

TOUCHING WORDS: HELEN KELLER, PLAGIARISM, AUTHORSHIP

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The originals are not original.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson¹

Something . . . may have eluded you in passing, namely, this *belong-to-me* aspect of representations, so reminiscent of property.

— Jacques Lacan²

We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are ways of shutting my eyes.

— Franz Kafka³

I. HANDS

At age twenty-eight, Helen Keller, a recent graduate of Radcliffe College, *cum laude* in English, and already the author of two highly praised books, *The Story of My Life*⁴ and *The World I Live In*,⁵ is suspected once again of plagiarism. A letter to an editor complains that she has lifted a passage word for word from the work of the English Unitarian clergyman and philosopher, James Martineau. The reply made by this remarkable woman—deaf and blind since her second year—is forthright and sensible, explaining that friends often read “interesting fragments” to her “in a promiscuous manner,” and that if she then uses them in her writing, it is difficult to trace the “fugitive sentences and paragraphs”

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¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Quotation and Originality*, in 8 RALPH WALDO EMERSON, COLLECTED WORKS 175, 180 (Centenary ed., 1979).

² JACQUES LACAN, *Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a**, in THE FOUR FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS 67, 81 (Jacques-Alain Miller ed., Alan Sheridan trans., 1981) [hereinafter, LACAN, *Gaze*].

³ GUSTAV JANOUGH, CONVERSATIONS WITH KAFKA, *quoted in* ROLAND BARTHES, CAMERA LUCIDA: REFLECTIONS ON PHOTOGRAPHY 53 (Richard Howard trans., 1981).

⁴ HELEN KELLER, THE STORY OF MY LIFE (1954).

⁵ HELEN KELLER, THE WORLD I LIVE IN (1908).

which have been spelled into her hand. But this is not the first time that her writing has aroused suspicion. She herself says she has been troubled by several such cases. "Sometimes I think I ought to stop writing altogether," she complains, "since I cannot tell surely which of my ideas are borrowed feathers, except for those which I gather from books in raised print."⁶

Helen Keller is aware that she reads books in two distinct modes. In one mode, she is an autonomous reader, her hand actively tracing and deciphering the braille code embossed on the page. In the other, she is the object of a "promiscuous" generosity, the hands of others signing into hers a mixture of discursive fragments, which she remembers but cannot place as having an origin or a source. In one mode, her fingers trace a linear sequence of signs across the ordered surface of a page, each word in its own place on its own line. In the other mode, her hand is itself the surface on which someone else's fingers imprint a sequence of tactile signs, a sequence that is not spatial but temporal, with letters, words, and sentences all spelled one after the other onto the same surface.

The hand becomes all-important to her. With it, she makes do in the absence of sight and sound, and it matters immensely that her access to language—and to knowledge in general—is channeled almost entirely through the sensuous and intimate medium of touch. The blind who have their hearing can still hear a book read to them, and in the United States the system of talking-book libraries furnishes the blind with recorded books free of charge. Similarly, the deaf who have their sight can read books directly, and for conversation they also have sign language, some dialects of which are wonderfully rich and subtle in chirographic expressiveness.⁷ For the deaf-blind, however, the touch of the hand is the only way to read or converse, by touching a book, or by touching hands, or, as Helen Keller did very adroitly, by touching another person's mouth. In *The World I Live In*, Keller says, "In all my experiences and thoughts I am conscious of a hand. Whatever moves me, whatever thrills me, is as a hand that touches me in the dark."⁸ Of course, the sense of touch is not limited to the hand, and Keller describes herself as possessing a

⁶ JOSEPH P. LASH, *HELEN AND TEACHER: THE STORY OF HELEN KELLER AND ANNE SULLIVAN MACY* 342-43 (1980). Anyone who studies Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan owes a great debt to Lash for this biography.

⁷ See generally OLIVER SACHS, *SEEING VOICES: A JOURNEY INTO THE WORLD OF THE DEAF* (1990).

⁸ KELLER, *THE WORLD I LIVE IN*, *supra* note 5, at 6.

deliciously unbounded sensation of perceiving the world through the whole surface of her body. "Sometimes it seems as if the very substance of my flesh were so many eyes looking out at will upon a world new created every day."⁹ Thus conceived, the mind realizes itself in a world unstructured by the hierarchy of visual perspective, in and as a body unstructured by the hierarchy of sight over the other senses: every moment is newly created and wholly perceived.

"Promiscuous" is Keller's word for an important mode of reading—it applies both to the person who reads and the mixed, indeterminate object of her reading. For the other mode important to her, the word that suggests itself as the opposite of promiscuous is "proper," signifying what is bounded and structured in the field of vision, what Lacan calls the "*belong-to-me* aspect of representations, so reminiscent of property."¹⁰ Of course, for Keller it is not a *visual* field, but the perceptual field which she learns to construct for herself out of the experience of her hands: there, in an incident very early in her relationship with Anne Sullivan, she is forced to acquire a sense not only of the "*belong-to-me*" but of the "*belong-to-you*" aspect (what English lawyers used to call the *meum et teum*) of that space. Sullivan calls the incident a "battle royal." Helen's table manners, she says, were "appalling." "She puts her hands in our plates and helps herself, and when the dishes are passed, she grabs them and takes out whatever she wants."¹¹ After a struggle in a locked dining room, lasting two, maybe three hours, Annie succeeded in getting Helen to eat with a spoon, to eat from her own plate and not from others', and to use a napkin—*properly*. This was a necessary first step before Helen would be responsive to Annie's attempts to teach her language, but her lifelong experience of *touching* the world in order to "see" it makes it difficult for her to sustain a sense of the boundaries routinely respected by people with hearing and sight, boundaries defined by those absolutely fundamental rules which we teach our children: keep your hands to yourself and don't touch what isn't yours.

It is in the space between "proper" and "promiscuous" reading, then, that Helen Keller finds herself accused of plagia-

⁹ *Id.* at 41. Compare John Milton's Samson, a blind poet's blind hero: "why was the sight / To such a tender ball as th' eye confin'd? / So obvious and so easy to be quench't, / And not like feeling, through all parts diffus'd, / That she might look at will through every pore?" JOHN MILTON, *Samson Agonistes*, lines 96-100, in JOHN MILTON: COMPLETE POEMS AND MAJOR PROSE (Merritt Hughes, ed., 1957) (1671).

¹⁰ LACAN, *Gaze*, *supra* note 2, at 81.

