

Embodied Criticism: A French Lesson

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for Susan Shapiro

What happens as scholars of various disciplines increasingly write in the first person?¹ What does it mean for us to place ourselves, our embodied and historicized selves, in our work? I am interested in what transpires when we do this not just in our introductions, prefaces, or acknowledgements, but throughout an entire text. Given this turn to the first person point of view, what are we to make of the narrating of self, the self narratives that are present in our work and in the works of others? What comes to pass as these narratives become sedimented, when we can see the layers of self narratives presented over time? How do we write and rewrite our stories knowing that at least some of our readers already know some of these earlier tellings? With these questions in mind, I want to think about how we read the traces of the lives of other writers in an author's work and what the traces tell us, and to consider how we account for changes in our own positions as writers in our own work. To do this means thinking about imagined readers coming to our various works over time and the expectations we create as we place ourselves in our work. What do we imagine our readers do, once they have come to know us in our work in particular ways as we do other things? What lingers? How do we tell stories, create new narratives about topics we have addressed in the first person already; what can and do readers expect in these instances? In a sense, all of these are new questions and I do not think there are simple answers. Instead I am interested in exploring what we do with these questions as scholars, as readers, and as writers by looking at a particularly pointed case of what happens when the "I" in a series of scholarly texts is figured in relationship to a charged and indeed tainted history and the author's various relationships to that larger story and key figures within it. To begin to address some of these

difficult issues I consider here the literary scholar Alice Kaplan and her engagements with the legacy of French fascism.²

I turn to Kaplan to ask how these issues of the “I” in a scholarly text play out when the work we do is about our relationships, and what might be construed as our complicities with historical figures whose legacies are indeed tainted. And once we have placed ourselves in these situations and written about them how can we write otherwise? My title, “A French Lesson,” refers to the title of Kaplan’s acclaimed memoir *French Lessons* (1993), which chronicles her life in French. I examine Kaplan’s powerful presence in this text and how it relates to her other scholarly work, especially her overt discussion of her personal engagement with French fascist Maurice Bardèche and the legacy of both Bardèche and his brother-in-law Robert Brasillach who was convicted of treason as a collaborator after the war in 1945. Kaplan writes about these legacies in *French Lessons*, as well as in her first book *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature and French Intellectual Life* (1986), and in *The Collaborator: The Trial and Execution of Robert Brasillach* (2000). In each of these works Kaplan addresses her relationship with Bardèche as it evolves over time. I am interested in the twists and turns of this interaction as presented in these works, *French Lessons*, *Reproductions of Banality*, and am ultimately concerned with how this depiction changes in the story she tells in *The Collaborator*. Because Kaplan presents this material in relation to the loss of her father, a prosecutor at Nuremberg who died when she was only eight years old, I will argue that the psychological stakes are extremely high. Kaplan’s insistence on the importance of this loss makes it virtually impossible not to see her personal story seeping through the pages of all her work. Given these details, I believe this self narration over time offers a case in point. And, as I will argue, even her more recent work, *The Translator* (2005) is haunted by this story. In other words, these works tell us not only about Kaplan’s relationship with Bardèche but her broader personal struggles with the legacy of French fascism, and the Holocaust as they relate to the loss of her father, the Prosecutor at Nuremberg.

For Kaplan the personal is political; her personal loss is tied to this larger story as inflected by her work in French. As she tells us at vari-

ous places in her writing, her father's funeral took place on her eighth birthday and missing him has drawn her to various father figures over and over again. These coupled interests, the allure of the enemy and her father's legacy as a prosecutor of war crimes, crimes that mark her as both an America and a Jew, haunt all of her work in French culture as she struggles both to be his daughter and her own person. This profoundly ambivalent legacy is at the heart of her scholarship. Father and anti-father figures, French men and Americans, trying to discern who is in the right, and how justice can be created after so much loss: these issues are Kaplan's most profound preoccupations. And in various ways, throughout her career, Kaplan has found ways of addressing them in the first person.

I. "I" as Writing Strategy

Around the time that *French Lessons* was first published, Kaplan recalls,

On a political level, my work has been antifascist, in *Reproductions of Banality*, to the work I did in *French Lessons* about Holocaust revisionism, and on a personal level working through my relationship to my father, who was a prosecutor at Nuremberg. *The feminism there is deep; it's not programmatic—it has to do with fathers, mentors, and what it means for an intellectual woman to have an ambition.* (Williams, "Writing in Concert" 173 my emphasis)

Kaplan makes clear that her position is both personal and political and, for this reason, feminist. And yet, for her, feminism is all about her relationships with men, more specifically with father figures, mentors, and teachers. In some sense these are over-determined relationships, capitulating to a seemingly too obvious Freudian script.

