Stitch Bitch: the patchwork girl
by Shelley Jackson

It has come to my attention that a young woman claiming to be the author of my being has been making appearances under the name of Shelley Jackson. It seems you have even invited her to speak tonight, under the misapprehension that she exists, that she is something besides a parasite, a sort of engorged and loathsome tick hanging off my side. May I say that I find this an extraordinary impertinence, and that if she would like to come forward, we shall soon see who is the author of whom.

Well? Well?

Very well.

I expect there are some of you who still think I am Shelley Jackson, author of a hypertext about an imaginary monster, the patchwork girl Mary Shelley made after her first-born ran amok. No, I am the monster herself, and it is Shelley Jackson who is imaginary, or so it would appear, since she always vanishes when I turn up. You can call me Shelley Shelley if you like, daughter of Mary Shelley, author of the following, entitled: Stitch Bitch: or, Shelley Jackson, that imposter, I'm going to get her.

I have pilfered her notes, you see, and I don't mind reading them, but I have shuffled the pages. I expect what comes of it will be more to my liking, might even sound like something I would say. Whoever Shelley Jackson may be, if she wants me to mouth her words, she can expect them to come out a little changed. I'm not who she says I am.

BODY NOT WHOLE

We're not who we say we are.

The body is not one, though it seems so from up here, from this privileged viewpoint up top. When we look down that assemblage of lobes and stalks seems to be one thing, even if it looks nothing like our ID photo, but it routinely survives dissolution, from hair loss to loss of limb. The body is a patchwork, though the stitches might not show. It's run by committee, a loose aggregate of entities we can't really call human, but which have what look like lives of a sort; though they lack the brains to nominate themselves part of the animal kingdom, yet they are certainly not what we think of as objects, nor are they simple appendages, directly responsible to the conscious brain. Watch white blood cells surround an invader, watch a cell divide. What we see is not thinking exactly, but it is "intelligent," or at least ordered, responsive, purposeful. We can feel a sort of camaraderie with those rudimentary machinic minds, but not identity. Nor, if we could watch a spark dart across a synaptic gap in a brain, would we cry out "Mom!" or "Uncle Toby!", for thinking is conducted by entities we don't know, wouldn't recognize on the street. Call them yours if you want, but puff and blow all you like, you cannot make them stop their work one second to salute you.

The body is not even experienced as whole. We never see it all, we can't feel our liver working or messages shuttling through our spine. We patch a phantom body together out of a cacophony of
sense impressions, bright and partial views. We borrow notions from our friends and the blaring organs of commerce, and graft them on to a supple, undifferentiated mist of smart particles. It's like a column of dust motes standing in a ray of light, patted and tatted into a familiar shape. Our work is never very successful, there are always scraps floating loose, bits we can't control or don't want to perceive that intrude like outsiders on the effigy we've constructed in our place. The original body is dissociated, porous and unbiased, a generous catch-all. The mind, on the other hand, or rather discursive thought, what zen calls monkey-mind and Bataille calls project, has an almost catatonic obsession with stasis, centrality, and unity. Project would like the body to be its commemorative statue or its golem, sober testament to the minds' values and an uncomplaining servant. But the statue doesn't exist except in the mind, a hard kernel like a tumor, set up in the portal to the body, blocking the light. The project of writing, the project of life, even, is to dissolve that tumor. To dismantle the project is the project. That is, to interrupt, unhinge, disable the processes by which the mind, glorying in its own firm grip on what it wishes to include in reality, gradually shuts out more and more of it, and substitutes an effigy for that complicated machine for inclusion and effusion that is the self.

EVERYTHING AT ONCE

You're not where you think you are. In hypertext, everything is there at once and equally weighted. It is a body whose brain is dispersed throughout the cells, fraught with potential, fragile with indecision, or rather strong in foregoing decisions, the way a vine will bend but a tree can fall down. It is always at its end and always at its beginning, the birth and the death are simultaneous and reflect each other harmoniously, it is like living in the cemetery and the hospital at once, it is easy to see the white rectangles of hospital beds and the white rectangles of gravestones and the white rectangles of pages as being essentially synonymous. Every page-moment is both expectant and memorializing, which is certainly one reason why I have buried the patchwork girl's body parts in separate plots in a zone called th cemetary, while in the story zone they are bumptious and ambulatory.

