Positionality of Self in Writing and God Trick Fallacy

Aimée Morrison | University of Waterloo
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> This essay emerged from my desire to examine closely moments of personal challenge that seem to have import for cross-boundary discourse. These types of moments have constituted an ongoing source of curiosity for me in terms of my own need to understand human difference as a complex reality, a reality that I have found most intriguing within the context of the academic world. From a collectivity of such moments over the years, I have concluded that the most salient point to acknowledge is that "subject" position really is everything.
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> —Jaqueline Royster, "When the First Voice You Hear Is Not Your Own"

A Confession and a Conundrum

I don't write unless I get invited to. It's not that I'm so important or famous or in demand. It's that I tend to have a comically bad time getting through blind peer review, to the extent that it takes me years sometimes to get an article accepted. In at least one instance, I had a conference paper proposal rejected by a reviewer acting on behalf of the same program committee that, simultaneously and on the basis of the same research, had invited me to deliver the keynote address. An editor at a flagship new media journal very strongly pushed me, in the first piece I had written as a new professor, to take out all the things that had made the article fun for me to write, things that made it more readable, vivid, and effective. It was a paper *about* rhetoric and metaphor that was *forbidden from employing* rhetoric and metaphor to make its argument. The fate of the following sentence was the subject of a surprisingly long email chain: "Language may shift our view of the world, but a popular consensus on vocabulary and metaphor does not necessarily alter the material operation of that world: tucking a flower into a gun barrel creates a powerful visual symbol, but does not preclude the florist being shot" (Morrison 74). These editors, and others since, operationalize the idea that scholarly writing has a specific voice in which its arguments must be expressed, which seems to be much flatter, less spiky or silly,[1] literal rather than figurative, impersonal, distinguished from my own style of writing by its formality and earnestness.

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[1]For a glimmer of hope, a good laugh, an astonishing precision of thought, and a metaphor involving throwing one's body across the muck so that Brad Pitt might be spared the indignity of soiling his shoes,

My reference to 60s peaceniks' anti-war agitprop produced an objectively great sentence—and it's the crux of the argument of the piece, which is about the hyperbolic and misleading metaphors by which the internet was mischaracterized in popular writing in the early to mid 1990s. The metaphorist I had particularly lined up within my (floral) sights was John Perry Barlow, lyricist for the Grateful Dead who traded on his 60s counterculture cred for his 90s guise as internet guru. Ultimately, the sentence stayed in my paper. IT'S CALLED STRUCTURAL IRONY AND I DID IT ON PURPOSE. But I have had this experience repeatedly; my work and my words and my metaphors carved and chastened and sanitized and re-sourced and re-contextualized until nothing of me remains in it, and what I wanted to say can no longer be expressed. The first voice I speak may be my own, but in order to enter the scholarly conversation, I have to change it.

Thanks, I hate it.

Provocation: Two Propositions and Two Trick Questions

Proposition 1

I am trained as a scholar in English (Honours BA, York University; MA, University of Guelph; PhD, University of Alberta). I am employed as an academic (Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, University of Waterloo). My research on Twitter activism, mommy blogging, the early personal-computer era, the rhetoric of the selfie, romantic comedy, and critical disability studies has been and is supported by competitive national grants that are double-blind peer-reviewed. I disseminate my research findings by means of written articles and chapters in high-impact-factor academic publications. Terry Eagleton once complimented my writing. Therefore, my writing is academic.

