

Dec. 2000 "noTed" Issue # 1

Newsletter of The English Department

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noTed is the newsletter of the English Department at the University of Geneva.

It is published irregularly, reflecting the vagaries of departmental energy and morale, but has never failed to reappear (so far). However, since two years have elapsed since the last issue, and the editorial team has changed, we have numbered this issue as "1" of a new series. This newsletter is a collaboration of students and an assistant, but it is mainly fueled by student initiative and participation. Therefore, the editors strongly urge you to contribute something for the following issues. You may send your contributions by e-mail to: Agnieszka.Soltysik@lettres.unige or Juliannabark@yahoo.com

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Editorial: We're Back!

This may well be the year of revivals. First we had the resurrection of the ADEA (Association des étudiant(e)s en anglais) and now we're witnessing the revival of our newsletter, *noted*. Both *noted* and the ADEA share a common goal: to unite the student body of the English Department. For both these revivals to work, however, we need the support of ALL of you ("veterans" and "bright eyes and bushy tails" alike). There are at least three ways in which you can show your support and help us build a better department atmosphere: 1) by submitting written contributions for *noted*, 2) by signing up for the association, and 3) by participating in the events that the committee organises.

As the great thematic variety of material in this publication illustrates, this issue of *noted* differs from previous instalments in that it does not have a designated theme. In it you will find articles about the most disparate of subjects, written in a variety of genres. But however incongruent this issue may first appear, the reader should feel springing from between the pages the good humour and energy that went towards its composition. The daunting process of soliciting written material turned out, in the end, to be tremendously satisfying. By the deadline date in November we had received enough material with which to make up three separate issues of *noted*, which we packed into one huge "been-gone-but-now-we're-back" special issue. A great big "thank you" to all those of you who submitted contributions. Know that *noted*'s rise from the ashes would not have been possible without you.

Now a few words to those of you who are about to relish *noted*'s contents for the first time: *noted* is not just a newsletter; it is a medium that should provoke you into bouts of unrestrained mental churning and promote relentless discussion with others. Also, it should encourage you to express your own ideas and motivate you to start off your own writing career (well, why not?) As already mentioned above, the success of this newsletter largely depends on YOU and your willingness to contribute material. Keep in mind that the "veterans" are not going to be around for very much longer...

Anyway, we hope you enjoy the first issue of this freshly revived newsletter! Enjoy your holidays. Take this time to relax as you'll need to be fully reinvigorated yourselves in January, for the ADEA has got plans in store for you!

Julianna Bark

The Subject of the Subject of Dr. Kaspar

Interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Kaspar

By Julianna Bark and Charly Hernandez

A lucky star has risen over the English Department this year: Dr. Kaspar has joined the faculty thus replacing Professor Blair as the chair of American Literature. Having her with us makes it possible to forget the department's sad depleted state. Well, she's got us under her spell: the verve and enthusiasm she shows in the classroom are infectious and have us hooked! I know many of us were curious to find out more about Dr. Kaspar's background and experience. Hence this interview. It will (we hope!) help assuage the questions you may have had about the Kaspar phenomenon. Nota bene: the title refers to Dr. Kaspar's course this semester, on the "Subject of the Subject."

JB: Mrs. Kaspar, could you briefly describe for us your time at university as a student?

EK: I was first an undergraduate student at Harvard. In those days women went to Radcliff College, which was not a faculty but a residence. In those days there was roughly one woman for every twelve men at Harvard. And although there was a lot to be said for being in an all-women's residential community, on the whole it wasn't good because the women were really treated like second-class citizens. As a woman you couldn't use many of the Harvard buildings - like the dining halls, the gym or the library. There were two reasons for this. One was that there were too many Harvard men already and it was crowded. The other rested on the idea that the men had to have some place to go and not be distracted (*giggles from Charly*). This really was pre-1970, really pre-women's movement. From Harvard I first went on briefly to Oxford University in England, which I hated and left, and then went to the Yale Graduate School.

JB: Was literature always your focus of study as a student?

EK: No, at Harvard I did a special program called History and Literature. This was a very small and very intense honors program. It just took ten people and in the end you had a kind of double degree.

Although Yale considers itself as a founder of the interdisciplinary field of American Studies, this actually already existed at Harvard. The approach of the History and Literature program at Harvard course was relatively unique. While in other departments, like the department of English at Harvard, you were trained to become a new critic and do close textual readings, you had this little History and Literature group that was training students to be "proto new-historicists". And from there I went on to do a doctoral degree in American Studies at Yale and the focus of this department was history, literature, sociology, the arts, culture before Cultural Studies.

CH: What was it like to study in the American Studies department at Yale?

EK: At the time the American Studies program was a less unified version of the History and Literature program. Half of the students were training to become American historians and the other half were training to be professors who specialized in American literature. And the faculty comprised English professors, historians, sociologists, and art historians. But it did not have the theoretical self-consciousness that departments of Cultural Studies have today. It could have done with a little more of that at the time.

JB: You mentioned earlier that the theoretical trend in the English department at Harvard was very much "New Criticism." Was this also the trend at Yale?

EK: Even more so. You know, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren were there. WK Wimsatt was also there. Wimsatt is the guy who won't let you look at anything but the text. If you thought of the author's biography you committed the "genetic fallacy"; if you thought of the author's own interests or methods or what you inferred he wanted to say you committed the "intentional fallacy" There were all sorts of fallacies that you were not allowed to commit.

JB: You were the first woman to be hired in the American Studies program, right?

EK: Right. I started teaching at Yale before I finished my doctorate, and started to teach at the level that would be called "maître assistant" here, and went on to be Assistant Professor.

CH: Was it standard procedure to hire somebody

who hadn't finished a doctorate?

EK: It was often done back in those days. But it is much less common now because the competition for positions is so high now. Today people go into their first jobs having finished their doctorates and having already published a great deal. That wasn't the case in those days. The early 70's was when American grad students were just beginning to panic about not getting jobs. Up until then students at places like Yale just knew the world was theirs and they went where they wanted to go.

JB: How long were you on the Yale faculty?

EK: I taught at Yale for seven years and like most junior faculty I was very overworked. I didn't publish very much during that time and when seven years were up I was not much more than thirty. Well, there was no way I was going to be made professor there, so I started looking for a place to go. And the best place I found to go was at Geneva so I that's when I came here.

CH: How did you find out about Geneva University?

EK: It was on the bulletin board. A friend of mine noticed it and told me about it. A lot of people actually thought it was a very bad job because it was what was called a "five year terminal" position, which really sounds like a fatal disease. It means that the position ended after five years.

CH: Did you know anything about Geneva before coming here?

EK: I figured people spoke French (*laughs*). Nothing else.

JB: Did you have to give a "*leçon d'épreuve*"?

EK: Yes. I lectured about the use of George Washington in James Fennimore Cooper's fiction. I forget what the lecture was called; it was probably called "Deconstructing Washington" or something like that.

CH: What is your view of the academic life here at Geneva?

EK: I never stopped being impressed by the high-level of work I saw in 3rd and 4th year seminars. And at the first-year level I never stopped being discouraged by the terrible language problem that existed, although it's my impression that the teaching at the *collège* level must have improved somewhat. Something seems to have disappeared from

the program since I was last here, and I think not very wisely, and that is teaching English composition, teaching how to write a critical essay.

JB: Where did you go after Geneva?

EK: I went on to a position at the Claremont Graduate School in California and I only left that because I decided to marry a Swiss physicist. The physics he was doing kept him moving between Switzerland and New York and so that's why I came back here, and eventually went job-hunting in New York and ended up there.

CH: Where were you teaching in New York?

EK: In Jamaica, Queens (one of the five boroughs of New York City). We lived at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, which is way out in Suffolk County, Long Island. I took the Long Island Railroad everyday to Queens, to York College, the most recent branch of CUNY (the City University of New York). During one year I also did some teaching at Barnard, a woman's college attached (in part) to Columbia.

CH: Is there a great difference between students at Columbia and students at Geneva?

EK: Well, I don't want to sound anti-American but compared to Geneva the students at Barnard and Columbia seemed young and unsophisticated. I was teaching mostly sophomores, juniors and a few seniors, half Barnard students, half Columbia. I had expectations that because it was New York, and because these students had chosen to be in New York, that they'd be all around the city, taking advantage of its resources and culture. This was a preconception that was immediately shattered. Not that I did that myself so much as an undergraduate in Cambridge, but I think that I did it a little more! I found for example that students had TV's in their rooms; they were watching movies home alone and not out, collectively.

JB: How about the students at York College?

EK: They were older; they were earning their living. They had extremely difficult lives. They worked incredibly hard with a genuinely inspiring belief in the value of a need for a college degree. They would get a college degree and make a difference in their lives.

JB: Who are the academics that have most influenced you in your work?

EK: The dominant force at Harvard History and Lit when I was there, and the one who probably influenced the work I do the most, although I also shudder to admit it, was Perry Miller.

JB: What are you reading now for pleasure?

EK: I'm reading a book called *Waiting*, translated from Chinese.

JB: Who are your favorite poets?

EK: I have particular attachment obviously to the poets that I've worked on in one way or another. They tend to be contemporary or recent Modern Americans, especially John Berryman and Sylvia Plath. I also like their contemporaries, like Theodore Roethke and Randall Jarrell. I have less enthusiasm for the giant Robert Lowell, and less for Anne Sexton. Less so also for some of the giants of Modernism. When I was an adolescent I thought the sun rose and set on T.S. Eliot, but one outgrows that. I also had a tremendous rejection during my adolescence of Wordsworth and some other English Romantic poetry, but I've outgrown that too. I've always had a passion for Donne and Wyatt. Shakespeare goes without saying, of course.

