The Lit Critters¹
Paul Ardoin

Stable of Contents
1. The Postmodern
2. The Transnational, the Postnational, and the Cosmopolitan
3. The Postapocalyptic
4. Zombies! No, vampires, the more apt metaphor. First, they ate our

brains, sure. But then they bled us dry, drained us of what’s ours. But more like a
worm, worm-shaped, vampire worms, something burrowing, biting and burrowing, some bookworm that wants to destroy, and so I’m barricaded inside of a library
instead of the usual log cabin or shopping mall or the rooftop of a convenient store.
‘Try to get through these,’ I’ll scream at my last stand. ‘Try to get through all of
these.’ And I’ll pile high a stack of Dickens, stand on Shakespeare and think, I never
taught you to speak,² but I won’t say it aloud because those vampires don’t speak
English and because I’ll need to save my breath for probably a mighty roar for
probably a leap from my rooftop, my stack in the stacks, along with a mighty blow
from my whatever I’ll deliver death with until they suck the life and words right out
of me.

Am I what’s called a culture warrior? The I, the he, the me, is I, Pall Arttwin,
defender of the rapidly disintegrating borders, a brave Kevin Costner of the terrible
near future, of all the terrible Costner futures, from the salty foreign deluge of
Waterworld to the former America cowed by roving bands of Shakespeare co-opters
in The Postman, and you can trust me to safeguard these documents with my life.³

I was Ford Lincoln Mercury to a series of reckless let’s go ahead and call them
abetters. At my last stand, atop a shaky pile of twentieth-century criticism, I’m going
to write a gossipy tell-all and title it The Philosophers’ Apprentice. The waters will be
rising, the worms devouring, this A. Palled Arttwin left behind to Kirk Cameron my
way through with only my faith and my holy firefighting mission, ‘Fire Sale!’ I’ll
yell, and probably have a flamethrower.⁴ ‘I’ll take all of you down with me!’
‘Freecell!’ I’ll yell, and heave books, color-coordinating the spines of my missiles
with the spines I’ll break on those hungry monsters, if they each have a spine to club,
if they even stand for anything. ‘Cell!’ I’ll yell, and launch the thickest Stephen King

¹ The Letter from the Editor for this issue of Transnational Literature describes this story as ‘ficto-
criticism,’ a term not used much in my own country but a fun one that seems an apt description. What I
would take particular care to emphasise here is the ‘ficto-’ end of things: this story is not true, the
narrator is not the author, and the real scholars and theorists mentioned here do not portend the coming
of an apocalypse (at least not the scary kind). In fact, I very much enjoy and admire the work of all the
figures mentioned in ‘The Lit Critters.’ My thanks to them.
² Shakespeare. The Tempest.
The Postman. Dir. Kevin Costner. Perf. Kevin Costner, Will Patton, and Larenz Tate (as Ford Lincoln
Mercury).
‘The Lit Critters’. Paul Ardoin.
Transnational Literature Vol. 3 no. 1, November 2010.
book in the place at that horde of zombies.\(^5\) I’ll work my way up from lowercase-l literature to the high higher highest modernist of them all, rejoicing as I send one after another of those bordercrashers across the room – bludgeoned with whatever holy, snake-thumping Saint Patrick righteousness stick I wield – flying across the room to whatever Library of Congress subject heading classifies the Egyptian book of the deadest.\(^6\)

Because classification is good for something, is necessary, is the shelves upon which we I stack those monsters. Because there has to be some sort of structure. Because don’t we all feel a little less idealistic when the so-be-its stop standing in line to pay last respects to the black market Claude Levis-Trauss? In chapter one of The Philosophers’ Apprentice,\(^7\) I’m a houseboy for Jane Tompkins. She’s more anxious and chronic-fatigueie than usual. The theorists are dropping like flies: Buzzdillard, Levi-Strauss, and is her husband Tsetstanley next? ‘And Antonioni and Bergman, too. On the same day. That’s something,’ I didn’t say, because I wouldn’t learn that until tonight when, running from that incessant, approaching, burrowing wave, looking back over my shoulder instead of in the direction I was going, I knocked over the bound NY Times obituaries, and it opened right … to … the … page, I swear, with the two facing each other, almost accusatory, each on the verge of spitting some terrible slander he never dared speak until safe in his grave: ‘You never should have made us leave that dead volcano of an island without her!’ ‘Me?!’\(^8\) Instead, the movie on my mind at the time was Stranger than Fiction.\(^9\) ‘I’ve heard it’s great,’ I report JT as reporting. ‘I have a hard time buying the number of Sue Grafton novels on that English professor’s office shelf,’ I report myself as replying. ‘I like Sue Grafton,’ JT replies, ‘What’s wrong with that?’\(^10\) Just like a reader-response critic. Just like a Sensationalist.\(^11\)