Hypertext doesn't know where it's going. "Those things which occur to me, occur to me not from the root up but rather only from somewhere about their middle. Let someone then attempt to seize them, let someone attempt to seize a blade of grass and hold fast to it when it begins to grow only from the middle," said Kafka. It's got no through-line. Like the body, it has no point to make, only clusters of intensities, and one cluster is as central as another, which is to say, not at all. What sometimes substitutes for a center is just a switchpoint, a place from which everything diverges, a Cheshire aftercat. A hypertext never seems quite finished, it isn't clear just where it ends, it's fuzzy at the edges, you can't figure out what matters and what doesn't, what's matter and what's void, what's the bone and what's the flesh, it's all decoration or it's all substance. Normally when you read you can orient yourself by a few important facts and let the details fall where they may. The noun trumps the adjective, person trumps place, idea trumps example. In hypertext, you can't find out what's important so you have to pay attention to everything, which is exhausting like being in a foreign country, you are not native.

Hypertext is schizophrenic: you can't tell what's the original and what's the reference. Hierarchies break down into chains of likenesses, the thing is not more present than what the thing reminds you of; in this way you can slip out of one text into a footnoted text and find yourself reading another text entirely, a text to which your original text is a footnote. This is unnerving, even to me. The self may have no clear boundaries, but do we want to lose track of it altogether? I don't want to lose the self, only to strip it of its claim to naturalness, its compulsion to protect its boundaries, its obsession with wholeness and its fear of infection. I would like to invent a new kind of self which doesn't fetishize so much, grounding itself in the dearly-loved signs and stuff of personhood, but has poise and a sense of humor, changes directions easily, sheds parts and assimilates new ones. Desire rather than identity is its compositional principle. Instead of this morbid obsession with the fixed, fixable, everyone composing their tombstone over and over. Is it that we want to live up to the dignity of our dead bodies? Do keep in mind the dead disperse, and even books, which live longer, come apart into different signatures.

NO-PLACE
I'm not where you say I am.

Hypertext blurs the distinction between subject and object, matter and the absence of matter. We no longer know where it does its thinking, or what it is driving at. (It's no one and no-place, but it's not nothing.) Instead, there is a communicating fabric spread out over a space without absolute extent, a place without placement (a place without placemats, I almost wrote, which is good too). In the no-place of hypertext, there's finally room to move around, like an orifice I can fit my whole body into, instead of just my finger or my p-p-p-pen. I adore the book, but I don't fit into it very well, as a writer or a reader, there's always some of me hanging untidily outside, looking like a mess, an excrescence, something the editor should have lopped off and for which I feel a bit apologetic. To make something orderly and consecutive out of the divergent fragments that come naturally feels like forcing myself through a Klein bottle. My hypertext novel Patchwork Girl grew in clumps and strands like everything I write, but unlike everything else it had permission to stay that way, to grow denser and more articulated but not to reshape itself. (It made me slightly nervous. Maybe I puritanically half-believed I ought to button down, zip up.) I can't help seeing an analogy between the editorial advice I have often received to weed out the inessentials and lop off the divergent story lines, and the life advice I've received just as often to focus, choose, specialize. You don't show up for tennis in a tutu and a catcher's mask, it's silly. But in this place without coordinates I cautiously began to imagine that I could invent a new game, make a novel, if we still want to call it that, shaped a little more like my own thoughts. It is as though somebody chewed a hole in a solid and irrefutable wall, and revealed an expanse of no-space as extensive as the space we live in, or as though the interstices between things could be pried apart without disturbing the things themselves, to make room for what hasn't been voted into the club of stuff.

GAPS, LEAPS

You won't get where you think you're going.

A conventional novel is a safe ride. It is designed to catch you up, propell you down its track, and pop you out at the other end with possibly a few new catchphrases in your pocket and a pleasant though vague sense of the scenery rushing by. The mechanism of the chute is so effective, in fact, that it undoes the most worthy experiments; sentences that ought to stop you in your tracks are like spider webs across the chute. You rip through, they're gone.

