces for the author.

In the Platonic dialogues, however, Plato has already formulated his thesis and employs the dialogue form to *persuade* his readers of his thesis, not to discover the thesis with his characters and readers, which is what Koromilas is attempting in her experiment. Thus, Plato's dialogues are not examples of “philosophical dialectic” but “persuasive rhetoric” (Rowe 12). Those dialogues are stylised and ordered and their purpose is to *simulate* philosophical discussion in order to communicate an already established philosophical thesis. The *form* of dialogue is not essential to the *development* of the thesis; it merely represents it. Plato could easily have written an

essay about love, or friendship, or piety, or temperance and almost nothing would have been lost. Except, it seems, the power of persuasion. Because Plato uses dialogue to persuade his reader to turn to philosophy—and to participate in philosophical discussions, for philosophy, as an activity, is “the art of dialogue” (8)—the dialogue comes across as “forced” (159), a criticism that Koromilas herself received about the philosophical dialogues in her first novel. Her project here has aimed at exploring the potential for authentic philosophical dialogue. But that dialogue, as it occurs in informal philosophy seminars or in informal gatherings of philosophers where new ideas are discussed, is fragmented and circular and moves forward in a very haphazard and very slow way. “Visibility” would have to go on for hundreds of pages before any new philosophical insight could emerge from the exchanges between Man and Woman.

Thus, and to complete the Wittgenstein quote from above, after dialogue now “comes the time for us to survey what we have said. We have made a whole lot of movements that do not further our purpose, or that even impede it, and now we have to clarify our thought processes philosophically” (64). After talking, philosophers head to a place of solitude where they clarify their thoughts in writing. Koromilas structures part three of this work with a series of letters in which her experimental selves will now clarify some of the ideas that emerged in the earlier parts of the novel and, keeping Calvino’s warning in mind, writing towards clarity will also require a writing within indefiniteness.

WOMAN

Dear M—

I'd been in this strange new world for three weeks when the housekeeper brought me your letter. I've a do-not-disturb button in the room which, when pressed, activates a red light outside my door. I assumed that would signal my desire not to be disturbed, a kind of language agreement, but even in its simple visual form, it is never understood. In the days since our end, and since my arrival here, nothing is understood the way I previously thought it ought to be understood. So, the housekeeper disturbs whether the red light is on or not. She will knock first and then she will ring the bell and then she will call the room phone from the housekeeper's phone in the corridor. I don't speak her language and she doesn't speak mine, but I pick up the phone, say nothing, and a few moments later she enters. In the mornings, she tidies and cleans. In the afternoons, she brings a plate of fruit—tomatoes, a pear, and a banana. In the early evenings, she brings the newspaper, turns down the bed, and places my slippers. The newspaper is in her language, not mine, but I like to sit with it, looking at the pictures, predicting the stories, tracing the logographic characters of the headlines.

In your letter, you make it quite clear that you are upset and that our families and friends are also upset. I understand that about the others. The disturbance of the sort we created must surely have changed things quite dramatically for them. Our separation may well have caused them to question their own marriages. I have seen this happen to groups of couples who've been friends for years. When one couple separates, there follows a domino effect where the others separate, one by one. It's uncanny, and yet, the reason is this: each couple will only sustain the illusion of love if all the other couples do. If the narrative is interrupted, the group's consciousness about marriage

mutates horribly into a scepticism of it, thus cankering it. I wonder who of our coupled friends will be next?

It is inaccurate to call them *our* friends now, for they have all surely given me up and kept with you. But have they found a way to console you by now? Have they found a way to help you “bear up against grief’s heavy counterpoise?” Why shouldn’t I quote from Sophocles? Our story was very Greek in the way it ended. Such drama. Who could have expected that sort of denouement from a couple of educated, intelligent, and rational beings? How our hearts raged and raged while our minds, which I always believed to be our more talented faculties, fell to illogic and then finally to silence. Such misery! I do sincerely hope that you have found a way to console yourself now and ended all that play. If you still expect some consolation from me, then maybe this: I have not seen O. I have not gone to him. There. You may take that as a win. So be comforted and cheer up.

