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**Essay (queer). The. Essay. Queer. And. All. That.**

Abstract:

What is this thing we call/name essay, and what is its relationship to queer? This paper claims that the joy of essay (and queer) is that there are no answers necessarily – the pleasure or *jouissance* is in what the search might bring and where it might take you; how the search is, or might be expressed. Essay (queer) elevates all that is tangential, oblique, unspoken, transitory, ambiguous, unsettled, peculiar, strange. Maggie Nelson sets the scene with an exposition of language, experience, and reasons for keeping on writing, giving us her *why-I-write* moment. What follows in this paper, with examples, is a consideration of etymologies, form, unconventions, and desire. In shaping a view, the approach taken ruptures the so-called borders between scholarly and creative to present a fluid, free-forming thing that does what Nelson suggests is ‘*never as certain, but always as possible*’ (2015: 142). It takes pleasure in Hélène Cixous’s *imund* or ‘not unclean’ idea of writing (1993).

Biographical note:

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Key words:

Genre – Fragment – Experiment

*i. Essay*

Maggie Nelson sets the scene. On the opening page of your edition of her latest work *The Argonauts* (2015), a book-length essay that puts ‘theory into experiential, working contexts, rather than thinking it through on an abstract level’ (Cotton 2015: 2), you read of risk and love and ‘hard to get’ morphing into recall of Wittgenstein’s idea of the inexpressible being contained in the expressed – ‘inexpressibly!’ (exclamation mark, and all) (Nelson 2015: 3). Nelson tries out everything here, tests the limits of language and experience. For Nelson it is her *why-I-write* moment or how she is able to keep writing. ‘Words are good enough,’ she claims (3).

You read the opening page over and over trying to fathom what it is she is saying, what she is at pains to introduce: eucalyptus trees being ‘widowmakers’, fucking on the floor with a face against concrete, the ‘I love you’ tumbling out of the mouth. This is your pleasure too you want to tell her; it doesn’t get better than this. Because you also understand not wanting to feed or exalt what cannot be said. You know what it takes to put words and sentences together so they try to make sense, how to govern syntax and vocabulary (or not; how it sometimes governs you), and the desire to beguile the reader. You can see how she is seducing you into believing her with a heady mix of the personal and formal, quote and counter-quote, her pinhole precision, and use of fragment. Yes, how she gathers up bits and snitches, scraps and shards, and how these fragments balloon around ideas to form something you might like to wear, try on for size. You have been in an empty church with a dirt floor and made similar observations, if not these exact words: ‘nothing you say can fuck up the space for God’ (3). You read her note she found in an encyclopaedia:

*It is idle to fault a net for having holes.* (Ibid.; italics original)

This is what writers do. Writers make paragraphs out of sentences out of their experience and their thinking and this is what they call writing. Words put after words put after words to make sense.

But then you turn the page and read quite the opposite, about words *not* being good enough. How language really does have its faults; that it is corrosive: ‘corrosive to all that is good, all that is real, all that is flow’ (4). How there is division between what is named and the unnameable; how once something is named there is no going back to any before. ‘[W]e can never see it the same way again’, Nelson writes (4). She continues to write in fragments – the fragment that is, according to Roland Barthes, self-sufficient, ‘the interstice of its neighbours’ (2010: 94) – blending the words of others seamlessly with her own – ‘for a time, I thought I had won,’ she writes in a following paragraph (2015: 4) – co-joining ideas in leaps and cartwheels across the page in a cumulative effect as you progress through the book. The names of theorists in small print begin to appear in the margins as tiny but significant navigational points, making room in its patterning for the aside, and ‘cantillation’ to use a Barthesian term (Barthes 2002), and/or its put-togetherness. You notice different quantities of white space between paragraphs and passages – you measure them with your reading thumb – to denote varying levels of connection, or not, perhaps. There is room and recognition for *your* reading of her reading in the reading of this text, a feathering together of her writerly cantillation with yours. But, Nelson argues, don’t be fooled, there is blood on

our hands, something is lost, is murdered. We need to mind our tongues, what we commit to language. In one fell swoop, like a kookaburra diving for a worm, it makes you think about ethics and writing – *and reading*: for whom does the writer put word after word? Where is the reader in all this? What might (or should) be held back? What is not for the taking? Why write, yes, but also, why read?