¹¹ KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 248.

rism, the space where she cannot tell for sure whether something is hers or someone else's, and where she feels at times that she ought to stop writing altogether. It is also here, in this space between the proper and the promiscuous, that I want to locate my exploration of Helen Keller and the question of plagiarism. As I have suggested already, with an allusion to Lacan, I proceed in the awareness of psychoanalytic as well as other modes of inquiry, all of which feature strongly visual concepts in their theoretical discourse. I want to try, as best I can as someone with sight and hearing, to understand what it is for someone deaf and blind to be an author.¹² What happens, for instance, to Foucault's concept of the "author-effect," when we factor out the visual and auditory dimensions of writing—when reading *and* writing are performed as *touch*, with its dual potential, both transgressive and proprietary.¹³ Or, what happens to the intensely visual aspect of much psychoanalytic theory—Lacan's "mirror stage"¹⁴ or Winnicott's "mirror role of the mother?"¹⁵ Does a deaf-blind child experience a mirror stage? And, if she does, what is the mirror and its significance? Is it just a metaphor? Or, to cite Foucault again: what is the Panopticon to the blind, or, for that matter, to the deaf-blind? Foucault says of the Panopticon—for him the quintessential mechanism of social discipline—that its major effect is to induce "a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" that "[he] who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; . . . he becomes the principle of his own subjection."¹⁶ Can we locate Helen Keller in a social space theorized in this way? Assuming that she is subjected to a field of visibility, does she *know* she is so subjected? Is she aware of that visual dimension of herself which is available

¹² It is quite a different matter to try, as a *man* with sight and hearing, to understand what it is for a deaf-blind *woman* to be an author.

¹³ MICHEL FOUCAULT, *What is an Author?*, in LANGUAGE, COUNTER-MEMORY, PRACTICE 113 (Donald Bouchard ed., 1977). Foucault distinguishes between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century construction of discourse as property and an earlier construction of it as transgression: "In our culture . . . discourse was not originally a thing, a product, or a possession, but an action situated in a bipolar field of sacred and profane, lawful and unlawful, religious and blasphemous. It was a gesture charged with risks long before it became a possession caught in a circuit of property values." *Id.* at 124.

¹⁴ JACQUES LACAN, *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I* (1949), in ÉCRITS: A SELECTION (Alan Sheridan trans., 1977) [hereinafter LACAN, *Mirror Stage*].

¹⁵ D.W. WINNICOTT, *Mirror Role of Mother and Family in Child Development* (1967), in PLAYING AND REALITY 111-18 (1971) [hereinafter WINNICOTT, *Mirror Role*].

¹⁶ MICHEL FOUCAULT, DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH: THE BIRTH OF THE PRISON 201-03 (Alan Sheridan trans., 1979).

to others but not to her?¹⁷

These two terms of deaf-blind reading, the proper and the promiscuous, are chosen deliberately for their lack of a visual or auditory connotation. They are also understood to be related, not as polar opposites constituting a structure, but as terms of an asymmetrical semiotic relation: one term defines the other. The promiscuous is defined as such only from the standpoint of the proper. It bears the imprint of “proper” thinking, for the promiscuous is structured as a feared or censured *lack* of propriety, a lack of boundaries and names and ordered relations. Promiscuity is *in-decent*, *un-seemly*, *im-proper*. What the promiscuous actually “is,” is a question that cannot be answered, for it can be posed only from a “proper” standpoint—although “standpoint” is a questionable term here, since the proper knows itself only in opposition to the promiscuous, constructing a difference as the “point” it “stands” on. Therefore, to say that it is in the space between proper and promiscuous reading that Helen Keller finds herself accused of plagiarism, is to locate her, not between polar opposites, but in a narrative and conversionary space, where an “I” structures itself by an act of appropriation, an act initiated in response to trauma in order to recuperate what is experienced as a shattered self. The trauma of the original accusation of plagiarism, when she was eleven years old, may have been cruel and unnecessary, but its ultimate effect is unavoidable. Like the “battle royal” in which Annie forces Helen to eat a proper meal, keeping her hands out of other people’s food, the trauma of being accused of plagiarism forces Helen to become aware of where her hands have been in other people’s words: only then does she begin to be an *author*.

Furthermore, her experience discloses a crucial relation between blindness and autobiographical narrative, a virtual imperative for narrative in blind experience. The visual field for sighted persons is a field of *kinetic* images—fluid, shifting, actively mobile and elusive, not to be pinned down, not by the unaided eye.¹⁸

¹⁷ Compare Diderot, who reports of the blind man of Puisaux, that the spectacle of power (*les signes extérieurs de la puissance*) is nothing to him, and that he scoffs at the threat of being imprisoned in a dungeon. DENIS DIDEROT, *Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those Who See*, in DIDEROT’S EARLY PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS 77-78 (Margaret Jourdain trans., Open Court Pub., 1916) (1749). But see FOUCAULT, *supra* note 16, at 200, for whom the dungeon is the opposite of the Panopticon: Bentham’s design for the ideal prison, a ring of cells open to a central observation tower, is not where one is shut away but where one is made *visible*: “[v]isibility is a trap.”

¹⁸ See JOHN HULL, *TOUCHING THE ROCK: AN EXPERIENCE OF BLINDNESS* (1990). In this extraordinary account of going blind, Hull finds that his way of remembering faces—even his own face—is not what he expected: “When I try to conjure up the memory of a

Looked at another way, it is precisely this kinetic quality of the visual that provides us with a continuously modulated three-dimensional map of ourselves in space, although we cannot *see* the process of this mapping, because it is not available to us to look “another way.” As with Lacan’s account of the gaze, it is the view of ourselves from the position of the other, a position which we can never occupy.¹⁹ I am in a room and turn my head, and what I see is not just the movement of the room’s features: what I also see, but without being able to see that I see it, is the continuously adjusted mapping of my own existence in the room, my relation to the chair (and you in it), a table, a window, the cat on the back of the sofa. I want to say that I *see* these features, that I actively focus my eyes and my mind and look at them, and as a consequence they become visible to me. But what is also happening is that I am seeing myself continuously represented and made visible where I am in the space of the room—although, again, this is