The reading of Kaplan's work that follows is very much indebted to my friend and colleague Susan E. Shapiro. It builds on conversations we had as we both first read *French Lessons* in 1993. Susan was uneasy with where Kaplan left readers at the end of that volume. She was not sure she trusted the "I" in the text and what that "I" seemed to have resolved by the end of book. Susan's cautionary voice returned to me as I began reading *The Collaborator* when it was published in 2000. The Kaplan I

had come to know in *French Lessons* and *Reproduction of Banality* seemed to have disappeared in the pages of this then new expository text, a rich history of the trial and execution of Fascist intellectual and writer Robert Brasillach. Moreover, she seemed to deny any past connection to this story either personal or intellectual despite her knowing otherwise. And in a sense, I return to this puzzle so many years later because the contradictions only grow over time as Kaplan continues writing. In *The Collaborator* Kaplan finds another style and writes again in this juridical mode in her 2005 novel *The Interpreter*, which is another story of justice-on-trial.

I come to this reading very much informed by my own work in feminist theory and a cluster of interrelated literary legacies—the work of feminist identity politics from the 1980s³; the turn to first-person writing among feminist literary scholars in the 1990s⁴; and a broader literary turn to first person writing in ethnography and the social sciences.⁵ In addition to these influences my reading, like Kaplan's, is also informed by psychoanalytic theory broadly construed. We are both interested in paying attention to the less than conscious desires that are a part of our work especially when using the first person.

Kaplan signals the importance of the unconscious or the less than conscious desires most powerfully in *French Lessons*. In what follows I look at a few of these key passages. As I will argue, these textual moments become symptomatic of Kaplan's broader engagement with French Fascism, 1945, and her desire to recover her lost father. With this in mind, let me turn to the first of these examples.

Midway through her memoir, Kaplan describes a close friend and confidant, actually a sister figure, Micheline, a speech therapist and daughter of one of her many French fathers, Papillon, the pharmacist. She writes of Micheline:

[h]er perspective is psychoanalytic; she believes, for example, that it is dangerous to treat a symptom without treating the cause. It is dangerous to cure someone of stuttering if the stuttering fulfills a psychic need the person hasn't understood. (98)

I begin with this description because it captures Kaplan's own profoundly ambivalent position in her work. Like the stutterer, Kaplan is a repeater. She returns again and again to the same biographical moments in her writing. She reiterates an ambivalence that she cannot overcome; the loss of her father is a psychic wound that she cannot get over. And, as we will see, it is dangerous for Kaplan actually to cure this symptom. As I read it, her own need to stutter in this way is too important, and it is in trying to overcome this symptom that she gets into trouble.

Traces of this stuttering ambivalence are already apparent in her first book, *Reproductions of Banality*. Here she writes:

As readers of fascism, as antifascist intellectuals, we need to examine our unconscious political complicity with the errors we denounce; what, for example, are the conditions today for an uncompromised use of the pronoun *we* in mechanically reproduced political discourse? Or, conversely, at what risk its absence? These are the uncomfortable questions that haunt my conversations with Bardèche.

Note: My visit to Bardèche took place over three or four days beginning July 13, 1982. (164)

Although I will return to this passage, for now what is important is that Kaplan already asks her readers to engage with her in the workings of the unconscious or the less than conscious in the fascist texts she reads as well as in her own work. This first text substantiates my belief that she already understood the risks involved in these engagements as well as her own need to keep returning to these same questions. These are the very issues that leave her stuttering time and time again. And, as I will argue, the cure for this ailment is too dangerous for Kaplan to let go of the symptom.

I read Alice Kaplan through the lenses of feminist and critical theoretical turns to the first person and a kind of psychoanalytic suspicion. These are also very much ways of reading and writing that inform Kaplan's own writing, perhaps most overtly in *French Lessons* but in her other works as well. In what follows, I want to explore what these templates open up in Kaplan's work and how they enable us to consider new questions about the "I" as well as about its absence.

II. A Lesson in French

When I first read *French Lessons* in 1993 I loved it. It is a beautifully written, sparkling, powerful, and compelling memoir. The book captured my attention so much so that I wanted learn more about fascism and Kaplan's work. I read backwards from *French Lessons*. I went to *Reproductions of Banality* and other published essays. And I learned a lot from Kaplan. I found her approach compelling and used portions of both *French Lessons* and *Reproductions of Banality* in a course I taught on Holocaust and Representations in 1994. I had my graduate students read the interview with Bardèche at the end of the first book alongside Kaplan's rereading/reproduction/revision of that interview and its aftermath in *French Lessons*. At that time I made connections between these texts and concerns and the account historian Claudia Koonz presents of her encounter with the head of the Nazi women's organization, a woman who was both still alive and still a Nazi at the time when Koonz was working on her book *Mothers in the Fatherland*. Then and now I was interested in what it meant to interview fascists and Nazis—people who were players in a specific historical moment—in the present. I was taken by what it meant to visit these subjects face to face, to be there with them, deciding in Koonz' case, what to wear, how to present her self.