Since I left you, I have become quite the pessimist about love. This turn was not all my own doing, I don’t think. There is surely an author behind my new thesis, nudging me towards articulating this new state of reality with the words I am now writing. I have surely been led here on this path of enquiry. This is the role I have been given.

But let me return to the last time you saw me. After you destroyed the equipment, I did run off intending to purchase a lightweight machine with the capability of connecting me to the network and to O. My last correspondence with O. was the one you intercepted. I imagined that the sudden and complete abruption of the erotic communications must have tantalised O. He would have been waiting for me in that space we shared, and despite how unreal you claim it was, it was a space we called our home. Waiting. It is a kind of enchantment, waiting for a lover. And how powerful to be in the position of enchanter! I’ve been reading Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse* and much

of what I will say here is a response to Barthes' project of deconstructing—I haven't used that word in years!—the language of love. When I say I am a pessimist about love, I mean I am a pessimist about the language of love. I can no longer utter it. It is commonplace and clichéd and vacuous. It angers me that it is so. This empty language charged with the ambitious task of giving words to our most sublime experiences, and it fails us. And if it fails us, if there is no real discourse for love, there is no love. The limits of love's discourse, limits the possibility of love. I am a kind of Hofmannsthal on the matters of love. I have completely lost the ability to articulate anything coherent on the matter.

I wasn't always this way. In the beginning with you and with O. and with all my lovers before you and him I used the words—i-love-you, i-adore-you, i-miss-you, how-romantic, were-you-thinking-about-me, my-lover, we're-fated, alter-ego, desire-you, want-you, forever, fuck-me—and I used the words in complete faith that they truly expressed my experience. I never thought twice about them. But you will recall that even in our early discussions, those that still retained a cold-blooded civility, I found everything you said quite dissatisfying. The more you used the word *love*, the lonelier I felt. This is why our early discussions ended where they began. This is why I left. This is why I did not go to see O. This is why I am in this limbo, in this room in a hotel in a country that is situated, geographically and metaphorically, between you and him. Without a language for love, I cannot return to you and I cannot go forth to him. I am silent. I won't ever say the words 'I love you' again. There. You may also take that as your win. For me, there is a kind of relief that comes with that concession.

Let me return to the waiting O. I have been imagining him waiting. If he is waiting, why is he waiting? He is waiting because he believes he is in love. His experience of waiting is essential to his experience of being in love. The waiting occupies his body and mind. I imagine he arrives and sets himself at the scene of our

rendezvous and will not move until I arrive. But how long will he wait? For as long as he believes he is in love. But how long will his body endure the tension of confinement which waiting demands? Even if his body is warm and comfortable, and even if his mind is pleasantly occupied with happy thoughts of my arrival, how long, realistically, could he endure that tension? The duration of the wait will alter his experience of love. His faith in my arrival will give way to scepticism about my arrival and that will give way to fear of abandonment. But maybe he is still hopeful. Maybe he is still waiting because maybe he still believes he is in love.

You never know when one will stop waiting; when one will go from loving to not loving. If he is still waiting, he must surely be a little angry now. I imagine him rehearsing utterances of loving admonishments he'll give upon my arrival. And then, when the waiting continues, what then? Grief? What comes with the desolating realisation that the person he has been waiting for is not real, does not exist, not anymore, will never arrive? Abandoned now he consoles himself by imagining my death. You also wished I were dead for not dissimilar reasons. If the loved one is no longer in loving attendance, only death provides peace of mind. For if the loved one continues to exist, they pose a constant threat. They threaten to exist with another lover. In the lover's discourse, threat refers to the potential for our loved one to exist with another as they once did with us. The very threat that we might not only be severed from our loved one but be replaced by another lover dislodges us so violently from our ontological security that it incites all the grotesque emotions. Fear. Jealousy. Spite. Disgust. Revenge. Rage. During our last days together, we played out a series of obscene episodes in which we expressed, so vividly, all the emotions. What is the philosophical significance of these emotions? They must have something to say about life, about existence.