loved face, I cannot seem to capture it, but the straight edges of [a] photograph seem to fix the mobile features firmly in my mind, so that I can imagine myself gazing at the image.” *Id.* at 19. This tells us a great deal about the place of the photograph in sighted as well as blind experience, and the way the technology of the camera has intervened over the last century and a half to transform our conception of the visual field. Hull understands acutely the effect on him of not being able to visualize space or visualize himself in space, and he comes to relish moments when the wind is blowing or when it rains. In wind and rain, sound performs the role of light in shaping for him an audible space where there was no space before. For a blind person in a space that is otherwise silent, there are only intermittent sounds that seem to come from nowhere and then disappear. There is no shape or continuity of space, no sense of things existing before or after they happen to announce themselves as sound. Opening the door one evening, he hears the rain in the garden, and in its varying sound he can make out even the contours of the lawn, the rain “shaping out the curvature” for him. *Id.* at 30. It is “an experience of great beauty . . . I feel as if the world, which is veiled until I touch it, has suddenly disclosed itself to me. . . . I am no longer isolated, preoccupied with my thoughts . . . I am presented with a totality, a world that speaks to me.” *Id.* at 31. At another time, in early morning rain, he listens for what it tells him of the many textures, layers and shapes of the world within earshot. Thinking of the common opinion that the blind live in their bodies rather than in the world, he compares his sense of his body to his sense of the rain. The body too is multi-layered and multi-textured, and he apprehends it not as an image but as multiple “arrangements of sensitivities, a conscious space comparable to the patterns of the falling rain. . . . My body and the rain intermingle, and become one audio-tactile, three-dimensional universe, within which and throughout the whole of which lies my awareness.” *Id.* at 133. This blind epiphany is surprisingly like Helen Keller’s sense of perceiving through the whole surface of her body a world that is in a continuous process of becoming. What Hull underscores is the sharp contrast between the simultaneity and totality of perception in a moment like this, its pleasure heightened by a feeling of recovered loss, and the very different experience of “the single-track line of consecutive speech which makes up [his] thoughts.” *Id.* He imagines the rain stopping and his sense of the world shrinking to the surface of his own body. Then he goes a step further and imagines himself paralyzed from the neck down, deprived even of his body sense, and he wonders at what point he becomes “only a line of thought-speech.” *Id.* It is this difference between the three-dimensional totality of perception in rare moments of fully realized acoustic space and the linearity of discursive thought that Hull comes back to again and again in his narrative.

¹⁹ See LACAN, *Gaze*, *supra* note 4, at 72-75.

not something I can say I actually *see*. The blind tell us what it is like to live in the absence of this invisible dimension of the visible—the way, without our noticing, that it assures us moment by moment of our own reality in the space of appearance. Without such assurance, the blind woman's walk through the world is an intensely *narrative* activity. In a familiar space blindness means a continuous exercise of memory and prediction. In an unfamiliar space, it means getting other people's help to mark out a path, or it means constructing a narrative around the sounds and sensations (or, for Helen Keller, just the sensations) that come and go at will and without notice. This has a very specific consequence for Helen Keller as a writer. John Macy, the editor of her first book, *The Story of My Life*, says that, unlike a sighted person, Helen lacks the capacity to "go back over [her] work, shuffle the pages, interline, rearrange, see how the paragraphs look in proof, and so construct the whole work before the eye, as an architect constructs his plans."²⁰ Instead, Helen relies entirely on memory to construct her narrative as a whole, just as she must rely on narrative memory to fashion the coherence of herself from day to day. This ability to construct herself as narrative, though, is something that Helen does not achieve without considerable pain and trouble.

II. MY WORDS, YOUR WORDS

It is not the accusation of 1908 but an earlier one that constitutes a fundamental trauma for Helen Keller. In November, 1891, when she was eleven, she sent a birthday present to Michael Anagnos, head of the Perkins Institution (now "School") for the Blind. She had written a story for him titled "The Frost King." Annie, in a cover letter said, "We thought it pretty and original."²¹ A rather conventional piece of narrative scene painting, the story tells how frost fairies accidentally transform the autumn landscape, coloring all the leaves crimson and gold. Anagnos was very pleased, calling the story a "precious gift," and immediately had it printed in the Perkins alumni magazine, *The Mentor*, rather than waiting for the appearance of the annual report several months later. From there it was picked up and published by *The Goodson Gazette*, a Virginia weekly for the deaf and blind. Within just a week, however, the editor of the weekly was shown a children's book by Margaret T. Canby, *Birdie and His*

²⁰ KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 224.

²¹ LASH, *supra* note 6, at 132.

Fairy Friends, in which one of the stories was “The Frost Fairies.”²² The editor then published his findings along with parallel columns of matching phrases and paragraphs from the two stories. In the turmoil that followed, most of the accusations were directed at Anne Sullivan as the one who had attempted to “palm off” the story as Helen’s own, but Annie and Helen both firmly denied that Canby’s story had ever been read to Helen. Anagnos was embarrassed by the incident. Though he voted officially to clear them both of any dishonesty, he was apparently dissatisfied and remained suspicious. Years later, Helen recalled learning that Anagnos privately continued to accuse both Annie and herself of deceit, and once he was quoted as saying that Helen was “a living lie.”²³ She and Annie were never to forgive him.

Helen Keller’s story has been told many times, and the “Frost King” episode is usually presented as a decisive event in her early experience. However, until Joseph Lash researched the episode for his dual biography of Helen and Annie, everyone tended to repeat Sullivan’s 1892 version that portrays Helen at the age of eight having Canby’s story read into her palm by Mrs. Hopkins, Annie’s friend from Perkins,²⁴ then forgetting it until three years later when she writes her own story as an unconscious copy of it. Typically, Helen’s earlier biographers cite this extended process of forgetting and later recall as a sign of Helen’s genius, “[h]er phenomenal power of concentration,”²⁵ her “remarkable” or “astonishing” memory.²⁶ But the evidence does not bear this out. Distributed in several parts of *The Story of My Life* and Michael Anagnos’s lengthy account of Helen in the Perkins Institution *Annual Report* for 1891,²⁷ there are letters and narrative passages which, when gathered together, suggest several possibilities: either Helen simply remembered “The Frost

²² MARGARET T. CANBY, *BIRDIE AND HIS FAIRY FRIENDS* (Philadelphia, Wm. F. Fell & Co. 1873).

²³ LASH, *supra* note 6, at 168.

²⁴ It was to Mrs. Sophia C. Hopkins, who had been her house mother at Perkins, that Annie addressed the letters she wrote from Alabama recording her early progress with Helen. In the summer of 1888, Helen and Annie visited Mrs. Hopkins at her home in Brewster, Mass. Annie, still having trouble with her eyes, asked Mrs. Hopkins to care for Helen while she sought treatment and some rest. In her explanatory letter in 1892 to John Hitz, Annie says that it was during her absence that Mrs. Hopkins probably read stories from Canby’s book into Helen’s hand. KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 343.

²⁵ VAN WYCK BROOKS, *HELEN KELLER: SKETCH FOR A PORTRAIT* 35 (1956).

²⁶ HELEN ELMIRA WAITE, *VALIANT COMPANIONS: HELEN KELLER AND ANNE SULLIVAN MACY* 145 (1959); EILEEN BIGLAND, *HELEN KELLER* 92 (1967).

²⁷ *Sixtieth Annual Report, Perkins Institution for the Blind* (1892) (reporting on academic year 1890-91) [hereinafter *Perkins Report*].