Stanley doesn’t die, so they go to Chicago for the every-other-annually Stanley Fish lecture, and I (or Paula Radon, as I’m called in the book, in order to protect my innocence) housesit their Delraybeachside and their Teddy Fish, just the kind of picky, demanding, undisciplined snappy cat you would expect reader-response critics to raise.\(^12\) It’s not okay to bite the hand that feeds you and then pets you while you eat because your interpretive cat mutiny gets to have everything its way, Teddy.\(^13\)

The walls are shaking, or they’ll soon be shaking. Perhaps my time would be better spent, my duties as culture warrior better performed, documenting my manifesto: ‘There is organization. There is structure. There is Literature. There are definitions. Words can mean. We understand through classification.’ Those worms will soon be coming through the floors and ceilings. I can hear them in pieces: ‘unto

---

5 King, Stephen. *Cell.*
6 Joyce, James. *Finnegans Wake.*
7 Not to be confused with James Morrow’s *The Philosopher’s Apprentice: A Novel,* which bears a small but vital difference in punctuation.
8 Lyman, Rick. ‘Michelangelo Antonioni, Director, Dies at 94.’ *NYTimes.com.*
9 *Stranger than Fiction.* Dir. Marc Forster. Perf. Will Ferrell and Dustin Hoffman.
10 As of 2010, Sue Grafton has worked her way to the letter U in her Kinsey Millhone ‘A is for Alibi’ series.
12 2009’s ‘The Stanley Fish Lecture’ at UIC featured Judith Butler on ‘Frames of War.’ 2007 featured Stephen Greenblatt on ‘Shakespeare and the Limits of Hatred.’
13 Fish, Stanley. ‘Interpreting the Variorum.’

‘The Lit Critters’, Paul Ardoin.
*Transnational Literature* Vol. 3 no. 1, November 2010.
you ... we do not tremble ... furious ... dirty ... prayers ... spectacle ... disaster ... fire ... decomposition ... spread demoralization wherever we go ..."14 Ahem: ‘There is structure. There is Literature. Literature need not preach morality but is essentially moral. Order is essentially moral. Moreso, structure, order, boundaries, an inside and an outside are necessary to develop, to understand a Literature ...’ ‘Secrets are only kept for a time ... are divulged ... the artist cannot always dominate his work ...’15 ‘There is a tradition,’ I had said at a complimentary dinner on a visit to GSU, and chuckled. They’ll think I’m chuckling nervously, I thought. They’ll think I said that a little too loud.

And the only place to go from there was to spin it as grandiose, as inspiring:
‘There is a tradition,’ I said, and I tried to stand up and I lifted my glass like leading a toast to all of us individually talented appreciators of a grand tradition, and I bumped the table a bit and had trouble standing because I hadn’t first slid my chair out a bit, and I was, I’ll admit, nervous, but who wouldn’t be in this job market.16 ‘I’m not drunk,’ I said, by means of explanation, and it was true, I wasn’t. In fact, I hadn’t taken a sip of the one drink I had ordered; I had wanted them to know I wasn’t a square but also wasn’t a flake or wildman or boozehound. But my ‘I’m not drunk’ came out like I was, had maybe warmed up before the meeting, or like I was so used to lying about being drunk that I started swearing my sobriety before even beginning to wet my whistle wel ywet.17 ‘The chair,’ I said but then sat down and moved on and avoided looking at Cal Thomas’s stupid masculinity-theorizing, mind-already-made-up face: ‘I’m glad you asked this question, really, because I think there’s really a need before they chew through, or Randy ‘The Animal’ Malamud’s stupid armchair zoologist face, ‘eat up the boundaries, and,’ to win him back ‘loosing mere anarchy upon the world ... widening the, um, gyre.’18 Ian Almond’s stupid gaze, blank and pitiless as the sun, deconstructed its way in right when I was on the verge of something: ‘Who is “they”?’ he postcolonialized, completely misunderstanding, and I said, ‘What?’ and he said, ‘the “they” who chew through,’ and I excused myself to the restroom where I looked in the mirror and came up with the perfect thing to you-can’t-fire-me-I-quit that orientalist wanna-be-Turk: ‘For one, they is these rhizonomadic Pnins taking up the tenure track. These nebbish nosepokers brokering away the borders.’19

