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Cover Page Footnote

David Bleich teaches writing, language and literary theory, women s studies, science studies, Jewish studies, and film studies at the University of Rochester. His recent book is *Know and Tell: A Writing Pedagogy of Disclosure, Genre, and Membership*, from Heinemann.

Learning from Everyone¹

David Bleich

In elementary school, our class was told to “keep our eyes on our own papers.” Sometimes people were caught “copying.” This “no copying” rule did not change for me through college and graduate school. No one wondered about this rule or whether it was the only possible rule for learning how to learn. When Helen Keller was eleven, her achievement with language was doubted as possibly fraudulent because she memorized a story, verbatim, then had it published as “her” story. One of Helen Keller’s defenders at the time was Mark Twain, who reminded people that everyone “copies” all the time. We just do it unconsciously. Twain’s defense was written off as charitable rather than substantive. As I discussed some time ago, the childhood acquisition of language is a sophisticated form of emulation (to be distinguished from imitation) that is governed and motivated by the social relationships which form the scenes of living. In our coming into language and knowledge, we overtake the language of others, change it, and pass it back to these and other others, thus sustaining, through the use of language, family, community, and society. If we view the use of language in this way, we will have to find a way to change the classroom rule of “no copying.”

This may not be such a hard thing to do. For one thing, in societies that don’t think writing is holy and in those where there are no written texts, there are no sacred texts. There may be sacred moments and sacred gestures, but not sacred texts. This distinction matters, as moments and gestures depend on the present, but texts as we usually use them do not. What if there were only speaking needed in classrooms and no writing? Then, it would be a virtue to be able to repeat what others have said, and, contrary to what occurs now, students’ ability to repeat others’ words would, instead of discrediting them, earn them public acclaim. One of the results of our deep dependence on writing is the illusion that texts that are not present, not in use, are as material as those that are present and in use. Each person’s writing, we now presuppose, connects them with a not-present material reality (the reference, the meaning) that others can steal by stealing the text. In this situation, texts are confused with language. People treat texts as if they were language, when actually, texts only *become* language when they are in living use, as when a text is read to others or when a script is performed in public. In the classroom, to copy is, in practice, to steal a text; because of the confusion, it

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¹ This essay was the keynote address at the Fourth Annual Colorado Conference of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning in Estes Park, Colorado in June 1998.

looks as if the thief is stealing language and thus not thinking. However, the thief is only stealing a text and his/her language is probably in good health, thank you, perhaps just as good as the language of the laboring text-producer. If each person's written text were considered to be in living use, it would be a virtue, as it is in the imagined "no-writing" classroom, to overtake other people's language: it would happen so often, and be noticed in addition, that its commonplace status would change classroom practices radically.

In the study of literature, it is considered a virtue to overtake other people's language. And it is not necessary to know a person's source for the language in order to see its otherness working in new ways. As I remove the hamburger from the freezer, I say, "O that this too too solid flesh would melt, thaw, resolve itself into beef patties." As I look at the cat who ate the rabid mouse, I say, "O Rose, thou art sick! The invisible worm that flies in the night in the howling storm has found out thy bed of crimson joy, and with his dark, secret love, does thy life destroy." As I deal with university officials smugly moving toward need-blind financial aid, the phrase "foolish prating knave" could come to mind. And finally, as I say on my answering machine, "Welcome to the darkling plain, swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight! The world, which seems to lie before us like a land of dreams, has really neither joy, nor life, nor love, nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain, so you might as well leave your message."

How did this happen to me? How did this language become my own? Do I love Shakespeare, Blake, or Arnold? Not really. Do I enjoy reading their work? Not too much. But I very much enjoy making their language my own. In this way, I make their language live again, live anew, and even if I oppose or reject features of these authors, I have overtaken their language and in this way I teach it to others. This teaching is not heavy handed or didactic. It is just easier to teach language when it is living within you, and you use it in regular exchange with others. You may say that I am showing off by reciting "poetry"; I think I am sharing *my* language. Wanting to hear a speaker is boring if we merely want to hear thoughts. But it is more interesting if we pay attention to how things are said and try to understand why they are said in just that way.

