The Fractured Self: Style, Influences, and Process

by

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ABSTRACT

An exploration of the art of writing fiction through the lens of memory, myth, and the fractured psyche, of performance and spectacle: image, projection, and the secret self. The craft of writing is the craft of myth. The very process of storytelling relies on collective, personal, and historical myth-making - stories surrounding the body and consciousness, collective and personal memory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BODY

The nineteenth century novel, specifically the works of Tolstoy, has greatly impacted my writing. The departure from the nineteenth century aesthetic through the lives and works of the modernists has also been crucial to my vision as a writer. Barnes, and McAlmon are pioneers whom I admire. I am equally moved by daring, contemporary voices, original in both form and content: Maso's mixed media, collagist work, *The Art Lover*; Zambreno's experimental, bold novel, *Green Girl*; Duras', heart-aching, semi-autobiographical novel, *The Lover*.

I am drawn to emotionally resonant, lyrical stories, narratives of utter beauty, sharp insight, and uncanny vision, like those of Gallant, Salter, and Johnson. Williams' tour-de-force, *Stoner,* builds to a haunting, meticulously crafted ending, reminiscent of Tolstoy. It is these elements that I strive for most in my work.

Like the stories I read, my own stories are often centered on the inner lives of women. I am endlessly fascinated by persona and the complex nature of identity, the fractured psyche. I am interested in performance and spectacle: image, public projection and the secret self. Attention to language is crucial to my narratives, and I often draw on poets for inspiration, and prose writers who have mastered the sentence.

Language and style, the inner lives of women, consciousness and the body, and the creative process are topics crucial to my development and sustained commitment as a writer.

Physicality—gestures, body language—are integral to character. How a character interacts, is cognizant of, or unaware of her body is revealing, significant. In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, on his way to sleep with Anna, Vronsky delights in, and is aroused by, his own body. He finds "pleasure" in touching "the slight pain in his strong leg" is "conscious of the muscles of his chest moving…" (370). In this moment, Vronsky is hyper-aware of his body, of himself, and his consciousness is rendered through physical longing: "All that he saw from the carriage window through the cold pure air in the pale light of the evening sky seemed as fresh, bright and vigorous as he was himself" (371). Vronsky experiences the world around him through the lens of a man filled with lust.

Tosltoy's language begins to mimic Vronksy's sexual longing. He "thrusts" himself out of the window of the carriage (371). All of Vronksy, eagerly, anxiously awaits release. Upon seeing Anna, Vronsky is filled with sexual yearning, desire: "Immediately a thrill passed like an electric current through his body, and with renewed force he became conscious of himself from the elastic movement of his firm legs to the motion of his lungs as he breathed, and of something tickling his lips" (371). Vronsky is acutely connected to his physical experience, conscious of his body.

Part of the magnificence of Tolstoy's work is that he probes the depths of the human experience. A Tolstoy novel is filled with love, death, sex, repulsion, fear, bliss, dread, and so on; a Tolstoy novel is concerned with, and mimics, life. Later in the novel, Levin visits his dying brother, Nicholas. Levin compares Nicholas's hand to a rake: "One arm of that body lay outside the blanket, and the enormous hand, like a rake, seemed to be attached in some incomprehensible way to a long thin spindle that was quite straight

from the end to the middle. The head lay on its side on the pillow. Levin could see the moist thin hair on the temples and the drawn transparent-looking forehead" (Tolstoy, 579). Levin likens his dying brother's hand to an object. This nearly lifeless-body is not the person that Levin once knew; Nicholas is emaciated, nearly unrecognizable. Nicholas, the dying man, finds his own body loathsome:

> There was no position that did not cause him pain; no moments of forgetfulness; no part of his body that did not hurt and torment him. Even the memories, impressions, and thoughts within his body now aroused in him the same sort of repulsion as the body itself. The sight of other people, their words, his own recollections gave him nothing but pain…. Formerly every separate desire caused by suffering or privation, such as hunger or thirst, was relieved by some bodily action which brought enjoyment; but now privation and suffering were not followed by relief, but the attempt to obtain relief occasioned fresh suffering. Therefore all his desires were merged into one: a desire to be released from all this pain and from its source—his body (593-94).

