

Editor's Column: The Polyphony Issue

"This Caribbean So Choke with the Dead": Horizontal Citation

WHY ARE THESE YOUNG MEN FLOATING ON THE COVER OF THE March issue, their Nikes and Adidases striding through space, their bodies halo-cushioned? The surrounding skies resemble Tiepolo's, while those airborne flower petals might have fluttered out of a Fragonard or the Rose Bowl parade. In Kehinde Wiley's paintings young men from Harlem, Detroit, or South Central Los Angeles cavort in Old Master settings. Hovering in rococo cloud palaces, these sweet youths in their do-rags seem at once ironic and sublime; they inhabit the heavens as comfortably as angels. Wiley not only navigates the spaces of eighteenth-century art but also insists on the importance of shopping and commodification as companions to a recently trademarked art history. "With the work I'm doing now, I'm interested in history as it relates to bling-bling," Wiley says. "In places like Harlem, people ornament their bodies, love Gucci and Versace. I'm interested in certain types of French Rococo ornament that end up as faux décor in shopping malls or in Michael Graves's faux neo-classicism, for that matter." By merging hip-hop street style with neoclassical art, Wiley entangles two kinds of time. According to Christine Y. Kim, curator at the Studio Museum in Harlem, his paintings take "elements from two very distinct, divergent histories" and cross-reference "the image and iconography to create an explosive and compelling collusion of histories and ideas" (Fineman, AR 39). Like the eighteenth-century clouds that surround them, these black men's bodies seem as light as air, but in uncloudlike fashion they colonize the space of high art: seizing, occupying, and regilding a contemporary world of patronage and privilege (fig. 1).

Like Wiley's painting, *PMLA's* March issue introduces playful and unexpected polyphonies. By exploring a range of intertexts,

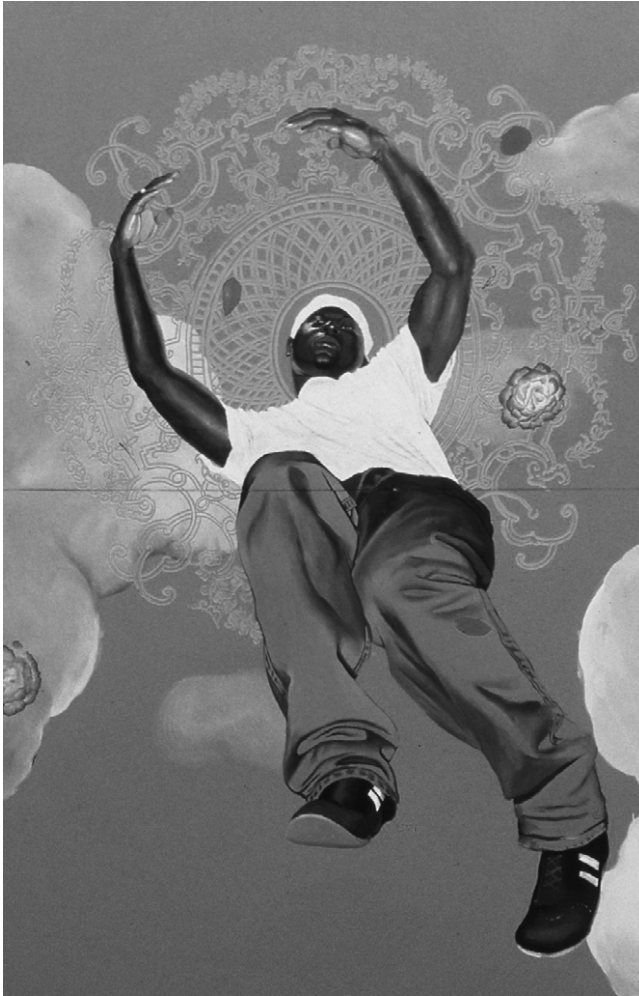


FIG. 1

Kehinde Wiley,
detail of *Go*, 2003.
Oil on panel.
Brooklyn Museum.

including the Web's horizontal buzz of communication, conscious and unconscious acts of citation, translation as the art of local dissemination, and a fresh theory of allusion, these essays take a surprising turn. They explore new pleasures and histories in intertexts, and they do this without recourse to a Bloomian or a Bakhtinian poetics—that is, without emphasizing the agonistic struggle or dialogic appropriation that has fascinated English-speaking scholars since the publication of *The Anxiety of Influence* and the translation of *The Dialogic Imagination*. Do these essays suggest a turn in intertextuality studies?

If the scholarly pursuit of influence, intertext, polyphony, and dialogic entanglement

has seemed dead or passé, three developments promise its reanimation. The first involves the Web-based collaborations Reinaldo Laddaga discusses in this issue: new speech communities coaxing collaboration from far-flung computers in hyperspace. Second, the speedup of globalization pushes us into the chasm Wai Chee Dimock calls “deep time”: “a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessionary, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations” (3). Each text or community is entangled with locales and histories not its own. In her rich analysis Dimock recovers so many unfathomed intertexts in Henry James, Margaret Fuller, and Henry David Thoreau that nineteenth-century American writing could be said to traffic in as many cultural interfaces as twenty-first-century search engines like *Yahoo!* or *Google*. Third, as epistemology mutates and categorical boundaries “between the human and the natural, the biological and physical, the organism and the machine, the mind and the body, are now, at strategic points, breached” (Levinson 62), the art of polyphony suggests a different agenda for contemporary readers. As category confusion accelerates, we gravitate toward interstices and traces rather than clean causalities, binaries, or arrays.