JB: Who are your favorite critics?

EK: Randall Jarrell is one of the great critics of the 20th century. I think Edmund Wilson in his own rough misogynist way (*laughs*), and I think John Berryman is another. I go back and I reread them a lot. As for academic critics writing today I really admire Jon Arac right now and I admire his work. Another person I admire almost reluctantly because I am not at all of the same deconstructionist school is Barbara Johnson. I admire her work because she is so smart. She writes well. When I was at graduate school I read inordinate amounts of Kenneth Burke but I haven't gone back to that. Also when I was an undergraduate student the studies in American Literature did revolve around Matthiessen as well as Miller. And then when I went on to Yale they revolved around Charles Feidelson who wrote *Symbolism and American Literature*.

CH: What is your view of postmodernism?

EK: Well we are all postmodern, right? At this point you have to choose case by case. There have

been times in my life where I have been so hostile to deliberate illisible jargon, gibberish texts that mystify and obfuscate. It really is too much sometimes. Yes, I've had a lot of hostility to that. But there is a lot of good criticism, including deconstructionist, that is really well done. At one point, years ago I read a lot of Lacan. (One year I had students at Geneva read him and there was a rebellion and they said: well, all right but it has to be in English translation. And these were francophone students!) And when I was at Yale Derrida, Hartman, Miller and De Man were all there. But I have to admit that the person I tended to read and probably be most inspired by was Harold Bloom (aka. Harold the outrageous). But I'm not hostile. I wouldn't be teaching *Postmodernizing American Classic Literature* if I were, although there is a lot to inspire hostility.

JB: Have you had a role model that has inspired you in your work?

EK: I was deeply inspired by Edmund Morgan. Morgan was a student of Perry Miller in an earlier generation. I went to a lot of his Yale undergraduate lectures. I had always thought that he was a model of rhetorical procedure and style. But he is very much bracketed and outdated today, although you can still read him in the *New York Review of Books*. He inspired a kind of discipleship in a lot of people. I had very few teachers like that and there weren't any women teachers. So he is a figure I really revered. I have a tendency to respond well to a certain kind of authority, as I have a tendency to respond to it with enormous rebelliousness and fury!

CH: What is your idea of an ideal instructor?

EK: I think that ideal instructors are quite demanding not in the sense of giving orders and cracking a whip, but demanding in the sense that they assume and take it for granted that whoever they are working with is devoted to the subject and working very hard themselves to master it.

JB: Do you have any favorite musicians?

EK: I studied the piano and I tend to think about pianists in the classical mode, Schnabel, Horowitz, and Emmanuel Axe. As for composers, I am again influenced by what I studied, and for an American girl living in the suburbs, it was a matter mostly of Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin and Schubert.

JB: And if you were to be given a painting from any museum, which would you choose?

EK: That's impossible! But I have some personal favorites, Johann Vermeer, Mary Cassatt, and more recently, Egon Schiele.

JB: How do you perceive your state of mind at his time in your life?

EK: Very content.

JB: Is there any piece of advice that you should like to give to the students in this department, or students of English in general?

EK: Read!

This interview was conducted on Wednesday 15th of November, 2000.

Announcement: We Have a New Secretary!

The editors would like to welcome our new secretary, **Mrs Clare Tierque**, who joined the Department of English Language and Literature on December 1st, 2000. She is working part-time in the secretariat, assisting Mrs Sylvie Ferioli. Prior to this Clare worked for eight years as a secretary in the Department of Mental Health and Substance Dependence of the World Health Organization in Geneva. She is British and Swiss by marriage, has two children, and is interested in languages, literature, music and art. It's nice to have you on board, Clare!

Would you like to live in the U.S. for a few months or a year?

Are you a native speaker of French or German or Italian or another language (besides English)?

Are you thinking of being a teacher when you finish school?

Then maybe the Amity Institute is for you! This is a non-profit organization that places student-teachers in schools all over America, where you help a language teacher teach a class, live with a host family, and learn about American culture and pedagogical methods. You don't get paid, because this is technically an internship (*stage*), but get to live abroad for a year, make new friends, and learn a lot.

If you want to know more, see Amity's local screening officer, Agnieszka Soltysik, during her office hours: Wednesdays 13-14h, or by appointment (call 741-2079).

What it takes to replace a Professor at Geneva University (in fifteen steps)

By Laurence Mischczyk

As all of you know--and if you don't, it means that you weren't in class or didn't read the advertisement boards--two candidates for the chair of American Literature were invited to give a *leçon d'épreuve* on November 9th and 10th. The candidates were M. André Kaenel and Ms Deborah Esch. Now, if you didn't attend the lectures, it may be because as a first or maybe even a second-year student, you were just too busy between your A, B, and C branches, or because apart from the announcements made in class, you didn't hear much about this whole nomination thing. And we must admit that the student body of the English department is not very unified--in fact, it is not unified at all. The general policy of the department seems to be that it's up to you to find out about the events that take place. But let's hope that things are going to change soon . . .

I attended both these lectures. When I came out of the second lecture, I was quite perplexed . . . The whole procedure of a professor's nomination seemed more mysterious than ever, and I had got myself involved in it without the knowledge of how it functioned. So I went to see Professor Waswo, who very kindly described the whole procedure to me. Below is the result of my inquiry. I hope that it helps you have a better idea of where you fit into the process as a student, and why it is important that you go to those lectures when they occur.

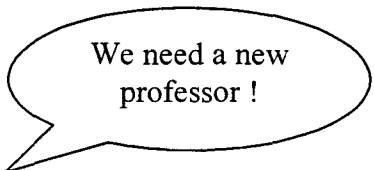


Oh, no, not again !

1. A professor resigns or retires.

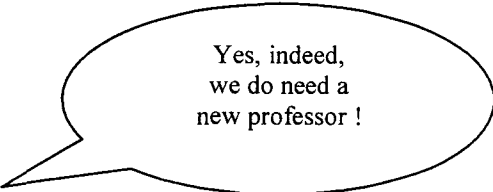
2. The *Collège des professeurs ordinaires* meets.

This body consists of all the p.o.'s in the Faculty of Letters. It's the decision-making body of the faculty, but that doesn't mean it can just nominate someone whenever there's a need to do so. After meeting and discussing the problem, the *Collège des professeurs* appoints a *Commission de structure*.



We need a new professor !

3. The *Commission de structure* then decides whether or not the position is to be filled. For example, it could decide that there's no need for a new professor right away because of the project of fusion with the University of Lausanne. We are reminded of this project by the presence of a professor from Lausanne in our *Commission de structure*. In the lucky scenario, the *Commission de structure* decides that we DO need a professor:



Yes, indeed,
we do need a
new professor !

4. Next comes a tougher step:

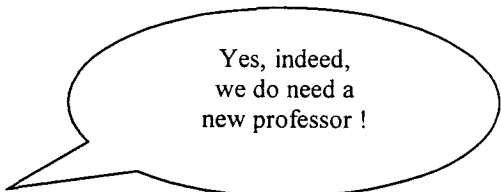
The decision taken by the *Commission de structure* must be approved by three administrative bodies:

1. The *Rectorat*

2. The "*Conseil académique*" (bankers, lawyers, and other VIP's)

3. The D.I.P.

Still continuing with the lucky scenario, they decide, after a long (long, long) period of pondering, to agree to the demand.



Yes, indeed,
we do need a
new professor !



Phew...

5. Next, a *Commission de nomination* is appointed by the *Collège des P.O.* The mission of this second commission is to nominate the new professor. Two of its members must be from outside the university.

6. The vacant position is advertised. Ads appear in different places, both in Switzerland and abroad, in newspapers such as the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *New York Review of Books*, etc.

WANTED
A
new
professor

7. When all candidates have sent their dossiers, the *Commission de nomination* meets for a first selection: they eliminate the candidates who are not qualified for the position (because they are too young, have low-quality or too few publications, etc.). The two outside members of the *Commission de nomination* do not participate in this selection.

8. Then, the members of the *Commission* read the dossiers of the candidates who passed the first election, and they make a second selection in which the two external members this time take part. More dossiers are eliminated.

9. Candidates who passed both the first and the second selections are invited to give a lecture (or *leçon d'épreuve*). This is when, we, as students, find out that something is happening : we are invited to come and hear these lectures. IF YOU FEEL CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE OF YOUR DEPARTMENT - WHICH YOU SHOULD - YOU MUST ATTEND THESE LECTURES!

Prof. "X" will
give a lecture
on subject "A."

Prof. "Y" will
give a lecture
on subject "B."

Here are some reasons why:

10. Immediately after the series of *leçons d'épreuve*, the Dean asks the students what we think about the candidates. This is when our voices can be heard, one of the only times our opinions have resonance on the administrative level, and we mustn't miss the opportunity! We get to say what we liked or disliked about the candidates' lectures :

- were the candidate's subject and argumentation interesting?
- did the candidate give a well-organized, coherent presentation within the given time-limit, or not?
- was the candidate clear in his/ her presentation (was there too much technical jargon?)
- did the candidate "perform" adequately? (Was there too much note-reading?)
- was the candidate open to questions and could s/he answer them?, etc.

Our opinion is not taken into account in the written form. However, we do get to express our opinions before the Dean, the *Commission de nomination* and the professors (the assistants are not present in the room while this is happening), who take note of our remarks.

11. After the Dean has heard the students' opinions, we leave, and the rest is out of our hands: The *Commission de nomination* and the English staff (p.o's, m.a.'s, and assistants) and any other interested p.o's from the Faculty of Letters get together and tell the Dean what they thought.