Here in the opening pages Nelson heralds the beginning of an essay on essaying where the reader is the one trying things out on her tongue, for taste, for size: for gratification. Later, Nelson writes:

So far as I can tell, most worthwhile pleasures on this earth slip between gratifying another and gratifying oneself. Some would call that an ethics. (96)

Is she right? There is nowhere to hide here; when you write, you expose your thoughts, and how you think. Your writing can be taken different ways, as defense, as manifesto, as assertion of value and desire, water tight, or full of holes (even when there are meant to be holes), and there is really nothing you can do about that, except to present it, allow it to exist. But when you read, ah, when you read, what happens in the space between the page and your reading body, between the writer's thinking-out-loud and the reader's return-thinking in private; what kind of essaying or queering tract of enquiry and knowledge-making goes on in this opening? How confident can any reader be? What do you really know? Here is a shout out to the doubting, uncertain, indecisive, indeterminate reader: the queer reader.

Nelson queers the essay good and proper in these early pages, from the get-go; she resists the order she just set out; where we thought we were going with all this; whose point of view we readers thought we could believe. (As an aside, it is worth noting Nelson's view on the essay is not that flattering: 'I don't think all essays are domesticated, but for some reason that's the connotation the word has for me' [Fleischmann 2015b: 1].) She undermines her own thinking with this wildness, undercuts the stability of what she has just written and only a page before. She asks us to look at things another way. Consider (reconsider) what it would mean to have these same words flow backwards, against. Take into account the very language we are speaking with, but speculate on what it might mean to have it spoken at large to a different tune; in other words, she asks what happens to the stuff that is in the margins, *between* those fragments of text, that is relegated to remaining outside language, to the matter of silence; that which is mute, unnameable, also undefined, queer.

Perhaps this is why Nelson favours the fragment as both a structural and stylistic device: text interwoven with white (empty) space as a performance of self, where narrative is found in the gathering together of the detritus and leavings of life. Why she leans towards that which is fractured, that which is always and only made up of parts, that thing that flows *because* it is in bits and pieces; an un-gendered space, riddled, as she says, with 'tics of uncertainty' (98). Her critics like it too: '[Nelson's writing] float[s] across categories, now memoir, now poetry, now philosophy, now criticism, too fleet and witty and subtle to be pinned down' (Laing 2015: 1). Or this: '[i]t is kinetic and arbitrary, and encourages readers to challenge their own assumptions' (Gleeson 2016: 2). Might this be a sort of queerness in both expression and content, and *keep-readingness*, structured on a central turn, as defined by Heather Love in *Feeling*

*Backwards: loss and the politics of queer history*, that is both ‘abject and exalted, a mixture of delicious and freak’ (2009: 2-3)? Because in the end, after stories upon stories upon confessions about the joys and complexities of falling in love, of giving birth, of living *and being* a queer family, Nelson wavers and prevaricates: she asks out loud, challenging her own assumptions and reasoning, was this the right thing to do? Specifically, what will her son think? Does she say too much? Might she destroy that which she wants to preserve? What happens next?

*I want you to know, you were thought of as possible – never as certain, but always as possible [...] [b]ut really there is no such thing as reproduction, only acts of production. No lack, only desiring machines. (Nelson 2015: 142-143; italics original)*

You decide then, this is your *why-I-read* moment.

## ii. (queer).

So what of this verb *to essay*, *to queer*, with action, something to do: as occurrence.

Any English noun can be verbed, but some are more resistant than others. In grammar the word *verb* can either be a noun, as we all know – as in a word to describe an action or incident – or it can be used as a verb with an object. The usage in the latter case is of a word that is not conventionally used as a verb, typically a noun, being used as a verb. Or, to put it another way: *I hate the verbing of that particular noun.*

Most readers will know that the word ‘essay’ comes from the French *essai*, as Jeff Porter points out in his essay ‘A History and Poetics of the Essay’, in *Understanding the Essay* (Foster & Porter 2012), where the verb form, *essayer*, means to attempt, to experiment, to try out (8). There needs to be effort to do something here. Action: one step in front of the other in a line of actions, like writing. This is attempt (literally *to tempt*). It is about testing out of ideas. Taking risks. Playing with something you have never played with, or at before.

Being seduced as the trier and the tried.

*Trying* here from the Old French *trier* ‘to sift’. If we try something on, we see if it fits, if it is suitable, if it tickles our fancy.