In this editorial I want to encourage renewed scholarly interest in polyphony, dialogism, and intertextuality: categories of analysis that have been largely superseded by materialist and historicist modes of reading. In an earlier era, scholars ambled along the road to Xanadu source-searching: seeking echoes and allusions. But *The Dialogic Imagination* changed all this. The heteroglossic or many-voiced work became a complex appropriative act; the subaltern writer was captivated by and forced to capture a world where images erupt with someone else's meaning. These laborious appropriations registered as political, power-creating acts demanding that we read form through the alembic of force. Now when we encounter Derek Wal-

cott's "The Schooner *Flight*" we cannot miss its purposeful retort to *The Tempest*, its act of shouting back. Walcott refuses to mourn once-regal white men who lie "full fathom five." Shabine, an Afro-Caribbean salvage diver, is driven mad by a weightier civics:

this Caribbean so choke with the dead
that when I would melt in emerald water,
whose ceiling rippled like a silk tent,
I saw them corals: brain, fire, sea-fans,
dead-men's-fingers, and then, the dead men.
I saw that the powdery sand was their bones
ground white from Senegal to San Salvador. . . .
(349)

"The Schooner *Flight*" argues polyphonically that aesthetes must relinquish the jewellike satisfaction of the "pearls that were his eyes" for the "powdery" bones of the Middle Passage.

This focus on heteroglossic or many-voiced works shatters the politics of the canon and offers a forceful mode for thinking about polysemy.¹ For Mieke Bal it also shatters residual illusions about aesthetic unity. Bakhtinian dialogics reveal "the utter fragmentation of language itself" by pointing "in the directions from which the words have come, thus thickening, rather than undermining, the work of mimesis. . . . This interdiscursivity accounts for pluralized meanings—typically, ambiguities—and stipulates that meaning cannot be reduced to the artist's intention" (10). In contrast, deconstruction

harks back to what this same view might repress when it presents the polyphony of discursive mixtures a little too jubilantly. Stipulating the impossibility of reaching the alleged, underlying, earlier speech, this view emphasizes what the quoting subject does to its object. Whereas for Bakhtin the word never forgets where it has been before it was quoted, for Derrida it never returns there without the burden of the excursion through the quotation. (11)

For both Bakhtin and Derrida recursivity weighs heavily on every creative act.

But Wiley's painting takes another course; he limns the pleasures of older art forms as they zing through the worlds of shopping and hip-hop to become hedonic simulacrum—the background noise of a product-driven multiverse where illusion turns into fashion and shoppers anoint their bodies with intertexts. Although Bloom, Bakhtin, and even Derrida insist on citation as agon (as a battle between father and son, teacher and ephebe; as the mark of warring classes, professions, political factions, and discourses; or—for Derrida—as the source of an excursion that misplaces its origins and ends), Wiley insists on a balmier aesthetic, on citation as accessory—the pleasure of using someone else's art as adornment.

What keeps citation as accessory from becoming art lite, a postmodern recycling of art for art's sake? By "translating the meanings of quotation as developed in language-centered theories into a visual context," Bal suggests, we discover that contemporary acts of quotation challenge the received meanings of older art and demand complex entanglements (15). Artists who appropriate Old Master art seize the allure of historical reference, record their belatedness as history's subjects, attach a frisson of melancholy to their products, and produce an art undergirded by tradition. But when Bal takes these older ideas off the shelf, she adds blood, mold, and gelatin—ingredients for a twentieth-century baroque.² When visual and verbal quotations create a mysteriously sutured polyphony, "they demonstrate the difference between the illusion of wholeness and mastery pertaining to the artist of art history and the somewhat messier, yet much richer visual culture of live images." The result is "an irreversible *new* Old Master," changing "the Caravaggio we thought we knew as well as the historical illusion that we knew him" (15). This constant change in the shape of tradition (a tradition that grows with the strength of each individual talent) echoes T. S. Eliot's famous essay. But the resulting polyphony is stranger still: a spine-tingling mass of weird flavors,

intimacies, and snares. For Bal citation creates aesthetic mess, exposed sutures, estranging presentness, multiply coexisting styles, and a jumble of cocreativity. This multiplicity also frames the essays in the polyphony issue of *PMLA*—a swerve from vertical theories of intertextuality to intriguingly horizontal ones.

Without dismantling Bloom's and Bakhtin's rich interventions, I want to experiment with additional ways of considering polyphony: with new categories for thinking about mixed-up works of art and intermingled texts.³ If Bakhtin's powerful theories of dialogue and double-voicedness empower scholars to trace the political complexities of polyvalence, a more horizontal model of intertext will allow us to explore the way citations, translations, and Web crawling open hyphenated spaces where choruses of overlapping voices and metaphors fold and unfold like butterfly wings, where we encounter intertext as thread, cocoon, nectar, entanglement. In addition to examining citation as ornament and textuality as fold, I want to investigate polyphonies that are almost not there: the creased, corner-hugging rubrics of ghostly and unread citation.