Writing about her experience interviewing the head of the Nazi women's organization in 1981, Koonz wonders if this woman “after decades of silence” would “impart to a new generation words of guidance and contrition” (xxi). She tells us that she knows from archival sources that this woman was “docile, self-serving, and rather noncommittal” (xxi). And, although there were no overtly anti-Semitic statements in her various writings Koonz was not quite sure what to expect. She hoped for a “Speer-like contrition; she had been, after all, like Speer, very young and extremely ambitious” (xxii).⁶ Nevertheless, approaching the actual interview, Koonz says she was “overcome with anxiety” (xxi). She continues,

I intended merely to listen and record, occasionally to insert a probing question. Oral historians must remain faceless and value-free in order to capture the full truth. Still, I have never interviewed an ex-Nazi since those hitching conversations of

my student days. Gazing out at the dismal garden, I wondered; my worries began to shift from the list of questions in my head to my image. Had I dressed appropriately for this encounter? What *was* the proper image for an ex-Nazi? Could I win her trust if I wore an A-line skirt (light gray), simple shirt (also light gray, hand-knit Irish cardigan (blue), sensible shoes (also blue)? Would my hair stay neat in its Germanic bun? Certainly, I thought guiltily, I had the right coloring for an “Aryan” image. These anxieties, I realized masked my deeper forebodings. Why did I even want to win the trust of an ex-Nazi? (xxi)

The text continues with Koonz describing the woman who greeted her, “a wiry, vigorous woman” dressed in “an A-line skirt (dark green), a Black Forest hand-knit cardigan (also dark green), a prim blouse (white) with a tiny brooch, and sensible shoes (brown)” (xxi). Even this woman’s hair is just as expected, “a hair net kept her white braids twisted neatly around her head” (xxi). Koonz had been so right about how to present herself that she too shudders, but only in this moment of recognition. Upon meeting this woman Koonz quickly understood that there would be no contrition. Instead, she writes, “I listened to pious excuses that reminded me of the rationalizations given during the war-crimes trials at Nuremberg. ‘How could I have known? We had our duty. You must remember the other side. . . .’ I had not been invited to hear a confession, and this was not an *ex*-Nazi. She remained as much a Nazi now as she has been in 1945 or 1933” (xxii). For Koonz, unlike Kaplan, as we will see, the interaction with this ex-Nazi entailed no threat of seduction. She was not only disappointed and angry, she also got bored. In this sense she was clearer about where she stood in relation to this past than it seems Kaplan ever was. In sharp contrast with Kaplan, she did not build a relationship. Instead after countless attempts to get Frau Scholtz-Klink to address Nazi atrocities and the horrors perpetrated by the regime, Koonz writes that it was pointless to argue. “I sat face to face over tea and cakes, with the everyday banality of evil, looking at a woman who had embraced an ideology and surrendered responsibility to a closed system that left no doubts—at least none that she would admit to” (xxxiii).

Kaplan opens the final chapter of *Reproductions* by warning readers that interviews are dangerous. She makes reference to Marcel Orphüls's powerful film *The Sorrow and the Pity* as well as the healing effects of "talking cures" (164). She also warns that there is always a danger in identifying with the enemy. In some sense Kaplan is a more sophisticated student of critical theory than Koonz. Kaplan seems to know from the very start the dangers involved in this work with fascists and their texts, especially their allures. And yet, this awareness proves not to protect her. Once she meets Bardèche she is strangely charmed and seems to lose perspective. So, by the time she is ready to write about her encounter with Bardèche, her fascist, Kaplan muses,

As I was calculating for the nth time the necessity of analyzing even the conditions of such an interview, I return again and again to my own sincere affection for Bardèche, the *littéraire*, the storyteller; to my genuine admiration for the easy bohemian atmosphere of the cottage and the endless hospitality of the entire family to their latest guest. What could be more in keeping, I concluded, with the errors made again and again in analyzing fascism than my own inability to distinguish the personal from the political, family language from polemic, charm for error? (166)

Here Kaplan imagines an easy divide between the personal and the political as if such a line might be drawn ignoring precisely the feminist and psychological theory that challenges such easy distinctions, works that complicate notions of desire and identity that see the ambivalences which blur these easy distinctions.⁷ These are the very critical modes she herself cites as informing her own work. The personal is political. She knows and she does not know this simple truth. Instead she is seduced. She becomes the child all over again. And yet this strategy proves untenable time and time again, even in this very first iteration of her interviews with Bardèche. Given this, she ends the final section of the interview as follows, first with Bardèche's words, and then one last parenthetical aside of her own.