In this moment, Nicholas' recollections, feelings, ideas—his inner life—are as unbearable and disgusting as his external, bodily experience. He craves liberation from suffering, and identifies the cause of his turmoil as his body.

Nicholas' death scene in Tolstoy's, *Anna Karenina* is reminiscent of William Stoner's death scene in Williams', *Stoner.* William Stoner, salt of the earth, farm boy from Missouri, who, by chance, was sent to university and found meaning in the cloistered existence of academia, dedicating his life to literature, is about to die. Williams

describes the unbearable suffering of a man on his death bed:

> …The pain came upon him with suddenness and an urgency that took him unprepared, so that he almost cried out. He made his hands loosen up the bedclothes and willed them to move steadily to the night table. He took several of the pills and put them in his mouth and swallowed some water. A cold sweat broke upon his forehead and he lay very still until the pain lessened. (274)

The ellipsis, signaling omission, is quite appropriate here. Williams indicates an interruption of Stoner's thoughts into physical awareness of the declining body. Before the above passage, Stoner listens to his friend, Gordon, and his wife, Edith, converse in the kitchen, "Gordon's [voice] low and urgent, Edith's grudging and clipped" (274). Not only does the ellipses offer an interruption in Stoner's reflection, but perhaps it also indicates the thoughts that cannot be fully expressed by a dying man, the necessary erasure of memory, of thought on the day Stoner dies.

Williams first draws the reader in to Stoner's awareness of his physical reality, the tactile, matter-of-fact business of the body declining. These specific, visceral experiences, allow the reader to feel more deeply the abstract, emotional truths that are to come. For instance, two pages later, Stoner is again conscious of his body, and is aware of his sense of self. He feels a "softness around him, and a languor crept upon his limbs;" Stoner is aware that death is upon him (277). Williams grounds his reader first in the sensorial, the body, and then penetrates Stoner's consciousness, accesses a dying man's truths: "A sense of his own identity came upon him with a sudden force, and he felt the

power of it. He was himself, and he had known what he had been" (277). This sentence is haunting. A quiet novel that slowly builds over a lifetime, we follow Stoner through his simpleton life on a farm, meeting and marrying, Edith, and the birth of his daughter. The language is terse, trenchant. The reader is carried through a series of events. We experience with Stoner the bureaucratic life of academia, and also the immense joy of learning for the sake of learning, of being protected by books. His unhappy marriage, his affair with Katherine, his daughter's alcoholism and unplanned pregnancy: these dramatic events are told in a stoic, pragmatic tone. The final chapter is the most haunting. In Tolstoyan form, we bare witness to the totality of a man's life. By deftly crafting the body to illuminate state of mind, Williams invites us to experience William Stoner's life and death.

In another scene in *Anna Karenina,* Kitty prepares for a ball that evening. She revels in the sight of her self: "Her bare shoulders and arms gave her a sensation as of cold marble, a feeling she liked very much. Her eyes shone and she could not keep her rosy lips from smiling at the consciousness of her attractive appearance" (91). Kitty celebrates herself. Like Vronsky in the carriage on his way to see Anna, Kitty is hyper-aware of her body and her experience. It is as if her dress is a natural part of her, "as if she had born in this net and lace and with that high coiffure and that rose and its two leaves on the top" (90). Tolstoy is interested in the human body, the human experience. Kitty feels vibrant, full of energy, truly alive. This is Tolstoy's genius: these instances of bliss arise from the ordinary. They need not be lofty or elevated. They blossom from the everyday, the small moments that fill our lives.

Later in the novel, a doctor examines Kitty. The experience leaves her, "stupefied with shame" (138). The doctor does not understand her feelings, and thinks her reactions are both uncivilized and rude: "He considered this natural because he did it every day, and did not, it seemed to him, either feel or think anything wrong when he did it. He therefore considered the feeling of shame in a girl to be not only a relic of barbarism but an insult to him" (138). Tolstoy treats this scene deftly, with empathy. We feel deeply for Kitty. Perhaps Kitty's shame has not to do with the fact that a man saw her naked body, but with the way in which he saw it. The process is sterile, without feeling. Her body is anatomically categorized, it is seen as *a* body, not *Kitty's* body—and that is what is painful. This is the doctor's job; it is a day-to-day task. The body is handled casually, unceremoniously. This small moment provides us with an abundance of knowledge about Kitty's character. By rendering physicality palpably, purposefully, Tolstoy illuminates a character's consciousness.