Citation as Ornament

Let's return to Wiley. How often does "high art" present black youths poised in flight, their bodies tilted above the viewer? In eighteenth-century painting this is the space of gods and saints, of putti and potentates. But Wiley paints regular guys in Nikes and blue jeans hovering happily above us. Just as these young men become heaven's jewels, so the heavens turn into backdrop or accessory, like a scene in a music video. Wiley's strategy is not monumental or agonistic; it must be read multiply: (1) these guys are just hanging out with the rococo; (2) they are signifying on white tradition and tilting its Euro values; (3) they participate in a polyphony as sampling—the eighteenth-century sky a borrowed instru-

ment or motif, their dharma halos aglitter with baroque surprise, their Nike swooshes an inversion of Mercury's wings—with all the mock velocity of hip-hop adornment (fig. 2).

Citation also turns into ornament in Mark Doty's "Couture," where the poet samples the high notes of Auden, Hopkins, and Keats. Keats's "Ode to Autumn" becomes the queen of Doty's poem. "Autumn's a grand old drag / in torched and tumbled chiffon / striking her weary pose. / Talk about your mellow / fruitfulness!" This romantic drag mistress vamps her way from Keats's harvest-drunk poetry toward a formal drag ball; she becomes a "smoky alto" who "hast thy music, / too." Here costume may be, as Doty threatens, "the whole show, / all of revelation / we'll be offered" (18–19). And yet the drag queen's accessories offer not only solace but philosophy. As the narrator explains, we may be forced to enter "eternity" naked, but cloth and sequins bind us to the earth, to the things that we love.

About gowns,
the Old Masters,
were they ever wrong?
This penitent Magdalen's
wrapped in a yellow
so voluptuous
she seems to wear
all she's renounced;
this boy angel
isn't touching the ground,
but his billow
of yardage refers
not to heaven
but to pleasure's
textures, the tactile
sheers and voiles
and tulles (16–17)

Shunning Auden's portentousness ("About suffering they were never wrong, / The Old Masters"), Doty trims the world's meaning to the textures of dressing up. Does this polyvalence



FIG. 2

Above: Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, detail of *Mercury Appearing to Aeneas*, 1757. Fresco. Villa Valmarana, Vicenza.



reflect an anxiety about Auden's influence? I've suggested that Bloom and Bakhtin theorize a vertical relation between precursor and newborn texts; the belated, already-spoken-for poet or novelist wrangles endlessly with a precursor's psychological (Bloom) or a stratified society's multileveled (Bakhtin) power. But, instead of agon, Doty imagines something more intimate—the intertext as a ménage with these elder poets. As well-known figures of speech are upgathered and stitched into lace or filigree (as ménage shifts to mélange), Doty's fellow poets become wardrobe masters or mistresses proffering old styles for the pleasure of messing around in someone else's clothes: wringing import from adornment.

Perhaps this is old hat, the assertion of a queer poetics where style (once again) becomes the dress of thought. But Doty uses even this idea to accessorize his poem. "Couture" ends with a flourish: "The world's made fabulous / by fabulous clothes" (19). When citation works as adornment, accessory, or supplement, ephemerality bends. Never originary or essential, the supplement is always secondhand, derived from the acts of others. But Doty's acknowledgment of the exorbitant need to dress or cite well builds strange and beautiful speech communities. His brief homage to Hopkins—"Even the words I'd choose / for these leaves: / intricate, stippled, foxed, / tortoise, mottled, splotched"—re-create imperfect echoes as "jeweled adjectives" (17–18): as if the best accessories were mottled and splotched, borrowed and blue, and metaphysics itself created from glittery hand-me-downs. Instead of measuring this action in Dimock's "deep time," Doty gives access to time made light: a momentary escape from the weight of history and an invitation to turn the past into play.

Intertext as Happiness; or, The Blissful Fold

"Couture" may mime the words of "Ode to Autumn," but when Doty folds Keats into his lines we also hear a fractal cry. Fold upon

fold creases each text. We see the drag queen sleeping in Keats's ode, the fear of mortal slumber in Doty. How should we respond to texts that are wrapped up in each other?

Hearing Spenser's sounds in *The Waste Land* or encountering the end of *Paradise Lost* at *The Prelude's* beginning still makes me swoon. These citations stall the forward beat of time and create an impossible sense of loose time (time not as static but as multi-layered, oscillating, multidirectional). Snared by citation, a poem or novel hovers; it moves backward and forward at once, as language systems banter or barter, as melodic lines sty-mie progress and bend, blend, or compete.

This creased and stuttering temporality, this fold in the progression of time, is one source of polyphony's bliss. If citation as ornament (as the vast world made light) represents my first frame for rethinking polyphony, in the second I want to investigate intertext as fold or entanglement: the danger of loose time. In Ian McEwan's *Saturday*, a novel set soon after 9/11, the characters see apparitional terrorists in their dreams; they fear the war in Iraq that is about to begin. Meanwhile, two thugs angry at the main character (Henry Perowne, a brain surgeon who escaped their ambush earlier in the day) attack his well-to-do London family. They force Perowne's daughter, a poet, to undress and read from her forthcoming book while she stands naked in front of her family: a prelude to rape. Trying to quell terror, her father hushes as she reads one of her poems: "The sea is calm tonight. The tide is full, the moon lies fair upon the straits—on the French coast the light gleams and is gone . . ." (229; ellipsis in orig.). Perowne performs a long and meticulous reading of this poem he thinks his daughter has written: "Henry discovers on second hearing no mention of the desert. The poem's melodiousness, he decides, is at odds with its pessimism" (230). Like any good literary critic, he keeps his distance. But the predator Baxter has an opposite response. Hearing this verse, he rises

in ecstasy. Daisy's nakedness becomes irrelevant, and he exclaims, "You wrote that.' And then, hurriedly, 'It's beautiful. You know that, don't you. It's beautiful. And you wrote it'" (231). Father and crook are unaware that she's reciting Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," a poem McEwan appends to his novel as its triumph and scourge (as if *Saturday* were as defenseless and ineffective, politically, as Arnold's poem was upon its darkling plain).