Fairies" *and* several other stories in Canby's book, or she had recent and frequent access to them, or she and Annie used key passages and phrases from the stories as a shared code for conversing about landscapes and seasons. Perhaps her relationship to Canby's book was a combination of these, continuing through the whole period, from the summer of 1888 to the fall of 1891, when Helen says she wrote "The Frost King." For instance, in early August 1891, well before any autumn change in the leaves, which Helen says inspired her story, she writes a letter vividly describing a thunderstorm, and the description matches a part of Canby's story, "The Dew Fairies," almost word for word: "Teacher and I watched from our window the great black clouds chasing one another swiftly across the sky, seeming to growl angrily when they met, and sending bright flashes of lightning at each other like swords."²⁸ (The key words here are "teacher and I"—for Helen, *watching* is an activity always mediated by other people's words, other people's hands.) Some weeks later, on September 29, she writes a letter to Anagnos, telling him how much she enjoys the books that Annie reads to her and their walks together in the autumn landscape:

We were especially happy when the trees began to put on their autumn robes. Oh, yes! I could imagine how beautiful the trees were, all aglow, and rustling in the sunlight. *We thought the leaves as pretty as flowers, and carried great bunches home to mother. The golden leaves I called buttercups and the red ones roses.* One day teacher said, "Yes, they are beautiful enough to comfort us for the flight of summer."²⁹

The italicized words come from Canby's story, "The Frost Fairies."³⁰ In her later account, Helen alludes to this letter and others of the same period, acknowledging that phrases in them showed how saturated her mind was with Canby's language. In particular, she quotes the sentence she attributes to Annie, about the comfort given by autumn's beauty, and says it is "an idea direct from Miss Canby's story."³¹ It is in fact an exact quotation, and it also appears word-for-word in "The Frost King." As an example of how Helen goes about adapting her model, she draws the phrases quoted together in the letter from different parts of

²⁸ *Id.* at 93.

²⁹ *Id.* at 79 (emphasis added).

³⁰ See KELLER, *Story of My Life*, *supra* note 4, at 349-50, 354. Anne Sullivan, in her statement about the incident, included by Macy as part of Keller's book, prints the two stories side by side in parallel columns. *Id.*

³¹ *Id.* at 67.

Canby's story. Then, when she writes "The Frost King," she uses these phrases in virtually the same order as they appear in Canby, but with variations of context and phrasing. For instance, she includes the phrase about leaves as pretty as flowers, replacing "pretty" with "lovely," but says nothing about "mother" and omits the comparisons with buttercups and roses.

There are numerous, well documented instances where Helen adapts or copies from Canby's book—not just "The Frost Fairies" but other stories as well. How much is from long-term memory and how much from more recent "promiscuous" reading is an open question and, I think, unresolvable. Surely, this process of imitation and adaptation was a fundamental part of Helen's education. From the circumstances of the September 1891, letter to Anagnos, it seems that Annie understood what it would mean for Helen to learn about the world, particularly in its visual dimension: she would have to learn about it *as language*. According to Nella Braddy, who was Annie's biographer and talked with her about her methods:

She had to get Helen's lessons out of the material at hand—they worked together—she asked Helen to write what she saw. Then Annie would give touches like color, then they would read stories in *Youth's Library* and notice what these had described that they hadn't. Then they would add those details to make it more interesting.³²

The world as language comes to Helen largely out of books.³³ Coaxed to write what she "sees," she comes to "see" what she writes, which is the imagery and phrasing of nineteenth-century popular children's stories written in the tradition of Romantic landscape description. Language, for her, appears to be concrete more than for those with sight and/or hearing. Scenes are remembered directly as language, and her experience of the world as touch, taste and smell is largely muted by the visual and auditory force of the language she adapts herself to. It is entirely possible that when Helen writes "The Frost King," she is work-

³² LASH, *supra* note 6, at 145.

³³ Anne Sullivan tells of an incident in the winter of 1891-92 when she took Helen outside during a light snow-fall. Helen was delighted to feel the cold flakes on her face and hands and, as they went back indoors, she said, "'Out of the cloud-folds of his garments Winter shakes the snow.'" KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 338 n.*. Annie recognized the sentence as obviously literary but had no idea where it came from. No one at Perkins recognized it as coming from any of the available books in braille. One teacher did finally locate it in an ordinary printed book and identified it as coming from a poem of Longfellow's, but in Helen's memory it is quite transformed from what it was in the poem. *Id.*

ing entirely from memory, that she remembers it largely word-for-word, because word-for-word is how she comes to know the world beyond her intimate knowledge of it as touch, taste, and smell. But then the evidence is not reassuring.

Did Helen plagiarize Margaret Canby's book? If we mean by plagiarism a deliberate and conscious intent to steal someone else's intellectual property, then the answer has to be *no*. She did quote verbatim from the book, and she frequently adapted Canby's language to her own uses, but it all seems to have been done innocently and has to be understood in the context of her relationship with Annie. Where the problem seems to have arisen is in the way people wanted to see Helen as an original genius. Annie herself often describes Helen's mind as "sensitive" and "philosophic," her work as "original," at exactly those moments when Helen is repeating the language of another text. Lash's chapter on the episode ends with the opinion that, when the plagiarism crisis broke, Annie panicked and denied that Helen had ever had Canby's stories read to her.³⁴ Lash is citing an anonymous unpublished typescript in the archive at the Perkins School, "Miss Sullivan's Methods."³⁵ It is legalistic in manner and rather sarcastically mean-spirited in debunking Sullivan's version of the incident. According to Lash, why it was written, who wrote it, and why it ended up in the Perkins archive, have a lot to do with the bad feeling that continued between Anagnos and Sullivan long after the crisis and right up to his death in 1906.³⁶ The anonymous indictment is the only source of a particularly damaging statement by a Perkins teacher, which prompted Anagnos to impanel a formal court of investigation. According to the teacher, one day during a late afternoon dinner Helen confided to her that Annie had in fact read Canby's story to her when she was writing her own. Their conversation was interrupted by Annie, who took Helen upstairs. When Helen returned, she denied what she had said earlier and seemed quite troubled.³⁷ Helen was made to appear before the court, without Annie, and

³⁴ LASH, *supra* note 6, at 150.

³⁵ *Miss Sullivan's Methods* (n.d., anonymous unpublished typescript, bound in leather, on legal sized paper 7.50" x 12.75", 171 pages numbered by hand; stored in the Samuel P. Hayes Library at the Perkins School for the Blind, Watertown, Mass.) (used by permission) [hereinafter *Methods*]. Lash speculates that it was written in 1906, after the death of Anagnos, by Julia Ward Howe's son-in-law, David Prescott Hall, countering statements that reflected Annie's ingratitude toward Anagnos. LASH, *supra* note 6, at 134 n.*.