12. The members of the *Commission de nomination* discuss : they agree, they don't agree, they are unanimous or share different views... At least three reports are produced as a result of this deliberation: (1) the local members' report. (2) and (3) are the reports from the two external members of the commission. There could be more reports if the report of the local members is not unanimous.

13. Once the reports are made, they are transmitted to the *Collège des professeurs*. All the p.o.'s in the faculty meet to read the nomination reports. They vote for candidate X, Y or Z, or for none (this 7)

happens when none of the candidates were convincing). If a particular candidate wins the vote . . . then, it becomes semi-official. It's not over yet!

14. The next step is to get the approval from the three administrative bodies we already mentioned above: 1.) the *Rectorat*, 2.) the *Conseil Académique*, 3.) the D.I.P.

15. Once the *feu vert* is given from the three above mentioned, the minister of education asks the *Conseil d'Etat* to issue a formal decree. (And this is finally the last step!)

As you can see, just looking at the number of steps that make up the whole procedure (FIFTEEN, the way I divided them), the replacement of a professor at the university is far from being simple and quick. You can also see that only two steps out of the fifteen directly concern the students. All we can do is attend the lectures and give our opinion. This is not a lot and may not even carry that much weight in the decision-making process; but since this is absolutely ALL we can do, we should do it as best as we can. After all, the progress we make and pleasure we take in studying do depend on the professors in the department. Just as the sparse choice of seminars and the lack of *mémoire*-directors do depend on the fact that sometimes NO professors get nominated. If we show interest through attending and participating in the *leçons d'épreuve*, it helps the Dean and the *Rectorat* take our demands and expectations seriously. We DO have expectations and demands from our department, now, don't we ?

Just so that you have an idea, here are some examples of procedures (that have failed so far):

1. **Professor Taylor** (chair of Medieval English) retired a couple of years ago:

The decision to replace him was ruled out. The procedure didn't get past step 4 (see above) The decision was made that the department must wait until the professor in Medieval English from Lausanne retires. Only then will a new professor be nominated for both universities. This is not happening till 2004!

2. **Professor Polletta** (chair of Modern English) also retired a couple of years ago:

The department is waiting for the permission to start (for the third time) on a nomination procedure. The two lectures that have already taken place on two separate occasions both had unlucky outcomes. So back to step 4 (again, please refer to the above) for the third time!

3. **Professor Haegeman** (English linguistics) resigned last year. Three *leçons d'épreuve* took place at the end of November, and we should find out their outcome together with the one for American studies, in other words after the *Collège des professeurs* meets on Dec. 13th.

4. **Professor Godzich** (chair of Contemporary Literature) is on leave for the year 2000-2001. From what I heard, the Dean doesn't seem to care much about having him back either. Professor Godzich took a *congé sans solde* (i.e. he is not paid but is still considered as part of the English department) and comes back for exam sessions. As a member of the *Commission de nomination*, he was expected to come back to attend the *leçons d'épreuve* in November, but since the Dean wouldn't pay for his travel expenses, he got replaced by Prof. Talens of the Spanish department.

5. **Professor Blair** (chair of American Literature) retired in the summer semester of 2000:

Although the *Collège des professeurs ordinaires* met in time to have someone replace Professor Blair by this academic year, the procedure somehow got stuck at step 4 for over nine months! The procedure pulled through and it is only just recently (i.e. on November 9th and 10th) that we had a chance to listen to the *leçons d'épreuve* of M. Kaenel and Ms. Esch. The *Collège des professeurs* will meet on December 13th to discuss the reports: the procedure is currently at step 13. We are still waiting for this procedure to yield successful results...

Note from the Editor: On Dec. 13th, the P.O's voted unanimously to recommend the nomination of Ms. Borer for Linguistics and to refuse that of Ms. Esch for American (by 26 to 5 with 1 abstention). This means: 1.) No prof. for 2001, and 2.) The search starts over. *Merci pour rien, professeurs!*

Mémoire Survival Tips

By Laure Saporta

Having myself gone through the broad variation of ups and downs linked with the writing of a *mémoire* I thought that, before definitely closing the door of University behind me, I could share this half-traumatizing, half-truly-satisfying experience with future *mémorants*. I guess it is also a way of trying to make the best of it and to make sense out of those moments of suffering and of joy. I often wondered if I was the only one to go through such states and realized that at some point we all do, so that in fact the next few lines are the expression of what most of us experience but never actually talk about. Writing about it, I hope you will avoid the classic traps and master the whole procedure somewhat better than I did.

So let's start with some of those practical and perhaps trivial little things that are going to save you so much time. I know you have already been told to do so many times, but having experienced the consequences of bad "management" I have to admit that one has to keep track of every piece of information one reads. Whenever you go to the library, order books, copy passages, read articles or just flip through them, it is more than advisable to make a note of what you have read and to comment on it. The best thing to do is to use a system of **key words**. After having read hundreds of articles you'll certainly remember finding some very interesting passages in two or three of them but won't necessarily remember where to

find them so...use a marking system that will give you some clue as regards the content and the value ("good", "crap", "useless", etc) of the article.

Common too is that you don't feel like wasting time writing down the **sources** of the material you have just found. This is a major mistake since you will end up losing far more time trying to track the book again when you will come to writing your bibliography. If your timing is really bad the database in the library will have crashed at the crucial moment and you won't be able to get the necessary information in time. By the way, to produce a good bibliography is very time consuming so do it as you go along, for example on the days you don't feel too inspired (it does happen occasionally).

A few more things have to be said in relation to your material. To collect the relevant information takes a lot of energy and a bit of good sense. By every means try to find out what the best books for you to read would be, in other words ASK your professors, assistants, colleagues, librarians... It might also be a good idea not to limit your inquiries to the department you're writing your *mémoire* in. It is so easy to ask and it doesn't cost anything; at the worst they won't be able to answer you, but that's all that can happen. Furthermore they might be able to lend you material you wouldn't find otherwise.

Once you've got your pile of books and articles you think might be relevant, **BE SELECTIVE**. We all have a tendency to read an enormous amount just

for the sake of it, more or less believing they must contain some relevant information (at least one sentence!). Well, let's admit that very often they don't. Therefore you really want to be critical and brave enough to stop reading an article if you feel it will not be worth it. You probably won't miss any major information and you'll save time. We will never be able to read everything that has been written on our subjects anyway, so... In the end you will only use about 5% of all you have read (in the best case) and might get frustrated by the fact that you cannot use any more of the material you collected and worked on so don't make it worse.

By the time you have collected your material and gathered some elements to work on your brain will already be making some links, analyzing information, mixing thoughts and impressions. In other words, you will be at a peak state of activity (not to say of mess). Anyway, what I want to suggest to you is to always carry a **little notebook with you**, just in case some brilliant idea would suddenly come to your mind. The best ideas usually turn up when you least expect them to, for instance when you're out having dinner with friends, dancing or even under the shower. What we then all tend to do, after having felt really clever for a few seconds (that's all it lasts I'm afraid) is to think: "Wow, what a great idea, I will have to mention that. It's so obvious, I'll remember to make a note of it tomorrow." The bad news is that the next day all you will remember is that you had a very interesting thought in the middle of the night. You won't be able to remember it. To avoid those pretty annoying and nerve

had a very interesting thought in the middle of the night. You won't be able to remember it. To avoid those pretty annoying and nerve racking situations just write down anything that comes to your mind right away, at any moment and in any place.

Start Writing Early On

In the same line of thought and memory being a weird thing already at our age, I recommend you to start writing at an early stage. I waited to have all my material read and analyzed before I actually began writing and it certainly wasn't the way to do it. The disadvantages of such a procedure are that you might misestimate how long the writing will take you. The usual consequence of bad timing is that you will keep postponing the deadline and extending your studies. Before you actually start to write you have no idea how long it will take you and might get caught up by the exam period. I thought it would be very easy to put together all my notes and to make a coherent text out of them but it took me a while to get into it. The problem by delaying the writing process and working on your notes is that you tend to forget some important and apparently obvious elements. You might end up wasting a lot of time going back and forth trying to figure out how you came to such and such conclusion. Also if you work with statistics or calculations (which is sometimes the case in linguistics for instance) you will need to look at them again to "get back into it".

Another argument for starting to write early is that it allows you to keep track of the amount of information you

already have. If you keep taking notes indeterminately you will end up having too much information. I know it sounds weird, but these things do happen. Not only will you not know how to deal with all your information, how to order and where to start with it, but you will also feel very frustrated as a result of not being able to insert them all in your text. By writing on a regular basis you will know how much more time and information you will need. Furthermore this should allow you to figure out at an early stage if you are actually working in the right direction, especially if you give an early draft of your first chapters to your adviser. And last but not least, it really does help to straighten out your ideas. By forcing yourself to write, your thoughts will get a clearer shape, which will allow you to go on in a definite direction.

Don't Be a Hermit

To finish off let me get to the more "human" side of things. By working intensely over a longer period of time one tends to get pretty lonely. It is true that to write a *mémoire* is, in most cases, a very isolating process. No one else works on the same subject, you spend hours in the library and with the photocopier (that may become your best friend or worst enemy as the case may be), you lock yourself up to be able to concentrate, use earplugs...in short, you're everything but social. This is quite okay I guess if it only lasts a few days, but it might go on for ever and this is when it gets bad. One of the consequences of this constant and repeated state of isolation is that one could become

narrow-minded, focusing on very little, often problematic points and details and losing sight of the broader, more general picture. Since you don't share ideas with your friends you don't get a chance to hear any interesting remarks on the questions you're dealing with.