Why does McEwan envelop Arnold's poem in his novel? As Daisy reads, McEwan allows the reader a slow illumination, the pleasure of knowing in the midst of danger that *we* recognize this poem whereas others might not: surely a vertical, class-conscious pleasure. McEwan uses the learned reader's recognition to induce a sense of involvement with this family's wealth and elitism. To detect "Dover Beach," or even to read it back into the novel once you stumble across it in the appendix, is to participate in the happiness of recognition, to be lifted into class-based reading practices and the uneven sharing of world resources on which these practices are based. "Dover Beach" is a lure or a snare. Perhaps McEwan includes the full text of the poem as coda to make sure that even the unknowing reader will be implicated in Arnold's melodiousness and therefore put on the guilt of this family's power with its knowledge. If, like Henry, like Baxter, you don't know "Dover Beach," the novelist offers you another chance to join the beloved community.

But what if McEwan's aim is also to provide the reader with bliss—with the ecstasy in language that the weapon-wielding Baxter feels when a young woman recites an incredible poem at knifepoint, a poem she knows by heart? Like Baxter, the reader may be folded into, may get inside, the poem at the same moment the novel folds the poem into itself. To experience this tissue of intertextuality in a novel that depends, for its plot twists, on enveloped bits of poetry is to play with the way a poem resonates because you've been with it and because it is, or has been, inside you.

It is the model of polyphony as entanglement that interests me here, figured in Gilles Deleuze's concept of the fold. As Marjorie Levinson comments, "[I]nstead of a subject and object, an inside and outside when these are conceived as structurally distinct and (however infinitesimally) separated domains, the fold allows us to think differentiation, orientation, position, and therefore identity in terms of topological variation: not objects and events, but ceaseless self-relation" (70).

That is, McEwan invites us to play a vertical game (we're among the elect; we understand the poem) while insisting on its horizontal reach (as Baxter garners more aesthetic bliss from the poem than his learned companions do and, in an oxytocin rush, reaches out for help). Entangled in the poem, Baxter makes confusing contact with the inside and outside of the ethical. Although his body finally crumples under the poem's assault (Henry and his son attack Baxter and throw him down the stairs), the inclusion of "Dover Beach" is also about connectivity and its consequences.

According to Deleuze, "The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside" (*Foucault* 96–97). This may sound pretentious, but these concepts animate *Saturday*. Once we discover its poetic coda (long after McEwan has taught us that a poem can save a girl's life), "Dover Beach" is no longer "Dover Beach" but has become, as Bakhtin might say, multivoiced. It may open connections to nineteenth-century legacies, but it also enfolds current interstate miseries, as well as a new cry for classless community. This is not the same argument that Eliot makes in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" when he suggests that each addition to the tradition changes the tradition. Instead, under the aegis of the pleasure-building fold, polyvocality involves a messy and violent bringing together of communities. *Saturday's*

melodic entanglements (and its clashing bodies) ask us to experience the blissful-sad impact of classes and texts in motion.

Let me have another go at this. In *The Act of Reading* Wolfgang Iser describes a reader's response to a moment in *Ulysses* that forces the reader to compare Bloom's cigar to Ulysses's spear. "The very fact that we equate them causes us to be aware of their differences, and so to wonder why they should have been linked together" (129). This confusion prevents the reader from gaining a single vantage point. "What all these techniques of inversion have in common is the fact that the discrepancies produced by the reader make him dispute his own *gestalten*. . . . This involvement, or entanglement, is what places us in the 'presentness' of the text" (131). To tangle or be entangled is also a dominant metaphor in Dimock's *Through Other Continents*. "What [fractal geometry] allows us to see is a tangle of relations, one that counts as a 'system' precisely because its aberrations are systemwide, because pits and bumps come with many loops and layers of filiation" (78). In Dimock's study of intertexts, "deep time" becomes the wellspring of "tangled history" (33), in which millennia and continents loop the loop and literature becomes "a densely interactive fabric . . . the home of nonstandard space and time" (3–4). Uneven duration and irregular extension pull citizen readers across centuries and beyond nation-states, invoking affiliations with unexpected origins and inviting us into pools of meaning of "indeterminate depth" (103).

In *Saturday* McEwan's exploration of allusion as bliss creates just this extra involvement with the sutures or discrepancies in both novel and poem as each other's intertext. We achieve not the comfort, the suckling, of intimacy but a suprainvolvement that is sensuous, intellectually bracing, and politically demanding. The only way to handle these loose strands of time is to keep folding and unfolding the text, which folds and unfolds us in return—to submit to reading as entanglement.

Seeing and Not Seeing: Cryptic or Ghostly Citation

In the bliss of the fold we measure the pleasures of polyphony, the circling of source and citation, the game of pleating each inside and outside the other, of noticing where "iron nails run in" and where they run out: the comedy of suture and the ethic of making soliloquy chorus. Polyphonies can present themselves as games or riddles that ride past an accustomed polity and catch us off guard—like Henry or Baxter—with communal longing and disorderly pleasure.