To try, after all, is a modest claim: it implies something partial, not quite whole. It makes no great declarations of total understanding. Its work is always unfinished. (Madore & Ventura 2016: 1)

If we dig the work of essaying we become like hermit crabs (Walker & Singer 2013), trying on different shells to see what works for our needs, what fits, what doesn’t; or drag queen – how we get a kick out of assuming the guise of the other, and dance. All the while refusing to be pinned down. Which would explain why Maggie Nelson has a partiality for fragments, for un-spoken, the never-as-certain.

*But always as possible.*

The metaphors of marginality and white space, of unspoken truth and elision, of disjunction and community are all readily available (just as the fact that

genre and gender share an etymology always remains conveniently obvious).  
(Fleischmann 2013: 50)

The idea here of essay-as-verb (queer-as-verb) accommodates the free flowing, unsettled nature of the endeavour, its looseness and transient character, and impermanence: indeterminacy. There is always *doing* to do. You could say the idea of queering, just like the idea of essaying, never gets there – and that’s the point – that any ‘there’ is only that, that which fits its own purposes.

Kazim Ali asks: ‘To read [writing] as “fiction” or as “essays” means what?’ Isn’t genre, he reasons, echoing Riki Wilchins, ‘a form of drag?’ (2013: 30). Like gender, it is constructed, a subjective act influenced by taste and value, idea and opinion.

Genre, like gender, is not so much passé as it is *boring*. (38)

Both genre and gender are acted out, they happen in the doing of it. They need to be verbed – gendered, *genred* – in much the same way that anthropologist Tim Ingold speaks of human *becomings* rather than human beings, he writes: ‘to human is a verb’ (2015: 115). This allows for all sorts of variations and deviations and goings on.

And we think Maggie Nelson would agree.

### **iii. *The*.**

A determiner is a modifying word that determines the kind of reference point the following noun has. In this case, not *an essay*, which is non-specific, generalised and inexact, but *the essay*, in reference to a particular sort of presentation of writing, a way of speaking, to genre.

As noted by the call-out for papers for this Special Issue on The Essay: ‘[T]he essay is a diverse and fluid genre and attentiveness to issues of definition seem important’ (Robertson & Cardell, pers. comm. February 2016).

The. Definite article. Noun. Grammar. A determiner (‘the’ in English) that introduces a noun phrase and implies that the very thing mentioned has already been mentioned, or is common knowledge, or is about to be defined. As opposed to indefinite article: a determiner (‘a’ or ‘an’ in English) that introduces a noun phrase and implies that the thing referred to is non-specific. Typically, the indefinite article is used to introduce new concepts into a discourse – which is not the case in this instance.

So we already know something. *The essay*. Definite article. It might even be common knowledge.

### **iv. *Essay*.**

Consider. Essay not as verb but as noun. There is so much to say here, but not too much. The truth is collations of what has already been said and written about the essay, has already been said, and written.

Okay, but if you had to say what your top picks were besides Michel de Montaigne’s (1533–1592) *que-sais-je*, what would they be?

Well there is Theodor W. Adorno of course. You keep hold of him only because he speaks of heresy and, coming from a religious family, you like this word; you know heretics were burnt at the stake, you learnt this fact at your mother's knee.

[The essay] does not begin with Adam and Eve but with what it wants to discuss; it says what is at issue and stops where it feels itself complete – not where nothing is left to say. (Adorno 1984: 152)

Adorno also talks of play and luck (152), discontinuity as essential (164), biases of the essay towards openness (165), and a certain sort of arbitrariness inherent in the endeavour – although he is quick to point out this does not mean the essay is random; the essay's openness 'obtains its contour from its content' (165).

By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object, which it is orthodoxy's secret purpose to keep invisible. (Adorno 1984: 171)

There is also Roland Barthes, where essay is a method of thinking out loud, essay as 'a natural consequence of thought' (Madore 2016: 1). Barthes considers essay to be a particular genre that predates this thing we know of as genre. It has a status all of its own: is *before* genre – which has a lovely irony to it where 'before genre' or perhaps what Hélène Cixous calls *imund* or out-of-the-world writing (the *not unclean* writing) (1993: 117) *becomes* a genre. Anti-genre if you like (Bensmaïa 1987).