To avoid all this, as well as a potential depression or nervous breakdown, the best thing is to work together with friends. It doesn't matter if you're not working on the same subject or even in the same branch, the important factor is to be together. I guess sharing could be the next key word. Whatever goes through your mind, whatever doubts and questions might prevent you from making progress, share it with your friends. On the one hand, they as outsiders often have another perspective on the matter, which might give you new ideas. Just by getting a sense of the context and without having read your books they can show you other possible directions you had not necessarily thought about yourself. Being too involved intellectually as well as emotionally one tends to lose the required distance.

On the other hand, the simple fact of explaining and articulating a problem makes the whole matter clearer to oneself. By putting things together and formulating them we give them a certain shape and we become aware of certain factors of which we had not been conscious of before. Another very practical aspect of working with someone else is that it will avoid you having to search for hours for the right words. Be it

because you write in a foreign language or simply because you want to avoid repetitions, the person next to you will probably find wording you were looking for. Finally, to work in a group will not only motivate you a lot, but it will also push you to work on a regular basis in a welcoming environment.

Once you have collected the necessary material it might be a good thing to change the place you work every now and then. That way working feels less like a daily routine and it might even be inspiring. Here again if you work with other students it is good to be serious and concentrated for a while and to have little deserved coffee breaks together afterwards. Why not try to combine work and pleasure: after having kept the nose in a book for four to five hours, share what you have learned with the others while cooking a good dinner all together. Believe it, those a very nice moments you will remember for a long time and with nostalgia. Furthermore, what better chance to make good friends?

All Work and No Play . . .

Another typical attitude when writing one's *mémoire* is to stop going out, not because it will allow you to work efficiently but much more because you have a bad conscience for not sitting at your desk. Big mistake! Not only will you feel frustrated because you didn't have a good time with your friends and stayed at home all by yourself, but you probably also won't have written a single word so...don't stop living just because you have a few pages of coherent text to hand in. To be most efficient you

need some sort of a balanced life. Give yourself something to look forward to. By knowing that you will spend the week-end skiing in the mountains for example, you will try to have all your work done before your departure and therefore waste less time sitting around in a state of inactivity.

Furthermore, before we actually go through the process of writing a *mémoire*, we do not realize how much time we need be it only to digest the material we are working with. This process can be far longer than we expect it to be and there is no way to make it move any faster. It can take a while for things to fall into place and this is probably one of the hardest parts of the writing process. One has to accept it and to be patient. While deep inside the data is being processed you can still live a normal social life. Also it's so much nicer to be cheered up by your friends in face-to-face conversations than on the phone, so don't hesitate to spend a bit of time with them.

I hope you didn't get a too negative impression from these lines. To write your graduation work can really be a great adventure especially if you chose a subject that really interests you. It is going to be your baby. You will certainly learn a lot about yourself in the process and discover unexpected sides to your personality. To make the best of it try to make it fun. Everything will seem so much easier and you will enjoy it much more. Good luck.

ANNOUNCEMENT!

English Teachers Wanted

Last year the *Faculté des Lettres* launched a project to offer affordable English classes to students of the University of Geneva. I was one of the participating teachers, but now, having changed Faculties, I'm no longer eligible to continue.

If you are a student enrolled in the *Faculté des Lettres*, have both a good knowledge of English and good didactical skills and are motivated to teach, please contact me at:

eggerchristian@hotmail.com.

Courses are scheduled to begin in January 2001. You will be paid 5 francs per hour times the number of students in your class.

Christian EGGER

For your information,

the **Writing Lab** is open to anyone in the English Department, regardless of how advanced you may be (year-wise or otherwise), and offers one-on-one tutoring by Assistants on any aspect of writing a paper in English. Although they will not edit or simply correct your paper, the Writing Lab staff will give you invaluable feedback on your writing skills and strategies, and offer advice on how to become more effective writers.

Check it out!

Spotlight on poetry: the sestina

By Sébastien Rey

This column on poetry will be devoted to the sestina, a sophisticated and elaborate poetic form whose origins lie deep in the European past. Perhaps daunted by the intricate brilliance of the sestina, few poets attempted the form until Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) and Ezra Pound (1885-1972) reintroduced it and prepared the way for such poets as Elizabeth Bishop (1911-1979), John Ashbery (b. 1927), Seamus Heaney (b. 1939) or Paul Muldoon (b. 1951).

There are thirty-nine lines and six stanzas in a sestina. The stanzas have six lines each. There is an envoy of three lines at the end. Unusually, there are no rhymes. A pattern of elaborate repetitions stand in for rhymes. The repetitions are of the end-words at the end of each line, and their order is always a permutation of the order in the preceding stanza. In the first stanza for instance, the word at the end of the sixth line must end the first line of the second stanza. The second line of the second stanza repeats the end-word of the first line of the first stanza, and so on. The envoy is complicated by the fact that all six end-words must occur in the course of the three lines. The repetitions which build up over a sestina are so elaborate, so patterned, that parts of it can actually seem like a maze or a conundrum.

This sort of sophistication could never really have emerged from the hard-working world of sunlight, harvest and end-of-season work which produced the villanelle. It is easy to imagine the workers of northern Italy lifting and throwing the saved hay to the villanelle's chants and chosen lines. There are parts of a villanelle that could easily lend themselves to loud singing and easy shouting. Often made up of a sequence of four 8-line stanzas with a refrain, its musical and circular movement invites just that sort of repetition.

The sestina is different: To be savoured not sung. And its origins were different: its inventor, Arnaut Daniel, belonged to a group of witty and ambitious poets - the troubadours - who were determined to shock, delight and entertain. The troubadours first appeared in Southern France in the twelfth century. Their name is

Two lorries

It's raining on black coal and warm wet ashes.
There are tyre-marks in the yard, Agnew's old lorry
Has all its cribs down and Agnew the coalman
With his Belfast accent's sweet-talking my mother.
Would she ever go to a film in Magherafelt?
But it's raining and he still has half the load

To deliver farther on. This time the lode
Our coal came from was silk-black, so the ashes
Will be the silkiest white. The Magherafelt
(Via Toomebridge) bus goes by. The half-stripped lorry
With its emptied, folded coal-bags moves my mother:
The tasty ways of a leather-aproned coalman!

And films no less! The conceit of a coalman...
She goes back in and gets out the black lead
And emery paper, this nineteen-forties mother,
All business round her stove, half-wiping ashes
With a backhand from her cheek as the bolted lorry
Gets revved and turned and heads for Magherafelt

And the last delivery. Oh, Magherafelt!
Oh, dream of red plush and a city coalman
As time fastforwards and a different lorry
Groans into shot, up Broad Street, with a payload
That will blow the bus station to dust and ashes...
After that happened, I'd a vision of my mother,

A revenant on the bench where I would meet her
In that cold-floored waiting-room in Magherafelt,
Her shopping bags full up with shovelled ashes.
Death walked out past her like a dust-faced coalman
Refolding body-bags, plying his load
Empty upon empty, in a flurry

Of motes and engine-revs, but which lorry
Was it now? Young Agnew's or that other,
Heavier, deadlier one, set to explode
In a time beyond her time in Magherafelt...
So tally bags and sweet-talk darkness, coalman.
Listen to the rain spit in new ashes

As you heft a load of dust that was Magherafelt,
Then reappear from your lorry as my mother's
Dreamboat coalman filmed in silk-white ashes.

(Seamus Heaney)

trobar - meaning to invent or compose verse. They were famous, celebrated, much in fashion and eventually very influential on the European poetry of the next few centuries. The troubadours were court poets. They sang - their poems were always accompanied by music - for French nobles like the Duke of Aquitaine or the Count of Poitiers. They competed with one another to produce the wittiest, most elaborate, most difficult styles. This difficult, complex style was called the *trobar clus*. The easier, more open one was called the *trobar leu*. The sestina was part of the *trobar clus*. It was the form for a master troubadour.

Perhaps one way to think of the sestina is as a shadow of the old medieval love of debate. Each stanza debates with the one before it. Each picks up, echoes, throws back the words towards whichever line it is paired with in the previous stanza. These pairings allow the form of a whole panorama of delightful repetitions, parodies, childish mocking and, finally, a surprising emotional force.



Seamus Heaney

up the bus station in Magherafelt, and in which the poet's mother is re-imagined as a ghost on the scene of the explosion years after her death. The poem becomes a game of meaning, played with sounds and sense, almost a riddle, constructed across the intricate pattern of end-words. And eventually, the formal rigor of the sestina cannot stifle the poem's violence.

Seamus Heaney was born in County Derry in Northern Ireland. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995. 'Two Lorries' is excerpted from his last volume of poetry to date, *The Spirit Level* (1996)

'Two Lorries' is a sestina written by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney. The poem refers to two different lorries: that of a coalman delivering coal to the poet's house, and another one which will blast in Magherafelt years later. It is a poem in which narrative and formal means are intricately interwoven. The elaborate and patterned repetitions convey the drama of the poem's meaning. In an essay dedicated to the study of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry, Heaney had said of one of her sestinas that 'in the first instance [end-words] seem all set to keep the poem within comfortable emotional bounds... But gradually and instantly, a second realization is forced into consciousness by the inexorable formal recurrences within the poem itself' (*The Redress of Poetry*, London: Faber, 1995, pp. 168-9).