³⁶ *Id.*

³⁷ *Id.* at 136-38 (quoting *Methods*, *supra* note 35, at 142-50). Helen alludes to the incident herself: "Something I said made her think she detected in my words a confes-

recalled how panicked she felt in the face of determined questioning that seemed intended to make her confess. Later, Mark Twain sought to comfort her, laughing at the incident as a farce (“As if there was much of anything in any human utterance, oral or written, *except* plagiarism!”) and portraying the court as a group of “solemn donkeys” and “decayed human turnips.”³⁸ The court split, four to four, in its opinion, and Anagnos cast the deciding vote in Helen’s favor. Helen was dazed by the ordeal and wept bitterly in her bed that night, wishing she were dead.³⁹

III. PROPERTY

“Miss Sullivan’s Methods” ends on a note of serious doubt and suspicion about Helen’s book, *The Story of My Life*, questioning the way it combines Helen’s own narrative with Anne Sullivan’s letters and several other writings, all of it arranged with a commentary by the editor:

One arises from a study of the Book in a questioning state of mind. He is inclined to ask himself, what in this book is Miss Sullivan’s, what is the Editor’s, and what is Helen Keller’s? He feels as he does looking at a *composite photograph*—the book is such [a] “*composite reminiscence*” of so much else. One feels as a bank clerk must feel, who far many years has been falsifying his accounts, and who says to himself, “which figures are right, which are wrong, which are the genuine figures, which are those I have substituted? For the life of me I cannot tell.”⁴⁰

Three very telling concepts inform the writer’s judgment. First, there is intellectual property: how does one decide what in the book belongs to Helen, what to Annie, and what to John Macy the editor. Second, there is the photograph, a “composite” photograph, and the anxiety that this medium, still new in 1906, with its promise of an unprecedented fidelity of visual representation, might also have the power to trick the viewer; as if the writer felt vulnerable in the very mode of perception in which he enjoys a distinct advantage over the two women. And finally, there is the figure of the embezzler, who has become confused about which are the real figures and which the false ones. Overall, this writer gives the impression of someone who desires strict accountability, a world of rigid distinctions between original and copy, au-

sion that I did remember Miss Canby’s story of ‘The Frost Fairies,’ and she laid her conclusions before Mr. Anagnos” KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 64.

³⁸ Quoted by LASH, *supra* note 6, at 146-47.

³⁹ KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 65.

⁴⁰ *Methods*, *supra* note 35, at 171.

thentic and counterfeit, "genuine" and "substitute," although there is the curious moment at the end, when he shifts his point of view and identifies with the deceiver rather than the deceived ("One feels as a bank clerk must feel"). My guess is that, when the writer imagines a potentially deceptive photograph, and then identifies with an imagined embezzler, he is telling us of his own confusion and difficulty with the concept of intellectual property, even at the same moment when he emphatically declares his conviction that not only was "The Frost King" a plagiarism, but its true circumstances have been obscured and covered up.

Generally, our understanding of intellectual property derives from the Anglo-American tradition of thought about property. A leading authority on the subject, at the time when Helen Keller is accused of plagiarism, is Eaton Drone's *Treatise on the Law of Property in Intellectual Productions in Great Britain and the United States* (also known as *Drone on Copyright*), which was published in 1879, one year before Keller's birth.⁴¹ Drone expounds the law of copyright at length, but he does so in the context of a fundamental argument about the meaning of intellectual property. In the 1870s American law was modeled, as it is today, on an early eighteenth-century British statute and subsequent court rulings, in both England and the United States, which declare that the common law right of authors to property in their intellectual productions is superseded by copyright statutes; that authors in fact have no rights except under the particular statute that applies.⁴² Drone rejects this position, and sees it as his task to argue the case for the common law right to intellectual property as a right prior to, and surviving, any copyright statute. Consequently, he devotes an introductory section to delineating "The Origin and Nature of Literary Property," which he ultimately traces to the seventeenth-century social contract theorists, chief among them being John Locke.⁴³

Locke's theory, which concerns men existing in a state of nature before their agreement to form a civil society, bases property on the presumed natural right that a man has in his own person. This is a theory of private possession, modeled on the privacy of the body, which Locke elaborates as a theory of private

⁴¹ EATON. S. DRONE, A TREATISE ON THE LAW OF PROPERTY IN INTELLECTUAL PRODUCTIONS IN GREAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES (1879) [hereinafter DRONE ON COPYRIGHT].

⁴² *Id.* at 1.

⁴³ JOHN LOCKE, *Of Property*, SECOND TREATISE OF GOVERNMENT, ch. 5, §§ 25-51, in TWO TREATISES OF GOVERNMENT (Peter Laslett ed., 1960) (1690).

appropriation: for whatever a man creates or cultivates or improves with the labor of his body becomes his property.⁴⁴ There is a deep and complex irony in this theory, because in Locke's seventeenth-century, social contract theory performs a radical act of social and political amnesia. Locke, and Hobbes before him, both base their accounts of the origin of civil society on an anthropology that erases the actual history of property in England, at least from the time of the Norman Conquest forward, and substitutes in its stead a theory about the origin of property in the prehistory of culture. With Locke, though, appropriation comes from a state of nature where everything is first "in *common*," so that Locke, more exactly, theorizes in a transitional zone between the traditional idea of a commonwealth and the modern concept of private property. Still, the erasure is itself a sign that Locke theorizes in order to prevail in a field of contested meaning; that the object of his theory is not so much nature as the still powerful, though altered, tradition of feudal property relations among lords, and their tenants and servants. It is a fact often overlooked, for instance, that Locke devotes the first of his *Two Treatises of Government* to demolishing the thesis of Robert James Filmer's *Patriarchia*,⁴⁵ a text written at the height of the revolution which beheaded the English king and abolished the crown. Filmer argued that all social and political authority derived from the supposedly "natural" authority of the father over his wife, children and household servants. This was an attempt to rationalize, by an appeal to origins, the feudal tradition of authority—a tradition which had *already* been dissolved from within by the development of a free market. The defining feature of this market was the institution of the legal contract, a device by which one man enters freely into agreement with another in pursuit of his own self-interest and is bound, not by an unwritten, supposedly "natural" bond between lord and servant, but by the mutually agreed upon terms of the written contract. That the two parties to a contract may in fact be unequal in property and power as a consequence of a prior unequal distribution of wealth, is a matter

⁴⁴ *Id.* § 27. "Though the Earth, and all inferior Creatures be common to all Men, every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*. This no Body has any Right to but himself. The *Labour* of his Body, and the *Work* of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*." *Id.* (emphasis in original).

⁴⁵ SIR ROBERT FILMER, *PATRIARCHIA, OR, THE NATURAL POWER OF KINGS* (London, 1680). (Filmer died in 1653, and the first posthumous edition appeared in 1680.)

that Locke's theory is silent on, exactly as it works to secure that prior unequal distribution as a system of property rights.