Just as Tolstoy and Williams focus on gesture and physicality to reveal character, so does Zambreno in her novel, *Green Girl.* A stark contrast to Kitty, who takes pleasure in her body before the ball, is ashamed of her body in front of the doctor, Ruth of *Green Girl* simultaneously revels in and is revolted by her body. On the surface, Ruth is experiencing the tenuousness of her twenties: a cashier at Horrid's, an upscale department store in London, Ruth is wrapped up in the day-to-day: her relationship with her roommate, Agnes, going on dates with men she abhors. She is infatuated with the golden age of cinema, popular culture and consumerism. But like other great works of literature, this is not solely the material with which *Green Girl* concerns itself. Zambreno

is exploring masks and persona, the fractured psyche, the female body.

Unlike Kitty, who admires her body as she dresses for her event, and Vronsky, who is deeply in touch with his physicality on his way to see Anna, Ruth's relationship to her body and her public image is not one of mere revelry. Perhaps this is partially a shift in aesthetic, sensibility: Zambreno may be considered a postmodern writer, even a post-postmodern writer—certainly experimental—and her treatment of the body throughout *Green Girl* aligns with this. For instance, on a bus home, Ruth meditates on the male gaze, her desire to at once, be seen and not seen:

> Look at me
>
> (don't Look at me)
>
> Look at me
>
> (don't look at me)
>
> Look at me don't look at me look at me don't look at
>
> me don't
>
> look
>
> (Look)
>
> (Don't look)
>
> I can't stand if you don't look
>
> Look
>
> Look
>
> Please
>
> Stop (59)

Avant-garde and exploratory, form still manages to marry content in this passage. The words "look" and "don't look" are concealed in parenthesis, suggesting the clandestine, the covert: Ruth's desire to not be seen. The words are then released from round brackets; no longer "hidden" in the arms of parentheses, congruent with Ruth's craving to also be on display as spectacle, object. Her relationship to her body is complex, ruptured, and uncertain.

Like Tolstoy, Zambreno appears eager to explore facets of the human experience. Ruth is not immune to day-to-day bodily occurrences: menstruation, urination, and defecation. In Horrid's, she is "inside a stall," wiping "drops of urine from the bowl, curly swivels of hair, her hair almost touching the pale splatters" (67). Pubic hair and bodily fluids, Zambreno seems to say, are parts of life. Ruth tries to urinate but "nothing comes out" (68). Still, "Ruth wipes, nonetheless, front to back, like a good girl" (68). This small moment is quite revealing, suggesting that feminine hygiene and morality are often conflated.

Ruth simultaneously adores her body and resents it. Her relationship to her physical self is intricate, ever-changing: on the bus she both appreciates her appearance, and is revolted by it. She is frustrated by her monthly cycle: "Groan. Knives. It is that time. Again. The red mixes with the brown, a filthy paint" (131). Zambreno does not merely glamorize the female body. She does not resist the ordinary, necessary functions of daily life. The body is not always beautiful. Zambreno dismantles dangerous myths about what the body is or is supposed to be: clean, pure.

Barnes', *Nightwood*, also defies conventional, overused ideas of femininity (*Nightwood* was penned in the 1930's, so especially for her time). Robin Vote, praying in the Catholic Church, is described as "a tall girl with the body of a boy" (50). Barnes goes on to write, "Even on the cold tiles of the Russian church, in which there is no pew, she knelt alone, lost and conspicuous, her broad shoulders above her neighbours [sic], her feet large and earthly as the feet of a monk" (50). This is an unusual, striking image. Robin's body is exaggerated, breaks conventionalist ideas of gender norms.

Williams, Tolstoy, Zambreno, and Barnes all deftly explore the human body, and in doing so, reveal the lives of their characters. In my own work, I am interested in the ways the female body is controlled based on the cultural narratives society perpetuates. I am concerned with destabilizing the myths surrounding women and their bodies. This may be accomplished in seemingly small ways: like Zambreno, I am eager to not always beautify the female form, but to explore it honestly, fully.