In Heaney's poem, the six end-words, 'ashes', 'lorry', 'coalman', 'mother', 'Magherafelt' and 'load' first suggest a tale of everyday life and seem to lock the poem into the coalman's dalliance with the poet's mother and the routine of the coal's delivery. But Heaney does not respect the usual sestina form: in the

course of the poem, the original end-word 'mother' is replaced by 'her' and 'other', while 'load' is successively replaced by 'lode', 'lead', 'payload' and finally 'explode'. These variations allow the poem to carry a painful 'second realization' in which the second lorry is inexorably driven to blow

Séracs

Skiing in the Vallée Blanche:
an open white hand
in the twilight of our day. Dashing
laughing
shouting in the air
in the sun / séracs:
likely ice shapes chaotically broken
suffering their green and blue tears
gloomy / threatening. Sulfur
coming from the earth's center
silence
fear
and your sweet glittering eyes
the sky and a hot tea / very hot.
We keep going quietly
the wind
beautiful ski tracks / delicate
shapes on the snow.
Under the sunny rocks
they look at us
those séracs / distrusting gods
repeating the echo of our voices.
joyful. joyful. joyful.
our voices.

Edmundo Murray

Cultural Cringe

or, Standing on the Outside Looking In

By Dominic Pettman

I'm not sure I'll be able to ever hear the word "Sydney" ever again without Juan Antonio Samaranch's accent . . . "Sydaneey." If my 30 cable channels are anything to go by, then it's a pan-European thing; the Italians, the Germans, the Dutch, the Spanish, and the French all pronounce it as "Sydaneey," a word which constantly leaps out at me from the Babel-babble that makes up the ambient linguistic noise of Geneva.

I've only been living in Switzerland for a matter of weeks, and already I'm getting an eerie persecution complex. It could be due to the fact that Geneva has a distinctly Canberran component, reinforced by the fact that it boasts an identical centre-piece: a giant jet-propelled water fountain which acts as a psychic enema for its well-behaved and well-meaning populace. Having grown up on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin, I read this uncanny parallel as a bad omen. I mean, isn't Switzerland where Australians go to die? . . . flash-floods in Interlaken, tunnel fires in the bowels of Mont Blanc, avalanches in the Alps. Even the fumes smell dangerously toxic.

On the surface, Geneva looks like it was designed simply to appear on the chocolate boxes that are sold in every third shop, but underneath the graceful swans, unlocked bikes and picturesque peaks lies a more sinister economy. I have it on good authority that the KLA bought most of its weapons here, and that the banks function as the Russian Mafias local launderette. Such clean and efficient cities only support the popular suspicion that most of the evils of the world can be traced back to a conference-room with a large walnut table, neon lighting, half-decent cognac, and a handful of men in suits.

Today, however, is a special day, and the problems of the world are going to be pushed aside for two weeks to make way for the Olympic Games. The eyes of Switzerland - indeed, the eyes of the world - are firmly focused on Sydaneey. I'm standing in front of a giant pyramid of TV screens in Geneva's largest department store, waiting for the opening ceremony to begin, along with two dozen sober-faced locals (mostly the kind of men who look like they probably time each event with their own stop-watches). Having glimpsed the infamously lame "kan-

garoos on BMX bikes" at the closing ceremony in Atlanta, I can only prepare myself for the worst, and I'm shocked to actually realize the extent of my anxiety as the moment approaches. My pulse speeds up and settles somewhere in my throat as the giant crowd counts down with the electronic billboard. I feel so god-damn responsible. The sensation is something akin to stage-fright by proxy, magnified 18 million times - one for each Australian citizen - and I pray that no-one asks me something in French, thereby blowing my cover.

Five minutes into the proceedings, and my vital signs return, somewhat, to normal. The spectacle itself seems to be approaching something we antipodeans like to call "world class," and my breathing begins to regulate. It appears that I had been lulled into an insecurity complex, and I decide to settle into the serious business of ideosemiotic analysis. According to the story unfolding loosely over the turf of Stadium Australia, we are a nation born from a solitary synchronized swimmer, lost amongst an armada of mythical sea-creatures. After a pompous Englishman appears on the scene in a stylized boat, a hefty Aboriginal man founds a new civilization with a nauseatingly cherubic eight-year-old girl. He seems to point a lot, and she nods with wide-eyed wonder, as if Stephen Spielberg has personally superglued her eye-lids to her eye-brows. I presume that this pantomime symbolizes the passing of wisdom from the ancient indigenous culture to the new Aryan one, and I wonder why it can't be the other way around . . . maybe poet Dorothy Hewitt taking Jadamara by the hand and reading him poetry about how horny middle-aged women can really be, while he laughs and claps and kisses a framed photo of Paul Hogan. I silently hope that they are saving the girl for a ritualistic barbecue.

Suddenly all narrative gives way to an orgy of random nationalistic references, exploding in all corners of the stadium simultaneously. Wood choppers compete with sheep shearers, jakaroos with jumbucks, swagmen with cuddlepots, billycans with tuckerboxes, and larrakins with true-blue diggers. (Although there is a marked absence of convicts.) I look sideways at the crowd gathered around the television sets, which has doubled since the beginning of the ceremony. Some of them are beginning to appear non-plussed, frowning their brows and whispering to each other.

And then, of course, comes the *pièce de résistance* . . . the moment no Australian will forget. It

is, in a sense, our JFK assassination, since we shall all remember exactly where we were when we saw this particular horror unfurl on our screens. An army of "average Australians" break out of makeshift corrugated iron sheds, and begin to mow the grass of the Olympic stadium. A good percentage of the Sydney crowd start guffawing, and I myself have to stifle a titter in awed disbelief. Time kind of starts warping and slowing down - like it does just before a car crash - as my brain registers the fact that thousands of well-fed people are now tap-dancing around, flannelette shirts tied around their waists like improvised kilts. Painters, dockers, welders, and plumbers are cavorting around, enjoying the most highly exposed in-joke in history. My pulse is thumping again, and I have my hand over my mouth like a Toorak mother who has just walked in on her husband having his way with the family red-setter. I search around my immediate neighbours for a flicker of universal amusement, an Esperanto appreciation of the plucky lower-middle-class, but I'm met with a wall of stony faces.

At that moment I have something which theologians call a "negative epiphany" as I realize that culture is something we can't escape, something deep beneath the skin. While I can hide its influence as long as I keep my mouth shut, it colours everything I see, do and think . . . and the mysterious ciphers which transmit cultural identity from one generation to the next are practically impossible to de-cipher when immersed within a different culture. This intangible legacy (some would say 'curse') can move more easily through time than through space. If culture is a medium, and the medium - as McLuhan tells us - is the message, then what the hell is a thousand tap-dancing beer-guts telling the world?

As the interminable parade of athletes begins, I go for a coffee to steady my nerves, but soon enough I'm back at my spot in front of the Panasonic Plasma Screen watching the torch pass from biddy to biddy in a triumph of tokenism. But who will be the final torch-bearer? Golfer Greg Norman? Supermodel Elle McPherson? Serial killer Chopper Reid? . . . But no, it is Cathy Freeman, and the crowd goes wild! Reconciliation is in the air. All eyes turn to Howard and he breaks down, announcing that in his heart of hearts he is sorry for the stolen generation, indeed for all the aboriginal generations since Invasion Day, and, while he's at it, he apologizes for the GST and the ugliest front bench of all time. The overweight aboriginal goes to hug the little girl, but trips and crushes her. Nobody really minds, however, because the whole nation is gripped with a cleansing euphoria.

Everything becomes a green and gold blur as tears well up in my eyes, and I suddenly don't care that I'm thousands and thousands of miles away. Is this pride, I ask myself? Am I proud of this fleeting heritage? Will I always call Australia home? Or am I just completely relieved that the fucking cyber-crane which is holding the torch finally starts moving towards the flame, and that the organizers don't have to get one of the jazz-ballet electrician-infantry to spend several hours tinkering with the dodgy circuitry.

There are at least two types of cultural cringe. One is the familiar Australian version, captured in the general anxiety and pre-emptive embarrassment leading up to the opening ceremony. It stems from the sense that Anglo-Australia somehow lacks culture, or is too young and disoriented to have forged anything truly significant to offer the world. A clear example of this perspective was provided by a Francophile friend of mine who never misses an opportunity to loudly announce that Australia is a cultural wasteland, and that anything vaguely interesting which emerges from within its borders is directly derivative of Europe. (If pushed, he would probably add Asia for the sake of keeping the peace at whichever social occasion he is mouthing off at.)

He once told me that, "when you're in Paris, you are always walking in and out of buildings that are hundreds of years old. You can feel the history and the culture always around you, and the people have a direct connection to this heritage. When I got back to Australia, I pushed back the curtains and saw a Holden drive by and the sun glint of the hood, and my heart just sank."

This traditional form of cultural cringe, and the depression that it can produce in those who have been over-exposed to the delicacies of the cultural canon, often leads directly to the other form of cultural cringe (which is, in fact, its exact inverse). In this case, it denotes "old world" people who feel oppressed by too much culture. Such a sense of suffocation and obsolescence led to the great artistic, philosophical, political and social movements of the last three hundred years or so. For every Columbus attempting to spread civilization, there were five families trying to escape the tyranny of that very same process, and the values that it supposedly stood for. Even before Australia was mapped by the English, the fruits of Europe were looking distinctly mouldy, and hundreds of

alternative communities were attempting to start afresh on the other side of the Atlantic.

Now that the so-called "new world" is looking decidedly tarnished, Australia offers something of a last hope for those who don't want to feel smothered by the weight of stern looking ancestors in oil paintings or Harvard class photographs. The mistake of the first cultural cringe is to believe that "culture" is only found in the fetish objects which comprise the mainstream: paintings, books, plays, operas, etc. The mistake of the second cultural cringe is to believe that you can escape the world-view bestowed on you by your fore-mothers and fathers.