Take shame. What I feel more than anything now is shame. The guilt I felt about leaving you, or before that, about lying to you about O., that guilt has matured into shame. I don't regret what I did, I regret that I became, and most likely still am, the type of person that does those things. Lies. Betrays. Blames.

If there is one episode I am most ashamed of, it is this one. My memory of it isn't complete, the narrative has fragmented and all I can recall are snippets of words and static, stylised poses of us in various phases of argument and my face caught in a single emotion, that raging face of the tragic theatre's mask. We are arguing again, long hours of the same circular arguments, stubbornly monological, punctuated by accusations towards you and excusals for me. You begged me to stop screaming, but there was no other way to communicate my rage. And what was I enraged about? I was enraged about having to account for the fact that I was in love with O. while I was still married to you. You called it betrayal; I called it pursuit of happiness. You called it madness; I called it a rational choice towards improving my life. You told me I had debased myself; I told you I was pursuing beauty. You told me I needed to see a psychologist; I told you that my falling in love was a philosophical act, an act of reason. You told me I was lost; I told you I'd found home. And each time you counter-argued, I raised the pitch of my voice and the sound of reason became the sound of rage. I should have paid more attention to the intelligence in my rage than to the easy narrative of love, because now in my quiet solitude—I must also tell you that I have returned to philosophy and I am studying daily—I am finally able to understand what my emotions had already begun to articulate in that messy way that they do. I did not just desire to love for beauty or union or mutual care. I desperately needed the comfort of a lover's devoted attention otherwise I could not sanely live in this world. It was this realisation that enraged me and then shamed me. What I saw as the cool nature of your love, and why I

turned to O.'s vigilant and virile love, was in actual fact your ability to transcend the existential horror of being so damn vulnerable. And I hated you for that.

So all I could do that night was scream and screech as if I wanted to communicate with the whole universe. You left and I stood there howling. Then you returned. In your hand, a knife, who would have thought you had it in you, and with such speed and dexterity you had me locked in your embrace and had the blade at my heart. I silenced my howl. When I said *stop it, you'll regret it* I did not mean to threaten you with revenge or condemnation. This is what I want to explain. This is why I am bringing all this up. What I meant was that the more we continued with that spectacle, the sicker we would become. Sicker for knowing that such obscenities occur in the world between married men and women, and sicker, much sicker, for knowing that we are the kind of humans who have done these obscene things. We should never have done those things. We should never have seen ourselves doing those things. Because there's no coming back from that unscathed. And now the shame of it. The shame of being so needy of love. The shame of being so damn human and needy and out of control.

The housekeeper has intruded again and she has brought the bowl of fruit. I'll take the pear, sit by the window and read more philosophy. It was wrong to leave philosophy. I imagined it might free my spirit that I might live more fully in the world, but all it did was unleash what philosophy had previously regulated. And I am back at the beginning. And as for shame. It's a feeling I'll hold onto as a talisman. Something good will come of it.

—W

DOCTOR

Dear M—

Thank you for taking time to send me your news. I am happy to hear that you are now recovered and I hope the same for W. Yes, continue with the prescribed for at least the first year and, I would encourage, continue until you are in an established and mutually satisfactory relationship with your next bonding partner.

