Take Her, She's Yours
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Published by Punctum Books

Jagoe, Eva-Lynn.
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puddle, but maybe that was because if I came in muddy from splashing in one, she would say that I had gotten all chuca. It embarrassed me when she said it about my panties, the chu rolling from the inside of her mouth into the sharp fricative. I hated how intimate she was with my periods, how there was no way, in my house, to hide your dirty laundry from her. I knew, also, that she mourned my entry into womanhood, and feared that I could get into trouble, like she had.

Dr. O said, “Yesterday there was a difficult point where it seemed like the divided structure of your mind was like a divided house. You spoke of civil war. Today, Dolores emerges as the figure who cleans up the mess, hides the stains.”

It made sense to me. Dolores was so often the false third term that would smooth over the dichotomies. A synthesis of my Old World mother and my New World father, she was the repository of all the dirtiness, both physical and emotional.

Then Dr. O said, “Maybe I am your Dolores. Perhaps you see me as just hired help. The unworthy but willing recipient of your brackish streams of consciousness….”

Leave

I got a fellowship from the Jackman Humanities Institute at University of Toronto. It awarded me a six-month teaching leave. Combined with the semester leave that was due to me after three years of teaching, this meant I would, for the first time in my academic life, have a full year off to research and write. I felt certain that, with that amount of time, I would be able to complete the project I had proposed, “Too Much: The Time of Reading, the Time of Psychoanalysis.” When I reread the proposal now, I’m fascinated by the disconnect between how knowledgeably I wrote about psychoanalysis, while I was such an incoherent mess in it. My writing is so self-assured, intimate yet also academic. Here are a few paragraphs from what I proposed:
Too Much is a short book on length. In it I discuss the politics and pleasures of certain long and slow forms of literature, film, and psychoanalysis that seem to run counter to the models of efficiency and brevity that define our society. In a personal and contemplative style, I write about the discomfort that such texts and practices elicit, arguing that they are anxiety-producing because they are perceived as too much: they take too long, they are too introspective, self-absorbed, and perhaps irrelevant. The book is a consideration of ignorance, of anxiety, and of the discomfort of wanting to know. In short, of hysteria as a reading and writing practice. Holding itself to a contained form, it struggles with its fear of being too much at the exact same time as it revels in its drive to too muchness. Its form is that of a paranoid book, trimming any excess because it desperately believes that its argument matters and suspects that if it takes up too many words, no one will listen. It sometimes feels that it should be less earnest so as to be more palatable, but it also loves every word, savoring all its nuance, its delicacy. Thin, it imagines itself fat, worrying and hoping that it will spill out over its container in the way that its subject matter does.

Dilatory and digressive, a novel like Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu or Thomas Mann’s The Magic Mountain, the films of Chantal Akerman or Chris Marker, or the years-long process of psychoanalysis, require a huge expenditure of time. Of time that is spent alone and not alone, attending to what is said and to what is not said, inside an interiority that is terrifying in its obviousness, its inscrutability, its repetition, and its extension. As someone who spends such an extraordinary amount of time on the introspective practices of reading (both literature and cultural texts) and being psychoanalyzed, I am afraid of being self-absorbed, so I strive to be efficient. However, if I am too concise and ordered, I long to be wordier, slower, excessive. Unsure why I struggle between two untenable positions, I believe that there is a way to reconcile them, that there is a way to be too much, to give free rein to desire, and at the same time to be contained, cir-
The impasse lies, I am coming to suspect, in the spurious ideological promise of synthesis. Our culture seems to promise, if not to cure, at least to manage oppositions or incompatibilities. They can be “worked through” or behaviorally modified or even medicated so as to become less troublesome, less provocative of anxiety. Nowadays, in a culture that defines itself as post-psychoanalysis and post-modern, the friction of these two irreconcilable ways of being in the world are smoothed over. It seems that you can be exactly what you want to be, you can balance excess. You can successfully inhabit a third position that conflates differences, that is neither too much nor too little.

This book is not a lot of things, perhaps worth enumerating. It is not an analysis of the work of Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Sigmund Freud, Chantal Akerman, Chris Marker, or others, nor does it undertake psychoanalytic readings of any of these texts. It engages with all of them in a subjective discussion of the practice of reading and teaching, but it does not talk “about” what happens in them or about their themes or motifs. Rather I want to think about how we read them. About how we don’t know. About how when we actually immerse ourselves in these expanded forms, we necessarily change from one discursive position to another, from knowledge to ignorance, from a university discourse to a hysteric’s discourse. We tend to forget that there is something strong in not knowing. My book reclaims the space and time of not knowing through its insistence on a reading and writing process that hinges not only upon the moments of insight, but also those of blindness [Paul de Man echo!]. Taking my impetus from the discipline of psychoanalysis, I believe that we can put into words our experience when we engage not only with stories or concepts that we easily grasp, but also with boredom and gaps and repetitions and inscrutability.

Though it still sounds good to me, I never wrote that book. I never wrote the Latin American sound project either. My virtual desk drawers are full of great ideas. But I was way too deep into
the *not knowing* that analysis had opened up inside me to write a knowing book.

I didn’t talk about this project with Dr. O. I might have talked about a scene in a movie or novel, but I never told him that I had formulated an intellectual argument about what we were doing. He was with me behind the curtain, and would not be duped by the expert way that I discussed the practice of psychoanalysis. It would have been like those moments at dinner parties when David would charmingly tell a story to the other guests about a trip we had taken, and I would be sitting there thinking about all the things he had left out—the arguments, the underwear not packed, the children crying, the flight almost missed because he was yelling at the counter agent.

I didn’t talk about the project because I wasn’t ever going to do it. And I had something else to talk about, or at least talk *around*: the end of my marriage. I didn’t know it yet, but that was how I was going to spend my leave. Not writing. Leaving.

*Anti-Revelation*

I never knew the moment that my analysis actually “began.” It was more that I came to know that I had been doing it. When I look at the analysis as a whole, I see that it was not a straight trajectory, but rather a series of loops in a spiral. I would find myself circling back to the same incident or feeling, repeating it from a different perspective or understanding, sometimes noticing a hitherto insignificant tiny detail, other times seeing it from the macro level. Every time it would have a different valence, and cause me to react with different emotions to it.

I didn’t have revelations, the way I had imagined I would. There are still many half-glimpsed shimmers or dark spots that I don’t understand. These misses are why the most exciting part of Proust’s entire book is, for me, not the famous madeleine moment, in which the taste of the cake in his mouth floods him