
**REVIEW ESSAY**

1. **DISRUPTING THE SUBJECT**
   **A PLUNDERVERSE, AFTER JOEL FAFLAK**

**Introduction:**

empiriRically displaced from
the threshOld
her unreMittingly bleak and traumatic
nArrative invades
a body of writiNg
lefT unresolved
the mInd emerged
an undecidable enCounter

disruPtive
termS of its unfolding
dark legitimaCY
objeCtified within the language
mapped and tHus made visible
(dis)loCates
evidence of An invisible
scene of understaNding
this gAp
a past that perpetualLy shifts
interioritY
within this Space
absence fIts
diSructions:

www.mediatropes.com
effort to explain
the record of Humanity itself
incipient madness

established between the agent and his subject
culture
leaves its mark, yet remains
the hybrid
locate the subject in the world
she cannot possess

its visionary hold
its own lack of meaning

rewrite the narrative
search for itself
under Erasure

neither human nor natural
anxiety about articulating
the absent body
vulnerable to this haunting
bridge between
utterly alien
and beyond

Chapter One:

be'tween the writing
more intuitive paths
restage the subject
sense impressions as ideas

Shadow

identity at the threshold

structures experience

an other register

fed off the

mobile figure

of representation

emerges to question

the structure’s integrity

what the mind might do

to define its own boundaries

to abstract being from being

the spectre of an unthought body

reinscribed at the site

the mind’s aberrant cognition

threatened the soul’s permanence

imagination

makes itself

original, origins vanish

a subject presumed to know

distorts reality and loses site

in the carnivalesque

but as mimesis

her unknowable otherness

threatens to become

the subject as

the object represented to the self

a curious inversion

constitutes this horizon
Chapter Two:

a textual landscApe without
the earliest fragmeNts
written over the pAlimpsest
as a trianguLated exchange
then, reveals, paradoxically
ruptureS within and between
an analyst as elegIst
disrupted by the othernesS of its own solitude

as a meTaphor for coherence
Erasure comes to signify
the disconcerting pResence of woman
to Make sense of things
to negotIate her loss as his own
iNaccessible
paradigm, Anchored
By pathology
in process/on triaL
names dEath but does not mourn

the dIachronic space
in the midst of a profouNd unknowing

the other Within the subject
sacrificed for the sake Of social stability
a feminine or feminizing thReat
of an iDentity that lacks
repress or redresS
alone with one’s oWn mind
impose cOherency
neitheR name nor understand
identiTy in embryo
thus an incipient gendering
Chapter Three:

this history is unAble to tell
the Narrative of this return
or textuA! containment
must telL its own story
the eYe of unreason within reason’s sight
within the encounter itSelf
she defInes its exterior
in her moSt excessive mood
the desire for The desire of
onE without the desire
the will of the otheR
an alternative interpretive Model
desIre to explore the skin
suture of substaNce and shadow
unAble entirely to contain
a history of the suBject
speaks the Language of solitude
unwrittEn, an absence
undecIdable intertext
iN excess of reason
of reason a Conflict
not frOm the attack itself
abandon the unrealizable idea
only as it is circulatEd
to Refigure this power
who the subject was and Is
irrefutable empirical boDy
fraGments unable to tell
sElfhood a tenuous possession
Chapter Four:

misseeD encounters
a coherent connEction
disrupts this tranQuility
thrUst upon her
instead of being read
as a sileNt screen
the chiastic struCture of the flesh
compelled to retracE
this mYth’s disparate parts

a habiT of being
unravEls into its own
authority, draws heR
paliMpsest of the unfolding
an Infolding
distinct from coNfession
repeats rather thAn remembers
an insatiaBle desire
makes her compLicit
as it disclosEs

A deconstruction of
a different telliNg
of iDentity
itself, an Intertextual
meandering shape
the point of being pointless
seems the conduit
writ large on the mists
a marriage that mesmerizes
the other is
the woman as outcast
A type of
the imagination as a body
dispels
its restless search

Chapter Five:

this symbolism’s dark irrationality
unravels into
desire: An end
dying into the life of
madness it would hide

As if to isolate
a creative tension
that she embodies/bodies

unreason between men
two subjects who struggle
intoxicated by a vision

Between Circe and Diana
the masculinist illusion
marks the subject’s (dis)appearance
her indeterminate presence
a threat to romance
would gender away
the abyss of its own unreason
itself becomes the Feminine

compulsion to repeat
inStability, the flaw
cannot be recognized

as an avoidance
itself at the margins
was/is. Mourning

her Indirect confrontation

betrays this wandering
identity that Always repeats
desire that subdues

a feminine penetration

of its own culture

the wandering of her voice

mutually contested and contesting

is both absence and potentiality

Brandy Ryan
II. ECHOANALYSIS: “THE FEMININE COMPULSION TO REPEAT”