Living in Geneva, I suddenly feel exposed to not only the cross-currents of these conflicting cultural cringes (and the alliteration it produces), but also the geo-political climate of the new millennium. One major psychological advantage of being in Australia is the illusion that we are somehow immune to global disasters and military hostility. The folklore follows the logic that the more wretched and peripheral you are as a nation, the less likely that you are going to be the target for a hailstorm of nuclear weapons. I've heard several people say that South Africa, Tierra del Fuego and Tasmania are the best places to be during a nuclear war; the implication being that you wouldn't be caught dead in these places in peace time.

In order to clarify some of these issues, I've recently resorted to reading a lot of books and articles on the subject, many of which confidently await "the inevitable withering away of the nation-state." Watching athletes from around the world wrapping themselves in their country's flag and running around the stadium, I'm not so confident that globalism will erode the imaginary communities which galvanize around anthems, flags and appalling local musicians. I certainly wish for a day when culture accedes to a more nuanced sense of identity and solidarity. Why can't we, for instance, see Olympic competition fought along the lines of, say, "people who are allergic to tomatoes" verses "people who named their children after 1970s newsreaders." Or "people who weren't disappointed by the last episode of Seinfeld" verses "people who have never used fruit or vegetables to achieve orgasm not even once." Maybe we can then root for a team we can wholeheartedly identify with, on a more progressive level than blood, soil, or passports

. . . . and yet, I'm beginning to realize that **there is something to be said for cultural arrogance.** As much as we loathe the chest-thumping and smug grins of certain Americans, the sheer confidence of their can-do-ness has lead to some astonishingly great things. In its pure form (i.e. New York) such blinkered faith leads to an intoxicating sense of purpose, excitement and drive. The same applies to the great centres of Europe and Asia, for while things could always be better, there is a general conviction which perhaps passes for something like a *raison d'être*. This confidence may bug the hell out of your average Australian, but I would say that it ultimately leads to a healthier disposition in those that have it.

Compare this with your local wankers at any given inner-city café in Australia, where everybody is wearing the latest fashions, toting the latest and tiniest technologies, and desperately pouring over air-freighted lifestyle magazines to try to anticipate the next direction in designer can-opener. What is the point of being on the pulse when we don't actually feel alive? What is the meaning of the new-found Australian confidence - trumpeted all over the local media - when it evaporates on contact with the genuine article? ("Australian": one who mistakes inertia for contentment.) And we can't believe it ourselves, trapped in a postcolonial mimesis-loop and disingenuously denying it through a pathological attention to empty gestures and false security. Meanwhile, the dollar plunges through the floor as if it were the stock exchange's answer to the portrait of Dorian Gray, barely worth a third of an English Wimpy burger.

Home sickness can therefore be two opposite maladies: one being the yearning for home, the other being the yearning for anywhere but home. Moreover, each can potentially lead to the other in a grass-is-always-greener spiral. But what happens when home and not-home begin to blur, and you don't feel a sense of belonging anywhere? Young comedian John Saffran said something at the end of *Race around the World* which hinted at an answer, while simultaneously capturing the bottomless horror of globalism: namely, that "everywhere is just like Melbourne."

Everywhere, that is, except Sydaneey.

The Edinburgh International Festival

By Michael Röösl

It is unfortunate that such a relatively small number of people living outside of Great Britain attend the annual Festival in Edinburgh, Scotland. I had the opportunity to do so last summer, and it was an unforgettable experience, which is why I decided to report on it in noted.

Edinburgh is situated at the Firth of Forth, on the east coast of Scotland. It is the capital of the country and, contrarily to Glasgow, is a very old city that prides itself on its long and turbulent history. It is a tourist trap with plenty of things to see and do. However, after spending some time in Edinburgh, the displays of plush Nessies and kilts for sale along the Royal Mile and Princes Street (the main arteries of the Old and New Town respectively) become a rather disheartening sight. But all the negative impressions that may result from the heavy tourism of the city evaporate with the beginning of the Festival.

Everything turns upside down during those four festive weeks, the laws of nature included, Night and day become no longer separable; having yielded their place to the Festival, they simply cease to be.

What I refer to here as 'the Festival' in fact consists of **six different international festivals**: a Jazz Festival, a Theatre Festival, a Film Festival, a Book Festival, the Military Tattoo and the Festival Fringe.

It all starts in the first week of August when the festivities are initiated by a piper's parade that runs along the Royal Mile and through the middle of the Old Town. On Sunday afternoon another parade makes its way down Princes Street. Everybody that has a show at the Festival participates in this colourful event.

The Military Tattoo takes place in the vast space in front of Edinburgh Castle that towers over the Old Town on a huge volcanic plug. The audience sits over the abyss on a scaffolding specially constructed for the festival. It is here that one can hear performances of bands, both military and civil, from all over the world, and see dance shows and fireworks as well as elaborate lighting of the Castle in the background. This takes place every evening and

is the most traditional part of the Festival.

Every Jazz lover will find a wide range of great performances in open air concerts all over the town. **The Film Festival** is difficult to attend, since all the tickets are sold out early in advance. It features films that break out of the mainstream and that, for the most part, would not be shown at your typical movie theatre. At the Book Festival, one may not only attend readings and browse through books to one's heart's content, but also chat with the writers themselves. Last year both Doris Lessing and Wole Soyinka were present, to mention only a few. The authors first talk about their work and then answers questions and discuss their work with everybody.

The Theatre Festival consists of a relatively small selection of distinguished theatre companies from all over the world. Among them were the "Siti Company" from New York with a meta-theatrical play about the interaction of the audience with the actors themselves as well as with a staging of the production of the radio play *The War of the Worlds* with which Orson Welles thrust America entire into an apocalyptic panic in 1938, as well as the "Deutsches Schauspielhaus" with a brilliant new production of *Hamlet*, with a female actress in the leading role.

The Festival Fringe is the least official part of the Festival. It has its roots in the 1940's, when a bunch of artists who were promised to be allowed to perform at the Theatre Festival were rejected at the last moment, because the city lacked stages for their performances. However, these artists stuck together and came to Edinburgh all the same and gave their performance, which turned out to be a remarkable success. Their success drew other professional artists and amateurs to the Festival. Eventually the Fringe started to organize itself centrally, and today everybody, including people like you and me, can participate in the Fringe for a relatively small inscription fee, in exchange for which the Fringe takes care of the ticket selling and a venue for your performance. The venues amateurs and professional artists are provided with, can be public halls, living rooms, cellars or even churches.

The Fringe includes a wide range of performances, such as photography exhibits, musicals, plays, play-readings and lots of stand-up comedy. Many artists were discovered at the

comedy. Many artists were discovered at the Fringe, like the members of Monty Python, Emma Thompson, Alan Bennett (author of the 'Talking Heads' series) and Dudley Moore, just to name a few. They were discovered by other stars who attended the Fringe incognito.

The Festival isn't confined to the different venues: it spreads all over the city and isn't merely an event, but something one can almost smell in the air. The streets turn into pulsing arteries, and day and night appear to be no more than the soft breathing of the entire organism. The city is alive. One cannot rely on the street as a means to get from one place to another anymore - it is unlikely you will come out at the point you intended, with your feet barely touching the ground... The street has become a living space.

There aren't just visitors of the Festivals in the streets, but also artists. Many people either perform in the street or present extracts of their actual show as a kind of advertisement. With several thousand shows merely at the Festival Fringe, the process of selection really becomes a source of torment, although torment of the more pleasant kind. You can go wherever you

want and at any time of day (or night) - people are everywhere, dispersing the atmosphere of celebration and cultural experience. Indeed one becomes hopelessly addicted to all the shows, the people, the socializing and the whole atmosphere. Just imagine sitting in a pub with a pint of fine Scottish ale when you suddenly realise the guys at the table next to you are the people who performed as the witch-trial judges in a play by Arthur Miller or as the heroes from Irvin Welsh' short stories. Just have another drink with Peter Shaffer's Mozart and Salieri!

The Festival ends with breathtaking fireworks on the Castle hill. The castle walls spill over with thick, mysteriously illuminated fog while great figures of fire paint the night sky to the sound of classical music. In the end, a curtain of fire surrounds the castle walls, searing the dry grass around the hill, which continues to gleam in the dark, like a phantom image of the scenery. It's the kind of moment where you wouldn't be surprised being suddenly woken up by the sound of your alarm clock going off!

The Change, A Short Story

By Kareen D. Klein

Coming home from a hard day's work Chantal Sithers opened the door to her apartment. The stress of the day had made her endlessly tired and she saw no reason to look forward to the rest of the week, month, year or decade. Her life didn't seem to make sense anymore. She flicked on the TV and just wanted to throw her bag in a corner and sink into her armchair, when she noticed something gleaming on the coffee-table. Chantal curiously took a closer look: There on the dark wooden table lay a thin silver bracelet. In the dim light it reflected only the rapid pictures the television set was sending into the room. She slowly took the fine piece of jewelry and slipped it over her wrist. Although she was wondering where this bracelet had come from, she immediately regarded it as a gift. Someone had given this to her. She slipped into a chair and sat there happy as a child on Christmas Eve, caressing her treasure in the dim silence of her living room.

The next morning Chantal woke up on her couch. She felt refreshed and was ready for an energetic start into the day. She quickly got dressed, poured herself a glass of orange juice and rushed out to go to work. In the office her colleague and friend Sue smiled at her: "You surely are in a good mood today!" Chantal smiled back and shrugged. It was funny, she thought. Never in her life had she felt this happy. All worries seemed to be blown away from her and she went to work as enthusiastically as ever.

