The Intimacy of Influence. Narrative and Theoretical fictions in the works of George Eliot, Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson

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Recently, I had an urge to make an analogy. I wanted to compare the process of making this book with movie-making. I could call myself the writer-director who helps the actors “to fly.” To pursue the analogy, all the texts I have brought together - those from the three novelists, from Freud, the key theorists and the other supporting writers, that is, all the fictions both narrative and theoretical - were actors who turned out star performances.

Or perhaps the texts were the writer-directors and me the jobbing actor. The “performative” aspects of scholarly writing demand their own dissertation. Suffice it to say that I cannot resolve the conflicting sides of my analogy. I cannot run with the comparison. Still, it haunts me. So I have to settle for a compromise. Just like they say in the movies, “None of this would be possible without...” I can vouch that there are many people in my life without whom this book would not exist.

Books are solitary affairs. Books do not come into the world without ensemble work.

My great debt goes to Mieke Bal. She let me experiment, then reined me in. Her talent for inspiration and her capacity to eliminate defence mechanisms constitute an art form. She aided me and my text through a formidable traversal.

In all my creative adventures, I always have to wander into the labyrinth. No danger, no gain. Labyrinths are indeed dangerous places. You can run the risk of becoming lost. You can become lost indefinitely. Half-way through my project, I got lost in “Labyrinth Lacan.” Like Ariadne, Mieke threw me the thread. At the other end she kept tugging, and did so persistently. Out I came.

As is evident from my study, Mieke’s Bal’s vision of cultural analysis has influenced me. Yet its intimacy has allowed me to find my own path and pursue my own undiscovered country. I have always felt torn and confused by a category like “literary scholarship,” as though it were unconnected to “creative writing.” The traditional divides
between the poet and the philosopher, the story-teller and the theoretician, have always pained and enraged me. I never knew for which team I should play. Mieke Bal’s work, her Theory Seminar and her mind-child, the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, gave me a medium in which to play for two teams, and join the sides together to make one. There is nothing homogeneous about this team. Its structure contradicts itself, and thus is huge and contains multitudes. I have not only written my dissertation, but found my own calling: the commitment to fictions both theoretical and the narrative, to a synthesis of analysis and performance. It has been a privilege to have worked with Mieke Bal.

Ernst van Alphen and I have had many valuable conversations; his work has helped me greatly. I would like to thank Michael Steinberg for his generosity. Marijke Rudnik was the one who introduced me to George Eliot. *Daniel Deronda* is one of the most important novels in my life. Without Marijke, I may never have met this most important of textual friends. I would also like to thank Marijke for helping me with my writing when I was at the Engels Seminarium between 1988-1991. René Hoogland has also been an important source of support in my work. Dominic Baker-Smith was very generous in agreeing to be on my committee at a late stage. And I thank him dearly for the long, long loan of Roland Barthes’ *S/Z*.

The Belle van Zuylen Institute hired me as an AIO, and Geestwetenschap paid me. Without the support of both, this book would not exist. More than this, the Belle van Zuylen Institute gave me a place to work. Without all their facilities, I would never have finished within time. Selma Leydensdorff gave me a helping hand when needed, and Inge Boer read two of my chapters, giving superb theoretical and textual feedback. Inge has always been a great support, and it was lovely to have her as my fellow POMO.

The Institute itself became my “Room of One’s Own.” (As the security guards know. They would sometimes find me there at 2 pm in the morning. Cheers guys). I would like to thank all the “Belles” at the Institute for providing a lively and affectionate community. Over the years, the office manager Barbara van Balen was immensely supportive, helping me out with professional problems, being there, being cheerfull, creating a great sense of *esprit de corps* for all. The “open
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doors” of Wendy Jansen, Yvette Kopijn, Ellis Jonker, Monica Scholten, Carianne van Dorst, Hanne Drogendijk, Irene Ciraad, Ruud van Oldenziel, and all the “TIN” girls, have always been hospitable. Everyone in the “promotion club” read several of my chapters and gave astute and productive feedback. I have been impressed and influenced by Marion de Zanger’s sensitive and erudite comments, as well as her humour, particularly over drinks and dinner. I would like to thank Wilma Cohen for her Zen-like serenity, particularly during the “final stages” of my project. She had to tolerate me “climbing the walls.”

Working at the Institute gave me the opportunity to meet two very important friends - my two colleagues, intellectual intimates, sister confessors, good counsels, and Spice Warriors: Sybille Lammes and Amade M’charek. Both have gifts which I could not begin to itemise nor categorise. I owe them both many debts. We have occupied the same room together for nearly five years. Scholarly, writerly and creative, Sybille is the contemporary answer to a heroine from a novel by Henry James; she has never let me escape conflicts and contradictions. Her generosity is clairsentient. The way Amade marries the material and the ideological would be the envy of Dr. Lydgate. She has taught me a lot about sticking to one’s guns.

The Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis has been my other home. The Theory Seminar introduced me to many gifted people. They helped me understand the practical applications of Code’s “friendship model.” Petra Vegeer was one of the first people to befriend me in the seminar. The way Frans-Willem conducted himself through the final stages of his dissertation left me sign-posts and warning signs along the path. Without these I might have fallen off the cliff-edge. I would like to thank Sasha Vojkovic for her formidable intelligence, wisdom and just “being there.” Whenever I have felt down, Murat Aydemir’s blend of brilliance and charisma has always cheered me up. Françoise Lucas, Patricia Pisters, Madeleine Kasten, Peter Verstraten, Markha Valenta and my fellow northerner Michael Burke, are all important members of my ASCA tribe. And most recently, Joyce Goggin has joined the brood. I would like to thank her for being smart, exuberant and indulging my passion for the films of Catherine Deneuve.
Last but not least, Maaike Bleeker and Janeke Lam I want to thank for the experience of “bi-sensitivity.” In 1997 I approached Mieke Bal with an idea which I hoped would fit into the 1998 Come to Your Senses! conference. I had always dreamed of a workshop which would be made up of artists who are scholars. Mieke gave me the go-ahead, referring me to Maaike and Janeke. Like me, they pursue the double path, though in idiosyncratic ways. Maaike and Janeke both have definite and impressive styles, both in their scholarship and art. Maaike and Janeke were already handling the conference’s ambitious and successful art project, but were still committed to the three of us teaming up for the workshop. For me, it was a unique experience. Furthermore, I am always struck by Maaike’s talent for positioning herself and her work at a refreshing remove from dominant practices. I am looking forward to the T-shirt she so admired and would like to bring me from America. It says “Change the **!!!..paradigm!”

At the other extreme, Birgit Hansen in Berlin, a philosopher and literary analyst by training, and a psychoanalyst in training, helped me to approach paradigms with caution. She helped me to understand that the envelope should only be pushed when that envelope has been paid great respect. She helped me with the concept of traversal and made an excellent close reading of my first versions of chapter 1.

ASCA is a department blessed with Sherry Marx, Maartje Geraedts and Eloe Kingma. Marrtje’s door is always open, Sherry is Our Lady of Speed and Support, and Eloe is the cornerstone of the cathedral. I would like to thank Eloe for her calm and practical help, all given when she was herself under so much pressure.

Kees Ostendorff also helped relieve professional pressures at the most apposite moments. He has been helpful and timely for the last four years. Carianne van Dorst was superb when it came to helping me with problems technological, and her friend John van der Kamp helped me with the final stages of my cover.

I would like to thank, once again, the generosity of the J.E Jurriaanse Stichting in Rotterdam and the Belle van Zuylen Institute, who both provided me with the funding without which I could not have published this book. The British Council were also very generous in providing me with additional funds.
As you all know, when it comes to final, textual details, I can be sloppy. I can look at a text a hundred-fold and still not catch those “ants.” The volunteer proof-readers did a great job. Any remaining mistakes are certainly not their problem. Thanks to Janet Potterton, Emma Dingwall, Philippa Collin, Markha Valenta, Michael Burke, Amade M’charek, Grace M’Cormick, Sasha Vojkovic, Mark Bellamay, Sybille Lammes. Thanks too to Sybille for her courageous translation of the “Samenvatting.” Many thanks to Daan Lisboan and Jeffrey Kleef at ASCA Press. The visual artist Una Gildea gave me useful advice about the book’s “jacket design.”

Robert Simon read through the first three chapters of my book and did something vital - he helped me to “flag” my terms. Robert is not only a talented art historian, but he has an ability to suss out what a book needs before it goes to the next stage.

Writing is a mode of performance. And there is a medium of performance called improvisation. I act with an improvisation company called Off Your Head. I think many people writing a dissertation start to find their “voice” only in the last year of the project. Off Your Head helped me find my voice at a performative level, and this has paid back into my writing. My thanks go to Debra Mulholland, Emma Dingwall, Adam Fields, Grainne Delaney, Ralph Lee, Juanita Kobble, Ralph de Rijker, and Sue Porter. For me, going back on stage involved another rite of passage; Debra and Emma were crucial in giving me badly needed confidence. My special thanks goes to Debra Mulholland for giving me nurturing but tough notes. She helped me to think again about the connection between performance and writing.

I dedicate this book to all my friends and to my parents.

Books are made of human thoughts, confrontations and affections. When some people ask me that most conventional of questions, “oh how is your love life?” I now respond “in which department?” We live in times when the tough and transformative intimacies so characteristic of Platonic dialogue, are not regarded as in the field of “love.” For this now most corrupted of terms, the Greeks had four different words. Conventions and atrophying ideologies insist on setting up a binary opposition between the notion of the “lover” and the “friend.” The experience of writing this book revealed to me the artificiality of that opposition.
Writing a book is an act of love. It is one which is dangerous and difficult, transforming the self. The result is that the writer becomes intimate not just with the vastness of a creative medium, but with myriad others.

I am blessed to have exceptionally insightful and generous friends. In the last couple of years particularly, I want to thank Liz Dale and Janet Potterton for their warmth and intelligence; Willem Alpherts, Stephen Smith and his affectionate humour, Kayla Ente, Helena Kupperman, Philippa Collin, Liz Savage, Grace McCormick, Elisha Davar, Annette Sloan, Sue Turner, Harbinder Kaur, Sian Griffiths and Steve, Claire Truscott, Lucy Spence, and Dawn Whittikar. During the first part of my project I spent a fair amount of time in London, also working on a screenplay. I would like to thank Nancy Diuguid for offering doorways into the seventeenth century.

My parents lie figured somewhere in this book, in ways I cannot as yet reflect upon. I would like to thank my mother, Mavis Lord and my father, Michael Lord. What they have given me goes beyond the medium of language. Though I will say this. My mother gave me a love of performance and drama. My father loved psychology. He kept books stored in closed cupboards. Exploring these I found an old and dusty book. Upon it was the name Sigmund Freud. I was only eleven years old. That was just one moment of calling.