I am considering ways in which to use gesture, physicality to render my characters more truthfully, connecting the body and consciousness in order to imitate life. The body—the corporeal, the physical—is vastly complex. The reactions, functions, and needs of the human body are all natural to life, and so, necessary to fiction.

CHAPTER 2

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

My first writing course during my undergraduate career was an Introduction to Poetry class. Beginning as a poet, it is not surprising I am often drawn to lyrical, imaginative works. Duras', *The Lover*, Maso's, *The Art Lover*, and Williams' *Stoner,* among others, have influenced my consideration of language and style.

Often focusing on a photograph, an instant, an image, Duras', *The Lover*, is told in fragments. The novel explores the relationship between a young narrator from a French family and a wealthy, older man, of Chinese descent. The narrator moves from first person to third person throughout the novel, indicating a sort of disassociation, splintering of the self.

The 15-year-old nameless girl at the heart of *The Lover* recalls meals as a young child, "garbage—storks, baby crocodile—but the garbage was cooked and served by a houseboy" and of forgoing dinner, "[indulging] in the luxury of declining to eat" (7). The language is deliberate, evocative. Sonically harsh, sometimes guttural, the juxtaposition of "garbage" "storks" and "baby crocodile" is unusual, surprising (7). The fact that the "garbage" is not only "cooked" but also "served by a houseboy" borders on the absurd. It suggests that the family might be concerned with façade, perhaps craves a sense of power, control.

Inherent to Duras style is the use of white space, the blank area between fragments, seducing the reader to breathe thoughts, ideas, and projections on to the page. The physical space between sections is also quite practical. A visual aid of sorts, it

enables Duras to move between time, and point of view, and signals to the reader that the narrative is somewhat non-linear. Duras language is striking, her sentences often minimal, terse. Much is left unsaid. This, certainly, is crucial to the narrative, and to Duras vision. We are asked to read between the lines, so-to-speak, in order to evaluate how one fragment informs the other.

Pastiche-like, *The Lover* cuts up images, small moments, superimposes them on other small moments, flashbacks, musings. The result is an authentic, or nearly authentic, representation of the way memory works. Associative and disjointed, recollection often relies on feeling and image. It is also ephemeral, fleeting; we lose memories, we remember one thing, not another, consciously or unconsciously. We repress. We choose to forget. Memory is, of course, subjective and fallible. It is human. It is the stuff of fiction.

While "lyrical" and "imaginative" describe Duras', *The Lover*, these words do not necessarily depict Williams' novel, *Stoner.* It is written in matter-of-fact, plain language. Exquisitely designed, *Stoner* escalates to a devastating ending. I cannot remember the last time that I bawled through the last chapters of a novel. I am compelled by the magic of *Stoner,* its quiet beauty. William Stoner reflects on his life in the last chapter of the novel:

> Beneath the numbness, the indifference, the removal, it was there, intense and steady; it had always been there. In his youth he had given it freely, without thought; he had given it to the knowledge that had been revealed to him—how many years ago?—by Archer Sloane; he had given it to Edith, in those first blind days of his courtship and marriage; and he had given it to Katherine, as if it had

never been given before. He had, in odd ways, given it to every moment of life, and had perhaps given it most fully when he was unaware of his giving. It was a passion neither of the mind nor of the flesh; rather it was a force that comprehended them both, as if they were but the matter of love, its specific substance. To a woman or to a poem, it said simply: Look! I am alive.

(Williams 250).

The language is unadorned, straightforward. The sentences employ parallel structure, repetition. There is an energy and vitality to this passage that mimics Stoner's consciousness, and it is consistent with the rest of the novel in its existential awareness. Perhaps what is most beautiful about this passage is the ways in which it claims life, relishes it. The words are utilitarian and do not draw attention to themselves.
The passage is aware, honest.

Williams' words are succinct and laconic, all the while retaining an emotive quality. Duras' style might be described as economical, piercing. Salter's language, on the other hand, is sumptuous, rhythmic, at times, dizzying.