On the way back to the table, I preserved the edge on my alliterative razors, by playing with the mnemonic in my head: 3Ts 2Ns 2Bs ... or not to be ... Terminator 2 ... A trinity terminator, descending from heavenouset, a second coming, darkness

14 Tzara, Tristan. ‘The Dada Manifesto.’
15 Truffaut, François. ‘A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema.’
17 Chaucer. ‘The Reeve’s Tale.’
19 Nabokov, Vladimir. Pnin.
dropping in Denmark. But Thomas was already signing a receipt, and Malamud was contorting his way back into his (completely unnecessary, by the way) coat, and the smug Almond draped his own coat over one arm and reached to shake my hand and thank me not to worry about the check and wish me a good flight back and apologize again that Meg couldn’t be here, she would have enjoyed discussing Yeats with me he couldn’t resist rubbing in. ‘Thank you for the necessary violence of your particular brand of hospitality, Professor Thomas,’ I should have said, I realized in my rearview mirror. ‘Thank you for exercising the sovereignty inherent in filtering and choosing. If we don’t preserve the right to exclude, they’ll be no home to welcome anyone into. Let’s keep some walls. Let’s have a house,’ I should have said. Four interviews, zero offers, an incomplete dissertation, and a head that aches from the shakes coming up my legs through the floor of a refuge that throws its weight against the trembling door the Derrideans just want to throw open in advance to who or what turns up, before any determination or identification?! One moment of weakness could deconstruct this entire library.

In chapter two of The Philosophers’ Apprentice, I accidentally drop chicken into the lap of Dominique Château, whose good sense of evasion I probably should have employed in Atlanta (‘I’m glad you asked this question, really, Cal, but I think first we need address La question de la question de l’art …’). I tend to Château and a table of other visitors au château, er, de la maison of my boss, Richard Shusterman, who, in cahoots with the French embassy, has smuggled in an autobus full of foreigners to explain to an empty room at our university why, ‘as we continue to feel the surge of increased globalization,’ we should keep the relationship between French philosophy and art at the front of our ‘entire life-world.’ When I dropped the chicken in Château’s lap, as I’ll explain in the book, it was not in response to the ridiculous demand spelled out by the conference’s promotional materials. My clumsiness wasn’t intentionally symbolic of anything, but my boss of chapter 3, despite her career-long attempt to shake off Sigmund’s shackles, would have pursed her lips to that claim in that way she did whenever she suspected motives were being unconsciously revealed. Perhaps she would have been right, too, but I wasn’t really supposed to speak to her. Perhaps what I meant by that chicken was ‘You preserve yours, and I’ll preserve mine!’ Perhaps what I meant was ‘All you comparativists. Go home, you appeasing expatriate Robert Slumdens. Go back to your Europe, your land of Franco Morettis. Your philosophy leads, literally, to robot readers.’ And perhaps when I apologized over and over and then scurried back to the kitchen as quickly as I could, I really shot away through the ceiling, triumphant on a trail of

21 Derrida, Jacques. ‘Of Hospitality.’
22 Château, Dominique. La question de la question de l’art.
24 Brennan, Teresa. The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity.
25 Robert Lumsden participated in ‘Does Literature Exist?: A Transnational Symposium.’ His contribution is recorded at the journal Transnational Literature, 1.1.

incredible, radioactive gas, bellowing (over and over), ‘Paula Radon blasts off at the speed of light. Looks like Radon’s blasting off again!’

Maybe it’s better that the end is nigh. My dissertation is going nowhere. At this point, my time is better spent on that hanger-on diary, at least until my own pen again s’awake, and I resign myself to construct a robot text for the world lit jet sitters to devour in a single setting, complete with an apology in their own language:

01101001 01110111 01110100 01110010 01101111
01100100 01110101 01100011 01110100 01101001
01101111 01101110

Thank you, survivor of the apocalypse, for picking up my unfinished manuscript. You know, Northrop Frye wrote about literature itself as a kind of apocalypse, he sure did – he called it ‘a human apocalypse’ and described literature as ‘man’s revelation to man’ (The Educated Imagination). The role of the critic, then, was to be more than just forming a ‘body of adjudications’; instead, Frye declared criticism to be ‘the awareness of that revelation’ of literature. Criticism, for Frye, was ‘the last judgment of mankind.’ Frye, of course, has long since gone to the worms, as I surely will have by the time you read this, but that doesn’t mean that you, postapocalyptic reader, shouldn’t embrace the ‘emancipatory possibilities’ of our brave new united transnational republic. Don’t think of this as a document of the end. Rather, consider it as bearing witness to the revelation of a future so bright, you will surely have to wear shades.