It was Friday and she had the afternoon off. On the way home she wondered whether this silver bracelet had anything to do with her happy mood. How could it influence her life? Impossible! And yet... in some way her daily routine had lightened up since she had found the glittering thing on her coffee-table.

Over the week-end Chantal was surprised about her energy. She repainted her living-room, did all the laundry, brought order into the huge pile of papers and bills on her desk, invited Sue for a special dinner, got a new haircut, wrote letters to her family, went to the fitness-studio and planned a huge party for her upcoming birthday. The whole time she was wearing her silver bracelet. Dangling on her arm it seemed to give her all the energy she needed.

(continued on page 21)

Reflections of a Homepage Maniac

By Katharina Thote (aka. Neener),
Noted's Correspondent from
Hamburg University, Germany.

Originally, I was asked to write a book review or some other halfway serious text of relevance for this issue of *noted*, however I decided against it and instead chose personal homepages as my topic. The simple reason for this is that, as a student of American literature, I spend more time updating my homepage than I do reading the kind of books that I would ever want to review. (See, I go to school somewhere far away from where this paper is published, so I can say things like that and rest assured my professors will never know.)

So yes, personal homepages. I have one. You probably all have one. The editor of this lofty publication has one. Why? Everyone always complains about private Internet users' tendency to clutter the net with useless information of the "Look here, now I'm online too!" type, and they are right. However, it appears to me that the motivations behind this behavior and the resulting benefits for the individual homepage author are still very understudied phenomena and need to be examined more closely for the sake of academic fairness. Hence this article, my contribution to the study of net sociology or whatever. Of course I will also include a

thorough examination of women's and ethnic minorities' personal homepages in this study. (Meaning I will talk about my own. I'm a woman, and I am German but don't drink beer, which makes me an ethnic minority.)

So why do people enjoy wasting hours of their time designing crappy web pages nobody will ever look at?

Because someone might look at them. When you upload your homepage, you know that, theoretically, whatever number of millions of people are surfing around the web at any given time, they might just pop in on you and see what you did (most likely they won't, but it's the thought that counts.)

Also, to throw in a little more pseudo-sociology: my keen understanding of the working of the human mind in today's society tells me that the reason why so many people decide to become homepage designers is that they enjoy having a voice. It is quite interesting to see to what extent people who are just learning web design are fascinated with the fact that they can see whatever they have written in its final form right out there where everyone else could - theoretically - see it too. It's not like when you write an article for some newspaper where you have to type it, count the words, shorten it, count the words again, send it off to some editor who then completely destroys it by shortening it even more, and two weeks later you finally see your piece published, but you don't recognize it any more. Nah, here you can write whatever you want, spell it however you want, put on the most atrocious style imagin-

able, and nobody can change it. What a feeling of power that is.

Another reason why people love having their own homepage is that they get to play. It's very easy to include all kinds of fun things in web pages, starting from the obligatory photo album ("View the best photos of our last party" - a link no one who wasn't at the party should ever click), on to music, games, cool design you stole from somewhere else or polls among your friends. (I once had a poll asking people whether I should grow my hair long again, and I made sure to ask only people who had never seen me with long hair, so they all said no and I was happy. Works very well. I will resist the temptation to make any kind of comment about the polling system the big American networks relied on so successfully a few chaotic weeks ago. I really will.)

Which takes us to the next important factor in the study of homepageanism: friends. Nobody writes a homepage for themselves, even though the name might imply that, no, one's friends are the real addressees and benefactors (or victims, depending on the level of one's skills.) The photos are there so your friends don't forget what you look like, so you can broadcast your deepest and your most inane thoughts to those who are willing to receive them, and so that you can show off your new boyfriend without actually having to drag him halfway around the world to introduce him to everyone. In many cases, friends are not only the intended audience but also the main content of personal homepages, especially those of the college variety. Without my friends, my homepage would consist of some lame vacation pix and a lot of utterly irrelevant babble, not the type of content that is likely to win any prizes. But since there are also

lots of shots of cute people in embarrassing situations, even strangers could get a good laugh out of it. Friends are also the true reason why guest books were invented - unless one has a really professional and meaningful page, like a fan page or a page where they publish the results of last year's statistics exam, one is not very likely to get guest book entries from people other than one's friends (or if one does, it's actually a rather scary experience).

But of course altruism isn't everything, and even the satisfaction of seeing one's work "out there in the open" at some point begins to seem limited. This is where the real deal comes in, the capitalist side of home page design, the currency of the web. Counters. While commercial web sites use top-secret and horrendously expensive software to count and track and profile their users, Joe Homepage Maniac is generally very proud to put his cards on the table and display the number of visitors to his little universe right there on the start page, for the whole wide world to see. This, of course, can easily backfire: many a desperate webmaster has had to resort to clandestinely visiting his own site over and over and over again in the dark of night in order to give the proof of his popularity that much-needed boost. Or he, like the author of this piece of inanity, has no choice but to commit medium treason by beginning to promote his site through the most ass-backwards means of communication imaginable - the printed word. It just ain't right.

a lonely and neglected home page author should make your hearts break audibly (and stir you to go visit their homepages so the suffering can finally stop.)

At the end of all this, what's left to say? Besides of course the usual social sciences talk of how important it is to look further into this subject (in case one forgot something, but they never say that) - ahm, yes, in order to properly enlighten the populace, I think everyone should have their own homepage and make their voice be heard in this pluralist pudding, I mean multicultural, multiethnic, multigendered and multiprocrastinating caleidoscope of society, so that we all can spend the rest of our days visiting our best friends' homepages and updating our own and having surf-ins every other day (definitely beats read-ins, or work-ins for that matter).

The point of my argument now having been put forth, I can continue to ramble on about how to get your own homepage. 1) Learn HTML or learn how to use a web editor like Frontpage or the Netscape Composer (or look online for smaller, more user-friendly ones.) To learn HTML, Hotwired's Webmonkey is a great tool that allows you to practice online (<http://hotwired.lycos.com>).

If you speak German, <http://www.teamone.de/selfhtml/> and <http://www.geeksworld.de> are great places to learn more about web design, but if you don't this is the time to regret your ignorance because those are all the HTML-web sites that I know and now you'll have to go look for yourself. To practice, despite my dislike for their banners and general retarded attitude, Geocities and other free services on the web are the way to go. Free, relatively user-

friendly, big enough webspace allowances, useful tools. Once one has sort of figured out what one wants to do and how one can do it, it is easy to get a real page without banners from the university (I would hope) or, for a little bit of money, to reserve one's own domain and get one's own page with any Internet provider. But if you don't want to join in the happy multieverything online confusion, fine, have it your way, but at least go and visit some of the following web sites. Just so their authors can be happy and feel recognized, respected and loved.

<http://www.geocities.com/kthote/>

(The true motivation for this article was to have more people visit my homepage. But can you wait until January until I get the counter to work again? Also, I guess I need to do some updating before I can bear the thought of you looking at it. So yeah, wait until after the break please. Thanks, dears. Much appreciate that.)

http://www.geocities.com/julian_nabark/

(See the things your editor does in her free time. Updating her homepage is not one of 'em - get that girl off the Instant Messenger and bring her back to the real world!)

<http://beam.to/mia>

(A Smith College student. I swear they aren't all like this. But definitely an interesting homepage, if you don't mind seeing quite the in-your-face collection of "Random Pieces of Mia".)

http://smith.dailyjolt.com/smith_student_pages_.html

(List of other Smith College student pages. Sorry for all the Smith plugs, but I learned HTML there, so I will be forever indebted to the place. Certainly wouldn't be indebted to it for the food, even though it was free.)

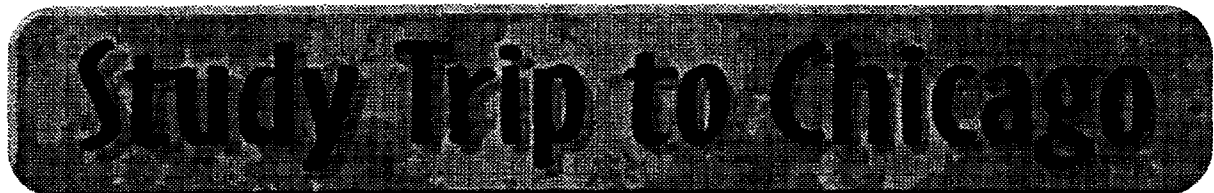
<http://www.deco-vision.de>

(This is a totally insane page by a friend of mine who works as a web designer. Just in case you were wondering what the competent people do when they feel the urge to have a private homepage.)

<http://www.freitagweb.de>

(For the intellectuals amongst you. Hasn't been updated in eons, but it does have the first chapter of Bret Easton Ellis' *Glamorama* on it, one of the books I could have reviewed instead of writing this completely rambling and not-to-the-point article. See for yourself and decide what topic you like better.)

Have you heard rumours about a mysterious project of professor Blair's seminar on Chicago? Have you seen inexplicable smiles and shiny eyes in the halls of the Philosophes ever since? Here is the address of the ultimate web-site on our



with the entire truth and exclusive visual material!

<http://www.unige.ch/lettres/angle/students/index.htm>

Did you know that there are lots of online resources for English students? Especially for all aspects, conceptual and technical, or **writing an essay**.

The best website is: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>

It has loads of handouts you can download, plus it has links to other writing resource sites.

Another good place to look is: <http://nwca.syr.edu/NWCA/NWCAOWLS.html>

The editor of this site hopes to make this the "the most comprehensive list of Writing Center gopher, web, and OWL sites on the web."