Bardèche: “The liberty of the press consists precisely in writing things that shock people. If you conceive of the liberty of the press as the liberty to write what everyone already thinks, it’s not worth it—don’t talk about the liberty of the press. [laughter] the liberty of the press consists in shocking,” he said, “I am on the side of Faurisson.”⁸

[Suzanne Bardèche interrupts our silence following this remark to announce that one of the grandchildren has returned from the beach, bitten by a jellyfish. After the wound has been tended, we sit on the porch drinking tea. I head back to my hotel at dusk.] (188)

For Bardèche, freedom of the press is about being able to write what is shocking, unpopular, disturbing. It is not about reiterating what is already agreed upon. The thrill in this claim is in pushing the limits, seeing how far one can go in saying things that are disturbing. Here he aligns himself most decidedly with the negationists who question the very truth of the claims of the Holocaust and the death camps. Bardèche’s laugh, which Kaplan notes, suggests a sly glee, an ironic pleasure in saying in this context, again something clearly and knowingly shocking for his audience.

The interview ends in an interruption, at the very point of shock. This man’s daughter enters the room to announce a more quotidian crisis. One of the grandchildren had been bitten by a jellyfish, and here, in her telling, Kaplan suggests that she too has been injured, but unlike the grandchild’s her wound is not attended to. That final tea at dusk does not mend the wound of this relationship. Reflecting back on this encounter and her script as she rewrites the story of this relationship in *French Lessons*, Kaplan knows that this stark first person writing is some of her best work. And strangely the deep ambivalences it reveals are precisely what elude her. This final scene captures poignantly Alice Kaplan’s deep longing for family and healing. It also makes vivid her anger at her own father for not being there, for dying and leaving her to fend for herself in search of other father figures. What are especially striking are the lengths she is willing to go to find such substitute figures. In this

case, she flirts with precisely those her own father had prosecuted, Nazis and their sympathizers. Strangely, she seeks comfort and community with these same maligned figures, perhaps a statement about her rage at her own father for abandoning her. Kaplan is in dangerous waters. She is the child who needs adult attention. Because her wounds are not fully healed, she is lured by the promise of an idyllic family setting even when it is not nearly so ideal. And, even here she is abruptly reminded that even these people are not her family. Because this fascist is still very much committed to his political legacy, Kaplan's desires for his approval, his comfort, and acceptance make clear the intensity of her ambivalence. It is powerfully, palpably present. Bardèche can never be her father.

III. *Revisions*

As I have noted, Kaplan returns to this very interview presented in her first book in *French Lessons*. She returns because there is something unresolved about that relationship that she needs to explore. And so she does. In "The Interview," a chapter from Part Four: *Revisions of French Lessons*, Kaplan picks up where she left off and continues to write and rewrite—in effect to right—this encounter. In retrospect, Kaplan clarifies the stakes in this relationship. She presents her ambivalent position in terms of a series of binary oppositions that she can somehow perhaps transcend as if there was such a clean and clear position for her to take. She uses these distinctions with the naïve hope that they will enable her to keep from having to take a stand one way or the other.

Kaplan describes being caught between America and France, the just and the unjust, the resistance and the fascists. All of these pairings are intimately engaged in the pages of her text. They reflect not only her abstract impressions of France but the very homes she enters and the families she visits. She frames her encounter with Bardèche in these terms. She tells the story in the context of another visit with another French family; that family is juxtaposed to Bardèche's family. Here the contrast is between the family of her friends, the heirs of the resistance and French republicanism, the Zay/Mouchard family and that of the Bardèche clan and its alliance with French fascism and nationalism. Kaplan describes these conflicting French traditions of fascist national-

ism and resistance republicanism using these two families to set up the contrast, and to seemingly keep herself, her American self, somehow impassively above the fray. By not choosing sides she is free to observe the lineage of these distinct French traditions as if she herself can remain untainted. They represent the contrast between Marianne and Joan of Arc, the tropes of two very different and feminized visions of France. Here Kaplan is the scholar speaking about these things as if from a distance. Despite her intimate engagements with both of these families she tries to remain untouched—not having to choose, charmed, intrigued by both. This position is by no means obvious. It stands in sharp contrast to Koonz's clarity about Frau Scholtz-Klink. Despite understanding her subject well enough to dress exactly right, Koonz, unlike Kaplan, cannot help but judge her subject. She cannot be neutral. It does not take her time and distance to come to this decision. Koonz recalls her frustration, anger and disgust even in the process of doing the interview. She does not go back again and again either to visit or to revisit and revise this position. Perhaps one might argue that Koonz was too quick to judge, too angry, but even still the contrast is striking. For Kaplan, even with time and distance, she finds it difficult to judge her fascist, to criticize him.