Not many of my time remember where they were when they tore down that wall, that one that read, ‘Sure, it may be a bit orientalizing to say East is East and West is West; Sure, it may be a bit naïve to say the Great Wall of China, the Chrysler Building, the Sistine Chapel bear a certain vital cultural specificity; Sure, it may be a bit xenophobic to insist unironically that good fences can indeed make good neighbors, but all the same …’ It’s surely for the best that we, the blind revelers carefully constructing our ill-conceived, pre-revelatory castles, moved too often in darkness to notice the gaps and spilled boulders of things falling apart. At the first hint, our ilk of old-guard savages might have been likely to sound the alarm.

Luckily, most had the sense not to resist the manifesto destiny of the new global democracy:

This transnational republic recognizes that the these were shaped by the those, that there would not have been a Pablo Picasso if he had not

27 See various, including Pokémon: The First Movie. Dir. Michael Haigney and Kunihiko Yuyama.
28 See Joyce.
29 Literal translation from the binary: ‘Introduction’
30 See http://www.transnationalrepublic.org for more information on ‘The First Transnational Republic.’
31 See Timbuk3’s 1986 ‘The Future’s So Bright, I Gotta Wear Shades.’
33 Frost, Robert. ‘Mending Wall.’
Yeats, William Butler. ‘The Second Coming.’
Reagan, Ronald. ‘Tear Down this Wall’ speech, 12 June 1987.
once viewed a Congolese Vili carving,\textsuperscript{34} that if George du Maurier had not hurt his eye in Belgium and searched for treatment in Germany and then tagged along with the girl he met there back to London and had a kid who had a kid then there would never have been an Alfred Hitchcock.

This is not a trivial example: if not for Hitchcock’s masterfully nebulous remake, the only version of ‘The Birds’ available to us would be that hideous piece of anti-progress propaganda masquerading as a short story.\textsuperscript{35} We would still be worrying about the dangers of complacency in the face of the creeping threat to our way of life or whatever.\textsuperscript{36} Very uncosmopolitan stuff. And, I’m sorry to say, that’s the backwards place I still occupied in my life when I wrote much of what you have of \textit{The Philosophers’ Apprentice}. Approach it with sympathy for the benighted and gratitude for your own enlightenment.

\begin{verbatim}
-01010000 01100001 01110101 01101100
00100000
01000001 01110010 01100100 01101111
01101001
01101110,\textsuperscript{37} Tallahassee, 2010
\end{verbatim}

In chapter three of \textit{The Philosophers’ Apprentice}, I am pinned to the wall of another beach house, where Teresa Brennan holds what looks to be half of a decorative curtain rod to my neck and insists that I admit the owner of Teddy the cat is a codfish. ‘He’s a codfish,’ I wide-eye. ‘No, say Stanley is a codfish, but say \texttt{CodFish}, with the F capitalized,’ pirates Brennan. ‘He is a cod\texttt{F}ISH,’ I promise, ‘Stanley Fish is a cod\texttt{Fish}.’ She slumps: ‘You won’t be good at this,’ and then, expectantly, ‘… with a hook on his hand.’ I solemnly swear, ‘Stanley is a cod\texttt{Fish} with a hook on his hand.’\textsuperscript{38} I’m wooden with fright, but Brennan’s assistant finds the whole scene riotous.

I came to Teresa Brennan a few weeks after the release of \textit{Globalization and its Terrors}. She was just about ready to stop celebrating with her assistant and dive back into her half-completed-and-still-(at the time)-a-bit-half-baked neuropsychological treatise \textit{The Transmission of Affect}. Woden Teachout, the assistant, was being promoted from assistant to sidekick (and fittingly-named, unofficial team pedant), and if I survived this initiation, I would be taking over her less glamorous photocopying and mail-opening duties.