Maybe it is not "boring" to hear thoughts; maybe it is merely morally burdensome—we have a sense of obligation to "get" the thoughts. Certainly, when Jane Tompkins reported her discomfort in lecturing it was the moral burden that disturbed her the most—the burden of having to contribute her professional skill while ignoring the obvious fact that living people, with active thoughts, were there, thinking and responding. Yet only she was permitted to speak, day in, day out. And we know how empty the "discussion" usually is in the short time following a lecture. A lecture becomes textualized, as this is now, only because you can't answer. And to the extent that you can't answer, the text is sacred. Sacred texts have put language out of business. To prove this, consider the citing of the sacred text with due reverence and without it. To cite the text with reverence, you say to the bereaved person: the Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; blessed be the Name of the Lord. To cite text without reverence but nevertheless with meaning and force, you say to the gambler who lost his shirt, the Lord giveth, etc. In the first instance you encourage the sufferer not to challenge fate; in the

second instance you communicate the foolishness of having invited the loss. When the text is no longer sacred, it lives, and so do we.

This discussion is not directly about desacralizing texts, though I *am* trying to do that. Rather, I am paying attention to social practices that perpetuate the constricting action of sacred texts, and as I have suggested, one of those practices is the sermon, or its academic counterpart, the lecture, where we “learn” from one person, justified as an authority, and not from everyone.

I derive the idea of learning from everyone from a Talmudic source, a rabbi, whose name I don’t remember and did not look up. My late brother, an ordained but not practicing rabbi, taught me the aphorism that first communicated this ideal to me. Who is rich? Those happy with their lot. Who is heroic? Those who conquer their passions. Who is wise? Those who learn from everyone. In Hebrew, these catechisms are given in the masculine gender, so literally translated my title would read: Who is wise? One who learns from every man. Recently, Daniel Boyarin in his book *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* has taken up the issue of Rabbinic androcentrism and has given an opinion that applies here: historic Jewish culture, which has many fundamental differences from the pagan and Christian cultures in which it lived, did find ways to share in the androcentrism of these cultures, and Rabbinic masculine privilege was one of these ways. So in its historical and traditional context, the idea of “learning from everyone” is an exhortation given by men to other men to respect one another’s pedagogical potential. Whether, in practice, this was done, I don’t know; it could have been as academic as any academic moral ideal issued today—meant to conceal a fundamental situation of cozy privilege and privacy.

The rule against copying is one of the ways, as Madeleine Grumet put it in her book, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* that all teachers, male and female, collaborate to “deliver children to patriarchy.” The rest of the process of delivery takes place through testing and grading—the bureaucratic machinery that enforces a strict individualistic style in teaching and learning and that practically no one is in position to resist. I place the ideal of learning from everyone with, but also in opposition to, some of its historic Hebrew forebears, and I affiliate it with the more recent ideals of Grumet and teachers like her who say that the practices of learning from everyone, which continue in spite of an acculturation process that diminishes them, can now be followed more purposefully as part of our regular pedagogies.

Because the ideal of learning from everyone is grounded in self-consciousness about our use of language, this ideal is affiliated with the principle of the materiality of language. This too is a principle of historic Hebrew culture, but it is also a principle in other societies, especially those where writing has not overtaken the culture. Authorship has a different function in a materialist conception of language: Helen Keller is a legitimate “author” of a story she only memorized and placed in a journal. Similarly, Homer is the legitimate “author” of a poem he heard from others and then performed. And so on. If there were no original text for Hamlet, there would be different “authors” given by the readings of Hamlet in the different performances say, of Laurence Olivier and Mel Gibson. In the cases of anonymous premedieval poems, we stick doggedly to concepts such as

“the Beowulf poet,” when it will never matter or be determined that a single person is the author of this work. Harold Bloom has offered similar vain speculations about the authorship of the Old Testament. From a materialist perspective, the author is the person who *transmits*, whether in writing or in speaking, the work to others, not the one who invents the work, even if transmission entails some invention. Nonmaterialist literate cultures, certainly ours in any case, teach their children, erroneously, that if you write it down (or write it up), it is forever, and *you*, by God, did it. The plagiarist who passes in the paper taken from the internet is as much the author of that paper as the hack who wrote it for the internet. It is only because authorship has this unquestioned status that these transmissions are illegitimate in our schools. If you take both the internet and authorship seriously, you can see that soon it will simply be impossible to expect independent verifiable authorship from any student. What we call ordinary education will be routinely criminalized.