For Kaplan being with Bardèche remains confusing. She is charmed even in retrospect by the warmth of this fascist family and their embrace of her. She longs to be included and takes delight in their company. She cannot separate this desire for inclusion from the moral questions it poses. Not choosing, as Kaplan wants to believe, is not a way of avoiding this choice; it is itself a choice, an acceptance of Bardèche and his position. She lends him legitimacy by not taking a stand. Even with hindsight, she is unable to make these distinctions.

In *Revisions* Kaplan writes about what it meant for her to return to France as a professor in the summer of 1982. She has finally arrived. She is what I like to call the really real; no longer a mere graduate student, she is a real scholar with funding to do her research and this change of status offers her legitimacy and stature. She has come to France to seek out the last living French fascist of that generation. Again she goes through the motions and describes grappling with the ethical questions, but the heady excitement of it all buoys her on. She is confident that as

an American and a scholar she can somehow rise above these concerns in ways that perhaps French scholars from France cannot. She need not be complicit, or so she thinks.

In “The Interview” she tells the story of her adventure to this place as if she were narrating a film in which she is the star. Having arrived in Canet the morning of her first interview, she writes, “I was too restless to stay at my hotel, so I walked around the old part of town until it was time for my lunch date at the Bardèche cottage. Walking through the market, I saw coming toward me an old man with a big crater in the middle of this forehead” (190-91). She has a glimpse of a strange and frightening looking man in town before arriving at the cottage only to discover that this very man was Bardèche. She continues,

“Oh, it is you,” I said, surprised, and he didn’t understand how I seemed to recognize him, even though we had never met.

“A first scene in a movie,” I thought. (191)

She then reminds us of the visual clue we, the audience for her movie, have already seen, the “hole in the head.” This is how we are introduced to the man.

She tries to do what she thinks her father would tell her to do: she lets him talk, and in the process she tells herself that she has to get in trouble to get anywhere, she must take these risks. As she explains, “he was an incredible collaborator” (194). This is the first part of her account, her reiteration of the interview, but what follows is the aftermath, what happened after it was all over and her first book went to press in the fall of 1985. At this very moment, Kaplan received a personal letter from Bardèche:

I received a four-page hand-written letter from him with this cover note attached:

Dear Alice Kaplan, I hesitate to send you the letter that is attached to this note. I am afraid that it might cause you pain. Remember, even if it irritates you, that I have much sympathy for you and much confidence in you. That is why I’ve written it. You must not be afraid of the truth of others; you must try to understand. (195)

This became the intimate prelude to a most devastating letter. She is keenly aware of what it will say about her relationship with Bardèche. As she explains, “is it too banal, too obvious, to point out that going to interview Bardèche had put me in a daughterly role?” (195). She continues by explaining that the four-page letter was a form of pay-back for this intimacy. Kaplan does not translate and share the entire letter with her readers. Instead, she offers the following account of its content:

The anger and disgust he had hidden so successfully was right there for me to see ... beginning with his frustration about all that we hadn't said at Canet Plage. He was setting out to haunt me, and to block me from thinking back on him with any peace of mind. (195)

The desire to look back fondly, to have peace of mind, feels strange given the context and content of these discussions and the history it opens up between Kaplan, an American Jew, and this unrepentant French fascist. Here again Koonz's example is instructive. For Koonz there never was any sense that she could have peace of mind once she realized that Frau Scholtz-Klink had never changed her position. Kaplan continues with her account of the letter:

You see dear Alice Kaplan how right you are in your reflections on the interviews. It's worse than you think. Because, after the interviews, there are letters. Not only is the monster not as monstrous as you thought, but he speaks—not only does he speak, but he takes his tools out of his toolbox like an electrician who is going to do repairs. It's hideous. (195)

Building on this translated excerpt, Kaplan goes on to explain that Bardèche insists she see her own complicity in his doings. She liked him. She has to admit that he was not a monster and that he does believe these terrible things—and that is somehow worse. He is not an abstraction, an other, but rather all-too-familiar despite his horrible commitments and complicities. Moreover, by engaging with him she must own that which she has done to and with him. As she explains, he referred to her as an

“anthropologist of anti-Semitism” and to himself as a “Negro” (196). She is among the occupiers and he is the victim aligned with those who were colonized. As he explains, he is among the “Negroes, with brains and sensibilities absolutely foreign to those of a good American” (196). Included in this perverse analogy, Bardèche extends and fleshes out the contours of this maligned French race of which he was a member. She describes these as indications, signs of their thinking and beliefs. These include the following:

1. No French intellectual knew about the existence of the concentration camps, he began.
2. Jews died because of allied bombings, because of disease; that was not the fault of the Nazis.
3. Painful as it is to acknowledge, there can be, and was, extermination *without will to exterminate*, “Pas de volonté d’extermination”: no will to exterminate. (196)

These key points shape what he says in the four pages of the letter proper. This includes the fact that “Jews just died like flies”—a point he makes even as he reminds her that he does not want to cause her pain (196). In her account of the letter Bardèche’s explanation continues with his insistence on the mandate of his beloved negationists like Faurison. Part of what made this all so horrible for Kaplan was that Bardèche punctuated his letter to her with the “ghoulish form of address ... Chère Alice Kaplan” (196). Kaplan finds this endearment especially terrible because she is a Jew—but I think that it is the intimacy, the love and the longing that it attests to, that makes it so disturbing. This becomes clearer as she concludes her account of the letter. It is the familiarity of the address that rankles her. As she explains,

[t]he horrible gist of it, as far as I was concerned, was not that he had written a negationist polemic—he had written many of those, the details of this one came as no surprise to me—but that he would address his revisionism directly to me, fashioning it, personalizing it as a result of the complicity we had established in our interview. (196)

In rewriting and embellishing her relationship with Bardèche what is most striking is Kaplan's need to tell the story again and again. She needs to repeat and reiterate, trying to get it right through multiple tellings. But in this particular account the difference is Kaplan's overt and conscious effort to place her *real* father in the story. Kaplan explains that she rewrote the story always with her own father in the wings, in the idealized position of the good prosecutor in some imagined courtroom passing judgment on her and on the entire situation. This desire to make him present compels and eludes her.

In these retellings, Kaplan was able to keep the temporality of 1945 alive in the present despite its place in a distant past. She ends her account with another dream, a movie dream in which she is able to finally make everything right. She places Bardèche on the stand and she—not her father—holds him to account in that idealized juridical context. He is finally in his proper place, the accused in her father's courtroom, but this time she is her father's daughter, she is the prosecutor. She cannot lose. Or can she?

IV. *The Collaborator*

The title of Kaplan's 2000 book *The Collaborator* is itself an interesting choice. She has already called Bardèche an ideal collaborator in her earlier works but now deploys this same term about herself—this time, for a different reason. As my dictionary reminds me, “to collaborate” is an intransitive verb. Its first meaning is to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort. It also means to cooperate treasonably as with an enemy occupation force in one's own country. Although Kaplan overtly dedicates *The Collaborator* to her mother, this is very much a book about her father's juridical legacy. Here she attempts a new level of objectivity and looks to the story of a trial about treason and collaboration to make her case. Yet, here again she returns to this very same crime scene. She does not and cannot fully leave her relationship with Bardèche, his family and his cause. As she explains,

I purposely did not work with Maurice and Suzanne Bardèche, Brasillach's surviving family members (Maurice Bardèche died

in July 1998), even though it is they who hold Brasillach's papers. I had interviewed Maurice Bardèche in 1981 for an earlier book, *Reproductions of Banality* (1986), and I learned what I could from him then. (*The Collaborator* xiv)

Here I simply want to note both the protest as well as the misdate. Remember she has already written that she interviewed him in 1982. She says this in both *Banality* and in *French Lessons*. I also want to observe that in making this claim, she both revives the lost martyr of Bardèche's entire revisionist enterprise, his postwar career, and the legacy of his beloved best friend and brother-in-law. In other words, even as she attempts to set the record straight after Bardèche's death, she ends up strangely breathing new life into the story at the heart of his entire revisionist project. She revives his beloved martyr and his cause. And yet, again, in this instance, the haunting father figures loom large competing with each other at an even more exaggerated tenor. She wants to be fair, but what does it mean to be fair in this case? By meticulously annotating the story of the trial, Kaplan revives Brasillach, and while she offers a profoundly complicated but also a hauntingly sympathetic case for the accused, she does so in hindsight. Interestingly, *The Collaborator* proved to be a major success winning numerous awards and even more public acclaim than her highly successful *French Lessons*.