Throughout chapter three, I interweave tales of my admiration for Brennan and my humiliation at her hands with my account of the development of the final touches on \textit{Transmission of Affect}, which would arrive DOA in academic text sales figures in comparison to her earlier, more straightforwardly revolutionary works, but spoke a truth to me over those few months I wish more academics had heeded. \textit{TOA}’s take on affect was a direct descendant to the contagion Durkheim, Le Bon, et al, saw

\textsuperscript{34} See Appiah.
\textsuperscript{36} McCarthy, Joseph. ‘Speech Explaining the Communist Threat.’
\textsuperscript{37} Literal translation from the binary: ‘Paul Ardoin’
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Peter Pan}. Dir. Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske.

\textbf{‘The Lit Critters’, Paul Ardoin.}

\textit{Transnational Literature} Vol. 3 no. 1, November 2010.
in crowds and Artaud sought in theater. For Brennan, there was a simple explanation for the electric feeling we get from the pavement in New York and the peace that settles over us on a trip to Delphi: we are permeable, and affects can easily be transmitted through our very membranes even without our knowledge. Awareness, she preached, was the first step in beginning to battle the plague of affects trying to infect us at every moment.

I began to identify that permeability in myself during the few months I spent reporting for duty at that house. ‘Have you ever looked, really looked, at how literally open you are to the outside?’ I asked my sister when she called on my birthday: ‘Even our pores are gaping vacuums waiting to be filled.’ She was terrified when she thought I meant her pores looked big and then annoyed and sorry she called as I tried to talk my way out of it.

At home, I began showering twice or three times a day, alternating between ice cold and scalding hot water, and scrubbing myself with first a bathing brush and, eventually, a hair brush. At school, I washed and scrubbed all that was exposed – face, neck, hands, arms – on every of many, sometimes twice hourly, trips to the restroom. I ate a raw foods diet as consistently as I could conveniently bear. I knew I was being ridiculous – I wouldn’t microwave plastic plates, wouldn’t transport my celery and carrots in Tupperware or a lunchbox – but I wanted to feel like a true apostle. Neither Brennan nor Teachout went further than vegetarianism, and Teachout seemed to eschew bathing in general most of the time, and the two would have had a good laugh together if they had ever noticed what I was doing, but they generally only noticed me when they couldn’t find some document I might have had last.

At work, I did grow a bit scatterbrained about my filing. I focused my energy toward paying the sort of somatic attention Shusterman used to go on about when trying to recruit me to the church of Feldenkrais. I willed each of my pores (thoroughly unblocked of sediment, thanks to my rigorous attention to cleanliness) to open wider whenever Brennan was speaking or even moving through the room. I drank in the sound of laughter as she and Woden frolicked together in the pool. And on my birthday, when Brennan left us ‘two revelers to the drinking’ and stepped ‘out for a drink of the evening air,’ I drank in the perfume of Woden’s unwashed body and, drunk on the attention Brennan had paid by addressing me even jokingly as ‘that strapping birthday buck,’ I moved in for a kiss. Woden declined: ‘Whoa dere, birthday boy,’ and laughed as she ran out of the house, presumably to track down the one true object of her affection.

Sure that Brennan had made for the beach, and probably distracted by the excitement of soon regaling her with a recounting of the rebuffing, and certainly a little tipsy from the lot of Kraken spiced rum Brennan insisted was the most appropriate beachside addition to the concoction we had been swigging straight from the blender, ‘Teresa’s patented “Sea Monster,”’ Woden stepped in front of a car on A1A and was dead in two days. Brennan wouldn’t allow me in the hospital room and never spoke to me again.

39 See Durkheim’s The Division of Labor or The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Gustave Le Bon’s The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind, and Antonin Artaud’s The Theater and its Double.
40 See various by Moshé Feldenkrais, as well as Richard Shusterman’s Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics.
In the concluding section of my admittedly-but-necessarily-abbreviated *The Philosophers’ Apprentice*, I make clear (in case the now incognito Theahresa Brennan googles the old spelling of her name) that I do not in any way mark Brennan as the source of the outbreak that turned authors, critics, and readers from book worms into bookworms, devouring, destroying, dementia-inducing. Rather, I insist she was the last bulwark, our last, best hope, the potential linchpin I kicked out from beneath the borders, of literature and art and all the rest, when I unintentionally forced her into retirement and opened the floodgates, the uncontrollable-lines-of-flightgates, to the multiplicity, the contagion, the horde.

Paul Ardoin

---

41 See ‘Evidence Will Contradict Einfeld’s Story,’ in the online version of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, for more on Teresa Brennan’s posthumous antics as Theahresa Brennan.

42 See Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*.