

LOOK AT ME, MA—I'M GOING TO BE A MARGINAL WRITER!

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How does one approach a topic 'Rewriting the Mainstream' and what voice do I assume now. It has to be a writers' voice here. The dematerialised body of the author speaks. The author opens her mouth now.

'Rewriting the Mainstream' immediately proposes the duality of mainstream literature and marginal literature, the major literature and the minor one. How do I see myself and what am I doing here—am I representing a marginal author?

The comedian Lenny Bruce said that the beginning of wishing to perform was to yell 'Look at me, Ma! '- Does one plan one's position, the writerly position? Is it, 'Look at me Ma—I'm going to be a marginal writer!'

The terms marginal, mainstream, major and minor appear as very rigid ones, there's a dichotomy here, an irresolvable difference. What can one rewrite and what is there to rewrite now. Perhaps the only thing that needs to be rewritten is the institutionalised study of literature and its arrogant stance. The author is studied, the author is observed, the author is situated, placed, described. The author is consumed, eaten, cannibalised, classified, labelled.

The relationship between the academy and the author is ambivalent. What is the function of the author-speak, the talk, the forum, the interview, the diary. This material serves as source material for the making of other things. My writing has also served as the making of other things—various formats of projection, different readings and mis/understandings. The position of the author is always ironic. One is talked about, one wishes to be talked about. And one does not serve as an authority on oneself. The author is replaced, translated and that is their function—to be mis/understood, in the words of a 1960s song 'Oh, Lord my intentions are good, please don't let me be misunderstood'.

The public ownership of literature subsumes the private activity of writing. The work is removed, stolen, appropriated. Literature is processed, a salami sausage and packaged. Writing and writing about writing seem very far apart.

I have recently read the marvellous and complex manuscripts of Eve Langley, unpublished manuscripts which are stored in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. There was a reversal there of the author's role. The work returned to the private and obsessive area in which it arose and had a subterranean, shadowy life. One has to search for Eve Langley and find her. She and her work are free from the objectified existence of a published work. The written text returns to her secret words, her beginning. A regressive movement now.

The writer has to be placed, named, labelled, positioned and she does not define herself. She becomes subservient to the gaze of another. The author is colonised. The groupings and identifications that seem so essential in the study of literature are like school sport teams, battling away at hockey. The author has to be located. The author has to make a good bet and further the aims of the one who writes about her. Is this author worth writing about now?

The study of literature could also be a study of potential literature, of varied literature/s, of

works which have not yet been written, of hidden literature. The author can also refuse to produce, refuse to write, like the Russian writers' group Neyerkins who, around 1917, met, discussed literary ideas, but decided not to write. The author can refuse to participate in the literary industry and refuse to supply the material goods that serve as the primary material of that industry.

The official literature, the literature that is accepted, that receives official support forms the mainstream literature, the commercially viable populist literature that reflects the views of the majority. We should study Wilbur Smith and Jackie Collins—and this is already being done in cultural studies.

My identification has always been with the avant-garde, the authors that influenced me were: Stein, Lautreamont, Joyce, Beckett, Burroughs, Artaud, Nietzsche and Kafka. That area immediately becomes affiliated with marginality yet the constant republishing of these works situate them in a position of importance (within a particular informed milieu) and in a situation that cannot be clearly designated. In my view these works were mainstream, mainstream, central, accepted by me. How does one read? One forms one's own affiliations. The concepts of marginality and mainstream depend on one's viewpoint.

The monolithic concept of culture suggests a hierarchical order and separate areas, the official culture and the production of acceptable material and the non-official culture. Yet Beckett can now be seen as a mainstream cultural phenomenon, a cultural edifice no different from Hemingway. Beckett was marginal once but he is not marginal nor minor now. The mainstream and the marginal overlap. The work of Kathy Acker shows this same phenomenon, a shift. Acker's self-published beginnings had been transformed into a saleable and prominent position, a cult position.

Literature is not static. It exists as a living organism, expanding and re-creating itself, metamorphosing. Authors expand, ascend and descend. And nobody reads Paul Claudel, a once-famous French poet and diplomat. The sentimental paintings of chubby plump little girls done by the knighted painters of the Victorian era have become an embarrassment. And the demise of Mr Leavis is obvious. Literary theory also ages, becomes debunked. When I began to study literature I was forbidden to write about Sylvia Plath. Now it is not possible to study literature without writing about Plath. She is now mainstream. Women's writing, once a peripheral area, now forms a majority of published works.

My own work has been identified with the positions of marginality, multiculturalism, ethnicity, migration, abjection, experimentation, feminist literary theory, postmodernism, the avant-garde. Do I have to provide a definition, an affiliation, a sense of belonging to a group? Will I still be an author if I do not write or publish? One can call oneself an author. One can name oneself. One can call oneself, 'author'.

The commentary on literature forms a mannered situation, within clearly set boundaries, a parlour game. The author is subverted, her place is filled by another. Her text becomes common property now and 50 years after her death. The authorly production of text and the study, the transformation, interpretation—the two areas are superimposed but they do not quite fit or replace one another.

The concepts of minor literature as written by Deleuze and Guattari in 'Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature' seem extremely valuable and relate well to my favourite author Franz Kafka; the dislodged, deterritorialised language of minor literature, writing with a political and collective value even when done by a solitary individual, the minor literature with its primary enunciation, expression that prefigures content, literature which becomes revolutionary, forging a new sensibility.

The author suddenly becomes a collective even if solitary; the author becomes an assemblage of enunciation, a machine for writing and I find all this quite wonderful, on an intellectual level, but I do not have to identify with it. Perhaps Kafka would identify with it and he did write about a 'minor literature'. But it seems somehow inflated to me. Perhaps I'll identify with it in the future, I have been known to change my mind and alter my statements.

Deleuze and Guattari do locate the revolutionary and the collective aspects also at the heart

of mainstream literature. Tolstoy would make a fine illustration for this. So in the end the definition of minor literature is not specific. The boundaries blur.

I am only writing letters, to you, yes to you, only, only you. Kafka writes 'how to attach girls to oneself through writing'. Kafka writes 'fearless, powerful, surprisingly moved...as I am only when I write'. The writerly act becomes the act of desire. The writerly act has itself at its centre. *L'art pour l'art*. Experimentation opens up the polyvocal elements of desire.

I have failed to place myself anywhere. But you said that you are avant-garde, before! I have named myself Polly. I am very fancy. Is one allowed to be contrary? I am never serious. I am ironic. How do I conclude now? (gap) How do I end? A text becomes finite, conclusive, limited, strained here, uneasy, shush.....I don't want to play the game. I don't want to play this game anymore. (in a child voice, with a French accent) I don't want to play this game anymore. (adult voice) But you must, you must play the game says the professor Elephant and professor Zurbrugg.

And now I conclude that I am subverting a talk and a statement, that I am rebelling against order, the father, the language of the father, that I am again producing a polymorphous text, a rebellion against power, a rebellion, an act of rebellion, an act of reversal, the master of words does become the minor, the naughty, such a naughty child, the minor, the child, the language regressing—assuming different positions, the crossing of the barrier. Kafka says 'there is nothing that is major or revolutionary, except the minor'. Yes, that's it, I agree, Yes! It's 'Look at me ma! I'm going to be a minor author!' (But that doesn't seem right).....Oh, I don't know.....