Nedra, the elusive heroine of Salter's, *Light Years*, is at once graceful and careless, spellbinding and mundane, cooking gourmet French dinners, sleeping all day, she is the woman who "does everything," she is the woman who "does nothing" (8). In the beginning of the novel, Salter paints a portrait of Nedra:

> Her real concern is the heart of existence: meals, bed linen, clothing. The rest means nothing; it is managed somehow. She has a wide mouth, the mouth of an actress, thrilling, bright…. Dark smudges in her armpits, mint on her breath… She

is twenty-eight. Her dreams still cling to her; adorn her; she is confident, composed, she is related to long-neck creatures, ruminants, abandoned saints" (8). Salter's language is a lovely mix of the practical, everyday, ("meals" and "clothing" and "managed,") and the elevated, nearly sublime ("abandoned saints"). The meaning would be quite different, and not as impactful, if the word "abandoned" were omitted; it connotes rejection, casting off of some sort. Nedra is of the earth, "related to long-neck creatures." This conjures images of "ruminants," giraffes and the like, elegant, graceful, and also fleshly, carnal. She has the remnants of sweat under her arms— of the body, natural, sensorial—and "mint on her breath," a sensual image. Comparing her mouth to that of an actress suggests exaggeration, performance. Her mouth is not only "wide," another sensual image, but it is also "thrilling" and "bright." Salter focuses on small, seemingly minute details and expands them. This description of Nedra is appealing not only because of its beauty, but because of its complexity. Nedra is concurrently earthly and otherworldly, pragmatic and dreamy. In this short passage, we understand the vicissitudes of her character.

Consider another passage in Salter's, *Light Years*. It dwells in summary, abstract, and the particular: "Life is weather. Life is meals. Lunches on a blue checked cloth on which salt has spilled. The smell of tobacco. Brie, yellow apples, wood-handled knives" (25). The combination of the infinitesimal, spilled salt, and the enormous—life itself— is effective. By juxtaposing specific details with larger ideas, Salter creates irresistible sentences.

Johnson's, "Work," also showcases sentences of unparallel beauty. The story opens with a man and his girlfriend, staying at a hotel "under a phony name," as they shoot up heroin (45). Johnson succinctly captures the tenor of their three-day binge: "We made love in the bed, ate steaks at the restaurant, shot up in the john, puked, cried, accused one another, begged of one another, forgave, promised, and carried one another to heaven" (45). Johnson's sentences are meticulously crafted. They build and escalate with an unmatched elegance and ease. After his girlfriend leaves him, the narrator meets his friend, Wayne, at the bar. Wayne convinces the narrator to join him in a fast cash exploit, and the two begin ripping wiring out of a deserted house for scrap metal. Back at the bar, the men celebrate what they perceive as a day of hard, decent work. The conclusion of "Work," is one of my favorite short story endings:

> The Vine had no jukebox, but a real stereo continually playing tunes of alcoholic self-pity and sentimental divorce. "Nurse," I sobbed. She poured doubles like an angel, right up to the lip of a cocktail glass, no measuring. "You have a lovely pitching arm." You had to go down to them like a hummingbird over a blossom. I saw her much later, not too many years ago, and when I smiled she seemed to believe I was making advances. But it was only that I remembered. I'll never forget you. Your husband will beat you with an extension cord and the bus will pull away leaving you standing there in tears, but you were my mother (54).

Johnson's images are exact. The likeness of bending down to sip a full drink to that of a "hummingbird over a blossom" is precise, striking. Not only does Johnson surprise and delight on a narrative level, but also on a syntactical level. His images and word choices

are at once unexpected and perfectly fitting. Johnson chooses the word "extension cord." He does not simply say, "your husband will beat you," but moves the scene to another level of precision, choosing the very specific, very visceral words, "extension cord" (54). Johnson's stories are both dreamlike and detailed, and the effect is stirring.

Masso's, *The Art Lover*, another lyrical piece that dwells in the specific, explores a young woman, Caroline, as she navigates life after the death of her art-historian father, and news that her best friend is dying of AIDS. Like *The Lover*, Maso relies on white space, the expanse between sentences, to fill the void of what cannot be said. The narrative is ruptured by Carole, perhaps Caroline's persona, also a writer.