Social contract theory thus performs not so much an erasure as a radical rewriting of the origin of property. To theorize a state of nature is to think into nonexistence the present order of things in whose midst one theorizes. After all, virtually every square foot of land in England had been inventoried already, *as property*, as far back as the eleventh century in the Domesday Book of William the Conqueror. Locke theorizes, then, upon an origin that is itself insufficiently theorized, and in doing so he proposes a concept of property without debt or obligation. If what you acquire exists first, as Locke says, in "the state that nature hath provided and left it in," then to whom do you owe any obligation, to whom are you tied by the bonds of exchange? This is the kind of question raised by the tradition of classical liberalism and its inability to provide or even account for a society as a collective or cooperative venture, its existence as a *commonwealth*. It is also the kind of question that has led Marxist readers, like C. B. Macpherson,⁴⁶ to argue that in Locke's state of nature there is already established a system of property relations prior to the social contract; that civil society is created as an agreement by an already existing class of major property holders for the purpose of justifying and protecting their disproportionate share of the world's natural and "common" wealth.⁴⁷

However, it is not just Marxism or post-modernist theory that recognizes a political design in Locke's thinking about origins. Even his contemporaries could see ironies in this kind of thinking, which was pervasive a good deal earlier in the seven-

⁴⁶ C.B. MACPHERSON, *THE POLITICAL THEORY OF POSSESSIVE INDIVIDUALISM: HOBBS TO LOCKE* (1962).

⁴⁷ We are not much concerned with the history of property today, either—or with economic history in general. Recently, a new chair was hired for an economics department which is getting added resources at a time when the rest of the university faces possible retrenchment. Asked why his graduate program offered no courses in economic history, he replied, "We can do economics without history," and the current practice of economists, with their focus on cost/benefit analysis, bears him out. Their key concern now is the "problem" of social cost. That is, does the cost to A of injury to her property (e.g., air or water pollution) from B's use of her property outweigh the cost to B of damages paid to A or of regulations restraining B from using her property in a way that injures A? According to the prevailing Coase theorem, if A and B are allowed to negotiate without legal or regulatory intervention, then the outcome will tend to maximize the social product and, consequently, minimize social cost—even if it means that B continues to injure A. To do economics like this, of course you don't need history. See R.H. Coase, *The Problem of Social Cost*, 3 J. L. & ECON. 503 (1960). But see Duncan Kennedy, *Cost-Benefit Analysis of Entitlement Problems: A Critique* 33 STAN. L. REV. 387 (1981); Mark Kelman, *Consumption Theory, Production Theory, and Ideology in the Coase Theorem*, 52 S. CAL. L. REV. 669 (1979).

teenth century than when Locke writes his work on property. Andrew Marvell, for instance, imagines in his long country-house poem, "Upon Appleton House," a moment in which the land, deliberately flooded to increase its fertility, seems like both the newly created world and Locke's original nature:

A levell'd space, as smooth and plain,
As Clothes for Lilly strecht to stain.
The world when first created sure
Was such a table rase and pure.⁴⁸

The ironies are manifold. "Leveled" glances at the democratizing political agenda of the Levelers, whom Locke also rejected.⁴⁹ In the agricultural context, flooding used for deliberate ecological management of an estate is read ironically by the poem's narrator as a scene of pure and original nature. This repeats exactly the way in which most Europeans, without irony, read the New England landscape, where the Indians made use of controlled burns to create lush grasslands along forest edges so as to support the deer and other animals that they hunted, while the Europeans saw the same landscape as an untouched nature that new world "savages" were blessed with.⁵⁰ Characteristically, Locke uses the figure of a lone American Indian killing a deer as the model of man's original acquisition of property.⁵¹ "[I]n the beginning" says Locke, "all the world was *America*."⁵²

These allusions in Marvell's poem to concepts of political and ecological origins are coupled with important allusions to concepts of psychological and aesthetic origins. For instance, the phrase, "Table rase," sounds a lot like Locke's notion of the newborn mind as it awaits the advent of sense-experience to write

⁴⁸ Andrew Marvell, *Upon Appleton House*, lines 443-46, in 1 THE POEMS AND LETTERS OF ANDREW MARVELL 76 (H. M. Margoliouth ed., 1971) [hereinafter MISCELLANEOUS POEMS]. Marvell's *Miscellaneous Poems* were first published posthumously in 1681; he most likely wrote *Upon Appleton House* around 1650, only a year or so after the beheading of Charles I, while serving as tutor for the daughter of Thomas Lord Fairfax, retired commander of the revolutionary "New Model" army, at the Fairfax estate of Nun Appleton.

⁴⁹ See CHRISTOPHER HILL, *THE WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN: RADICAL IDEAS IN THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION* (1972); MACPHERSON, *supra* note 46, ch. 3.

⁵⁰ WILLIAM CRONON, *CHANGES IN THE LAND: INDIANS, COLONISTS, AND THE ECOLOGY OF NEW ENGLAND* 47-51 (1983).

⁵¹ Locke, *supra* note 43, § 30. "Thus this Law of reason makes the Deer, that *Indian's* who hath killed it; it is allowed to be his goods who hath bestowed his labour upon it, though before, it was the common right of every one. And amongst those who are counted the Civiliz'd part of Mankind, who have made and multiplied positive Laws to determine Property, this original Law of Nature for the *beginning of Property*, in what was before common, still takes place" *Id.*

⁵² *Id.* § 49.

upon it a knowledge of the world. Furthermore, the name "Lilly" in the line about cloth stretched for him to paint on, is Peter Lely, the Dutch portrait painter who came to England in 1641: the idea of the blank canvas as an untouched nature, lying open for civilized man to inscribe himself onto it, is exactly the idea of the creation of intellectual property that Eaton Drone draws from his reading of Locke. For Drone all property—real, personal, or intellectual—is founded on the same principle: "there is no purer, stronger, better title to property than that acquired by production."⁵³

It does not matter to Drone that the passages he quotes from Locke suggest a system of property relations already in place, as in the sentence, "The grass my horse has bit, the turfs my servant has cut, and the ore I have digged, in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my property."⁵⁴ That is, in imagining a horse that is *his* horse and, significantly, a servant who is *his* servant, Locke assumes an already functioning market economy based on a system of property that underwrites one man's ownership of another man's labor. Similarly, when Drone quotes Locke to the effect that a man acquires whatever he removes from the state of nature by reason of the labor he has invested in it,⁵⁵ Drone passes over the slippery patch in Locke's argument which assumes that laboring on something is the same as acquiring it, an assumption that simply buries the question of original acquisition, which Locke's treatise sets out to explain in the first place.⁵⁶

In following Locke as his authority on property, Drone ignores fundamental difficulties in Locke's theory. As a result, he expounds what is essentially a free-market concept of intellectual and literary property for which language exists as so much raw material, untouched by any prior relation of production, exchange, or obligation, and simply waiting for the writer's labor to mine it and make it his own. According to this view, a writer acquires property in words by the distinctive order he bestows on them: that is what the law of copyright protects.⁵⁷ Writing is un-

⁵³ DRONE, *supra* note 41, at 4.

⁵⁴ LOCKE, *supra* note 43, at § 28.