Proposition 2

Ambient sexism drove me out of computer science after high school even though I had the best grades. My mom and I watched screwball comedies every Saturday night on our local public television station when I was a kid; I loved it. I was a mommy blogger for four years after my child was born. I have 7000 followers on Twitter. I'm autistic, have ADHD, and am chronically insomniac. I am a skilled amateur photographer and pianist. I post pictures of my outfits on Instagram and write long self-reflexive autobiographical captions, and create elaborate memes about Chopin's Nocturnes that I post to piano forums. Three of my publications examine a network of mommy bloggers I was a member of. Two more of my publications begin from conundrums posed by my own experiences (going massively viral on Twitter; not seeking academic accommodations as a neurodivergent faculty member). Another examines sexism in STEM and racism in higher education through viral Twitter hashtags. I wrote a paper about *You've Got Mail*

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see Eagleton, Terry. "Bodies, Artworks, and Use Values." *New Literary History*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2013, pp. 561–73. https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2013.0040.

as a remediation of the romantic comedy genre. All of my publications use the personal pronoun. A stranger once complimented my facial-injury Instagram series. Listeners of my ADHD podcast describe themselves as "fans." Therefore, my writing is personal.

Questions: Which proposition best captures the relationship between ethos, positionality, and narrative? Which proposition best captures academic writing?

Answer: Both of these are trick questions.

Both propositions are equally valid. Academic writing builds ethos through claims to positionality expressed through narrative. We always write from *somewhere*, as *someone*, and we are thus *partial* and *imperfect*, which is exactly what contemporary academic structures of publication cannot let us be.

Meditations on Academic Rigour

Please remove all identifying details before submission

We might understand academic writing as a discourse built on self-erasure. There is no narrating "I." Even as we rush to acknowledge the power of self-identification, acceptance, and inclusion by sprinkling our pronouns over our syllabi, email signatures, Zoom avatars, and Twitter bios, we continue to excise them just as thoroughly from our research writing.[2] Along with the personal pronouns, academic training aims to sever one's life from one's work: Even in subjective and interpretive fields such as literary studies, fannish motivations or personal connections to the research are derided. Writing in your PhD application that you "have always loved reading, even as a small child," is deemed naive and juvenile; explaining your focus on a given historical period as deriving from the feelings of pleasure you get from consuming texts and culture from that period is embarrassing, irrelevant, and unserious; liking a text or not liking is irrelevant and expressing such opinions in seminars deeply cringe. Why?

Unpopular opinion[3]

> Submissions must conform to journal style, please see guide on submission page. Submissions longer than 8000 words, inclusive of references, will be rejected outright. Submissions must use: American spelling; Arial 12pt. font, double-spaced and with first line indent of 1.25cm; no images; numbers between zero and ten written (e.g., "eight"), otherwise numerals (e.g., "42"). Please remove all identifying details before submission. List four possible peer reviewers for your

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[2]One notable exception, in the sense that I noted it because I happened to be reading deeply in queer theory, occurs in research on gender identity and pronouns, which refreshingly employs "we" instead of the generally used "the present research," even in work that does not employ auto-ethnography (see, Bradley et al.; McEntarfer and Iovannone; Huffman et al.). I see you, gender scholars.

[3]See, "Unpopular Opinion Puffin." *Know Your Meme*, www.knowyourmeme.com/memes/unpopular-opinion-puffin.

submission along with a rationale and contact information for each. Consult prior issues for a sense of what types of submissions are in line with the journal and consider how your work fits within these bounds. We receive many more submissions than we are able to publish, and estimate a minimum of four months between submission and review. You agree that your submission is not under consideration at any other publication. It is the author's responsibility to ensure adherence to these requirements; failure to do so may result in a desk rejection without review.

As academic institutions and participation in the enterprise of higher education expand, a certain standardization and bureaucratization of processes develops to manage the scale-up.[4] A side effect has been to conflate success at conforming to the standards and fitting within bureaucratic processes with academic excellence: "This essay is a desk reject because it arrived with end notes rather than in-text citations, and exceeded the maximum number of allowable keywords."

As academic institutions stopped barring entrance to applicants who are not male, WASP,[5] and from professional or upper class backgrounds, a certain standardization and bureaucratization of topic, method, and orientation to research has been gathered under the sign of "scholarly norms" to maintain the status quo as it existed prior to these inclusions. A posture of detached and objective expertise is enforced: "This essay is a desk reject because the researcher has listed ten of the research subjects as co-authors of the study, and is a member of the community being examined and cannot be objective."