Masso integrates found objects, a poster for a missing parrot, an astrology chart, prints by Van Gogh and Matisse, a sign-language placard. Boldly blending mixed media, she creates a story, through words and visuals, of art and grief. Though at times the narrative fell a bit flat, I do admire Masso for her keen artistic experimentation, her willingness to cross-pollinate between the arts, experiment with form, creating something fresh, innovative. Masso is willing to play with style and content.

The moments I appreciate the most in *The Art Lover* are instances of keen insight, charm, when Masso's language is at its finest. The novel begins: "A girl in a striped bathing suit sits at the water's edge. She digs deeply in the sand and from the vast beach makes shapes: an arch, a pyramid, two towers. Not child, but not yet adult, she is at the tender age of becoming" (1). Masso's writing is at once clear, lucid, and dreamy, redolent. Observant, with a sharp attention to color, Masso's writing is almost painterly.

She moves deftly from the specific, "earning" the abstract. Of the death of

Caroline's father, Masso writes: "We loved each other so much, we felt it necessary, in preparation, to say goodbye our whole lives" (13). Masso's language moves fluidly between the precise, sometimes microscopic, dwelling in the smallness of an image and expanding outwards, reaching towards some sort of universal truth.

Mavis Gallant's stories often inhabit the lives of women. Her stories are deft, seemingly effortlessly crafted. Consider the Gallant story, "When We Were Nearly Young." The story begins: "In Madrid, nine years ago, we lived on the thought of money. Our friendships were nourished with talk of money we expected to have, and what we intended to do when it came" (1). The Gallant story dwells in the particular, the specific. Within the first two lines of the story, the reader is aware of place, timeline, and the character's driving desire, her need. Gallant's language is precise: "I remember being served calves' brains in an open skull" (186). The image is unnerving, visceral. Yet another example of Gallant's precision, economy of language: "…she was an untidy, dusty sort of girl, and you felt that in a few years something might go wrong; she might get swollen ankles or grow a mustache" (187). Gallant's language is meticulous, exact, and playful, imaginative

Language has driven many of my stories. As my writing progresses, I am learning, in earnest, how to integrate various parts of the writing process, including narrative drive, so that form and content are in harmony (or disharmony, depending on what my aim is). Attention to the sentence, and a reverence for the beauty of language, will continue to inform my stories as I develop as a writer.

CHAPTER 3

WOMEN IN FICTION

Barnes' *Nightwood*, is the story of Robin Vote, and her notorious group of friends and foes. Very much of its time, *Nightwood* explores the 20's and 30's in Paris in all of its glory: the fluid sexuality and experimentation, the intersection of various art forms, a cultural and artistic renaissance. Robin continues to be one of twentieth century literature's elusive characters. She is almost impossible to pin down. Her relationships are often disastrous, destructive. Robin Vote's evasive nature is compelling, frustrating. One of the most beautiful lines in *Nightwood*: "We sleep in a long reproachful dust against ourselves" (90). Poetic, sensitive, and haunting, this sentence moves me to my core. *Nightwood* is dreamlike, at times, absurd, at others, nightmarish, but nonetheless, a fully realized examination of Robin Vote: her impulses, desires, and shortcomings:

> On a bed, surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly over-sung by the notes of unseen birds, which seemed to have been forgotten—left without the usual silencing cover, which, like cloaks on funeral urns, are cast over their cages at night by good housewives—flung off the support of the cushions which, in a moment of threatened consciousness she had turned he head, lay the young woman, heavy and disheveled. Her legs, in white flannel trousers, were spread as in a dance, the thick-lacquered pumps looking to lively for the arrested step. Her hands, long and beautiful, lay on either side of her face. The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the

> odour [sic] of oil and amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire.

The first sentence in this passage moves fluidly, curves and bends, delays itself. Beginning with "on a bed," the woman finally emerges from her scenery many lines later, "heavy and disheveled" (38). It is a stark, very modern image. Evocative, the scent of her body is, "the quality of earth-flesh, fungi," a sexual image. The sentence burns with desire, yearning. It has a feverish immediacy. *Nightwood* wholly, earnestly enters the life of a queer woman in pre-war Paris.