Hypertext likes give and take, snares and grottos, nets and knots. It lacks thrust. It will always lack thrust; thrust is what linear narrative is good at. As far as I'm concerned, we can trust thrust to it. It means we'll need other reasons to keep readers reading—assuming that's what we want—than a compulsion to find out what happens next. There's no question that hypertext will lose or never acquire those readers for whom a fated slalom toward the finish line is the defining literary experience; hypertext's not built for that. Probably it is because linear text's so well-built for it that it has become the dominant narrative style in the novel. But there are other reasons to read. I can be caught in that slalom myself, but I emerge feeling damp, winded and slightly disgusted. It is a not entirely pleasant compulsion disguised as entertainment, like being forced to dance by a magic fiddle. It becomes harder and harder to imagine going anywhere but just where you're going, and words increasingly mean just what they say. (Common sense reality does the same thing: there is little opportunity for poetic ambiguity in the dealings of everyday life.) Plot chaperones understanding, cuts off errant interpretations. Reading a well-plotted novel I start by knowing less than I know about my own life, and being open to far more interpretations, which makes me feel inquisitive and alive. I finish by knowing more than I want to know, stuck on one meaning like a bug on a pin.

In a text like this, gaps are problematic. The mind becomes self-conscious, falters, forgets its way, might choose another way, might opt out of this text into another, might "lose the thread of the argument," might be unconvinced. Transitional phrases smooth over gaps, even huge logical gaps, suppress contradiction, whisk you past options. I noticed in school that I could argue anything. I might find myself delivering conclusions I disagreed with because I had built such an irresistible machine for persuasion. The trick was to allow the reader only one way to read it, and to make the going smooth. To seal the machine, keep out grit. Such a machine can only do two things: convince or break down. Thought is made of leaps, but rhetoric conducts you across the
gaps by a cute cobbled path, full of grey phrases like "therefore," "extrapolating from," "as we have seen," giving you something to look at so you don't look at the nothing on the side of the path. Hypertext leaves you naked with yourself in every leap, it shows you the gamble thought is, and it invites criticism, refusal even. Books are designed to keep you reading the next thing until the end, but hypertext invites choice. Writing hypertext, you've got to accept the possibility your reader will just stop reading. Why not? The choice to do something else might be the best outcome of a text. Who wants a numb reader/reader-by-numbers anyway? Go write your own text. Go paint a mural. You must change your life. I want piratical readers, plagiarists and opportunists, who take what they want from my ideas and knot it into their own arguments. Or even their own novels. From which, possibly, I'll steal it back.

BANISHED BODY

It's not what we wish it were.

The real body, which we have denied representation, is completely inimical to our wishful thinking about the self. We would like to be unitary, controlled from on top, visible, self-contained. We represent ourselves that way, and define our failures to be so, if we cannot ignore them, as disease, hysteria, anomaly. However:

The banished body is unhierarchical.

It registers local intensities, not arguments. It is a field of sensations juxtaposed in space.

It is vague about size and location, unclear on measurements of all kinds, bad at telling time (though good at keeping it).

It is capacious, doesn't object to paradox, includes opposites--doesn't know what opposites are.

It is simultaneous.

It is unstable. It changes from moment to moment, in its experience both of itself and of the world.

It has no center, but a roving focus. (It "reads" itself.)

It is neither clearly an object nor simply a thought, meaning or spirit; it is a hybrid of thing and thought, the monkey in the middle.

It is easily influenced; it is largely for being influenced, since its largest organs are sensing devices.

It is permeable; it is entered by the world, via the senses, and can only roughly define its boundaries.

It reports to us in stories, intensities, hallucinatory jolts of uninterpreted perceptions: smells, sights, pleasure, pain.

Its public image, its face is a collage of stories, borrowed images, superstitions, fantasies. We have no idea what it "really" looks like.

Because we have banished the body, but cannot get rid of it entirely, we can use it to hold what we don't want to keep but can't destroy. The real body, madcap patchwork acrobat, gets what the mind doesn't want, the bad news, the dirty stories. The forbidden stories get written down off-center, in the flesh. In hysteria, the body starts to tell those stories back to us--our kidneys become our accusers, our spine whines, our knees gossip about overheard words, our fingers invent a sign language of blame and pain. Of course, the more garbage we pack into that magical body the more we fear it, and the more chance there is that it will turn on us, begin to speak, accuse us. But that body-bag is also a treasure-trove, like any junkyard. It knows stories
we've never told.

**BOUNDARY PLAY**

We don't think what we think we think.

It's straightforward enough to oppose the self to the not-self and reason to madness. It's even possible to make the leap from here to there, though coming back presents some problems. But the borders between are frayed and permeable. It's possible to wander that uneven terrain, to practice slipping, skidding in the interzone. It's possible, and maybe preferable for the self to think of itself as a sort of practice rather than a thing, a proposition with variable terms, a mesh of relationships. It's possible to wander that uneven terrain, to practice slipping, skidding in the interzone. It's possible to a text to think of itself that way. ANY text. But hypertext in particular is a kind of amphibious vehicle, good for negotiating unsteady ground, poised on its multiple limbs where the book clogs up and stops; it keeps in motion. Conventional texts, on the other hand are in search of a place of rest; when they have found it, they stop.