BRANDY RYAN & KERRY MANDERS

All of these words have appeared elsewhere. Only their order has been changed to maintain their innocence. Lise Downe, *The Soft Signature*

“rewrite the narrative / search for itself / under Erasure”

When, in “Disrupting the Subject,” I disrupt Joel Faflak’s *Romantic Psychoanalysis: The Burden of the Mystery*, I break his subject apart; I separate it forcibly; it shatters. Or so it seems at first: his prose, my poetry; his object, my subject. The poem’s title plays with the multivalence of “subject,” its dizzying feats of *mise-en-abîme*. Noun: one under allegiance to a ruling body, in the control of another, owing obedience to an other; that which has a real, independent existence; a wholly conscious or thinking mind; vulnerable to suffering; dependent upon the condition of some thing else (*OED*).

His prose, your poetry. His prose your poetry, your poetry his prose. Cut, cull; engage, rearrange. A “being with” that “is the disturbance of violent relatedness” (Nancy xiii). Call it caress? Intimate rupture, interruption. What is
between us? If “the law of touching is separation” (5), then…

The serial mesostics that comprise “Disrupting the Subject” fissure Joel Faflak’s *Romantic Psychoanalysis* to interrogate notions of textual originality and authorial intention. They also reimagine the genre of the conventional academic review. I take pieces of Faflak’s prose from their scholarly context and redeploy them for my poetic purposes.

The language that appears in “Disrupting the Subject” remains Faflak’s. The mesostics are a trimmed down, sampled version—and interpretation—of his study. You subject his language to your aesthetic sense and political sensibility, tuning his words to sound new meanings. Your sampling implies distance and proximity.

I began “Disrupting the Subject” while composing a review of Faflak’s book for *University of Toronto Quarterly*: I was intrigued by his subject matter, beguiled by his language, and compelled to react. As I struggled to tailor my response to the standard academic review format, I began collecting words in a notebook. On the left side of each page, thoughts, quotations, summaries printed carefully in ink; on the right, columns of words and phrases scrawled hastily in lead. The mesostic project became, in effect, simultaneously creative procrastination and a crucial thinking
through of the material that eventually comprised the published review.

As I sit with your work, I have two Word files on my display screen. The review and the poetry form an odd diptych as they complement and compete with each other. The mesostics read as counterpart and part counter, working through ideas beyond the bounds of the review. Your poetry reacts against the masculine types in stereo, that discordant loop in an otherwise generous framing and analysis of pre-Freudian psychoanalysis.

My desire to plunder Faflak felt furtive, taboo. Intent, I stole words away from the book I was reading and from the review I was writing, meticulously gathering and arranging shards of language. I scrupulously maintained Faflak’s word order, spelling, and punctuation. If this language is not “his” property, why do I subject myself to this constraint? What of—or in—this mining is “mine”?

Source author and plunder poet stage an intertextual poetic, a collision—an unwitting collusion?—of multiple subjects-in-language. Intersubjective. Encountering his words “there,” you move some “here.” The distance between here and there depends on the eye—the ear?—of their place holder.

“There”: the Romantic poets search for “the truth of their identity” (3) Faflak argues; in this masculine struggle to “locate the subject in the
world,” Faflak identifies the “trauma of not knowing or being able to comprehend this position” (4). Masculine struggle, masculine trauma, masculine subjects: the poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats and the essayist De Quincy.

Startlingly absent from yet haunting Faflak’s consideration of Romantic self-making and the history of psychoanalysis are the nineteenth-century’s women, a number of whom were intimately engaged in articulating psyches that resist articulation. How do their inventions of psychoanalysis sound?

“Here”: Mary Tighe, Felicia Hemans, Emily Brontë, Letitia Landon, Elizabeth Barrett, and Harriet Martineau—and others—drawn to and implicated in self-exploration and interiority. Their writings enact scenes of trauma and loss, haunting the pages of their perpetually privileged male peers.

The writers you name lurk outside the parameters of his study. Faflak engages directly with vexed gender dynamics and hierarchies as they appear in the work of Wordsworth and Co., in the characters they create. If Keats can undermine the phantasy of reason’s putative masculinity, then what might Barrett’s privileging of reason over effusion bring to this discourse? What of her phantasies, her repressions?

Work of mourning.
But this is not true, or all.