Thank you, also, for alerting my attention to the article. Yes, there has been some negative press about my work. But you know that I shall not be swayed. I don't care what they say, I don't like them, I am, quite literally somewhere between detesting them all and being indifferent to them. I may have only recently begun my studies in this brave new field of inquiry, but my sense of what is right and wrong in the affairs of men and women in love has forever changed. After all these years and after all the misery my patients have related to me, and my own misery added to that, I have concluded, quite determinedly, that the syndrome we call love with its set of all the crazy emotions, (read your Sousa), poses a very real moral threat to humanity. In short, and I am not kidding at all, I am anti-love. I am quite literally and completely and very, very fiercely disgusted with our essential stupidity, our insistence on buying-in to this notion of love, love of the personal and erotic sort, the sort of love that starts off making you tingle and ends in your absolute misery. Yes, the romantics have a place for misery in their aesthetics, and some masterful works of art, as well as some rather catchy tunes, have been produced in misery's name, no doubt continuing the work of Ovid and Lucretius's *cures*. But I claim that both the works themselves and the miserable pleasure we find in them is completely immoral. And I am prepared to take this to the very end and to claim that we must let go of our romantic notions about love and return to a pre-romantic era, a pre-modern era, as it were, where the serendipitous violence of the initial love event,

the fall, is avoided entirely. We already have dating sites that help us avoid all that risk and help us to control our search for someone to intimately bond with. This is rationalism. And I mean this quite formally. Agreeing to devote your heart and mind and body to a person you meet based on one frighteningly contingent encounter is completely unreasonable; it is an act of faith. An act of religious faith, where the religion is Love. Now, philosophers seem to think they know a thing or two about reason, but sometimes old-fashioned mothers know best. One of my patients, a lecturer in philosophy who is in recovery from yet another love disaster that has reduced her to a blubbing idiot who cannot put two coherent premises together, told me that her mother had paid for an online matchmaking service for academics. We must look for other more functional ways, and may I say, saner ways, to create and sustain intimate personal and erotic unions.

And why? Why am I so stubbornly controversial? It is not just because I hate love—and I do, I absolutely detest the very premises it is based on—it is because the average person today is a miserably frightened being, absolutely terrified of falling in love, and worse, much, much worse, absolutely lacking in power and learning and courage and patience to do anything excellent should they find themselves in love. No one reads the ancients anymore. No one has the time. We want love, but we don't want the mess. And yet, it's all a mess. It's one mistake after another. Of course we make mistakes when falling in love, we always choose the wrong person, this is because love's projected trajectories (who we will fall for) are hidden from us (yes, determinism; yes, neuroscience), but we blindly fall and then when we realise we have fallen in love with someone who isn't what they seemed we wreak havoc on them and on everything and everyone around us (children, friends, parents). To be fair, universities are delivering courses on love these days—and not just the poetry of love, but the real-world practical potential of love. This must be commended. But my patients

are way past their university days. So what do I do with these wretched people who sit with me in my room and talk to me about their problems—which are always, always, I stress, always about love. Or work, or money, or the past, or the future, but even when love is not explicit, it is always there, lurking. The extent of love's violent reach is incredible. So what do I do with these people? What do I do with these angry, aggressive, jealous, hating people?

Let me take a step backwards. Why does love produce such violent emotions? My patients never question these emotions. Never! Not once! Not one of them has ever come to me and said, If this is what comes after love, Doctor, then I can only guess that there might be a fundamental problem with love itself. No. They come to me, the boring wretched creatures, totally resigned to their fate, because the romantics have convinced them that if they are lucky enough to experience the sublime, they must also accept the inevitable, the misery. The romantics, I hate them and the arguments. The argument from romance, dear friend, is complete bullshit. You want to know what these violent emotions mean? They are an attempt to make sense of the shocking realisation that love does not exist.

Love is wrong. Love, of the personal and erotic sort always, is wrong. It is immoral. Žižek, for whom I have immense respect, which is something I cannot say for many philosophers these days, calls love evil. Why does he say this? He says this because of love's discrimination bias, love's one-sidedness. When you fall in love romantically, you fall for one person and one person only (until, of course, you fall out of love, when you go on and fall for another individual). You single one out amongst a crowd of many others. You fall for one person and proclaim that you love them and them alone. Your bestowal of love on one person whom you've singled out from all of humanity is clearly irrational at best, insane at worst. It is cruel, violent, unreasonable. What makes one person more worthy of your romantic attention than the next? You

couldn't get away with loving one child more than another, morally speaking, that is, you'd be a horrible parent if you ever admitted that.