More recently and closer to home, Maria Tumarkin's review of Megan Daum's book *The Unspeakable* puts it pretty well:

[Essays] are for picking up ideas, feelings, forces in the air, still unnamed and amorphous, and giving them a foothold in language. Whatever is in the air and whatever is disappearing – unnoticed, unmourned. They are for resisting choices offered to us that are not true, yet made to seem inescapable. (Tumarkin 2015: 7)

(As an aside: Tumarkin also asks why, in Australia, there aren't more essayists, especially from gifted writers from outside the literary establishment? She asks, where in Australia are there books [of essays], which are held together not by a narrative but by 'a sensibility, or a consciousness, or a voice, or way of moving through the world' [4].)

Unsurprisingly, you gravitate towards voices from writers who identify as queer, who in their very language approach the topic obliquely hinting at synergies between content and form, *logos* and *lexis*. For example, T Clutch Fleischmann ruminates on the relationship between their desire for essay and desire for queer as being a little bit dangerous (where they want everyone or everything to be both queer and essay), like promiscuity, because the risk is that in order to get what you want, you disregard or eliminate difference. For example they once wanted to see Gertrude Stein as a trans man writing essays – how interesting that would be, how tongues would wag, and what would Alice B. Tolkas have to say about that – but realised if they named her like this they would in fact erase what she was (Fleischmann 2015a: v). Of essay and queer Fleischmann writes:

They are only what we make of them in the moment we claim them, and in the moment others encounter us, and in the moments after that, too. (Ibid.: vi)

Because the question is, Fleischmann asks, will there come a time when queerness and/or essay becomes less interesting, when the two ideas as such become extinct, merely things along with other things on a spectrum – that is to say, when queerness loses its interest as resistance to any sense of identity, and essay and ‘its way of slipping among genres’ loses its interest in relation to fluidity and heresy (Ibid.). Because, to put it more precisely: in order to bend rules, there have to be rules to bend.

Still: the joy of the essay (and queer) is that there are no answers necessarily – the pleasure or *jouissance* is what the search might bring, where it might take us, and how it is, or might be expressed. The essay, as we have seen, is about thinking out loud about ideas or half-ideas, or scratching an itch, and in the very thinking about that thing, or the itch, the essay (and queer) *through that thinking* becomes something that is different; it transports us somewhere new and unexpressed until that very moment. Essay (queer) elevates all that is tangential, oblique, unspoken, transitory, ambiguous, unsettled, peculiar, strange.

#### v. *Queer.*

Maggie Nelson confesses she is afraid of assertion, what she calls totalising language. That is, language which ignores the particular, is crafted out of in-built assumptions, and elevates a kind of rightness. Hence the ‘tics of uncertainty’ in her writing (2015: 98). She slashes and cuts them out, editing herself into some sort of boldness, taking risks, mustering courage; admitting unknowingness by knowing that state of becomingness precisely.

At the same time you are writing this essay on essaying queer and all that, you are doing some editing of your own, you are responding to corrections on your bent essay ‘Sub Rosa’ for three contrapuntal voices published in *The Lifted Brow*’s folio on ‘the queer unconscious’ (Rendle-Short 2016). If pressed to stake a claim, you are not sure what it is you have written; essaying like queering is such a subliminal practice. On the surface it is a story about meeting a trans woman for the first time as a Pinkie, or ward cleaner, on a male orthopaedic ward when you are a teenager (at a time when everything queer was banned in Queensland), plus also the question of pronouns and how they can find you out: gossip, traction and luminosity. But beneath, it is a hint at something else, fall-from-grace perhaps, about incarceration and longing. In any case, doing these corrections is a chance to read your self before being read by others, to experience (again) the intimacy of the reading body reading the writing body, to allow the ‘inexpressible’ (Maggie Nelson’s, and Wittgenstein’s, words ringing in your ears).

Queer. All that is deviant from the norm, oblique, off centre, boundary-breaking; all that is hybrid. We know the drill. Queer comes from the German word *quer* meaning ‘oblique, perverse’, Old High German *twerh* from the root *terkw*, ‘to turn, twist, wind’. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the ‘queen of queer theory’, according to Nelson, wants queer to be ‘a continuing moment, movement, motive – recurrent, eddying, *troublant*’ (2015: 29, italics original). Sedgwick writes: ‘Keenly, it is relational, and strange’ (1993: xii). But even as this definition boxes queer in, it slinks away, insists on resisting. It refuses to be skewered.

This is what reclaimed terms do, Nelson argues: ‘they retain, they insist on retaining, a sense of the fugitive’ (2015: 29). They inhabit interstices.