Like Zambreno, Barnes explores the idea of "playing" object, that is performance, public image: "The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a "picture" forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human" (41). A novel that examines gossip, hearsay, it is concerned with the liberation and constraints intrinsic to the nature of public spectacle, performance.

Duras' *The Lover*, too, enters the life of a woman on the periphery, trying to understand herself. The narrator relays the experience of wearing a man's hat, which was taboo, "…no girl wore a man's fedora in the colony then" (13). Like Robin Vote, the narrator in *The Lover* describes the experience of not adhering to social or cultural norms. The narrator describes the small, simple moment of trying on a hat, "just for fun" (13). Inspecting herself in the "shopkeeper's glass," she relays that, "beneath the man's hat, the thin awkward shape, the inadequacy of childhood, has turned to something else…Suddenly I see myself as another, as another would be seen, outside myself,

available to all eyes, in circulation for cities, journeys, desires" (13). This sudden psychic shift is quite compelling. Reminiscent of Ruth in *Green Girl*, the narrator now sees herself as she believes other sees her: wishing to be both spectacle and spectator. It is in a man's hat that she is able to play persona. The phrases, "awkward shape" and "inadequacy of childhood" are vulnerable, disclosing. It is in a man's hat that "she turns to something else," experiences the way in which others may perceive her. An intimate, carefully rendered scene, Duras delves into the roles women play, the life of masks, personas.

Zambreno's, *Green Girl* is another captivating example of a novel that deeply explores the inner lives of women. The narrative is fractured by the presence of the narrator, who created Ruth, and thus, has a complex relationship to her. Reminiscent of Rodrigo, S.M, the narrator in Lispector's, *The Hour of the Star*, the narrator loves and loathes Ruth, pities her, is frustrated by her: "But I won't choke Ruth why would I choke her I love her…I would choke her to get at her insides" (94). The narrator in Zambreno's *Green Girl* is a postmodern device, designed, in part, to pull the reader outside of the novel, a constant reminder that the novel is imitation, art. Perhaps the narrator also serves as a sort of superego, as well as a comment on the nature of making art. The narrator sculpts, creates Ruth, and is enmeshed with her.

Zambreno's honest exploration of identity, façade is captivating: "Being a girl is like being a tourist, always conscious of yourself, always seeing yourself as if from the outside" (229). Like Duras and Barnes, Zambreno delves into a world of fractured identity, the splintered self.

CHAPTER 4

PROCESS

I often write in fragments, focusing on an image, a feeling, a moment, lingering in an instant. By beginning with the microscopic, the miniscule, I begin to circle outwards, moving into scene, dialogue, expanding into a larger scope. I am interested in the fragment itself: the way it aids in rendering fractured consciousness, self.

My writing process often begins by closely studying a story or a scene from a novel I deeply admire. I will often study stories to better understand structure, form, and narrative drive (all elements I struggle with in my stories).

Collage, painting, cooking, and various other art forms inform my creative process. I believe that keen observation, an attention to detail, a reverence for the senses, whether it is studying a watercolor or inhaling the scent of fresh basil, is integral to an artistic life.

As I complete a collection of short stories, and move towards a novella, I am interested in integrating into my own art the elements of craft that have influenced me the most. I am in continuous awe of Tolstoy's ability to penetrate a wide array of human experience. His sense of empathy and his razor-sharp eye, are elements I have studied and admired repeatedly. The modernist novel, too, has greatly impacted my writing. With a great attention to consciousness, bold experiments in form—time, point of view, language, and so on—the works of Barnes, and countless others, have left an indelible impact on my writing.

I am committed to continually studying the beauty and magnificence of language, as illustrated in the works of Salter and Gallant. Attention to the body continues to be a theme I explore in my own work, as well as issues of identity, the complexity of memory and the self.

In Tolstoy's, *Anna Karenina,* Kitty celebrates her body before a ball. In her novel, *The Lover*, Duras paints the portrait of a fifteen-year-old nameless narrator being served trash for dinner by a houseboy. A man recalls the sustenance he receives from a bartender after a day of what he perceives to be, honest, hard work. These narratives seduce, startle, and stir. In their wake: reasons to live.