Similarly, the mind, reading, wants to make sense, and once it has done so it considers its work done, so if you want to keep the mind from stopping there, you must always provide slightly more indicators than the mind can make use of. There must be an excess, a remainder. Or an undeideciable oscillation between possibilities. I am interested in writing that verges on nonsense, where nonsense is not the absence of sense, but the superfluit of it. I would like to sneak as close to that limit as possible without reaching it. This is the old kind of interactive writing: writing so dense or so slippery that the mind must do a dance to keep a grip on it. I am interested in writing this way for two reasons. One, because language must be teased into displaying its entire madcap lavish beauty. If you let it be serviceable then it will only serve you, never master you, and you will only write what you already know, which is not much. Two, because the careful guarding of sense in language is not just analogous to but entirely complicit in the careful guarding of sense in life, and that possibly well-intentioned activity systematically squelches curiosity, change, variety, & finally, all delight in life. It promotes common sense at the expense of all the others.

**REALITY FICTION**

It's not what it says it is.

Reality thinks it "includes" fiction, that fictional works are embedded in reality. It's the boast of a bully. But just because reality's bigger doesn't make it boss. Every work of art is an alternate "world" with other rules, which threatens the alibi of naturalness our ordinary reality usually flaunts. Every fictional world competes with the real one to some extent, but hypertext gives us the chance to sneak up on reality from inside fiction. It may be framed as a novel, yet link to and include texts meant to be completely non-fictional. Thus the pedigreed facts of the world can be swayed, framed, made persuaders of fiction, without losing their seats in the parliament of the real, as facts tend to do when they're stuck in a novel. Hypertext fiction thus begins to turn around and look back on reality as a text embedded in a fictional universe.

Ironically, that might make us like reality better: it's reality's hegemony that strips it of charm. Reality is based on country cottage principles: what's homey must be true. It is a tolerable place to live. What's dreadful is the homey on a grand scale, Raggedy Ann and Andy turned Adam and Eve, cross-stitch scenes of the Grand Canyon, the sun cast as the flame snapping behind the grate, the ocean our little kettle. Those goofy grins turn frightening on a cosmic scale; the simplicity that makes it easy to pick up a coffee cup is not suitable for managing a country, or even a conscience. The closure of the normal is suffocating at the very least. By writing we test the seams, pick out the stitches, trying to stretch the gaps between things to slip out through them into some uncharted space, or to let something spring up in the real that we don't already know, something unfamiliar, not part of the family, a changeling.

**THE FEMININE**

She's not what he says she is. The banished body is not female, necessarily, but it is feminine.
That is, it's amorphous, indirect, impure, diffuse, multiple, evasive. So is what we learned to call bad writing. Good writing is direct, effective, clean as a bleached bone. Bad writing is all flesh, and dirty flesh at that: clogged with a build-up of clutter and crud, knick-knacks and fripperies encrusted on every surface, a kind of gluey scum gathering in the chinks. Hypertext is everything that for centuries has been damned by its association with the feminine (which has also, by the way, been damned by its association with it, in a bizarre mutual proof without any fixed term). It's dispersed, languorous, flaunting its charms all over the courtyard. Like flaccid beauties in a harem, you might say, if you wanted to inspire a rigorous distaste for it. Hypertext then, is what literature has edited out: the feminine. (That is not to say that only women can produce it. Women have no more natural gift for the feminine than men do.)