As academic institutions became more demographically diverse, historically excluded groups began to push for their own knowledges, perspectives, discourses, and cultures to be reflected not just in material studied in the classroom but also in the structures of academic discourse itself. In 1974, the Conference on College Composition and Communication thus asserted that "students have a right to their own language," and the pushback has continued ever since. As Vershawn Ashanti Young notes wryly, "people be mo [sic] pluralingual than we wanna recognize" (112): "This essay is a desk reject because the writing deviates substantially from academic standards of correctness, construction, and vocabulary. We suggest the author work with an academic coach or editor to bring the work to the level of discourse required for publication."

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[4]For a rollicking good time, to learn more about bureaucratization and the post-war academy, see Graeber, David. *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*. Melville House, 2015.

[5] "WASP" is an acronym for "White Anglo Saxon Protestant" originating in popular and sociological discourses alike in the United States to name the upper and upper middle class demographic that has been traditionally dominant in economic, political, educational, and social spheres. E. Digby Baltzell's 1964 book *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy and Caste in America* outlines in part the mechanisms by which the WASP establishment systematically hoarded opportunities, wealth, and power by means such as educational exclusions.

Procrustean Prose

Academic work that expresses rootedness in identity and cultural location via the interpolation of life narrative into academic writing or of life experience into academic research programs and insists on employing a voice to articulate a perspective that hasn't been stripped of its individuality and idiosyncrasy produces a kind of irritating friction in the scholarly machinery. It disturbs the ostensible efficiency and coherence of academic publishing, whose upholding of the value of "academic rigor" manifests in the policing of writing style, conformity to standard academic English, and the arcana of formatting even at the very outset of review processes. Donald Bartholomae, in a famous and controversial essay from 1986, inadvertently expresses the power game that plays out at this level of form and discourse:

> Writers who can successfully manipulate an audience […] are writers who can both imagine and write from a *position of privilege*. They must, that is, see themselves within a privileged discourse, one that already includes and excludes groups of readers. They must be either *equal to or more powerful* than those they would address. (9; emphasis added)

Bartholomae describes students' acculturation to this discourse as the process of "inventing the university," but it is less an act of invention than a re-entrenchment not just of modes of speech but of a competitive and combative understanding of scholarly communication as rooted in domination. For Bartholomae, student writing succeeds by "assembling and mimicking [academic] language," daring an attempt to "carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before the skill is "learned" (5). Bartholomae, then, explicitly sets form over content: it is better to sound scholarly while not making much sense, than to express a valuable insight in non-scholarly language.

To admit a greater diversity of aspirants to the ivory tower is one thing; to reconceive academic writing to permit this greater demographic diversity to be visible in modes of address, use of personal pronouns, community or experiential knowledge in addition to theoretical or experimental knowledge is still, much of the time, a bridge too far. We're probably not ready to re-invent the university.

"It's me, hi, I'm the problem, it's me"[6]

Maybe academic writing has always already been anti-autobiographical; our apprenticeship into academic identity secured once we learn to write in the omniscient, universal, passive style of scholarship, a discourse that is no one's natural language. Thus, we assimilate into established forms of thinking and publication, away from the messy particulars of our own locations, identities, and experiences. And so we proceed, we

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[6]See, Swift, Taylor. "Anti-Hero (Official Music Video)." *Youtube*, 21 Oct 2022, https://youtu.be/b1 kbLwvqugk. (It must be exhausting always reading through my lengthy footnotes.)

hope, across a tidy, easily parsable, comparable, measurable academic life course, or, if you prefer the Latin, *curriculum vitae.*[7]