The materialist view of language is that it counts, so to speak, only when in use and in the service of its living situations. Language lives at its moments of performance, just as we live in these same moments. Yesterday and tomorrow are related to today and get their meaning for us from today. From a materialist standpoint, meaning is not separable from the action of the words in use. In the terms most of us were educated in, however, there is “meaning” over here, and language over there, and we can “apply” one to the other in a variety of ways. From a materialist perspective, meaning and language are always in the *same* place at the *same* time. Except in a superficial sense, a word doesn’t have a meaning prior to our use of it. It has only recognition value. When we overtake words and language in infancy, childhood, and later, we get, more or less accurately, how the use of the word created its meaning in our experience, and then we reproduce it, more or less efficaciously for each new situation, yet with incremental change that represents the responses to the new situations of use. The use of recognition value is that it makes change possible.

Another demonstration of materiality may come from the word spirit—in Hebrew and in German. In Hebrew, there is no word for spirit that has the same reference as it does in German and in the Latin-derived languages. In Genesis, the word for the “spirit” of God that “hovered over the face of the deep” is *ruakh*, which in modern Hebrew is also “wind” and “social feeling.” Both the German *Geist* and the Hebrew word refer to the breath of life, but in the German and Latin versions the meaning is also decorporealized: the bodily meaning of “breath” is extended with a transcendental and immaterial meaning, something like a “life principle” or essence of life that leaves at death. (That the word *ruakh* in Hebrew is gendered feminine and *Geist* gendered masculine may also matter, but I don’t know how.) The incorporeal meaning of “spirit” does not exist in Hebrew. The word *nishama* is also translated as the “breath” of life in Genesis, and refers in Hebrew sometimes to “the soul.” Yet “soul” is English and not Hebrew. In Hebrew, this life principle is identified as corporeal and not transcendental. As the Hebrew came into Christian culture, the materialist basis of the language changed in translations, and the materialist approach to language was forgotten in the West. It was revived by Wittgenstein and then later by Derrida. The bizarre character of most of their work is testimony to a kind of “lack of fit” of their own uses of

language within academic discourse and styles of reasoning. In a sense, Derrida's work may be understood as an attempt to force into academic genres a materialist use of language, where the moment of articulation matters so much. Wittgenstein, on the other hand, presented his thoughts nonacademically, in a series of informal observations that follow from one another. In both cases, the explanation of their difference rests on their materialist presuppositions. A third case of an attempt to move toward a materialist view of language is J. L. Austin's speech act theory. Noting the performance action of language, he, and later Searle and others tried to relate, in a systematic way, the various uses of language to social speech situations. So far, this project has not succeeded again because of its academic presumptions but also because its scope is too narrow. As we speak today, the materialist view of language is a small minority and has few advocates who are also interested in teaching the native language, the mother tongue.

Learning from everyone requires a materialist view of language and an approach to pedagogy that lets teaching and learning become reciprocal in each classroom. When a curriculum is brought into a classroom, it becomes contingent on how class members receive, study, criticize, change it, and contribute to it. The steps in this process that I am focusing on now are to show the collective value of class members' (1) sharing responses to texts, (2) overtaking the languages of texts and other class members, and (3) discerning the effects of our taking new language uses into our thinking, values, teaching, and learning. (Back fifty years: I'm sorry, Mrs. Levine [my fourth grade teacher]; not only am I guilty of copying, but I am now thinking it is a good thing.) We will see how it feels to take others' language and make it our own.

My case in point comes from classroom events in a course I taught in the spring of 1998. The course is "Hollywood and Jewish Values in America." It enrolled twenty-five students. The idea of the course was to consider how the fundamental genres and styles created by the Hollywood studio system, which was founded exclusively by the sons of East European Jewish immigrants, became overwhelming sources of social, political, personal, and entertainment values in America. The course featured reading four texts, including Boyarin's mentioned above, seeing a film each week, writing a one-page response to each film distributed on email to all other members of the class, three five-page essays distributed to groups of four or five, and one twelve-page essay. Because of technology, it is now easy for every student to see, read, hear, and know what the other students are writing and saying as contributions to this course.