Still: queer here matters; it needs to come out of the margins, be heard. The so-called ‘Sodomy Law’ in Queensland that my incantation-as-poem ‘Sub Rosa’ refers to *still holds* today, in 2016; offenders get up to fourteen years – for what? Stealing with aggravation and carrying a weapon or physically harming someone can give you up to fourteen years, too; assault on nurses, doctors and paramedics gets you fourteen as well; as does conspiracy to murder, a maximum penalty of fourteen years. These wild discrepancies in law do not make sense; the current Sodomy Law in Queensland is a travesty.

What you keep thinking about is your trans friend in that male orthopaedic ward all those years ago, wondering where is she now; did she manage to transform the body-traction shame into head-held-high honour?

You look up the words *sub rosa* again. Theoretically this term can be used as both an adjective and adverb. You use it as a noun but push it further grammatically to make it become a verb, to make it do something it technically is not – to *sub rosa* that, to have it happen in secret, allow it to squeeze through cracks up from the floorboards when no one is looking. From the Latin, literally: under the rose.

*Under our nose.* The question of shame as a verb.

Maggie Nelson again, quoting Sara Ahmed: ‘I have long known that *the moment of queer pride is a refusal to be shamed by witnessing the other as being ashamed of you*’ (2015: 18; italics original).

#### **vi. And.**

Queer. It is a word you have only started to use lately, with any sort of urgency, propelled on by the terrible hate killings in Orlando in June 2016 and the need to say something, something more than what you have said to this point. But it is not a fixed position; you will hold onto lesbian as well; LGBTI occasionally; and QUILT BAG, a term a friend told you about, that is strangely fetching, where Q here is for queer *and* questioning.

So what of the queer essay, the bent essay, the essay that Acts Up as Fleischmann suggests, ‘that steps outside of the line it was supposed to stand behind’ (2013: 46)? This sort of essay, they argue, wrestles with knowledge and truth not to discredit this sort of know-how but to do, undo and redo – to echo Louise Bourgeois – for new purposes, ‘obligating us to enter literary, social and political grounds with which we may be unfamiliar’ (49). This is where we must go. This is the clarion call of the form. This is where heresy happens, where we might have to give something up in order to gain anything.

Which brings us to docents, as exemplar, how essay and queer plays out in both *logos* and *lexis*, where the very idea of *play* is here both noun and verb.

Peta Murray’s presentation of what she coins ‘essayesque dismemoir’ at the NonfictionNOW conference in Flagstaff, Arizona, in 2015, is a great example of essay-

as-queer-as-performance. Murray, an Australian playwright and essayist, worked the floor with props and docents, putting on wigs and moustaches in order to present Buster Loose (Visiting Fellow of the Academy of Applied Facial Hair) and Wanda Luszt ([Acting] Professor of Manicure). As Murray describes them, these docents are construed as Alter(ed) Egos, interlocutors and mentors, ‘pathologised as personae’ (2015b). She dares to allow them into the sacred space that is the PhD dissertation where Murray bears her candidate’s creative and intellectual soul, where they stake a claim or two. These docents instruct The Candidate, they question and cajole; they dash her hopes. They challenge Murray’s insecurities; tell her what she doesn’t want to hear.

WANDA: ‘Because it doesn’t work unless you’re really at risk.’

CANDIDATE: Where I died a second Death.

WANDA: Deeply embarrassing for all of us. (2015a: 88)

Murray’s *essayesque dismemoir* is an expression of an art form she readily admits ‘has already forgotten what it sets out to be’, is propositional in nature, and is what Murray calls rhapsodic, something of an ode or song, that happens and can only happen when ‘done on her feet’ (2015b). On her feet in the theatre, in the round: with her body, in front of audience. She enacts her thinking in front of us; she makes apparent the doing, undoing and redoing of the work, the *delicious and freak* that make up the self. It is, if we think of it in Barthesian terms, ‘my resistances to my own ideas; it is a *recessive book*’ (Barthes 2010: 119). In other words, Murray doesn’t know what will happen next – she *can’t* know what is happening – she has no idea where the docents will lead her (or leave her); she is performing blind, in what might be called an out-of-the-world or *imund* performance, *not unclean* – which is on point for queer. (The point Cixous makes with *imund* is that what is forbidden *is* joy, jubilation [1993: 117].) But this is exactly what Murray wants, what she needs, what she must have. *Essayesque dismemoir* is not to be written, she proclaims loudly from the floor but *wrung*. ‘It is to be *wrested*, not wrought’ (2015a: 155).