⁵⁵ See LOCKE, *supra* note 44; DRONE, *supra* note 41, at 3 n.4.

⁵⁶ This slippery patch is exactly where the modern industrial laborer discovers that her labor does *not* entitle her to a property right in the product of her labor.

⁵⁷ Drone quotes a judicial opinion in a key British case: "The subject of property is the order of words in the author's composition; not the words themselves, they being analogous to the elements of matter, which are not appropriated unless combined, nor the ideas expressed by those words, they existing in the mind alone, which is not capable

derstood as something belonging exclusively to its author whose unique production it is. No discursive practice affects this property relation, either before something is written or after. Such is Drone's assumption when he argues against the doctrine that there can be no property in intellectual productions because they are "incorporeal" and therefore cannot bear "distinguishable proprietary marks." To refute this, Drone invokes the commonplace notion that "corporeal possessions perish; but time does not destroy or efface what is best in literature."⁵⁸ Thus the material monuments of antiquity have decayed and are no longer distinguishable, while the writings of Cicero and Horace endure, their unique identities preserved through the ages down to the present day. But it does not occur to Drone to question what cultural purpose is served in nineteenth-century England by their preservation, production, circulation, and consumption as the texts of an elitist educational practice. The way a culture exists, not prior to, but *in* and *as* its written productions, the way a text functions as a site of contested meaning, as both something written and something read—this is simply not available to Drone in the way he thinks. For Drone, writing is the uniquely personal property of its author in a free-market economy.⁵⁹

This, then, is most likely the concept of intellectual property underlying the accusation of plagiarism against Helen Keller and all the deep hurt and embarrassment that it causes her and Anne Sullivan, as well as Michael Anagnos and the Perkins School. When we remember that Helen is only eleven years old, with just four years experience of language, when a court of inquiry examines her about "The Frost King," we might understandably think that all this concern for property law is misplaced, and that we ourselves are acting like Twain's "solemn donkeys" and "decayed human turnips" who constituted the plagiarism court. Were it not for the public nature of this sorry episode, which forced the principle actors to assume a formal posture about the plagiarism issue, we might actually question whether the concept of property law has anything to do with it at all.

of appropriation." DRONE, *supra* note 41, at 5 n.3 (citing *Jeffreys v. Boosey*, 4 H.L.C. 814, 867 (1854)).

⁵⁸ DRONE, *supra* note 41, at 7.

⁵⁹ Drone is arguing against the Anglo-American tradition of copyright, by which an author transfers her property right in her work to a publisher. He might have found support in the French tradition of the *droit d'auteur*, which reserves broad rights to the author over her work even after publication. See BERNARD EDELMAN, *LA PROPRIÉTÉ LITTÉRAIRE ET ARTISTIQUE* (1989). For the development of this right in Germany, see Martha Woodmansee, *The Genius and the Copyright: Economic and Legal Conditions of the Emergence of the 'Author,'* 17 *EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STUD.* 425 (1984).

IV. A GIFT FOR MR. ANAGNOS

In fact, "The Frost King" starts out as something quite different from private property. It starts out as a *gift*, a birthday gift, which Helen sends to Michael Anagnos. It is important to understand the transformation which it undergoes from the time it leaves her hands until its publication, first in *The Mentor*, the Perkins alumni magazine, then in the *Goodson Gazette*, and finally in the Perkins *Annual Report*. A gift, after all, is not a commodity, nor is it given in expectation of something in return. In a gift culture, the gift keeps its status as a gift only when the recipient in turn gives it, or something of comparable worth, to another person. It ceases to be a gift when she keeps it as her own, adding it to her stock or capital; in a gift culture whoever does this and prevents the continued circulation of the gift is thought to be immoral and in serious debt. As Lewis Hyde puts it, "The only essential is this: *the gift must always move*. There are other forms of property that stand still, that mark a boundary or resist momentum, but the gift keeps going."⁶⁰ In its pure form, gift culture has existed among rural folk and primitive tribes-people, but it also exists within our own world of advanced technology, industrial capital, and commodity exchange. Hyde locates it on the margins of the mainstream economy, in what our culture constructs as a "feminine" economy of "child care, social work, nursing, the creation and care of culture, the ministry, [and] teaching."⁶¹

A perfect example of the "feminine" economy is the Perkins School itself. Just recently, in the fall of 1990, *Life* magazine published an article, "To Reach the Unreachable Child,"⁶² on the education of deaf-blind children at Perkins. Both the writer and the photographer are women and, without exception, the text and photos feature children and the adult women who are their teachers and mothers. No men are present or even mentioned. Typical of the story is the way it describes the relationship between a seven-year-old and her teachers. The girl has not yet acquired language and, frustrated at her inability to communi-

⁶⁰ LEWIS HYDE, *THE GIFT: IMAGINATION AND THE EROTIC LIFE OF PROPERTY* 4 (1983).

⁶¹ *Id.* at 106. Under the heading of culture comes writing, of course, and scholarly research. This essay of mine, though it will be added to the inventory of my own intellectual capital, my *curriculum vitae*, and hopefully will count toward enhancing my academic status and income—is still a gift, to be consumed and circulated in the gift culture of research and scholarship; no one will pay me for writing it, and I will not sell it—a fact that may lead to difficulties with the IRS about the deductibility of my expenses but nonetheless marks the essay as a gift.

⁶² Lou Ann Walker, *To Reach the Unreachable Child*, *LIFE*, Oct. 1990, at 88 (featuring photograph by Mary Ellen Mark).

cate, she throws a tantrum. The teachers, said to be “extraordinary,” “take the screaming and thrashing calmly, trying to figure out what has caused the fury, and then they go back to work, tirelessly, lovingly providing Lindsay with language, the key to ending her agonizing frustration.”⁶³ This surely is the “feminine” economy of gift culture in action; the rewards, often felt to be powerful, are not measured in the same terms as in the mainstream market economy. “‘Sometimes I can’t believe I get paid for this,’ teacher’s aide Ashley Pope says without a trace of irony,”⁶⁴ and according to the article she is paid less than if she were teaching at a public school. Still, the actual costs of educating deaf-blind children are very high. The care of one student, a girl of seventeen, is put at \$140,000 a year, with her home state of Indiana contributing half of it and Perkins absorbing the rest through its endowment. Again, this is where the *Life* magazine article comes in, for it circulates in more than just one medium of exchange. The form in which I received it, on a recent visit to the school, was a re-print that Perkins has packaged for mailings to current and potential supporters.⁶⁵ In this form the article includes a cover letter from the school’s director, who happens to be a man, and who makes explicit what the article assumes: “The gifts that make Perkins the school it is come in many forms and from many sources. And it seems that everyone who gives a gift to Perkins also in some way receives a gift. A gift that comes from the children.”⁶⁶

A gift from one of the children is exactly what Helen Keller’s

⁶³ *Id.* at 92.

