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## AVANT-PROPOS

Quite recently, I sat reading in a café near my old campus. Raising my eyes from my book—the new, “collected” Joe Brainard<sup>1</sup> was just out—I recognized a former colleague approaching my table, flanked by two younger women whom I could not place. “May we interrupt?” “Of course”, I responded (a bit ruefully perhaps). “I want you to meet our visiting scholar from Italy; and this is Jane, one of our very best research students.” Greetings were exchanged; and inevitably the conversation was launched on the subject of coffee. Why is Italian coffee so incredibly good while the stuff that passes for coffee in the United States is so mediocre? (Well, “mediocre” is not the adjective we employed.) Always one for fairness and nuance, I mentioned that Canadian coffee could at least be considered so-so, and even sometimes bordered on the drinkable; whereupon the three applied linguists—they were all attached to the University’s English as a Foreign Language unit—announced that they would be leaving the very next day for a conference in Toronto. It was on the topic of genre.

“Genre?” said I brightly. “I wonder if you happen to know the work of a friend of mine from Australia? Her name is Freadman, Anne Freadman.” The three looked at me a little pityingly. My friend spread his arms wide and, beaming, intoned the words: “Anyone for tennis?” We laughed; and the conversation turned immediately to an issue that has baffled me even longer than the coffee question. Why have literary scholars, in the main, so signally failed to draw the consequences for their work of the revolution in thinking about genre that took place, to a very notable degree in Australia, around the time Jane the research-student was born? Would the lit. crit. folks ever catch on? I was launched now on one of my favourite hobby-horses—perceiving which my companions set down their empty coffee-cups and returned to their workplace, leaving me, Brainard for a time forgotten, in a reflective mood.

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1 R. Padgett, *The Collected Writings of Joe Brainard*, The Library of America, New York, 2012.

For what had struck me was that it was a mere essay of Anne's, and one written so long ago and published in a journal that, from the point of view of the Northern Hemisphere, could only have been thought obscure, that had been mentioned as if it were still up-to-date, relevant and important. Presumably my friend was using it in his teaching. Most scholars, myself very much included, wrote and published articles and essays; but not, I reflected, with any thought of their becoming classics in the literature of their discipline! For us, articles were mere stepping-stones, or progress-reports; they would rapidly be displaced, either by essays written later (by the same or other hands), or else by the book-length work of which they were mere forerunners—essays and books whose own life expectancy was likewise short. Scholarly publishing was very largely a conversational affair—whereas Anne's work, be it a book-length contribution such as *The Machinery of Talk* or “just” an essay of moderate length like “Anyone for Tennis?”, had a quality of durability that gave it an altogether different status.

Each and every statement that bears the Freadman signature has been so carefully thought through, and submitted to such rigorous testing, that it can, and does, stand alone as a permanent reference. It is, and remains, of equal interest to—but in no way redundant with—her other published work. The rigour of her work, in other words, is part and parcel of its integrity. So accurately has it been thought, so carefully has it been said, so strictly has it been tested, that it stands on its own, of permanent value, while the conversation goes on around it. In no circumstances does it need revision or restatement.

Scholarship of such integrity, I reflected, is the other of run-of-the-mill work, the kind that keeps academic conversation going and for that reason is of largely “passing” interest. It is work that defines the very topic of conversation—its stakes, its direction; the kind of contribution that, for that reason, has the invaluable quality of starting many more conversations than those that define its own immediate field of interest. Not merely persuasive, although it is also that, it raises issues and poses questions that give us, its readers, work to do on our own—new thoughts to pursue, new methods to try, new definitions to explore, more groundwork on which to build.

Then I realised something else. That very quality of integrity grounded in rigorous thought that makes Anne's work so valuable is also the most

salient property of the figures whom she has admired—those who, in turn, have grounded her work, to the point sometimes of becoming its actual object. Such figures, in the domain of linguistic and discursive theory, are Roman Jakobson and Charles Peirce—the one structuralist in his approach and a veritable master of the “essay that proves to be definitive”, the other a famous pragmatic thinker whose intellectual integrity made him the author of a fascinating *Nachlass* of book-projects and drafts whose very unfinished state is evidence of their author’s intellectual integrity, his rigorous approach to the business of thinking.

But then I realised too that Anne’s range of interest embraces other important figures of imperturbable integrity whose stance, though, is moral in kind rather than purely intellectual. One such would be Victor Klemperer, who—excluded by Nazi law from social and intellectual participation—“wrote back” in a personal diary that was published, after the war, under the significant title of *I Shall Bear Witness to the Last*. And another such exemplary figure of integrity would be the subject of Anne’s most recent preoccupation: the feminist writer and, yes, autobiographer—herself in many ways a social witness also, and dedicated to a mode of veracity all her own—Colette.

That autobiography is a genre to which not only intellectual but also moral integrity is crucial may well account for the intense interest it arouses among literary scholars as well as ordinary readers. Its challenge arises, I would say, from the intellectual difficulty of self-knowledge, so memorably pin-pointed by Montaigne. But a woman like Colette, making her way under the conditions of early and mid-twentieth century modernity, also faces issues of personal integrity and writerly veracity, issues that would have been well beyond the ken of Montaigne and that in turn bring to the fore in Colette formal questions and modes of (non-) composition—such as indirection, incompleteness, scatter—that are not only characteristic of her own writing but germane too (I now realised with a shock), to the writer and essayist whose “sketchy” style I had been contemplating in the café earlier. Like Klemperer and like Colette, Brainard too “wrote back”, his prose as sketchy as his drawing, and like Colette in particular, his mode of recollecting taking the form of a collection. Example: his famous “I remember”, imitated—even more famously—in Perec’s *Je me souviens*.

Since Rousseau (the first “write-back” autobiographer?), I now mused as my second cup of coffee grew cold, writers of integrity had conceived,

and realised, an understanding of what is bizarrely called identity in terms contrary to masculinist assumptions of unity, wholeness, completeness; and had done so in a spirit of veracity. Here was yet another insight that I owed to the indefatigable work of Anne Freadman, whose Colette book was not yet available, but of which I had gleaned more than an inkling from conversation and correspondence. It was certainly an etymological scandal that autobiographical integrity requires a denial of wholeness and completeness. But, as the best philosophers seem always to have known, what lies at the heart of genuinely critical thinking—thinking of integrity—is inevitably the ironic puzzle of the double bind, the *skandalon* or stumbling-block of thought.

Now that I've read *The Livres-Souvenirs of Colette*, I realise how far beyond the range of Anne's much more disciplined argument my reverie had taken me. The book does not consider the write-back dimension of Colette's autobiographical texts, except inasmuch as their ultimate object is the "telling" of time; and it draws a careful line between the linear-story autobiography (as represented by Rousseau's *Confessions*) and Colette's delightful memory-collections (which, however—one might think—may well owe something to the other autobiographical Rousseau, he of the *Rêveries*). Work of integrity can and does, on occasion, start lines of thought it might not wish to follow, although it should not be held responsible for them.

Which in turn brings me to the dynamics of the Festschrift, a genre that not accidentally itself subscribes to the strange logic of the collection in its desire to give an account of the multiplicitous resonance enjoyed by work that matters. As a token of gratitude, we pluck from the various fields of our competence enough flowers to form a substantial bouquet. And what the collection thus signifies is more, far more, than what, individually, we may each be able to say. It's that surplus of significance, in turn, that provides a perceptible measure of the durable resonance such work enjoys.

ROSS CHAMBERS  
Ann Arbor, January 2013