But you do, you pick one out of the many and you say you love them. Fine. Go ahead. Best of luck to you. But what if love has given you the wrong person? A rational person would quickly back off. It would be stupid not to. But that initial encounter, induced by a series of chemical reactions in the brain, creates an attachment that is impossible to sever. And with attachment, comes promises. You very quickly hear yourself promising everything and promising well into the future of which, surely you must know, you have no control over. And with promises comes obligation. Which is why so many unhappy patients cannot leave their partners. Much as I try, they stubbornly, stubbornly stay. No amount of logic, no amount of talk, no amount of philosophy can break these attachments. But some attachments must be broken.

Take B. B. He's a gentleman, sixty years old, recently widowed, yes, lonely, a lonely old school teacher. He comes to me with what he, quite rightly, thank Logic!, believes is a serious problem he cannot deal with alone. He has fallen in love with his student, a mature in body and mind young lady of fourteen years. I can sense his urgency. He sees this young lady every day. There is real danger here. He knows temptation. He's been there before. I don't have time to treat him with the traditional talking cure; we need something that will help him quickly. Either that or leave the job. Can you see that I am morally obligated to help? He has agreed to my unorthodox solution and I prescribed the same medication as in your case, which also has the effect of blunting libido. The drug takes time to take effect, as you know, so he has requested two weeks leave. We talk everyday as a cautionary measure.

You were one of the first of my patients to choose the chemical cure for your heartbreak. You now think you should have taken time to heal yourself and reflect on your situation rather than turn so quickly to the drug. But that is the romantic bullshit

again. Your case was far too fragile and urgent. Time does heal all, but you were in a very vulnerable state. And let us not forget the violence, towards your wife, but also towards your own self. You came out of that, luckily, but not all do. I would not have wanted you to take that risk. Feel satisfied that you acted morally on this one.

Yes, there was a significant level of coercion on my part, and I may have overstepped my boundaries, but I wanted to help ease your suffering. Yes, we could have kept to the more traditional path, with Ovid and Lucretius, and I did, if you recall, prescribe the relevant fragments from the Cure, but the stoic missives proved impossible for you, angered you more. Recall your response to the following.

She's nothing, so please yourself, and care for other girls,
let her be just one of many, to you, now.

You were enraged! How could she be *just one of many* when she'd always been *the one*? But you weren't enraged with Ovid or even with me for prescribing that couplet. You were enraged with yourself for getting love wrong.

I will end now and prepare for another patient, R. She has recently been cured of despair thanks to agreeing, after my very strong coercion, to participate in a study conducted by the University of B. I had been treating her for a number of years with the traditional talking therapy—just mild issues, like building self-confidence as she wanted to prepare herself to start dating again; she wanted a relationship. One day, she reports having fallen crazily in love, but the lover is a married man. He gives the usual narrative of being unhappy and preparing to leave his family, which of course does not happen, and over the course of a few years I see her disintegrating, literally each week she is thinner and smaller and quieter. She presents with symptoms of OCD. Thus, she fixates on his phone messages, fixates on the length of time it takes him to reply to her, fixates on the number of times he tells her he loves her. She comes to see me with a photo album of him. Yes, my patients quickly overcome the normal embarrassments of

what the Confidants—as I call them—now demote as oversharing. She has only recently put the thing together and now she carries it with her. She cannot focus on our sessions without looking at her phone in anticipation. And then, a few months ago, she reported receiving warning at work for under-performing and, in addition, she confesses that she has completely ceased all work on her PhD. At that point, I become enraged. You know how unorthodox I am, dangerous some say, but I could not stand this anymore. She was not only boring me, but her pain was totally unnecessary. She's been on the medication for a few months now and her reports are positive. The married bloke, I am happy to announce, is out of the picture, she is working on her PhD again, and we are right back at the beginning working on her self-confidence in preparation for finding a person with whom to bond. The difference this time is that her brain chemistry will help her make a better choice.

