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**ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BENGALURU-27**

**ARTS & CULTURE JOURNALISM – VI SEMESTER EJP**

**SEMESTER EXAMINATION: APRIL 2017**

**JN 6313 - Journalism - Arts & Culture**

**Time- 21/2 hrs Max Marks- 70**

**Instructions:**

1. **This paper has TWO SECTIONS and FOUR printed pages.**
2. **This paper is for the VI Semester Journalism students who have opted for the Arts & Culture Elective.**
3. **You are allowed to use a dictionary.**
4. **You will lose marks for exceeding the suggested word-limits.**

**I. The following is an excerpt from an essay tilted *Full–body reading* by Anna Wilson published on Aeon. Read it carefully.**

In his essay ‘Uncritical Reading’ (2004), the Yale English professor Michael Warner writes about the way that universities break students of disreputable reading habits. When students first enter the classroom, he writes:

*They identify with characters. They fall in love with authors… they shop around among taste-publics, venturing into social worlds of fanhood and geekdom… Their attention wanders; they skim; they skip around. They mark pages with pink and yellow highlighters. They get caught up in suspense. They laugh; they cry. They get aroused (and stay quiet about it in class). They lose themselves in books, distracting themselves from everything else, especially homework like the reading I assign.*

The kind of reading that Warner describes his students bringing in from outside the classroom – excessive, feelings-y, full-body reading – is often associated with reading for pleasure, gobbling up genre fiction such as horror and romance on a lunch break or in the bath; getting the shivers, getting aroused, weeping, the glow from a happy ending. These aren’t pleasures of the classroom. They aren’t for serious literature.

As the literary critic Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick put it in her essay ‘Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading’ (2002), students are taught instead to master what Paul Ricoeur termed ‘the hermeneutics of suspicion’. ‘Hermeneutics’ (from the Ancient Greek for ‘translating’) denotes a method or system of interpretation, a way of finding out something. Students are taught to take an objective, almost hostile attitude to a text, to pick it to pieces and investigate it like a crime. They must not love it too much.

The hermeneutics of suspicion is built on centuries of philosophical and pedagogical ideologies that separate body and mind, then rank the mind above the body. Growing up, I loved books. I loved them so much that I went to graduate school to study them, and I didn’t read a novel for five years. One of the terrible secrets about attending graduate school in literature is that it can ruin your ability to read for pleasure; pick up a book, and a nasty voice whispers that you should be reading something serious – or reading something seriously. So in the classroom, I learned

to put away my body. Outside of the academy, however, specifically through fan fiction, I was learning to read with it.

I’d always fantasised about stepping into books and having adventures with my favourite characters. Now I wrote them down and shared them. Strangers left positive comments on each chapter. I discovered that I could write. Later, I learned that there was a name for this kind of story: ‘Mary Sue’. The name comes from the short satire ‘A Trekkie’s Tale’ (1973), written by the mathematician Paula Smith and first published in a Star Trek fanzine to parody the flood of (in her opinion) terrible fan fiction stories in which all-American teenagers with names such as Mary Sue stride into the world of the Starship: Enterprise and win Captain Kirk’s fickle heart. Smith’s parody is embarrassingly similar to my first story and thousands like it online, written by young women experimenting with fan fiction. But as I read more widely, I discovered a rich vein of sophisticated and brilliantly written fan fiction, offering insights into characters I knew and loved.

While bingeing on Harry Potter fan fiction, I was taking courses at high school, then university, in classical and medieval literature. I learned Latin, and read Virgil, Cicero and St Augustine in the original language. I wrote cold, sober, critical essays, but stayed up late into the night with fan fiction, my guilty pleasure, seemingly as far removed from the study of literature as it was possible to be. I moved to Canada to go to graduate school. By then I knew that fantasising about meeting Geoffrey Chaucer, or imagining what Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine might do if she met Sir Lancelot, was not the way serious readers did it. But I struggled with cognitive dissonance; since it was obvious to me that fan fiction had made me good at reading.

Fanfiction makes its source texts richer for its loving readers. It amplifies allusions and hidden currents, pulls out notes of characterisation and subtleties of plot, and spends time with them. After reading fan fiction, I return to texts I love with a new eye – sometimes a more critical one. For example, I read hundreds of stories embroidering the relationship between the Harry Potter characters Remus Lupin and Sirius Black, which – fan fiction writers suggested – was the real reason Sirius’s family had thrown him out. Thanks to fan fiction, I was wondering ‘Where are all the gay people at Hogwarts?’ long before J K Rowling announced that Dumbledore was gay (but his first crush was an evil wizard, and he apparently never loved again – thanks, JK).