In my third reframing of polyphony I want to recover citation as hyperactive ghost, an obscure loop that calls readers, perhaps against their wills, to claim alien or abject kinship groups. The producer RZA says that "[f]or hip hop, the main thing is to have a good trained ear, to hear the most obscure loop or sound or rhythm inside of a song. If you can hear the obscureness of it, and capture that and loop it at the right *tempo*, you're going to have some nice music man, you're going to have a nice hip hop track" ("Sampling"). What happens to allusions one overlooks, to polyphony designed to appear and disappear?

In *A Room of One's Own* Virginia Woolf takes a fragment spoken by a woman who committed infanticide and layers it deep in her essay. "[N]ot every sample is a huge chunk of a song," the Beastie Boys say.

We might take a tiny little insignificant sound from a record and then slow it way down and put it deep in the mix with, like, 30 other sounds on top of it. It's not even a recognizable sample at that point. Which is a lot different from taking a huge, obvious piece from some hit song that everyone knows and saying whatever you want to on top of that loop. ("Sampling")

Woolf's uneven kinship web emerges as ghostwritten citation designed to oscillate, to speak with the still small voice of the dead. Early on the narrator declares, "Here then was

I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance) sitting on the banks of a river . . . in fine October weather, lost in thought.” Woolf sweeps us into the glowing foliage of the riverbank; its willows weep “in perpetual lamentation, their hair about their shoulders.” In this landscape of grief an undergraduate oars by, and the river’s reflections open for him, then close “completely, as if he had never been. There one might have sat the clock round lost in thought. Thought—to call it by a prouder name than it deserved—had let its line down into the stream” (5). As Woolf describes the fishlike vulnerability of a new idea, her narrator is accosted by a Beadle who dries up this “wash and tumult of ideas”: “he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path” (6).

By now there are at least thirty loops of sound freighting the “sample” that begins this fast-flowing paragraph. Who can recall it? “Here then was I (call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance).” Woolf lifts this allusion (encrypted or muffled by the surge of her sentences) from the sixteenth-century “Ballad of Mary Hamilton.” One of “four Marys” who were handmaids to Mary, Queen of Scots, Mary Hamilton is an infanticidal mother. She has lain with or been raped by the queen’s consort and gives birth to a baby, who is sent out to sea and disappears (like the young oarsman?) “as if he had never been.” The ballad ends when Mary Hamilton is about to be executed; in plainspoken poetry she excludes herself from all future tense:

Last night there were four Marys,
Tonight there’ll be but three.
There was Mary Beton and Mary Seton,
And Mary Carmichael and me.⁴

Woolf elides Mary Hamilton’s name, but she keeps calling it near. Mary Hamilton approaches in the story of Mary Seton’s mother

(who was so busy with children that she did not provide endowments for women’s colleges); in the fable of the narrator’s mythical aunt Mary Beton (who, falling from her horse in Bombay, left the narrator five hundred pounds a year for a room of her own); and in the tale of the hypothetical Mary Carmichael, who has written a novel about Chloe’s love for Olivia. Mary Hamilton approaches, but she keeps falling out of the story; she greets a suicidal avatar in the nightingale-breathed Judith Shakespeare, who, finding “herself with child” by Nick Greene the actor manager, killed herself “one winter’s night and lies buried at some cross-roads where the omnibuses stop outside the Elephant and Castle” (48).

A discarded child, a discarded mother, a discarded voice. Iser argues that the blanks in a text “make the reader bring the story itself to life” by promoting connectivity (202). But the blankness of Mary Hamilton’s name passes so quickly that it lacks connecting fascia. It operates as a ghost in the text: a story deliberately and repeatedly withheld. By refusing the voice she projects onto the other three Marys, Woolf creates paradoxical space for our kinship with the dead in *A Room of One’s Own*; Mary Hamilton testifies from a ghostly loop: a polyphonic chorus of women who struggle (as Mary Hamilton so imperfectly struggled) to surmount the costs of heterosexual subordination. *A Room of One’s Own* offers another example of a communal polyphony, in which Mary Hamilton becomes, even in her absence, the blank-voiced equal of the narrator herself. At the essay’s end when Woolf asks the reader to prepare a place for a new Judith Shakespeare, Mary Hamilton and her drowned child may be elliptically included: “As for her coming without that preparation, without that effort on our part, without that determination that when she is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry, that we cannot expect, for that would be impossible.” And yet Woolf adds that “she would come if we worked for her” (114). Cocreativity is not just about pleasure; it is also about

Fig. 3
Christ Pantocrator,
13th century. Detail
of a mosaic. Hagia
Sophia, Istanbul.

labor. Woolf reaches into the ghostly loop so that the hard facts of sex work, childbirth, and child rearing might not disappear completely into the annals of absence.

Unread Citation

I have suggested three ways to reassess citation. First, as an accessory or sample citation lightens the weight of the past and makes the co-ownership of meaning pleasurable. Second, as enfolding bliss the intertext demands entanglement or involvement with asynchronous, unfolding, still-vital and space-collapsing histories. Third, in ghostly citation the *inter* goes missing. Polyphony can drown, or bob out of sight, and yet still call the missing text near. But what happens when citation does not call, when an audience simply abandons entanglement?