—D

PROFESSOR

Dear W—

How wonderful to hear from you and how especially wonderful to hear that you have returned to philosophy. May I also enthusiastically welcome you to the pessimist camp. It's actually quite a surprise to see you here. I do remember you as a student. You were the only one that cried after my introductory lecture on epistemology. Did I scare you so much? I don't think I ever apologised for that. Though, to be truthful, I wouldn't have apologised anyway. You needed a bit of dislodgement and I'm glad I was the first to shove you out of your zone of intellectual and emotional comfort. What did we call you? The Last Idealist. No. Actually, I think it was The Last Optimist. Indeed, you were. I think you held that title for the most part of your undergraduate studies and then I didn't see much of you after that.

Anyway, to the present. The pessimist camp is simply the only camp of which you would ever wish to be a member. This is where the real work occurs. I can only imagine you arrived here after experiencing, and surviving—my congratulations to you—a most severe emotional blow resulting in what we used to call an existential crisis. Your life must have recently been overturned by some terrible intimate story. It is okay. All our philosophical enquiries are intimate ones. As Wittgenstein advised, “When you are philosophising you have to descend into the primeval chaos and feel at home there.” The tone of your letter suggests a cool approach to your new study. You must, therefore, be feeling quite at home in this shambles called life. You are becoming a philosopher.

But beyond the philosophy you are now reading, I am quite sure you've read your standard sciences and, given your fresh focus on the problem of love, you must surely also be reading your neuroscience. If not, I urge you to do so at once. These are the

people we are now in dialogue with, though really, they are just adding to the traditional arguments for determinism by simply revealing other hidden causes for our actions, not without us, but within us, the hidden activities of our brains. They thus show us yet again that we are, in the formal sense, not masters of our wills and, for you, this means we are not masters of our loves. In terms of your project, your problem of love, this might alter your definition of love. Whatever your current definition of love is—love is desiring another; love is possessing another; love is forming a union; love is bestowing value on another—you might now also want to consider the following. Love is brain activity that releases dopamine, that transmitter of pleasure—that is, when love is addictive. Or, love is brain activity that triggers norepinephrine, that stress hormone that fires up our heart and blood pressure—that is, when love is stimulating, when love makes us high like a drug. Or, love is the experience of losing serotonin, which reduces us to anxious, out-of-control wrecks—that is, when love becomes obsessive, when love makes us crazy. Want to end an unhappy romantic bond or forget an unrequited love? Just ask your local neuroscientist for a prescription of antidepressants. Want a long and monogamous marriage? Just ask your local neuroscientist for an oxytocin inhaler!

Look, of course neuroscience is helpful to the overall project, but in terms of addressing the dissatisfaction you have with the language of traditional romantic love, why would science's vocabulary make you feel any more authentic? You say the word love is vacuous? Well, here you go, you now have access to an entire new vocabulary that correlates to scientifically proven facts. Next time you fall in love just replace "I love you" with "When I am in your presence, my brain is very actively releasing dopamine." But even then, can you see what you will have done? You'll be speaking another fiction, for even if the object of your loving attention is equally versed in the vocabulary of the inner brain, the language of science only tells part of the story. Surely there is more to your experience of being in love than brain chemistry alone.

Let us accept, say, that neuroscience tells most of the story. Is love, as we know it, in trouble? Are we, as lovers, in trouble? That depends on whether we think there is still something to keep from the old story. If so would what we want from the old story be compatible with the new? Is there anything from the old story you would wish to keep? You may, surely you must, want to remain the intelligent author of your own love story. But say neuroscience denies you that, because it does. It does. Would you still want to keep love? I mean, love in the romantic sense we've come to need, love with all its profundity and beauty and poetry and, sure, even with its practicability, its motivation for us to bond and to form unions and families, and even, yes, even I say with all its miseries and jealousies and despairs? I would. And I think that, for the vast majority, philosophers would. But why? We philosophers are some of the most cold-blooded men and women around, so why? Whatever the truth of the matter is, whether it is our brain chemistry that moves us or whether we believe to be our own causes when we choose to go in pursuit of it, the experience of love is one of the most profound human experiences we have. And if we are not truly the authors of that experience, we should, at the very least, remember that, in our daily lives, in our daily exchanges beyond the neuroscientist's laboratories and scanners, we very truly act as if we are in fact the authors of that experience. Call this an illusion (in fact, go ahead and read up on Smilansky's "illusionism"), but it is an illusion that is a reality. It is already in place. It works. And it generally makes us feel good. Hopeful.