V. Stuttering, Again

It is dangerous to cure someone of stuttering if the stuttering fulfills a psychic need the person hasn't understood. (*French Lessons* 98)

I want to move towards my conclusion by citing two passages, one from *The Collaborator*, the other from *French Lessons*. Together they powerfully demonstrate how Kaplan connects her own psychic longings for her father with her work on French fascism. In *The Collaborator* she writes:

What drives me. What was fueling my insatiable curiosity about this event, these characters? Again and again, an image from childhood came into my head. It is 1963, when I was eight I

opened the bottom drawer of my father's desk and found a gray cardboard box filled with black-and-white photographs of Nazi death camps. They had been used as evidence at the Nuremberg war crimes trials where my father had served as a prosecutor in 1945. He had been dead for less than a year when I opened that drawer. Since that day, I have thought often about those photos and what they represent. As I traced the itinerary of Robert Brasillach, a writer who believed that Nazism was poetry, I felt the shock of those photos more intensely than ever. (*xvii*)

This passage is a repetition, almost verbatim, of something she had written in *French Lessons*. In the earlier text, she wrote:

When Bardèche's letter came I traveled quickly back to that day when I was eight, so powerful in my imagination that I often think it is the basis of my entire sense of history, when I violated the privacy of my dead father's desk drawers and found the evidence from Nuremberg: photos from Auschwitz. Evoking those pictures with my eight-year-old self-consciousness, the horror came back, the horror of being too young to live with this much horror, too young to have a dead father. Then, returning to my adulthood, I measured my father's absence again, its twenty year duration. My father hadn't been there to explain the photographs of Auschwitz; he wasn't there to tell me what to say to Bardèche. I understood how much I owed to his death, his absence a force field within which I had become an intellectual; his image, silent and distant with headphones over his ears, a founding image for my own work. Headphones were also an emblem for loneliness and isolation: they transmitted voices, they absorbed testimony, but they had no voice to give back. (197)

I offer the earlier account last because it more fully articulates the connections, the issues Kaplan seems no longer interested in pursuing in *The Collaborator*. Kaplan's words are telling guides into her later work. Like her silent, distant father, she too has grown up and is now ready to enter

into her own courtroom, albeit a textual space in which she takes on the role of her father and more. She is not only a full-fledged scholarly prosecutor, but also defense attorney, judge, and jury all in one. She does it all. She is fully absorbed in this work. Given this, she seems to choose not to talk back. She takes on a more objective, distant stance and this too has its personal allures. As she tells us in *The Collaborator*, by tracing “the itinerary of Robert Brasillach” she was able to feel “the shock of those photos more intensely than ever” (xviii). To feel that shock again and again, seems to offer Kaplan a way of maintaining the intensity of her relationship with her lost father and his work in the present.⁹ The juridical setting gives her the emotional distance she seems to need to engage these emotions. This time the courtroom context allows her to feel these emotions again and again without having to give up this need for repeated exposure. She can tell the courtroom tale from various angles and stay right there. She need not move on. Although perhaps lonely, isolated in this endeavor she can be nearer to her father. By returning to the courtroom and not talking back she gets to have him. And, as if in anticipation of this reading, Kaplan circles around this same alluring setting, the courtroom, in her most recent work. Here too she is still in pursuit of justice, still in France, and still looking back to around 1945 as if to stay forever in touch with her father.

VI. An Interpretation

In *The Interpreter* (2005) Kaplan focuses on the narrative of an interpreter, this time moving more easily between English and French. She widens her net but is never far from her father, France, or 1945, even as she remains at a distance from all of these things and the loss that animates these objects of her deepest desire. By addressing the role of the interpreter, the voice that moves between those silent earphones, she is able to communicate across distances of language, continents, and time. Here is where she identifies. This is the role perhaps Kaplan knows best. It is at the heart of her narratives about her own life in French. In *The Interpreter* Kaplan turns to the legacy of both the French victims of post-war American GI violence against French civilians, especially women under their control—flawed Americans, racist Americans—who over-

whelmingly prosecuted African American soldiers for these offenses. For this story, Kaplan takes on the role of the truth-telling French translator, a man who stood witness to these crimes. She tells his mediated and transformed story to an American audience. Like that haunted French translator she too eventually had to tell this story. He does it through the elusive embrace of fiction in his 1976 novel, *OK Joe*; she does it by retranslating that story back into history in English. *OK Joe* functions as a trope through which Kaplan can again repeat, enhance, rewrite, and reiterate a disturbing courtroom drama from France circa 1945 for English readers in the present.

In *The Interpreter* Kaplan revives and recreates the historical makeshift military courtrooms out of which it emerged. This time she tells ugly American truths she has learned in French and must translate back into English. In this way *The Interpreter* is a bit different from her previous work. Here her anger is more overtly directed at her own long-dead American father, the prosecutor, and is expressed through these terrible racist stories. In this book, America is not the land of the just; rather, it too offers Kaplan a tainted history. She cannot rise above this; the racism here is home grown. It is profoundly American even as it gets played out in postwar France.