CONSTELLATION

I'm not what you think I am. I am a loose aggregate, a sort of old fashioned cabinet of curiosities, interesting in pieces but much better as a composite. It's the lines of traffic between the pieces that are worth attention, but this has been, until now, a shapeless sort of beauty, a beauty without a body, and therefore with few lovers. But hypertext provides a body, a vaporous sort of insufficiently tactile body but a body, for our experience of the beauty of relationships. It is like an astronomy of constellations rather than stars. It is old-fashioned, in that sense. It is a sort of return, to a leisurely old form, the sprawling, quizzical portmanteau book like the Anatomy of Melancholy ("a rhapsody of rags gathered together from several dung-hills, excrements of authors, toys and fopperies confusedly tumbled out," as Burton himself described it) to the sort of broad cross-fertilization of disciplines that once was commonplace, only hypertext does not provide so much courtly guidance across the intellectual terrain, but catapults you from spot to spot. (The wind whistles in your ears. It aerates the brain. You begin to feel like a circus performer, describing impeccable parabolas in the air, vacating every gesture before it can be fixed, wherever anyone thinks you are is where you've just been, sloughing off afterimages. You feel pared down, athletic, perfectly efficient.) The athletic leap across divides has its own aesthetic, and so does the pattern those leaps form in the air, or, to be more exact, in the mind. People spend their lives forging such patterns for themselves, but only the cranks and the encyclopedic generalists with vague job descriptions, the Bill Moyerses, have the nerve to invite others to try out their own hobby-horsieride through the World of Ideas. More often these are private pathways, possible to make out sometimes in a novelist's ouevre (rare butterflies turn up in Nabokov's fiction enough to make you guess that he was a lepidopterist, if you didn't know already) as a system of back alleys heading off from the work at hand, but not for public transit. Until recently, that is, since the internet seems to be making possible a gorgeous excess of personal syntactical or neural maps, like travel brochures for the brain. What results isn't necessarily worth the trip, but some of it will be: art forms take shape around our ability to perceive beauty, but our ability to perceive beauty also takes shape around what forms become possible. Hypertext is making possible a new kind of beauty, and creating the senses to perceive it with.

COLLAGE

We don't say what we mean to say. The sentence is not one, but a cluster of contrary tendencies. It is a thread of DNA--a staff of staphylococcus--a germ of contagion and possibility. It may be looped into a snare or a garotte. It is also, and as readily, a chastening rod, an IDJbracelet. It is available for use. But nobody can domesticate the sentence completely. Some questionable material always clings to its members. Diligent readers can glean filth from a squeaky-clean one. Sentences always say more than they mean, so writers always write more than they know, even the laziest of them. Utility pretends to peg words firmly to things, but it is easy to work them loose. "Sometimes the words are unfaithful to the things," says Bachelard. Indeed they are, and as writers, we are the agents of misrule, infidelity, broken marriages. It was not difficult, for example, to pry quotes from their sources, and mate them with other quotes in the "quilt" section of Patchwork Girl, where they take on a meaning that is not native to the originals. We set up rendezvous between words never before seen in company. we provide deliciously private places for them to couple. Like the body, language is a desiring machine. The possibility of pollution is its only life. Having invented an infinitely recombinant language, we can't prevent it from forming improper alliances, any more than we can seal all our orifices without
dying.

In collage, writing is stripped of the pretense of originality, and appears as a practise of mediation, of selection and contextualization, a practise, almost, of reading. In which one can be surprised by what one has to say, in the forced intercourse between texts or the recombinant potential in one text, by the other words that mutter anagrammatically inside the proper names. Writers court the sideways glances of sentences mostly bent on other things. They solicit bad behavior, collusion, conspiracies. Hypertext just makes explicit what everyone does already. After all, we are all collage artists. You might make up a new word in your lifetime—I nominate "outdulge": to lavish fond attention on the world, to generously broadcast care--but your real work will be in the way you arrange all the stuff you borrow, the buttons and coins, springs and screws of language, the frames and machinery of culture. We might think of Lawrence Sterne, who, when accused of plagiarism, answered the charge with an argument that was itself a plagiarism.

WE LIKE TO MAKE STATUES

We are not who we wish we were.

We like to make statues of ourselves. The Greeks marched ever more perfect bodies out of antiquity, slim vertical columns, like a line of capital I's, a stutter of self-assertion. But works of words are self-portraits too, substitute bodies we put together, then look to for encouragement. Boundaries of texts are like boundaries of bodies, and both stand in for the confusing and invisible boundary of the self. The wholeness of an artwork helps firm us up; in its presence we believe a little more in the unity we uneasily suspect we lack. As a result we have an almost visceral reaction to disorderly texts. Good writing is clear and orderly; bad writing inspires the same kind of distaste that bad grooming does, while experimental novels are not just hard to read, they're anti-social. Proper novels are duplicate bodies to the idealized ones we have in our heads, the infamous "thin person struggling to get out." They're good citizens, polite dinner guests.