But that is not a real life, or a tenable position, even if we fancy it up using Latin words.[8] Authored texts are always in some substantial way personal, regardless of how we twist our sentences to pretend otherwise. I have reason to believe that much of who I am, how I think, how I relate to others, how I respond to novel situations, etc., is determined by the set of material circumstances of my embodiment and lived experiences, by the familial circumstances of my upbringing, by the cultural circumstances of my geographic and historical location. These circumstances equip me in particular ways to move through the world and, in important ways, determine what experiences and opportunities I have, which in turn produce further opportunities or foreclose them. The "Aimée Morrison" who sits at the desk to compose this paragraph is the momentary culmination of a series of random events that somehow cohere into an Associate Professor of English that others recognize as distinct, and who is interpellated by the hail of "Hey, Aimée."[9] But I could have been anything else if anything had been different at any point, and I will be different, surely, next year, tomorrow, or when I'm 80. Two weeks ago, I practiced Nocturnes at the piano for 90 minutes a day, struggling over chromatic polyrhythms and syncopated arpeggiations that seem to presume a human hand with different anatomy than mine. I have been researching the idiosyncratic fingering charts Chopin developed, as much an innovation in music pedagogy and performance as the compositions he is more recognized for. Today, instead of practicing

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[7]This is exactly the kind of clever wordplay, linguistic resonance, and cheap joke to which I am helplessly drawn, moth-like to flame-such. I experienced such a powerful moment of learning when it popped into my head that I dared to think it might resonate with you. This is exactly the kind of clever wordplay which Reviewer 2 demands five peer-reviewed sources to support and which editors attempt to remove as too cute-clever or impressionistic. Current editor sensibly suggests I need a reference right here so I offer this one, Ourobouros-style, to my own forthcoming piece, "Vitae Statistics: The Anti-Autobiographical Imperative of Academic Self-Documentation," included in *In The Spaces Provided: Career Narratives and Academic Womanhood*, a collection edited by Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle through Routledge.

[8]A neurologist assessing me after a first attack of cluster headaches in my mid-40s, sent me on my way from the consultation with the following very confident assessment: "We can for now say that you have a diagnosis of idiopathic cephalalgia." To which I replied: "Yes, yes, 'head pain of unknown origin,' I also understand Latin," which was the bright spot in my entire run of headaches.

[9]Casting about for someone—anyone—to write me a reference letter for grad school as I was finishing my BA in 1997, I landed on the Marxist Victorian Literature professor, Norman Feltes, teaching an honours seminar I had enrolled in because it fit my schedule. He agreed, but only on the condition that I apply to a specific university. Because Norman made me apply to the University of Guelph (a farm school??) to work with Susan Brown (I'm not a Victorianist???), who hired me to work on the digital humanities Orlando Project because I was "good with computers," and Orlando was housed mainly at the University of Alberta, so that's where I went for my PhD, and in my first week there, a fellow first year PhD student, Lily Cho, loaned me Rosanne Alluquère Stone's book, *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*, because I was "a computer person," which was what prompted my switch into new media studies. Stone's book opens its first chapter with an autobiographical story which an endnote flags for its rhetorical utility and dodgy veracity. And look at me now, here, doing this footnote. Weirdly, it wasn't in Norman's class that I read Althusser. Oh, and that thing I wrote that Terry Eagleton liked? It was part of an In Memoriam for Norman describing how he stood up and sang "Jerusalem" on his last day of teaching before retirement, which happened to be in that self-same seminar I was enrolled in—it was personal writing (Morrison et al.).

lifting my ring finger over and past my pinkie finger to strike a key note beyond it, I am developing an expertise in the many different kinds of ways fingers can be broken, nail avulsion, wound care, and how to type with three fingers, lifting my right middle and ring fingers up and out of the way, replacing their accustomed actions with my index and pinkie fingers, and marvelling at how difficult it is. I'm focusing my interest on the materiality of artistic creation through a new lens, because I crushed my fingers in the garage door. I'm rereading some critical disability studies, this time through the lens of physical debility rather than mental disability.