We glimpse unmarked or unread citation as a central plot device in Flannery O'Connor's "Parker's Back." In its sad ending a southern laborer and ex-sailor, A. O. Parker, comes home to his wife, Sarah Ruth, bearing a new tattoo on his back. Though Parker wants to deploy this tattoo to earn her love, the spellbinding face of the Byzantine Christ covering his back remains unread (fig. 3).

"Another picture," Sarah Ruth growled. "I might have known you was off putting some more trash on yourself."

Parker's knees went hollow under him. . . .
"Look at it!"

"I done looked," she said.

"Don't you know who it is?" he cried in anguish.

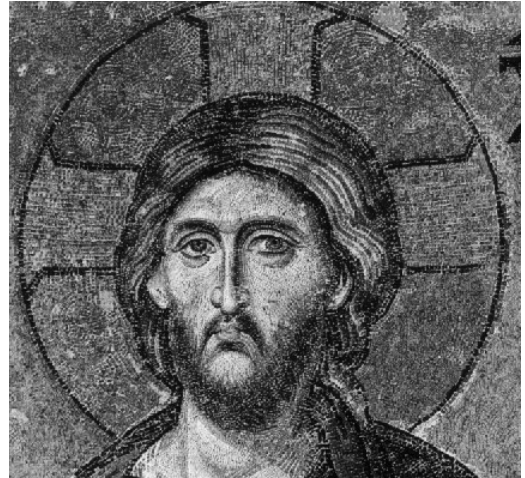
Parker longs to make his skin sacred to his wife's snakey touch:

"Know who is it?" Sarah Ruth said. "It ain't anybody I know."

"It's him," Parker said.

"Him who?"

"God!" Parker cried.



"God? God don't look like that! . . . He's a spirit. No man shall see his face."

"Aw listen," Parker groaned, "this is just a picture of him."

"Idolatry!" Sarah Ruth screamed. "Idolatry! Inflaming yourself with idols under every green tree." (529)

To recognize this icon's meaning in the Georgia countryside, Sarah Ruth needs knowledge of the visual history of Christianity or a picture book like the one the tattoo artist uses, or she needs to be Catholic like O'Connor. Instead, "[s]he grabbed up the broom and began to thrash him across the shoulders," while Parker "let her beat him until she had nearly knocked him senseless and large welts had formed on the face of the tattooed Christ" (529). Outside he leans against a tree, "crying like a baby." Having covered himself with citations, Parker becomes something his wife abhors, an icon of suffering; he is doubly defaced.

I want to posit unread citation as a fourth frame for rethinking polyphony. Iser says that "the social norms and literary allusions that constitute the two basic elements of the [writerly] repertoire are drawn from two quite different systems: the first from historical thought systems, and the second from past literary [or iconic] reactions to historical problems" (81). But what happens to readers outside these systems? In 2006 the Libyan American poet

Khaled Mattawa circulated a poem about his cat, "Buster," to the fellows at the University of Michigan's Institute for the Humanities:

His name is Buster and he busts what he can.
 For this is more than a lifetime's worth
 of words and what they shake off
 from the branches or gather
 from waves, mist, and foam.
 For he has brought me to the time of my living.
 For in my weakness I'm now a specimen of the
 majority.
 For I consider him my little brother.
 For I've almost given up on wishing upon
 myself the prestige of an interesting
 pathology.
 For he has slept beside me like a lover.
 For he once brought me the lower half of a
 squirrel, gutted and clean.

In the English tradition, Buster follows Christopher Smart's cat Jeoffry, which "leaps up to catch the musk" (line 701). The readers of Mattawa's poem are asked to play the game of disentangling, differentiating, and then putting together texts that are wrapped up in each other. Still, colleagues who were oblivious to this polyphony loved the poem too, perhaps because Smart's funky homage to the rhythms of the King James Bible broke through Mattawa's poem in citational waves.

But in another of his poems, "Before Huron," Mattawa describes "the Canaanite who watched a star wane / then burning flood the horizon with its / flesh-colored wax." He explained that in the Koran Abraham believes in the sun as God, but when the sun goes down he begins to believe in the moon and then turns to monotheism. Listening to this explanation, I found myself delighted, embarrassed, and lost. Not having read the Koran or studied its reception, I could not get entangled, could not read closely enough. Intimidated, I remembered that sacred texts are not equivalent. Not only are the Koran's stories different from Jewish and Christian tales, but the repertoires of quoting, the citational etiquettes, are

different too. At what point would I become an adequate reader of Mattawa's poem?

Since modernism has a high tolerance for the unread, since its readers, as Iser explains, expect to be "non-fulfilled" (208), perhaps half ignorance is an appropriate reading strategy. Since Bloom argues that every strong reading is a misprision, should we bow to the inevitability of reading wrong? But what do we do with the truth claims religious texts try to enforce—important for Sarah Ruth and for the Islamic and Jewish Abrahams?

The unread citation is an ethical challenge. Opening oneself to polyphony means struggling to abandon a tightly wrapped ethnocentrism. Polyphony offers, after all, a threshold as well as a fold. It demands hospitality: the attempt to transcend mere identity by seeking a deliberative bliss and entanglement. Instead of putting on style as philosophic accessory, polyphony can demand wearing another culture as the full dress of thought. Although Sarah Ruth and other orientalist exclude "unreadable" citations as immoral or exotic, for the rest of us the unread allusion can become a great leveler, a space of stretched and insistent horizons. Even if we carry the baggage of duplicate or triplicate cultures on our backs, we can never keep up with a multiple, hyper-allusive universe but must listen as deeply into polyphony as we can, as if attending to something blank and astonishing.