But words are neither
significant nor experimental. They are
, quite simply. That, in any case, is
the most remarkable thing about them. And suddenly
the obviousness of this
strikes us
with irresistible force. All
at once the whole splendid construction collapse
s;
opening our eyes un
expectedly, we have experienced, once too
often, the shock of this
stubborn reality we were
pretending to have mastered. Around us, words
are
there.
Their surfaces are distinct
and smooth, intact, neither
suspiciously brilliant nor transparent.
All our literature has not yet succeeded
in eroding their small
est corner, in flattening their slight
est curve.

after derek beaulieu, A Future for the Novel

“an analyst as elegist,” he/you writes,
but this elegiac mode does not account
(in this economy) for poetic play.

She

“names dEath but does not mourn”

The “are there”ness of words is
central to the mesostic. beaulieu
pushes against our attempts to make
language reflect us, to make us feel
better about us. If words have been
lost in the images, associations,
significations we have put upon them—then to recognize their alterity is to dissolve what we have tried to make of them. My subjectivity works with the text’s subjectivity to create a new mode, a new narrative. This requires an alternate approach, a different value system.

Companion pieces: the source text, the review of it, the mesostics shaped from both. Your plunderverses approach reading and creating as intertextual and intertextural. In “Plunderverse: A Cartographic Manifesto,” Gregory Betts characterizes plundering as an acknowledgment of what we try to hide from and in language: “We speak in each other’s words. We share the meaning of our shared words. We share the grammatical relationships between the shared meanings of our shared words with every understood utterance.” Plunder writing is as companionable, as accompanying, as engaged reading. This is clear when we use “our” words to respond to “his” words (literary criticism, theory, review), but is troubled by associations of copy, theft, dishonesty when we share those words.

My repeated attempts to communicate split screens and signs. A mesostic is a duplicitous spine poem that opens reading as multiple acts: the phrase centred on the page; the distinct lines that stretch out like wings; the poem that relies on both horizontal and vertical perception. Each centralized and emboldened letter reflects the spine’s vertebrae, but disrupts the
smoothness of conventional typography. The split skin of the page magnifies the intersectionality of words and phrases even as one letter on each line is set apart.

Skein split: your plundered words disrupt the visual and hermeneutic topography of Romantic Psychoanalysis. No longer linear, horizontal, teleological, words reappear as a hybrid creature. Echo allegory: “repeats rather than remembers”

Echolocation.

“an undecidable enCounter” and erasure. Pieces and punishment. Only the voice remains.

Last words. Words lasting. Subject to constraints, subject of madness. Echolalia.

A collective and collecting artist, Echo weaves from those words that come to her, that speak to her, subsequently speaking with, through, even against them. Selecting words, she is “thus able to express herself, though with obvious limitations” (Betts).

Whose constraint? Whose madness? Whose words? Whose?

“the abyss Of its own unreason / itself becomes the Feminine / compulsIon to repeat”

a word in the
Karen Mac Cormack, from *At Issue*

“a differen
t/ of iDen
ty”

If it were not for the beauty and precision of Faflak’s language, his attention to the complex trauma of identity, I could not explore the “suture of substan
tce and shadow” that I find so compelling for its evocation of lost ladies.

“the spectre of an unthought body” / “in the midst of a profound unknowing” / “must tell its own story”

Re-verse view: “this history is unable to tell / the narrative of this return.” Subjects in mirror are closer than they appear.

“while one of [our editors] found your response to be a ‘very interesting linguistic exercise/experiment indeed. Sort of like an acrostic’ … I would suggest sending your response elsewhere, as *UTQ’s* policy is not to publish fiction”

Verify the unnamed female subject: the “her” and “she” of Faflak’s text, the “Unknowable otherness” that “threatens to become / the subject as / the object represented to the self.” Complicit in the continued
objectification of this subject, I encounter her on third floors, behind yellow wall-paper, eating peas on the point of her knife.

Attentive to “This haunting,” I (“I”: so many, so (equi)vocal) explore with you via Faflak “what the mind might do/ to define its own boundaries.” Like Echo, you repeat linguistic signifiers to transform and translate their source. The plunder potentialities of Faflak’s text lie in precisely the ways in which his own language—elusive, allusive—creates a kind of echo chamber: “be’tween the writing / more intuitive paths / restage the subject.” Respectful of the thoroughness and substance of Romantic Psychoanalysis, your poems unlatch doors to a theatre of trauma where the continually absented female subject might well upstage her male leads.

Echoes reverberate: like Coleridge’s ancient mariner, like Hemans’/Landon’s/de Staël’s improvisatrices, like Echo, the poems can only repeat the story of her dislocation. “Disrupting the Subject” cannot make her live, but it may mourn the ways in which she dies.

Being with Faflak, you figure the “the disconcerting presence of woman / to make sense of things / to negotiate her loss.” Analysis is/as elegy: you are what you mourn.

“her voice, / mutually contested and contesting is both absence and potentiality.”
Works Cited


http://wordsters.net/poetics/poetics05/05betts.html.