A film of special importance was Billy Wilder's "Some Like it Hot" (1959). It is the story of two musicians on the run from gangsters whose crimes they witness. The fugitive pair disguise themselves as female musicians and go to Florida with an all-female group. The singer in the group is Sugar Kane played by Marilyn Monroe. The two musicians, the saxophonist (Joe/Josephine) played by Tony Curtis and the Bass player (Jerry/Daphne) played by Jack Lemmon, become members of the group. In order to chase after Sugar, Joe/Josephine meta-pretends to be Osgood (played by Joe E. Brown), a male millionaire; Daphne is chased by the real Osgood and begins to enjoy his female role. At the end, when the criminals have been eliminated, Osgood proposes to Daphne, and even when Daphne finally reveals that she is a man, Osgood says so what, "nobody's

perfect." Sugar accepts being fooled by Joe because she is "not too bright." As the four principals are seen together in the final scene, there is no other "realistic" resolution.

Here are the responses to this film given by upper level students at the University of Rochester, Spring 1998.

Fry: Joe and Jerry also show a hyper-intensification of heterosexuality through their dressing up. That they continually say to themselves (and to each other) "I'm a boy I'm a boy I'm a boy, you're a boy. . ." while in the women's clothing shows the heightened feelings of discomfort with homosexuality at that same time, a rise in heterosexual feelings.

Sin: Was I the only person who found that there was some sexual tension between Sugar and Daphne: the playful touching of the two in the water and the fact that Sugar seemed fairly anxious to hop into Daphne's bed led me to believe that something besides friendship was thought of between the two. . . . Sugar's attraction to Daphne surprised me.

Jo: Is Tony Curtis gay? Did he cross dress? These issues seem as if they are determined by individual interpretation to me, but I have to say, though, that Jack Lemmon sure seemed to enjoy his role as "Daphne" in the film . . . just as Ms. K pointed out. Can the theme of the film be summed up in the last lines of the film, spoken by Daphne's suitor, Osgood, that - "nobody's perfect."

Ho: They are the precursor to guests on Jerry Springer. "My Millionaire Son's Spouse is a Show-girl Cross-dresser!" Anyway I found it interesting that Tony Curtis, who is gay, played the more "masculine" of the two. He was always ragging on Daphne, and was the more physical of the two. He was typically the one roughing up Jack Lemmon, instead of the other way around. Although done comedically, this film was breaking new ground in the realm of publicizing drag.

Lav: This was the first time that I saw Marilyn Monroe in a film. Her voice was much higher than I expected and she seemed very 'breathy.' She also wasn't nearly as thin as I expected her to be. The image of what women should look like has drastically changed. . . . People in the movie were much more 'heteroflexible' than I had anticipated them to be.

Fri: I was kind of surprised at how she wasn't really thin. I remember watching the film and . . . none of us thought she was thin, although she did have a beautiful face.

- Pea: For those of you that don't know, I sew and have done costuming for four years now. So, I was very interested when I learned that the film won an Oscar for best costuming. The man on [television] said something that I found shocking. He said that the costumer's greatest challenge was that Marilyn was the largest that she had been her entire career in that film.
- Wei: The one performance I didn't enjoy in this film is that of Marilyn Monroe. . . . At least twice in the film she described herself as "not very bright." . . . It is obvious that the film-makers saw her as a feminine ideal. Her conversations about finding a rich man really bothered me. Perhaps the powerful men in Hollywood wanted to believe that all they needed to get a beautiful woman was a lot of money and a yacht.
- Whit: This was the first time in any movie that I've seen a character like me (Joe's fake Shell Oil persona) that's exactly how I feel about women; anybody wish to try and change my mind? . . . I'm just joking. That was probably the best way to try and pick up a woman. I was so impressed that he pulled it off, but of course he did, that's what Hollywood was about during that era, sex with Marilyn Monroe.
- Quin: What I found most striking (as Ms. G pointed out) were the parallels, often subtle, between Sugar and Marilyn Monroe. In her first speaking scene we see Sugar hiding out in the ladies room with her flask. . . . Monroe herself was a drinker and was hospitalized for her overdose on sleeping pills. . . . But the fans still loved her, just as the boys love Sugar in this film.
- Kal: Sugar was a pathetic character and if it were not for her looks, she would probably be in a lot of trouble. It is pitiful that she will always be reminded of her Shell millionaire friend at every corner when she sees a Shell station.
- Gra: However, Jerry likes the attentions he gets from Mr. Osgood because he is a wealthy man. He even tells Joe that "a guy dressed as a woman would marry a guy for security." This is when Joe brings him back to reality by telling Jerry that he cannot marry a millionaire because "he is a BOY."
- Kou: He seemed to completely forget that he was a man and started talking about the wedding, his soon-to-be mother-in-law, where they were going on the honeymoon, etc. . . . Then Daphne takes off the wig and says, "I'm a man!" and Osgood says, "Well nobody's perfect." THE END!!!! Unbelievable!!