Fanfiction can fill gaps in the world of the story, or tease out elements forbidden or unspeakable in the original text and bring them to the surface. Another example is slash fiction – fan fiction that imagines a gay romance into a straight narrative, like those Remus/Sirius stories I binged on (the name ‘slash’ comes from the /).

Slash is particularly powerful for me as a queer woman because it subverts some fundamental assumptions in media narratives about who is watching, and what they want. When I read slash, I feel recognised and loved as a reader in a way I almost never do when I watch TV. In fact, fan fiction gave me something I’d been craving; it was literature for me. Though I’ve always loved science fiction, I felt obscurely unwanted by books in which the female characters were unsatisfying and marginalised: women are barely imagined as part of the science fiction audience, let alone catered to.

By the same token, romance novels (one of the few genres that almost exclusively caters to women) were overwhelmingly heterosexual, with male and female characters I found boring and unrelatable, moving through prescribed motions that always ended with marriage and babies. Reading romance novels felt like forcing myself into a too-tight corset: reading fan fiction was like taking a deep breath.

Yet I have seen that boundary shift since I began graduate school. The economic recession and subsequent funding crisis in the humanities has accelerated a process that had already begun. Namely, that scholars are reconsidering empathy and imagination as tools for teaching and study amid discussions of how to keep the humanities relevant. There is a new belief that

objectivity in literary criticism is not only undesirable but impossible. Increasingly, graduate students are trained not to avoid saying ‘I feel…’, and to consider how their own bodily experiences, inflected by gender, race, sexuality and class, shape their interactions with literature.

Now a teacher myself, I always begin by asking students how they feel. I’m hoping that, like Warner’s hypothetical students, they’re not ashamed of how they read for pleasure, so I urge them to refine and sharpen tools they already own. The most important thing I learned from fan fiction, I tell them, was personal – although I don’t divide the personal and the scholarly so much these days. I learned to take pleasure in texts that didn’t care about me, and that ability to resist narrative and turn it to what I wanted gave me the courage to mentally step outside norms of gender and sexuality that I thought I couldn’t escape. I came out halfway through my PhD, met my wife and changed my dissertation topic to start writing about fan fiction. Consciously, I brought my body – and my heart – back into my university work.

**I.A Answer the following questions in 150 words. (4x10=40)**

1. ‘The most important thing I learned from fan fiction was personal – although I don’t divide the personal and the scholarly so much these days.’ – What does the author mean by this?
2. How have imagination and empathy helped your relationship with the texts that you have read in your Optional English class? Is it different from the texts that you read in your Arts and Culture class? How? Give examples.
3. In your opinion, does the ‘Hermeneutics of suspicion’ approach work better than the ‘Full-body reading’ approach while reviewing a book? Why?
4. Do you think that the authors that we read play any role in ‘Full-body reading’? Explain with reference to your reading of Elena Ferrante’s *My Brilliant Friend* or Siddalingaiah’s *Ooru Keri*.

**II. Read the following excerpt from an essay on travel by Shahnaz Habib published in The Guardian.**

A lot of travel can be about pretending. I should know – for years, I have been pretending to enjoy monuments in various countries. I have spent perfectly sunny mornings in museums that I did not care for and I have sat in cute trolley cars and I have thrown coins into wishing wells. I have tried hard to enjoy walking tours. There are good arguments for doing new things, but having made them all to myself, I am now beginning to see the case for doing only the things you are curious about. As I grow older, I hope to become more like my father, who caused much amusement by firmly declining a ride by the White House when we went to Washington DC to visit my in-laws. “It’s the White House,” my mother-in-law said to me. “Anyone would want to go.”

Anyone except my father. Over the years of saying no to other people’s adventures, he has retained his triangularity in a world of round pegs with well-rounded to-do lists. He loved what he loved – the bridges of New York, the Halal street food vendors, the ferry to Staten Island –

not because they were iconic but because they pierced his indifference. One of his favourite New York days was spent at Zuccotti Park, visiting Occupy Wall Street.

Lately, I have been testing out my father’s attitude to travel. When we arrive in a new place, I skip the iconic. When I hear of fun walking tours, I murmur, “eminently avoidable”. Instead, I visit bookstores and shop for groceries and daydream in urban parks – activities that I can enjoy without leaving Brooklyn. I have a fetish for small urban places of worship and now I sidestep the major monuments in favour of these. The truth, frightening and liberating, is that nothing in the world is a must-do.

**II.A Answer the following questions in 200 words each. (2x15=30)**

1. Write about a strange attitude to travel that you have encountered. Were you repulsed or excited by it? Why?
2. Do you think that ‘a lot of travel can be about pretending’? What determines pretence in stories of travel? Do you agree with the author?

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