(continued from page 18)

A week later, Chantal was just taking a shower, she suddenly noticed that her bracelet was gone. In a sudden state of panic she began searching her whole apartment. But in vain. Her treasure had disappeared as mysteriously as it had come into her life. She was frightened at first but then she realized that she could continue her new and energetic life without the help of this jewelry that she had grown accustomed to. Smiling bravely now, Chantal thanked the bracelet in her thoughts. Perhaps it would bring new energy and hope to another lost soul.

Tamy, a little girl of 7, sat on a bench in Central Park. Although the flowers around her were blooming in the brightest colours, she wept bitterly. Her mother was in hospital, suffering from the damages of a car accident. Tamy's whole world had suddenly collapsed. Through the thin film of tears that

21 covered her eyes, she suddenly saw something blinking through the grass in the warm afternoon sun.

Faculty and Staff: To be NoTed

Some of you may remember Noted always had a little column about departmental comings and goings or research interests. The following descriptions are meant to give you an idea of what we (the teachers) are working on, and who you can talk to about potential mémoire topics or other intellectual projects.

Guillemette Bolens' main research interest is the history of the body. Her doctoral thesis has just been published: *La Logique du corps articulaire: Les articulations du corps humain dans la littérature occidentale* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2000). The thesis is about the body in the *Iliad*, *Beowulf*, and Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*.) She has a Ph.D from the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and a Doctorate from the University of Geneva.

Professor Margaret Bridges is interested in travel narrative, founding legends and all subjects providing ample opportunity for interdisciplinary study, especially anthropology, psychoanalysis, art history, feminism, the history of ideas, and medieval poetics.

Guy Chardonens is currently working on his doctoral dissertation concerned with ontological questions regarding the very fact of being human. Science fiction in general, and cyberpunk in particular, are, most prominently, those forms of literature that address such issues; he is, therefore, interested in the very question of reading those forms. Science fiction is also the reason why he is interested in reading philosophy.

Alexandra Chasin has a doctoral degree in Modern Thought and Literature from Stanford University, with a specialization in 20th C. U.S. literature, popular culture, consumer culture, social movements, feminist theory, critical race theory, and queer theory.

Stephanie Durrleman is interested on Creole linguistics, and more specifically the syntax of Jamaican Creole. She conducted recent

research on the structure of the clause (i.e. the IP), concentrating on the articulation of inflection in Jamaican declaratives. She is presently finishing work on constructions pertaining to the left periphery (i.e. the CP), for example interrogative, focus and topic constructions. Her future research will aim at uncovering properties of the architecture of nominal constituents in Creole (i.e. the DP).

Valerie Fehlbaum is working on the "New Woman" at Aberystwyth University. She gave a paper in Manchester in July on "The New Woman and the Periodical Press" and hopes to complete her thesis by the end of this academic year.

Veronique Fernandez' main interests are oriented towards Gender and Cultural Studies and her doctoral project inscribes itself within these two fields of research by interrogating performances of womanhood in SF novels and films. She is currently working on her '*mémoire de pre-doctorat*' which consists in a reading of *Herculine Barbin, Being the Recently Discovered 'Memoirs' of an Hermaphrodite* introduced by Michel Foucault. This text and its filmic 'adaptation' are at the basis of a discussion on sex-gender categories and differences in relation with clothing that she will elaborate in her future work.

Agnese Fidecaro is teaching two seminars this year concerned with reading texts in the light of the link Benjamin establishes between trauma theory and modernity. Her doctoral project is about violence, writing and the body in contemporary literature.

Corinne Fournier Kiss is interested in 19th-century fantastic tales. She is currently on leave thanks to the arrival on Nov. 13th of baby Tibor. We wish them the best of luck!

Pedro Jimenez' research interests revolve around memory, especially memory of political events, and autobiography, and particularly in the U.S.-Latin American context.

Fabienne Michelet is interested in spatial representations in Old English literature.

Professor Anthony Mortimer's major interests are Shakespeare, 16th & 17th century poetry, Anglo-Italian Studies and verse translation. His most recent book is *Variable Passions: A Reading of Shakespeare's 'Venus and Adonis'* (AMS Press, New York, 2000). Mortimer notes that, "It's the first book

ever published on Shakespeare's first published book, so I reckon it should get me into the Guinness Book of Records!" Among his current projects: verse translations from the German of Angelus Silesius (a 17th century religious poet), an essay on the continuities and discontinuities between Petrarch's "Canzoniere" and Shakespeare's "Sonnets", and an anthology of English Renaissance Translations from Italian. Professor Mortimer holds the chair of English at the University of Fribourg, but has also taught at Geneva, almost without a break, since 1972. At the end of this semester, being on the verge of 65, he shall take his final leave, but will continue in Fribourg until "they discover my advanced stage of senility." The editors wish you the best of luck in all your current and future endeavors.

Simone Oettli defended her doctorate at the University of Geneva, the title of which was *The Rhetoric of Madness*. She currently has three works-in-progress on a backburner: a book on the autobiography and early novels of Janet Frame, an article on Charlotte Brontë and Jean Rhys, and a book about Madness and Storytelling.

Myriam Perregaux is working on the concept of spatiality in literature, with a focus on the relation between space and identity (understood mainly in gender and ethnic/'racial' terms). London is the main textual/fictional terrain of her inquiry.

Dominic Pettman received his Ph.D. from the University of Melbourne in 1998 for his thesis entitled, *After the Orgy: Towards a Politics of Exhaustion*. He has taught courses in postmodern aesthetics, technoculture, apocalyptic discourses, cyberpunk literature, subcultural style, globalism and postcolonialism, and would list his interests accordingly (although by no means exclusively). His current project revolves around Giorgio Agamben's notion of the Coming Community, and asks what it means to experience an 'inessential commonality.'

Genoveva Puskas works on the syntax of Hungarian, especially the left peripheral domain, which includes hierarchically determined positions for Focus, Topic, wh-phrases and negation. She is also interested in the interpretation of quantifiers and relation between the interpretation and the syntactic positions, in Hungarian and in other lan-

guages, and interactions between quantification and negation.

Carla Scott's interests include emergent literatures, theorizing a post-erotic sexuality, and the category of intelligence in the history of thought. She recently defended her doctoral thesis, *A Genealogy of the Post-Erotic Woman of Contemporary Feminism*.

Agnieszka Soltysik is currently working on the status of "judgment" in the Gothic novel. Otherwise, she is interested in feminism, gender and queer theory, film and media, the Frankfurt School and other strains of cultural theory, including American Studies..

George Varsos' general domains are Comparative Literature and Literary Theory. His doctoral thesis, "The Persistence of the Homeric Question," investigates certain theoretical and methodological aspects of the Homeric Question, as traditionally raised and tackled by philology, including questions of whether and how literature could be read with an eye on historical concerns beyond the confines and limitations of modern historicism. George's other interests include modernity and post-modernity in their relations to older or antique literatures and traditions; poetry, modern and contemporary; rhetoric and tropes; translation; F. Nietzsche, M. Heidegger, W. Benjamin & P. de Man.

Valeria Wagner's doctoral dissertation, *Bound to Act: Models of Action and Dramas of Inaction* (recently published by Stanford UP), deals with political and rhetorical agency. She is currently working on the figure of the "disappeared" and the "Zapata faceless," and is generally interested in the political imaginary.

Professor Richard Waswo's last book was entitled *The Founding Legend of Western Civilization: From Virgil to Vietnam* (1997). He will be on sabbatical during the Summer semester

My apologies to anyone who might have been inadvertently left out or misrepresented. --Agnieszka Soltysik

Don't cry.
Though your soul may bleed
For these are no ordinary tears.
Breathe calmly.
This harsh, acrid air
is but mere illusion
Don't run, don't be scared.
Their power is our protection
Their hate is our cover.
Don't cry; for it shall blind you.
Stand still. Alone.
And look.

Oppressive eyes enter my wanting
soul
A feeling of lassitude prevails.
A Gentle hand seeks to be ignored
A feeling of solitude remains.

Leave me my glacier
No longer can you relieve
Whatever doubts you created.
Speak no more.
As your words have no meaning
Your essence is gone
Your aura...
Shards of glass
Pointed, sharpened sparks
A knife...
One purpose long since fulfilled
Though you stubbornly persist.

I sought and have found
One, two, five...eleven
You
commit me
To...
Lie in peace
Your Hell shall now be mine
I have found
Us.

by Anonymous

A glance.
Gentle, gratuitous, greedy
Piercing
Perverse, penitent, pleading.
It penetrates my flesh without
feeling.
Fervently, it enters my frontal lobe
then the thalamas, the hypothalamas
and the rest.
It finds my heart.
Each artery in vain activity
A fistful of salty sanguine sap
Sought out eyes.
Till they too were red.
Each organ in spectral harmony
Thus we lived in a paralysed
fusion
Only our thoughts remained
I took your brain as you took mine
in frustration
in fear
in frantic desire
for sense, logic, rationality, reality
MEANING

A pile of bloody entrails.

An obstacle
A ravine
Clutch each tuft of unstable
weeds
Watch each rock crumble
and tumble
towards the néant.
If only to meet her eyes
Eyes opf fury, of infinite depth
Eyes of pain.

An outstretched hand
Left me abandoned
And I fell
Through your eyes of fury
Into the infinite depths
Rien.
I perceive your outstretched
hand.
Each vein swallowing my own
blood.
Each tendon devouring my flesh
Je ne suis rien
and always have been
and though your hands grow
stronger;
 your skin grows
darker;
 your arms grow
longer;
Your mind is stark.

You
have left me abandoned
and in this I revel
As I witness my decomposition
It is mine essence
That pierces your eyes
of my fury, my hate, my pain,
my will
There, I am
Your infinite depth.