This time, or at least for now, Kaplan's hero is the interpreter, the French intellectual who served as translator at these postwar American military tribunals in France. He is the one person with enough distance and knowledge of both French and English to testify to these events. In this way, he is her role model and it is in this role as translator and interpreter that Kaplan positions herself. This is a role she knows well, it is all about reiteration. As translator and interpreter, she can keep alive her father's legacy. And, perhaps, in a deeper sense, this is how she can keep stuttering. She can write and rewrite these powerful courtroom dramas, the stories she longs to return to again and again.

Through her work it seems that Kaplan can revive her father's absent presence. As she continues to acknowledge, on a personal level her work on not only French fascism but also on these postwar trials is all about working through her relationship with her father, the prosecutor at Nuremberg. And like those pictures she found in his desk this work

makes visceral those tangled memories of horror and loss that are what she has left of her father. In her most recent books, she seems to take comfort in playing out these tales in the context of the courtroom. Even when justice is denied, as in the case of *The Interpreter*, there is something reassuring about the juridical process as a place of return. With her father seemingly by her side, she can advocate for justice in doing this kind of research and writing. In this sense, Kaplan's work offers her a space to continue to explore these desires. Her writing is itself a brilliantly adaptive strategy that fulfills a deep psychic need that had she never written so personally we might never have known. Perhaps these works are in a way a kind of cure in the sense that the differences between these courtroom stories and not just their similarities may signal that Kaplan is closer to the elusive cause of her distress. In other words, both the iteration and the difference are crucial; together they help explain Kaplan's obsession with "fathers, mentors, and what it means for an intellectual woman to have an ambition" ("Writing in Concert" 173).

Notes

- 1 I want to thank all of the editors of this special edition but most especially Marlene Kadar for her patience, her critical eye, and her generosity in working with me on completing this essay. I also want to thank those who were in the audience at two conferences where I presented pieces of what has become this paper. I thank those who participated in the session "(Re)Presenting the Body and Identity: Gender, Sexuality and the Body Aesthetic" at the Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Society held in, Honolulu, Hawaii in July of 2007, and those who participated in the Symposium, "Female 'Bodies' of Knowledge" held at Temple University in April of 2002.
- 2 This essay does not address Kaplan's extensive work in the area of translation, especially the translation of French Fascist literature. That would be an excellent site for further exploration of many of the issues raised in this essay. At this juncture I simply want to note that this work may very well connect to and flesh out certain aspects of this argument and may be especially relevant in relation to Kaplan's most recent work, *The Interpreter* (2005) a work I address briefly in the conclusion of this essay.
- 3 This work from the 1980s had a particularly powerful set of resonances and meanings for me. I include here especially the work of lesbian feminist poets and writers including Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Minnie Bruce Pratt, Irena Klepfisz and Melanie Kaye-Kantrowitz and many others.

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- 4 This turn to the first person in feminist and literary studies in the 1990s includes for me the work of some of the following feminist scholars: Susan Suleiman's *Risking Who One Is: Encounters with Contemporary Art and Literature*; Marianna Torgovnik's, *Eloquent Obsessions: Writing Cultural Criticism*; Nancy K. Miller's *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and Other Autobiographical Acts* and *But Enough about Me: Why We Read Other People's Lives*. I have also learned a great deal from various works by Marianne Hirsch, Jane Gallop, and Rachel du Plessis among many others.
- 5 These influences include work by Ruth Behar, Trin T. Minh-ha, James Clifford, Virginia Dominguez, and David Watt.
- 6 Albert Speer is often referred to as Hitler's architect. He was convicted in the Nuremberg trial after the war and spent 20 years in prison. He became especially well known through his memoirs *Inside the Third Reich* first published in 1969 and a long series of later biographies including Gitta Sereny's *Albert Speer: His Battles with the Truth* (1995). I mention this biography because of the interviews Sereny does with Speer.
- 7 For more on these feminist ambivalences, see Laura Levitt's *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home*. For a powerful psychoanalytic reading of these dynamics, see Kaja Silverman's *The Threshold of the Visible World* (1996).
- 8 Robert Faurisson is professor of French literature currently at the University of Lyon. He is perhaps best known for his controversial articles denying the Holocaust, especially the gas chambers, and his efforts to promote these positions. For these reasons he has taken on the mantle of Holocaust denial, and has been called both a Holocaust denier and a negationist. He also brought Noam Chomsky into these debates, and that in and of itself became a controversy. For more on the Faurisson controversy over all, and his relationship to Noam Chomsky in particular, see Hitchens.
- 9 This effort to sustain an intimate relationship with the dead echoes the argument I make in the introduction to *American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust* (2007). See, especially, the introduction where I discuss this process in relation to Irena Klepfisz, to the woman in the film *Hiroshima Mon Amore*, and to my father (1–12).

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