Books, of course, like other bodies, fall apart. Literally, and also in the invisible body of the text, because language is libidinous, and the most strait-laced sentence hides a little hanky-panky under the dust ruffle. But monkey brain doesn't want to think about that, project can't hear, and so the novel, over the course of time, has become, despite the most flagrant tendencies toward polymorphous perversity and transgender play, a very stalwart announcement of nothing much. A sturdy who cares. One writes, one produces literature, and as Bataille says, "one day one dies an idiot." A project without any particular purpose that I can see, besides the announcement that project exists, that there is purpose and order, a sort of recitation of what we already know. The novel has become the golem, the monster that acts like everyone else, only better, because the narrative line is wrapped like a leash around its thick neck. I would like to introduce a different kind of novel, the patchwork girl, a creature who's entirely content to be the turn of a kaleidoscope, an exquisite corpse, a field on which copulas copulate, the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing machine on an operating table. The hypertext.

Hypertext is the banished body. Its compositional principle is desire. It gives a loudspeaker to the knee, a hearing trumpet to the elbow. It has the stopped stories to tell, it mentions unmentionables, speaks unspeakables; it unspeaks. I don't mean to say it has different, better opinions than novels can muster up, that it's plugged with better content. Hypertext won't make a bland sentence wild or make a dead duck run quacking for the finish line. Fill a disjunctive structure with pablum and you will only cement the world's parts more solidly together, clog the works with glue. It's not opinions I'm interested in, but relationships, juxtapositions, apparitions and interpolations. Hypertext is the body languorously extending itself to its own limits, hemmed in only by its own lack of extent. And like the body, it no longer has just one story to tell.

CONSTRAINTS & THE BOOK

It's not all you think it is.

I have no desire to demolish linear thought, but to make it one option among many. Likewise, I'd
like to point out that the book is not the Natural Form it has become disguised as by its publicists. It is an odd machine for installing text in the reader’s mind and it too was once an object of wonder. Turning the page, for example, has become an invisible action, because it has no meaning in most texts, the little pause it provides is as unreflective as breathing, but if we expected something different, or sought to interpret the gap, we might find ourselves as perplexed by that miniature black-out as by any intrusive authorial device we get exercised about in experimental literature or hypertext. Similarly, the linear form of the novel is not a natural evolutionary end, but a formal device, an oulipian constraint, albeit one with lots of elbow-room. Like all constraints, it generates its own kinds of beauty, from graceful accession to linearity to the most prickly resistance. My favorite texts loiter, dawdle, tease, pass notes, they resist the linear, they pervert it. It's the strain between the literal and the implied form that’s so seductive, a swoon in strait laces that’s possibly sexier than a free-for-all sprawl. Constraints do engender beauty, Oulipo and evolution prove that, but maybe we’ve shown well enough how gracefully we can heel-toe in a straight line. We can invent new constraints, multiple ones. I think we will: just because I advocate dispersal doesn't mean I'm as impressed by a pile of sawdust as I am by a tree, a ship, a book. But let us have books that squirm and change under our gaze, or tilt like a fun-house floor and spill us into other books, whose tangents and asides follow strict rules of transformation, like a crystal forming in a solution, or which consist entirely of links, like spider-webs with no corpses hanging in them. Language is the Great Unruly, and alphabetical order is a contradiction in terms.

AGAINST HISTORY

It was not how they said it was.

I see no reason why hypertext can’t serve up an experience of satisfying closure not drastically different from that of reading a long and complicated novel, though it will do it differently. But I’m not sure closure is what we should be working toward, any more than a life well lived is one that hurries without interruption toward a resounding death. A life that hurls itself ahead of itself seeking a satisfaction that must always remove itself into the future will be nothing but over in the end, and the same with those greased-lightning luge-novels. Don Delillo said in a reading in San Francisco a week ago that the writer sets her pleasure (his pleasure, is what he actually said), her eros, against the great, megalithic death that is history’s most enduring work. I take that death to be not just the literal extinction of life after life, but the extinguishing of the narrative pulse of all those lives under the granite gravity of history recorded. History is a cold, congealed thing, but if it is not too far past, there are strands of DNA, molecules of story imbedded in it, which can be rejoined and reanimated by a sufficiently irreverent Frankensteinbeck. It’s not the same as life, fiction has a funeral flavor to it, no question, a stony monumentality life luckily lacks, it has the thudding iambic footsteps of the undead, but this is all to the good, because everyone listens to a monster. Writers can’t make facts react backwards, redo what's done, but what we have left of what's done is stories, and writers tell those better than most people. The incredible thing is that desire suffices against history, against death, against the hup-two lock-step of binary logic and the clockwork of common sense. What we imagine is all that animates us, not just texts, but also people. A beaker of imaginal secretions makes us all desire’s monsters, which is what we ought to be.