The essays in this issue suggest still more strategies for polyphonic reading; they resurrect the problem of multivoicedness for a new scholarly age. Reinaldo Laddaga's "From Work to Conversation: Writing and Citizenship in a Global Age" describes the ways that "very large-scale conversations" constructed by Web technology change the nature of authorship. Laddaga replaces the fixed textual object with writing systems that expand when they are shared, creating texts that displace nation-states with Web-based communities. The Internet may be the ultimate polyphonic medium, where stories never end and the edges

or margins between collaboratively produced texts disappear. Laddaga's thinking about the horizontal, collective potentials of Wu Ming, an Italian literary collective, and *Translation Map*, an interactive translation site, trace new Internet outposts in a network of songlines.

Pauline Yu's "Your Alabaster in This Porcelain": Judith Gautier's *Le livre de jade*" describes Gautier's translations of Chinese poetry into French as imperfect but valuable interventions. Yu argues that Gautier's contemporary culture (rather than the Chinese culture these translations might more accurately reflect) sounds a dominant note in her translated poems. But instead of critiquing these poems as flawed, Yu celebrates Gautier as cocreator of a transcultural *poetry in transit* that ushers in a new era of French respect for Chinese verse. In a nineteenth-century cultural milieu that had imagined this poetry to be quaint and primitive, Gautier reveals its sophistication by transposing Chinese verse into images her French readers could applaud and comprehend.

Richard John Ascárate's "Have You Ever Seen a Shrunken Head?: The Early Modern Roots of Ecstatic Truth in Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*" describes the voracity of Herzog's unconscious colonial intertexts. In a film about the entrepreneurial Brian Sweeney Fitzgerald's attempt to move a riverboat across a tall mountain (he needs funds to build an opera house in the Peruvian jungle), Ascárate discovers an imperial unconscious that entangles Herzog in images he had hoped to eschew.

Laurie Langbauer's "The Ethics and Practice of Lemony Snicket: Adolescence and Generation X" places Snicket's Baudelaire orphans in the thick of adolescent indecisiveness, Gen X thinking, and metafictional self-interest. She explores the ethics of reading in an author who finds source texts in Capote, LeGuin, Melville, Nabokov, Nietzsche, Plato, Poe, Sterne, Swinburne, and Tolstoy, among others. Langbauer looks at allusions as name-

dropping or accessories, but their perverse pastiche also opens a path to the ethical. If reading offers the Baudelaire orphans clues to escape their predicaments, it is also a goad to adventures in which one is forced to make ethical guesses in the midst of tragedy.

Gregory Machacek's "Allusion" systematizes a new glossary of allusive writing. His coinage "phraseological adaptation" is designed to bestow a more precise nomenclature on the science of reference making. While I have used the terms *allusion* and *intertext* interchangeably, Machacek separates them, revisiting Kristeva's definition of intertextuality as the sum of knowledge systems that allow texts to mean and adding his own definition of intertextuality as the "saturation of one text by phrases from the entire literary tradition." His careful enunciation of "allusion" and "echo" and his invention of a fresh terminology for thinking about polyphony, including "reprise," "spur," and "phraseological adaptation," opens a new technical vocabulary—not only for formal thinking but also for more historically precise delineations that can result in new stipulations for thinking about intertexts in contemporary criticism.

Finally, the March issue's state-of-the-art essays explore sites where two or more histories become complexly enmeshed. Nancy Miller argues eloquently for autobiography as an entanglement of self and other; Mary Ann Caws impishly describes the experience of reading women writers' biographies while being tangled up in her bedclothes; and Marjorie Levinson critiques the formal politics and poetics of a wide range of reading practices and defines new formalism as a set of critical projects to be disentangled from prior formalist philosophies.

Like these essays, Marc D. Cyr's "Journey of the MLA Job Candidates" is not to be missed. Cyr pays homage to T. S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" while parodying the absurd situation of job seekers sojourning at the December MLA convention. For Cyr's narrator,

this humbling journey approximates the winter fandango of the wise men seeking Christ.

Eliot's poem is already part of a conversation, one among Anglicans fascinated by Christian mystery. Eliot begins by citing, with reverence, Lancelot Andrewes's sermon on the nativity:

"A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter."
And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling. . .

Eliot extends Andrewes's story, making it vivid with detail and regret. In contrast, the coming of the job candidates is material, cynical, and jaded, but also very funny.⁵

A bunch of us new PhDs went together,
And a cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year—
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The roads hubcap-deep in slush,
The airport jammed with holiday families,
Little kids lying down on the concourse floor,
Snot-nosed, screaming, refractory,
Even the Hare Krishnas cursing and
grumbling,
The ticket agents hostile, the flight attendants
unfriendly. . .

While Eliot limns the wise men traveling at night and hearing voices "singing in our ears, saying / That this was all folly," the MLA narrator takes the red-eye and hears his dad "Muttering as he loaned me the airfare, / 'You could've gone to B-school.'" While Eliot asks an epic question, "were we led all that way for / Birth or Death? . . . I should be glad of another death," the MLA parody is deflationary, as the narrator wonders whether the per-

ilous trip to the convention is worth it "[f]or one lousy interview." Being a "part-time temp" at one's alma mater is a drag: "With all your old crowd gone off / And the new bunch seeming like aliens to you, / But for a position teaching five sections of comp? / Tenure-track or not, I'd rather die."