Improvising from a set of instructions to self, gestures, and ritual actions she has worked with before, or not, Murray intersperses the reading of lists of important or not-so-important things with the playing of objects, speech notes taken from notebooks, and random readings from found texts. Out of her ‘*Essayesque Dismemoir*’ valise, she surrounds herself with tools of the trade: chalk, Pears soap, fancy trousers, and her mother’s visitor’s book. She enacts.

SAY: *Essayesque dismemoir* riffs and rifles, trips and trifles.

SAY: *Essayesque dismemoir* is what is left after the sorting. It is what remains after all the words that might have been chosen have been rejected.

SAY: *Essayesque dismemoir* is the work of an erstwhile playwright who comes late to nonfiction. Who cannot craft an essay. Who will not write a memoir. Yet who has her own inner dramaturg and a thing for form.

SAY: *Essayesque dismemoir* is de-composition. It’s a text that’s having a tantrum. It is in the vein of a monologue. It resembles a play. Yet. But. (2015a: 155–156)

Peta Murray's 'who-cannot-craft-an-essay' is a disquieting evocation of all that is slippery and odd and resistant to categories. It is. But it is not. In your view, perfectly queer.

What I write about myself is never *the last word*. (Barthes 2010: 120; italics original)

But what of this *de-composition*, this *yet, but* play? In discussion post-performance in Arizona, the question arises about the necessity of the written page versus the stage: that is to say, what does it mean for the reader or audience member to be presented with a page that can be reproduced and published versus the presentation of work 'in the flesh' where you have to be there to see it. Or to put it another way, does the page limit the essayist, the queer-ist? The alternatives, reviewer Richard Gaughan notes, are more ephemeral, where it is possible that the 'perfect performance' would not reach further than the audience of a single room. To which Murray retorts, laughing: 'I don't need to "bottle up" the perfect performance; I'm past that' (Gaughan 2015: 2).

### **vii. All.**

You read another work, from Australian essayist Noëlle Janaczewska, who writes aurally, for the ear. Her performance essay, made for both radio and the page, 'Hardheads and woolly thinking' is impossible to pin down; full of stuff, it resembles Murray's *tantrum*: field notes, the mash-up, spoken word, memoir, stand-up, the blog, reportage, as well as the tradition of the illustrated lecture (2013). It balloons into the reading/listening space to give you another 'out-of-the-world', *imund* experience. The essay in this form is, Janaczewska notes, under-developed in Australia, and is 'a protean and accommodating genre' (1); it allows for speculation and comedy, a different sort of joy.

Janaczewska's poetic, in both form and logic, bends out from a centre, a big-hearted centre made of thistle-as-poetry – 'thistle is a thistle is sometimes a thistle in name only' (2) – to take us on an episodic journey-as-list to ask, what's in a name? This cantillation ducks and dives and weaves in taxonomies of place of science of longing – 'a library is a noun with a history' (6) – to bring us to a full stop, to some sort of revelation:

[I]n their different ways, hardheads and woolly-headed thistles suggest to me that maybe a part of being Australian is feeling a part of somewhere else. (8)

She does what Maria Tumarkin suggests an essay can and should do: pick up fletings and forces in the air, to give them 'a foothold in language' (2015: 7). Intended to be spoken as aural cloud, Janaczewska's thistle-words float as cadence, intone as sliding ninth chords. This music brings you back to your body, to desire and language, to Nelson's I-love-yous tumbling out of the mouth and concrete floors, and to writing.

### **viii. That.**

That. That thing. Which is writing. Nouns, verbs, prepositions and pronouns. Words spun together in sentences like spiders making webs. The doings and redoinings. The going somewheres. The not arrivings. This is what writing is, Cixous writes in 'The School of Dreams': 'starting off' (1993: 65). Getting up. Out of bed. Testing the limits

of language and experience. How you don't know who you are until you get going, how you have to break eggshells, your own skull, suck up bad smells, bleed your gums; how in order to discover the body (discover what it means *to human*), you have to set forth, wander to wonder, smell roses – the yellow and orangey-pink ones are best with the deepest notes – and write gorgeous nothings while gazing at rainbows across rivers: 'A not admitting | of the Wound' (Dickinson c. 1868: 21).

## Notes

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