Chaos theory suggests that distal[10] trivia can unexpectedly have high salience and deterministic effect: this is Edward Lorenz's butterfly (or, originally, seagull) flapping its wings and altering the strength and path of a tornado thousands of miles and many weeks away. The butterfly/seagull tale is a narrative account of a mathematical fact Lorenz discovered in the new field of computational weather modelling: a fractional rounding error difference in input data, at the third decimal, produced massive changes in a model's output, seemingly out of all proportion (Gleick 16–17). As pathetic fallacy would suggest, this meteorological fact mirrors an important plot point in the current essay: we ourselves are but the distant effects of innumerable variables too complex to control. The self is temporary and contingent, relational and contextual: the "I" we recognize as "me" is the unpredicted and unpredictable outcome of innumerable unrelated variables. We are the bodies we occupy; we are the relationships we have with others; we are the things that have happened to us.[11] How on earth could I ever imagine writing from any other position than "I"? How could I ever be so bold as to think that I could scrub out the subjective bits, the material flotsam and jetsam of my biography, to presume to be able to pronounce anything at all with perfect objectivity, free from preference, bias, or even the undue influence of my own rumbling stomach (Danziger et al.)? I can't, of course: that's why Haraway calls it the "god trick," a term that ought to be impossible to understand as anything other than naming a cognitive error, but which we continue to mistake for a scholarly goal (Haraway).

My insistence on acknowledging my own partiality and positionality, then, like Haraway's, is an "argument for situated and embodied knowledges" that is simultaneously "an argument against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims" (181). The irresponsibility Haraway refers to is of published work that mistakes its partiality for universality, an arrogance of claiming too much. However,

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[10]We are all but chance events, truly: the word 'distal' was in this draft before my garage door gifted me a Tuft fracture, which is the name of the kind of finger break that happens on the head of the *distal* phalanges: the tip of your finger. This, according to the orthopedic surgeon, is the "best" kind of breakage for musicians, as even open fractures of this sort heal relatively quickly, and with least risk of deformity or loss of mobility and function. See, Carpenter, Shannon, and Rachel S. Rohde. "Treatment of Phalangeal Fractures." *Hand Clinics*, vol. 29, no. 4, Nov. 2013, pp. 519–34. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hcl.2013.08.006.

[11]See, Barrett, Lisa Feldman. *Seven and a Half Lessons about the Brain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020. Not for nothing, but Barrett is a Gugenheim Fellowship-winning neuroscientist who writes here as if she is aiming to be understood by readers beyond Reviewer 2, employing anecdote and metaphor to a highly readable effect in a book that is 125 pages of engaging text followed by 35 pages of deeply-sourced notes.

the irresponsibility also inheres in the suppression or erasure of scholarship that does not engage in such tricks: for Young, "The narrow, prescriptive lens be messin writers and readers all the way up, cuz we all been taught to respect the dominant way to write, even if we dont, cant, or wont ever write that one way ourselves. That be hegemony. Internalized oppression. Linguistic self-hate" (112).[12] But how could we write differently—from established standards of academic discourse and, crucially, from one another—and still legibly as academics? How will we know what is good academic work and what is not if we do not hold one another to identical standards? How can we imagine a pluralism that does not devolve into "anything goes," since that is the question the argument for pluralism always seems to invite? For Haraway, "the alternative to relativism is not totalization and single vision, which is always finally the unmarked category whose power depends on systematic narrowing and obscuring" (182). To break from this single vision entails risk, if my own series of rejections and rewrites and snide remarks about "me-search"[13] and "too clever by half" and "that's way too many footnotes" are any indication.

"NEVER HEARD OF YOU!"

Consider the experience of Hannah Gadsby, in their breakout Netflix special, *Nanette*. After twenty conventional minutes of self-deprecating jokes about having trouble with Pride parades as a lesbian who doesn't like loud noises, Gadsby calls a time-out on themself, and expresses their intent to quit comedy. In the dead silence that follows, they articulate the role their own comedy has played in arresting their development, as they transformed traumatic moments of their own life into cheery punchlines to please and entertain others. And they refuse to do so anymore. But the show must go on: *Nanette* continues as a masterclass on both the structures of trauma and the structures of comedy that proceeds by undercutting the practice of professional comedy through the medium of comedy, all the while being blisteringly earnest and deeply personal. It is a virtuosic act of comedy writing and comedy performance. What mesmerized me and others also managed to enrage more than a few people, whose unhinged reaction to *Nanette* Gadsby addresses at some length in their follow-up special, *Douglas*. The "haters," as Gadsby describes them, attacked *Nanette* on several fronts: it wasn't comedy, it wasn't funny, it wasn't standup. They were so enraged by Gadsby's fame that they sought Gadsby out on social media to tell the comedian that they were a nobody and that the haters, in fact, "never heard of you." Collectively, these responses denied Gadsby ethos, and thus delegitimized the critique as well as the innovation in comedy enacted in *Nanette*: it wasn't so much that the haters didn't find Gadsby funny, it's that they went to great lengths to *deny Gadsby the status of a comedian*, to expel Gadsby entirely from the genre,