- Ur: While *Sugar Cane* presents an unmistakable depiction of a Fallen Woman due to her single status, I believe that this image is more of a critical commentary on society-imposed gender roles. Instead of portraying Sugar's alcoholism as yet another immoral aspect of her being, the film appears to depict this habit as a direct result of societal sentiments. . . . While it may not be easy to perceive this film along the lines of *Gulliver's Travels*, I think that Joe/Josephine's quick but meaningful comment on learning how the other half lives dismissed my doubts as to whom the finger is pointed at in "Some Like It Hot."
- Cla: There is a thin line separating between love and abhorrence of the film, and thinking too hard about it will not only give me a headache, but will make me cross that line into abhorrence. . . . In "Snow White," she dreamed of riding off with the young charming prince, and in "Some Like it Hot," Marilyn dreamed of marrying a rich man with a yacht. The similarities between the two women are startling. Both naïve and dependent women expressed their emotions through song and dance, and both escaped a deplorable past life. . . . The dreams of women have shifted from love to economics, and I must say that I prefer the latter dream.
- Dac: The women in the film appear to be fragile little girls. . . . Daphne and Josephine are essentially the women and essentially the mothers of the ladies. . . . However, as we are seeing this, we are also seeing that even as a woman, man must continue on his reign of protecting woman. Man must have the controlling role in every situation.
- Cam: This movie was so fun!! I loved all the "girls" in the band because they did not seem stereotypical girlie. In fact Josephine and Daphne were the "real" ladies on the trip. It seems that a man's interpretation of a woman is more womanly than a woman really is. I hope that made sense.
- Bore: Joe and Jerry switched roles somewhat when they become women. While Joe was still the domineering one, "Daphne" allowed Jerry to step into a more adventurous character. Jerry had been the conservative, stay-at-home one, while Joe was the one who wanted to bet their work money at the dog track. When the duo became women, Daphne quickly became friends with all the other girls and was having a good time, while Josephine was trying to calm Daphne down and make sure she didn't do anything rash.

Gig: I did see where the two men had a relationship like a marriage. One being the dominant personality and the one to convince the other to follow. Jerry is the follower. He has the stable dependable personality but does not want to be alone. . . . The whole movie centered around the sexuality of Sugar.

Ben: Really I do not have a profound thought in my body at this moment. . . . sorry.

The foregoing responses are excerpts from the one-page responses sent out over email. They might suggest how the habit of mutual exchange in classrooms might become the prevailing convention. For some, though not for all class members, these habits continued into their final projects; they cited others' opinions, views, judgments to contribute to their own discussion of the course's issues.

In considering ways to understand these responses, consider the group of four that raises issues of non-hetero gender identity. Two respondents consider if Tony Curtis is gay, one notices lesbian moves, and one comments on the "intensification" of heterosexuality. The students commented on this film after noticing that at the beginning of his book, mentioned earlier, Daniel Boyarin characterizes himself in adolescence as "a sissy who did not like sports." The question then arose if Boyarin was gay. The students noticed that after all, there is no statement in his long book which discloses many personal facts and feelings, that says that Boyarin is either gay or not gay. So Mr. Jo asks "if" Curtis is gay, while Ms. Ho says he is. The discussion suggests that the assuming and guessing about who is or is not gay has moved from private to public zones. As we know, if you raise certain questions, others will say you have a stake in those questions: the students who asked about lesbian issues are eligible to be identified as having a stake in those issues. In this instance *it did not matter* to these students, as it did not matter to Boyarin, how their discourse identified them. The students succeeded in converting private uses—"is so and so gay"—into language others can adapt in inoffensive discussions. The private language has been converted into a curricular issue.