Actually, now that I've written that, I've had a little thought. I may well quite contradict myself. (To be fair, I haven't thought much about love's philosophy, my professional interests lie elsewhere, though my personal interests are certainly partial to this all too human emotion, of which even I have had some experience, though not enough to have fully understood it). Now, to the thought. Love is one experience in which it is actually okay, or even quite significant and meaningful, if we are not its

intelligent authors. Mystery and ambiguity add to the experience of falling in love, at least at the point of that first encounter. I am talking about fate. The idea that *it was meant*, and that *we were meant*! Actually, I must be borrowing from that crackpot Žižek, though, of course, Aristophanes set up the cosmology for this when he said that our desire to find love is a desire to return to a previous primitive state of union. For Aristophanes, love is a predestined search for our other half. And we love this idea. As soon as we fall in love we immediately start constructing a narrative of events—this is definitely Žižek—from the past and leading right up to our encounter, a narrative that reveals what caused us to cross paths and fall in love. I wonder what neuroscience will add to love’s narrative of fate.

I think I shall leave us both to ponder that and look forward to hearing from you again.

—P

MAN

Dear W—

I was not anticipating an epistolary engagement with you. I believed we'd said everything there was to say to each other. But your letter adopts a tone of voice, a kind of cold temperament which is quite new and rather interesting. Thus, I am compelled to respond. I would also like to hear back from you. I would like to continue the conversation for no other reason than to join you in this exploration of the problem of love. I believe I have become an optimist in love. Not that I was a pessimist before. Rather, as you pointed out, I was rather cool about it. But I was never indifferent. Accepting, maybe. I accepted it as a fact, and moved on.

Before I begin I would like to say that, yes, I am quite consoled, thank you. Quite recovered, in fact. All new.

Barthes, eh? Okay. So Barthes says that "once the first avowal has been made, 'I love you' has no meaning whatever." I know you felt this even before you read this. You never said it, but in the silence where I expected to hear "I love you, too" I know you must have been saying "I don't believe you."

I don't really know what I meant when I would say to you "I love you" every day just before I said "Goodbye" for the day. By attaching it to "Goodbye" I was turning it into a conventional expression and, seemingly diminishing its meaning. But I never wished to diminish you or my love for you. I was just using the language I had at hand. Whenever I told you "I love you," I always believed it was our own special little phrase, with a meaning that only we could understand. But, of course, the lover's discourse is spoken by everyone, so how could I have claimed anything original or personal when I used it. No wonder you thought I was banal.

Still, I say seemingly diminished, because I want to put forward an optimistic argument for repetition and convention. I am only now thinking about, so this will be crude. But I hope you can help me to further clarify my thoughts and I look forward to your counterpoint.

I know how you despise the word “habit,” but I think there is a kinder way of seeing it. Why not see my habitual practice of saying “Goodbye, I love you” as a kind of ritual? A ritual in the same way that religions have rituals. I’ve been reading my de Botton. Powerless to recreate the feelings of that very first avowal, with its intensity of attention on you and only you and its mad focus on you and only you amongst all the others, all I had was the “I love you” that every other man in the world has, plus the opportunity, if I would take it, to repeat “I love you” every day. My love declaration may have lost the vigour of the original, old message, but I did not want to forget that I once did say it meaningfully and vigorously and that it *was full* of meaning and that for that one brief moment the words “I love you” did completely signify that I love you. I was telling the truth. It was the truth. So, my little ritual of “Goodbye, I love you” was the repetition of that very important truth and by repeating it I wanted to be sure that I would never forget it.

—M