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[12]Chopin's fingering innovations spring from a similar insight: "Contrary to the pedagogues of the time, who sought to equalize the fingers by means of laborious and cramping exercises, Chopin cultivated the fingers' individual characteristics, prizing their natural inequality as a source of variety in sound: 'As many different sounds as there are fingers'" (Eigeldinger et al., 17).
[13]See, Pickles, Matt. "'Mesearch' - When Study Really is all About Me." *BBC News*, 10 May 2017, www.bbc.com/news/business-39856894.

from the discourse. Gadsby understands this reaction: "I've seen this pattern in other art movements. It's that, you know, changing of the guard. People break rules, they get accused of not being actual artists. And I was like, this is old news" (qtd. in Cornish and Hodges). In this view, an "artist" is one who conforms to prior ideas of what "art" is; it is a designation that others grant or deny you. It is a power play.

Life writing and auto/biography studies, of course, have long been attuned to the contingent nature of the self, to its relationality, and to the compromise between readers and writers resulting in the uneasy truce of the autobiographical pact: the narrating "I" on the page is firmly attached to the proper name on the cover of the book, and that the narrated events are true if not the whole complete accounting of a full life (Smith and Watson). Auto/biography studies understands that an objective factual accounting is never possible in life writing, but nor is it desirable; the subjectivity of the life writing text, indeed, is partially what authorizes it and produces value. A first-person account is the account of one person, whose experiences are unique and thus valuable in their particularity and specificity. Can we imagine a kind of academic writing that makes use of this insight? How can we possibly make comprehensible and assessable truth claims— that is, do peer review—if we are not shaping each of ourselves into the standard figure of the Objective Academic Researcher? Are we doomed to solipsistic and relativistic chaos if we abandon the omniscient passive voice of established scholarly discourse for the idiosyncracies that attend writing focused through the personal pronoun?[14] How to earn credibility, legitimacy, authority if not by behaving in the expected ways, using the conventional methods, and crafting recognizable claims? Haraway proposes a scholarly discourse comprised of "partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (182).

YMMV

"YMMV" ("Your mileage may vary") is internet slang meant to acknowledge particularity and to limit the universality of claims of all sorts, without diminishing the use value of these claims or their testability.[15] Subjective, but not arbitrary. Say, a YouTube video were to compare three digital tablets from different manufacturers and name one as preferable: the vlogger's envoi might remind users that she is interested in

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[14]Perhaps a reader of similar vintage to myself will recognize in this worry an echo of the panic around postmodernism in the academy, or of feminist calls to expand the literary canon, or of student protest movement demands for courses and departments in what was then called "Ethnic Studies" —namely, that breaking apart academic teleologies, certainties, and metanarratives by increasing diversity of perspectives, goals, values, and methods would render the idea of scholarly judgment, discernment, and coherence impossible.