In the film, the question of whether anyone is gay did not matter, but for different reasons. The status of cross-dressing in society was different from what it is today, and its potential for raising issues of sexual orientation was ignored outright in the film. The prevailing assumptions led audiences to the purely comic reading of the cross-dressing. This situation, in turn, permitted something else important to emerge in the film, even if it were unacknowledged in society: the separation of marriage as a practice from gender identity. This separation is enacted by the conversation between Joe and Daphne after they return to their room from the yacht-seduction and from the tango dance floor. The separation holds at the end of the film, when Osgood refuses to allow that Daphne's being a man is an impediment to their being married. Daphne had established her female identity through gestures early in the film and underscores this identity in the tango scene. The coup de grace of her female identity comes when, climactically, she uses the *language* of the fiancée in the first conversation with Joe and in the final

conversation with Osgood. Only one student mentioned this move in this dimension, Ms. Kou:

He seemed to completely forget that he was a man and started talking about the wedding, his soon to be mother-in-law, where they were going on the honeymoon, etc. Then Daphne takes off the wig and says, "I'm a man!" and Osgood says, "Well nobody's perfect."
THE END!!!! Unbelievable!!

It is unbelievable to Ms. Kou, because she sees no expected resolution in which the traditional gender roles are restored. The situation is *not* brought back to reality, as claimed by Ms. Gra in the response preceding Ms. Kou's. In the film, Daphne ignores Joe's exhortation that he is a boy, and claims that even if he were a boy, marrying a millionaire is a very good plan. At the end of the film, this value is reaffirmed—and that is what is unbelievable to Ms. Kou. As given, the film, ostensibly with comic intent, has separated marriage from gender. It is, perhaps, the safest conclusion to draw from a critical reading of the film.

But that is too abstract a conclusion to explain fully the energy and appeal of the film. If I take seriously the universal praise this film received from my class, other conclusions might be drawn. A few students (Ms. Wei, Mr. Kal, and Ms. Dac) complained about the diminishment of women. There was barely a film in Hollywood that did not diminish women in some way. However, even the students who complained enjoyed the film, particularly the antics of Josephine and Daphne. Their performance as women was convincing, and extra-funny because it was so convincing. In spite of themselves, viewers believed that Joe and Jerry had become women, as, perhaps suggested by Ms. Sin, who thought she may be the only one noticing a homoerotic feeling on Sugar's part.

Viewers tended to say that "Jack Lemmon" enjoyed the role, a statement that may be meant to communicate their own enjoyment. Through their marketing techniques, Hollywood studios have encouraged identifying actors with characters. As a result, such identification has become a convention that encourages discussion about whether the actors themselves are gay, something irrelevant to the interpretations of the films, but not irrelevant to how people are predisposed toward issues raised by the films. Ms. Ho, assuming that Tony Curtis is gay, sees something progressive in his portrayal of the "more 'masculine' of the two." However, the correspondence between Sugar Kane and Marilyn Monroe raises interest in the film beyond, perhaps, its status as an entertainment piece.

At least six viewers commented on their viewing of Marilyn Monroe and not on Sugar Kane, the character. Four of the viewers commented on her weight or on how she was not thin as expected, how so much of her body was shown and that her voice was "breathy." Two of the viewers made a point of the actual parallels between the role played by Monroe and her actual life situations. In this dimension, the film is the product of the Hollywood Jewish (and other) men who, habitually, showcased a female star with special emphasis on her status as a sex object. This collection of responses shows that some viewers notice what is happening but are only marginally disturbed, like Ms. Wei, who was particularly impatient with the economy of clever, deceptive rich men looking for "not too

bright" excessively sexualized women, with the women looking for men in the same terms. Viewers, male and female, are taken with Monroe, perhaps even more today than in her time, as she has become mythologized. The visual spectacle of her performance distracted most viewers, as men, like Mr. Whit, identified "sex with Marilyn Monroe" as the theme of Hollywood, not just the theme of this film. If we believe the stories about the Kennedys as well, it was the theme of many heterosexually identified American men, for many years, and it is still a theme. Women continued to evaluate her in terms of the standard of beauty: now thin is considered to be more beautiful than it was forty years ago, or four hundred years ago. For many viewers, male and female, the issues of heterosexual sex and body image added up to the most serious weight of the film, while the meaning of what Joe and Jerry did was merely the "screwball" element in the screwball comedy.

What happens to Joe is the rationalization of the sexual obsession. The fickle and deceptive saxophone player turns out to be good. Because Sugar is "not too bright," she overlooks the deceit, as, thankfully, a good man in her own social class can be found to marry. What happens to Jerry, however, is unexpected. Concealed by its "screwball" identity, diminished in prominence by the presence of Sugar Kane, the transformation of Jerry into a woman is never denied. I think the widespread enjoyment of this film is explained by how Jerry's transformation makes the film evenhanded, balancing out the misogyny of the Sugar Kane plot with an ostensible joke that says it is OK to be a woman, *even if you are a man*. Viewers like Ms. Cam who said that "It seems that a man's interpretation of a woman is more womanly than a woman really is" helps all viewers to see the sense of Jerry's final transformation into Daphne. I think she says that you see the real woman more readily in Daphne through his overtaking of female language than you do in either the exaggerated woman or the unnoticed woman. The language is the key to the other.