Allusions may give pleasure, but they also help fuel the self-recognition of in-groups. To enjoy Cyr's poem one needs to have journeyed with Eliot's grim magi and to have experienced the economic straits of MLA job seeking and hazing. But the polyphony that results suggests that intertexts can also be gifts in which several histories come together and jam.

As a last example I would like to explore a ghostly or encrypted citation in Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*, an ode to the pleasures of pairing (fig. 4). In this painting Bacchus finds his mate, Ariadne; companionate panthers pull Bacchus's cart; male and female revelers exchange leering glances; Silenus finds wino love; and the little dog in the foreground bonds with a boyish satyr (who prompts a mischievous bond with the viewer). But in the right foreground a reveler evades these happy pairs. Tangled in snakes, earthen-colored, and self-involved, he seems to hail from a different world. In fact, more than a decade before Titian painted *Bacchus and Ariadne*, excavators discovered a statue of Laocoön and his sons buried in the basement of one of Nero's palaces (fig. 5); as echoed in this snake-wrapped figure, the sculpture became a popular allusion for Titian and his contemporaries.

It is possible to be enraptured by Titian's painting without knowing this history. But once it is known, the snake man's entanglement is like a prophecy, a proto-history of how companionate intimacy ends. As Susan Gustafson writes, "While the abject may appear to lie completely outside the boundaries of narcissistic unity, it actually surrounds, penetrates, and entangles those boundaries. Abjection reveals itself as a narcissistic crisis demonstrating the fragility of fantasies



FIG. 4
Titian, *Bacchus and Ariadne*, 1520–23. Oil on canvas, 69½ × 75¼ in. (176.5 × 191 cm). National Gallery, London.

of unity as it encroaches on or becomes the borders of the symbolic order” (1087). One could say that Titian’s allusion to *Laocoön and His Sons* becomes the navel of this picture, inviting us to break the painting open to see its historical and psychological layers. The snake-bound Laocoön ruptures the narcissistic fantasy of love and unity driving Titian’s primary “plot” and reveals almost too much about penetration and imploding orifices: the world-weariness of intimacy as it turns into entanglement. The half-buried or encrypted reference breaks into the bounty of the painting, smearing the work’s smooth

iconicity and opening its companionable images to trauma.

I have stressed the horizontal dimension of polyphony, but here lost time seems to emerge from the deep to challenge the shallows of love and community. Nonetheless, one could argue that Titian’s snake-entangled Laocoön offers an image of the unending sutures of polyphony. His torso may be contorted in agony, but the creases of his body communicate bliss.

Patricia Yaeger



Fig. 5

Agesander, Athenodorus, and Polydorus, *Laocoön and His Sons*, c. 100 BC. Height: 72½ in. (184 cm). Vatican Museums.

NOTES

I thank Carol Bardenstein, Brenda Marshall, Christi Merrill, Valerie Traub, and John Whittier-Ferguson for their generous help with this essay.

1. I do not mean to underplay the density of Bakhtin's thought, but want to emphasize two points. First, because language is "ideologically saturated" it ensures "a maximum of understanding in all spheres of ideological life" (271). Extending this idea, Bakhtin argues that when language is most heteroglossic, it is also dialogic; it enacts "a struggle among socio-linguistic points of view" (273). Second, each utterance brushes up "against thousands of living dialogic threads. . . . [I]t cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue" (276). Each word is an answer, and yet it comes to the page streaming contexts and prior intentions. Each word is linked by a web or network to the horizons of its community. Despite this horizontal vision, for Bakhtin the work of literature crystallizes vertical contestation, as language is "drawn into the battle between points of view" and value judgments (315). The time line Bakhtin offers is near mythic: "both object and language are revealed to the novelist in their historical dimension, in the process of social and heteroglot becoming" (330).

2. See, e.g., the work of Andres Serrano, Ana Mendieta, and Jeannette Christensen (Bal 54–55, 48, 33).

3. That is, Bloom's and Bakhtin's models continue to provide rich, intriguing opportunities for reading. In Michael Awkward's book on song covers, for example, Aretha Franklin's "strong misreadings" of older artists' songs vibrate with the politics of influence. "The truly exceptional tribute album is anything but an exercise in preservation, obeisance, and fidelity. Instead, it is an opportunity for the younger artist to present herself as no longer 'a true fan' striving to honor her idol's performances, but as a highly skilled craftsperson struggling to capture the listener's 'imagination' from the tenacious hold of her predecessor. Employing her vocal and intellectual resources to reshape her predecessor's texts, the younger artist seeks to refashion the 'imprint' of the listener's memory in order to establish her own artistic significance" (32).

4. I cite the Baez ballad for its accessibility. Woolf could have known the ballad in any number of versions. Here is the ending of Child's version A:

Last night there was four Maries,
The night there 'l be but three;
There was Marie Seton, and Marie Beton,
And Marie Carmichael, and me. (385)

Several versions have a different cadence ("Yestreen the queen had four Maries, / The night she'll hae but three . . ." [vers. I; 393]); some leave out this stanza altogether.

5. Eliot's magi see "three trees on the low sky" "an old white horse" that gallops away in the meadow, "a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel," and six hands "dicing for pieces of silver." The magi are vouchsafed an epiphany they cannot recognize, but for the reader this epiphany opens up Eliot's sad poem to the promise of future sacrifice as birth.

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