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Storytelling Deconstructed By Double Session

ARThUR D. AUSTIN*

On the next page a deconstruction graphic unfolds. The pages are stuffed with statements that challenge each other and "play havoc with the logic of meaning." It is an extension of Jacques Derrida's use of the "Double Session" technique in *Glas* (1974). "On every page, *Glas* demonstrates the borderless condition of texts, and the susceptibility to the most unexpected encounters." I flush out the "encounters" of law storytelling. The "encounter"

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1. CHRISTOPHER NORRIS, DECONSTRUCTION: THEORY AND PRACTICE 142 (1982).
2. "'The Double Session' is one example of a technique that Derrida frequently uses to bring home the effects of intertextuality, the ways in which writing cannot be contained within the limits of a book, an authoritative discourse or self-enclosed system of meaning. This technique takes the form of a graphic reminder, of printing two very different texts on a single page and virtually forcing the reader's eye to shuttle incessantly between them." CHRISTOPHER NORRIS, DERRIDA 46 (1987). See Arthur Austin, *What Differs? Who Differs? What Is The Diffirance?*, 13 CARDOZO L. REV. 1351 (1991).

The Double Session is by no means original with Derrida. According to William S. Burroughs' biographer, Burroughs discovered a similar technique by accident; a friend sliced through a pile of newspapers, then made a mosaic out of the strips. Calling this the cut-up method, Burroughs cut out strips—sentences, words, paragraphs—and mixed them to create a new form of literature.

It made explicit a simple sensory process that was going on all the time anyway—which is that when you're reading a newspaper, say, you're reading one column but you see the other columns as well, and the bus you're on and the person sitting next to you. There was a juxtaposition of what you were doing and what was happening around you. What the cut-up method did was incorporate that juxtaposition. Marcel Duchamp had done it years before by placing four unconnected texts in four divisions of a square. Von Neumann had introduced the cut-up principle of random action in his *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior.*

TED MORGAN, LITERARY OUTLAW 321 (1988). To Burroughs, the idea of mixing up a Shakespeare sonnet and an Eisenhower speech was a great breakthrough. When he described cut-ups to Samuel Beckett, the latter snorted: "That's not writing, it's plumbing." Id. at 323.

Burroughs even thought "that by mixing up medical articles they would locate a cure for cancer." Id. at 324.

"Glas" is between legal scholarship as universal or as fragmented. The dispute is triggered by the new fashion of narrative. To some members of the law academy, narrative storytelling is the most effective way to express the frustrations of "oppressed" people. They argue that storytelling is the distinctive property of the "oppressed" and, as a distinctive form of scholarship, can only be evaluated by their criteria. Others disagree. It is a Glas encounter.

In Glas (meaning death knell), Derrida posed a face-off between the philosopher Hegel (on the left side of the page) and the thief-homosexual-writer Genet (on the right side). It is Derrida's "most graphic demonstration of how texts can invade each other's space . . . . Hegel and Genet are brought face to face in a kind of interlinear gloss which exposes philosophic reason to the lures and obsessions of the homosexual thief-turned-writer." The objective is to glean knowledge from the encounter.

I use quotes to create a succession of encounters, from right to left, from top (bottom) to bottom (top). Each sentence is "wrenched out of context and transformed into a mind-bending parody of itself." To extract knowledge about the encounters, the reader has to experience alienation, confusion, and passion.

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5. CHRISTOPHER NORRIS, supra note 1, at 142.
6. Id.
7. On the other hand, I reduce confusion by not following bluebook ukase.
Introduction
A specific piece of writing thus has no clearly defined boundaries: it spills over constantly into the works clustered around it, generating a hundred different perspectives which dwindle to a vanishing point. TERRY EAGLETON, LITERARY THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION 138 (1983). No two artists would ever make quite the same choice, yet each might be, artistically, true to the subject. ELISABETH WOODBRIDGE MORRIS, PH.D., THE DRAMA: ITS LAW AND ITS TECHNIQUE 2 (1898). Perhaps, then, the word "meaning" should also be discarded, since it carries with it the notion of message or point. The meaning of an utterance, I repeat, is its experience—all of it—and that experience is immediately compromised the moment you say something about it. STANLEY FISH, IS THERE A TEXT IN THIS CLASS? 65 (1980).

[ . . . . ]

The double session, about which I don't quite have the gall to say plumb straight out that it is reserved for the question what is literature, this question being henceforth properly considered a quotation already, in which the place of what is ought to lend itself to careful scrutiny, along with the presumed authority under which one submits anything whatever, and particularly literature, to the form of its inquisition—this double session, about which I will never have the militant innocence to announce that it is concerned with the question what is literature, will find its corner BETWEEN [ENTRE] literature and truth, between literature and that by which the question what is? wants answering. JACQUES DERRIDA, The Double Session in A DERRIDA READER: BETWEEN THE BLINDS 171 (Peggy Kamuf ed. 1991).
Footnote Double Session


VI. K. Abrams, Hearing the Call of Stories, 79 CALIF. L. REV. 971, 972 (1991). It is not fashionable these days to praise the work of Ernest Hemingway. His women too often seem to be projections of male needfulness.

VII. D. Donoghue, FEROCIOUS ALPHABETS 185 (1982). Well, I won the stake, and in twenty minutes had left the Casino with a hundred dollars.

VIII. J. D. Littell, Teaching Law: A New Genre of Legal Scholarship, 12 HARV. WOMEN’S L.J. 1, 2 (1988). He talked about leaving his wife for her, but he was too ambitious to risk his political career with a divorce.