[15]Formal and informal dictionaries online define "YMMV" in this way, demonstrating the term's wide usage and surprisingly nuanced understanding of standpoint epistemology. See, "Ymmv." *Urban Dictionary*, 19 July 2006, www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ymmv; "YMMV." *Cambridge Dictionary*, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ymmv; and "YMMV - What Does YMMV Stand For?" *Slang.net*, 6 Jan. 2022, https://slang.net/meaning/ymmv.

a tablet that can be an all-purpose machine, and that "YMMV," which here means that if your needs are different than hers, you might find a different tablet more suitable. At its best, "YMMV" indicates authorial self-reflexivity and humility by acknowledging the particular material circumstances that undergird an interpretation or a recommendation, and by recognizing that the audience is almost certainly comprised of readers, listeners, and watchers whose needs and contexts are different from the author's. The metaphor derives, of course, from the automotive industry: "Your mileage may vary" is a boilerplate hedge located in the fine print at the bottom of mandated, statutory fuel consumption specifications affixed to the windows of new vehicles. "6.1L/100km highway / 9L city" seems to be a manufacturer making a claim of fact about an internal combustion engine, until the footnoted text reminds me that my own habit of jackrabbit starts, or constant use of the air conditioner, or speeding means that my own mileage is determined by my behaviour *in relation to* the design of the vehicle.[16] In between the design of the engine, the climate, and my lead foot, my mileage will vary from the manufacturer label. How could it not? Such an admission does not mean that statutory fuel efficiency declarations are no longer meaningful; it just acknowledges contingency and the impossibility of omniscience or perfect knowledge.

In academic writing, particularly in the subjective and interpretive humanities disciplines, our work involves arriving at subjective conclusions on the topics we have researched, developing claims that we forward through argument, employing pieces of textual or other evidence we link together with sentences we have composed and arranged in order to persuade readers that our interpretation of the evidence, and thus our claim, is plausible and useful. If we're brave enough to abandon the writing practices that produce the god trick, we will both demonstrate and acknowledge that a claim can be both mostly correct and incomplete simultaneously, that it can be particular in its expression, and still offer something of value to *some* readers, but probably not *all* readers: YMMV.

I Quit Academic Writing

Taking cue from Gadsby (who shares with me dual diagnoses of ADHD and autism, and a strong aversion to convention for the sake of convention), I hereby quit academic writing, or at least the kind of academic writing that requires the god trick, standardization of approach and tone, and the enactment of competence through bland prose stripped of all its personality. For me, research writing is always and has always been both personal and academic. Rhetoric, at its most useful, acts to persuade both speaker and audience: ethos is contingent, dialogic, humble, and relational. It is probative rather than magisterial. It requires, I think, that we write in our own voices, from our acknowledged subject positions and claiming our situated and partial knowledges, even as we make claims to the attention of an audience. This requires craft, attention, and

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[16]Fuel consumption labeling was devised during the 1973–1974 Oil Crisis in the United States. The familiar "your mileage may vary" phrase does not ever appear exactly as such, but rather as "your actual mileage may vary," in the 2008 revision of the label. The phrasing was much wordier, specific, and detailed in prior iterations. See, US EPA, OAR. "Learn about the Fuel Economy Label." *EPA: United States Environmental Protection Agency*, 3 Sept. 2015, www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/learn-about-fuel-economy-label.

expertise, as Gadsby is regularly required to remind critics who express surprise or rage at the power of their work: "I have skills, people, I know what I am doing, even if you don't like it" (Gadsby 19). Do you think Terry Eagleton and Chopin show up recursively here by accident? Or that the chaotic interplay between the footnotes and the main text is something other than a demonstration of the imbrication of the personal (life) and the scholarly (work)? I readily admit that take as my entry into researching an experience I have had or a curiosity that has gripped me or a problem I have a burning intellectual need to resolve. This does not make my writing solipsistic or self-serving or narcissistic. If anything, to write this way necessarily entails self-reflection: to notice the things I don't know, the things that others don't know, to ask how and why my own judgment of certain topics diverges from others', to assess the means by which this divergence has occurred and what it means, and to bridge that gap with words. Some writers on ethos suggest that this is in fact the first task of the rhetorician. That the tools of rhetoric are a mode of enquiry that we must apply first to *ourselves*, in categorizations, naming, and relationships between things that we test and re-test, and bring into the world, with the aim of persuading a particular audience: *who* that is matters, and *how* we relate to them matters. Writing is an act of connection—it has always been personal.

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