Consider now the post-tango conversation and the final one somewhat differently. In the first conversation, Daphne is very happy, as we see her in bed singing and shaking the maracas. She says, "I'm engaged. We're planning a June wedding." Joe only says it can't be done, that there is a problem. In each case Daphne says there is no problem: his mother is not a problem, she doesn't smoke, and what to do on the honeymoon has been discussed. But even Daphne's language that agrees that the marriage cannot succeed is female. She will get a "quick annulment" and collect alimony. When Daphne repeats after Joe that "I'm a boy" she quickly adds, "I wish I were dead." Daphne simply does not stop being a woman. Yes, Ms. Kou, this is unbelievable. Joe, the "strong" or "masculine" man, is unable to persuade Jerry to rejoin him in "reality." Without surgery or fanfare, but with the help of good writing, Jerry, thinking in "female" language, has become Daphne.

In the concluding scene, Osgood is the loyal partner. Daphne tries to persuade Osgood that the marriage won't work. She can't wear Osgood's mother's wedding gown because she is not built the same way; she is not a natural blonde; she smokes, after all; she can never have children. Osgood is undeterred. But the punch line of this joke is not when Daphne pleads that she is a man, but that Osgood says, "nobody's perfect." Being a man is just an imperfect form of a

woman: a reversal of the myth, partially believed by Freud, that a woman is an incomplete version of a man. To some, this ending may be unsatisfactory, but to most it is not. It balances the misogyny present in the other parts of the film. In this sense it is not a joke.

In the same sense, it is not a joke that Jerry overtakes female discourse and *becomes* Daphne. The action of this new language is real. It is blended in with other actions and gestures, into the total scene, including the early situation of having to escape the vengeance of the mob. Jerry escapes completely into womanhood, including the escape from the domineering of Joe, his gambling, his irresponsibility. Joe was the profligate saxophone player that Jerry lived with, one who could not become a real partner or a responsible roommate. Perhaps Daphne as a desexualized Sugar is ridiculous; certainly that idea is part of the topical rationality of this film. But Sugar does find the right saxophone player, and by the rules of comedy, there is a double marriage at the end, and one of them includes acceptance of a man as being an imperfect woman. Unbelievable!

The materiality of language makes it possible to take other people's language without stealing it, to take it in a way that enhances it in its earlier contexts. To learn from everyone implies that we will take our language from unlikely sources, that we will be able to assimilate the seemingly intellectualized formulations of Ms. Ur (Sugar Kane is "the unmistakable depiction of a Fallen Woman"), the colloquialisms of Ms. Cam ("The movie was so fun!!), and the hip cultural parody of Ms. Ho ("My Millionaire Son's Spouse is a Show-girl Cross-dresser."), the judgments of Ms. Cla and Ms. Wei: "naïve and dependent women" who express themselves through song and dance, or those who think of themselves as "not too bright." The materiality of language teaches that we may prefer but will not privilege this one's language over that one; we will not judge it and give this one a higher grade than the respondent who said, "Really I do not have a profound thought in my body at this moment. . . sorry." We may if we overtake the language of Ms. Ben (the last comment) persuade ourselves that this film does not matter at all, that it is a self-indulgence by one zone of society: a possible description of many films or other works of art.

Sometimes, I can't believe how much work it takes to understand the minds of twenty-year-old students. Each year, they are different from me in different ways in time and culture. Yet because of this constant change of circumstances in my classrooms, something genuinely new takes place when even the same words leak out of lazy students who repeat clichés and don't bother to find new things to say. I can't always identify what is new about a student informing me that the printer broke down, but something is new about it coming from a different face at a different time for a different reason. The same conundrum holds for each member of the classroom. Once the new situation is acknowledged, the old words become new, and they are eligible to be overtaken with purpose and imagination. Go ahead! Copy from your neighbor! Covet your neighbor's language! Take it! Convert it! Play with it! Both you and your neighbor will be happier for it. ●

Works Cited

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