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 98.

⁶⁵ “*To Reach the Unreachable Child*,” PERKINS SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND (reprinting *Life* article, *supra* note 62, as a brochure for publicity and fund raising) [hereinafter *Perkins Reprint*]. The extra pages that come with packaging the story as a Perkins publication make a lot more room for photographs, especially those that show cuddly children playing with the young women who are their teachers. An added two page spread features Lindsay romping with her teachers in deep grass filled with dandelions, and the cover photo shows her in the same setting, her face lighted by an open smile. Inside, there is a significant substitution. In the *Life* article, a large photo of Kenneth, a ten year old, shows him curled up alone inside a large playroom container wearing a protective helmet. The caption reads: “Some deaf-blind children develop ‘stims,’ reflexive habits for extra stimulation, like banging their heads against walls. That’s why Kenneth wears his helmet most of the time.” Walker, *supra* note 62, at 91. In the Perkins brochure, this image, suggesting the isolation and loneliness of a deaf-blind child, has been replaced, and the same caption stands next to a photo that shows Kenneth playing with his teacher, his head in her lap, a smile on his face, the helmet cast aside in the background. *Perkins Reprint, supra*, at 7.

⁶⁶ *Perkins Reprint, supra* note 65, at 3. Helen’s story (and Canby’s) is about making gifts. A figure of great wealth, King Frost is on the lookout for opportunities to bestow it on others. In Helen’s words, “he does not keep his riches locked up all the time, but tries to do good and make others happy with them.” What leads to the key incident of the story is King Frost’s decision to send his wealth—large vases of brightly colored

story was, a gift for the school's director. As the current director's letter indicates, a director is an ambiguous figure on the boundary between two cultures, between the "feminine" economy of a gift culture and the market economy of risk and competition, profit and exploitation. Like university presidents and board directors for hospitals, museums, symphony orchestras, and other cultural institutions, the director stands at the boundary across which wealth accumulated in commerce and capital investment is translated into the form of a gift. The position requires skill, tact, and considerable powers of persuasion. Michael Anagnos, in his handling of Helen's story, performs this boundary function, but in reverse—by translating a gift into a form of wealth and institutional property.

When Helen Keller is accused of plagiarism, her accusers proceed on the basis of assumptions about property, and about intellectual property in particular, that apply to the story, not as a gift, but as a publication. Only in its published form does the story begin to matter as intellectual property and, decisively, it is not Helen Keller who publishes it but Michael Anagnos. In publishing the story in 1891, in the Perkins alumni magazine, Anagnos transforms it from a gift to an ornament of institutional prestige for his school. To be sure, his long, glowing account of Helen in the *Annual Report* for 1891, where he prints the story again, is filled with enthusiastic praise, much of it—astonishingly—for what he sees as her intellectual independence and self-sufficiency:

Helen's mind seems almost to have created itself, springing up under every disadvantage, and working its solitary but restless way through a thousand obstacles. It is enriched with an extraordinary set of powers and capacities, which are ever on the alert to serve it at its bidding and minister to its functions with alacrity and efficacy. They enable her to receive, revive and modify perceptions; to analyze, sift, weigh and compare impressions; and to produce ideas which reflect not dimness or pale moonlight but effulgent solar splendor.⁶⁷

About "The Frost King" itself, Anagnos exclaims, "If there be a pupil in any of the private or public grammar schools of New England who can write an original story like this, without assist-

gems—to Santa Claus, "who loves to do good, and who brings presents to the poor, and to nice little children at Christmas." KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 350.

⁶⁷ *Perkins Report*, *supra* note 27, at 80.

ance from any one, he or she certainly is a rare phenomenon.”⁶⁸ It is a measure of his extravagance that Anagnos can take a deaf-blind girl, who is wholly dependent on her teachers and friends for every visual and auditory perception, and describe her as one who writes a story in intensely visual language “without assistance from anyone.” Still, even with such praise for Helen, his publication of the story assimilates it to the property of the institution. Helen wrote it, but she is a Perkins student. Though her mind may seem self-creating, its liberation is a product of the school and its educational program. Remarkably, there is no mention of Anne Sullivan and the “feminine” economy of teaching, caring for, and meeting the needs of a child. Instead, and quite ironically, the praise installs Helen as a paragon of independent mastery, self-creating and self-possessing, in the style of the narcissistic masculine ego, which is also the style of the Lockean and modern Anglo-American concept of property. The irony is one that Anagnos himself will complete in the same volume of the *Annual Report*, where a signed note is inserted, apparently just before the printed volume went to the bindery, in which Anagnos briefly describes the plagiarism and regrets the “mistake,” though it is not clear whose mistake it is—Helen’s in writing the story, or his own in publishing it.⁶⁹

Just who was to take the credit for Helen’s education was often a matter of dispute. Was it Anne Sullivan? Or the Perkins School, and Michael Anagnos its director? Or was it Helen alone who should take the credit? During the year just before the “Frost King” episode, differences between Anne Sullivan and the school over this question flared up and even made it into the newspapers. Sullivan, the half-blind Irish orphan girl who had been rescued from the Massachusetts almshouse by the school and its Boston Brahmin patrons, was, in their eyes, never grateful enough. The Howe family in particular showed her their disdain. Samuel Gridley Howe, the founder of Perkins, was world famous for his success in 1838, when he taught language to the deaf-blind girl, Laura Bridgman. Howe died in 1876, and Annie carefully studied the record of his work with Laura Bridgman in preparation for becoming Helen’s teacher. But in a letter in 1887, just two months after she had led Helen Keller to the discovery of language, Annie confided to Mrs. Hopkins, “Something tells me that I shall succeed beyond my dreams. Were it not for some

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 98.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at 94-95.

circumstances that make such an idea highly improbable, even absurd, I should think Helen's education would surpass in interest and wonder Dr. Howe's achievement."⁷⁰ In time Helen's fame, and Annie's too, did eclipse Laura Bridgman's and Samuel Gridley Howe's. But on one occasion when Annie ventured to ask Howe's widow, Julia Ward Howe, the celebrated poet, whether it were possible "that the almshouse ha[d] trained a teacher" Howe replied contemptuously that "it ha[d] nurtured the vanity of an ill-mannered person."⁷¹ Years later, Annie recalled that the Howes always made her feel uncomfortable, and that she would be "painfully aggressive" when she was with them.⁷² It also did not help her relationship with Michael Anagnos, the director of Perkins, that he was married to one of the Howe daughters. In 1890, Annie's aggression took the form of a newspaper interview, in which she declared, "Helen is not a regular pupil at the Perkins Institution I have the whole charge of her and my salary is paid by her father."⁷³ It all came down to a single question: who owned Helen Keller? This time it was resolved by Anne Sullivan being obliged to make a retraction of her public statement in a letter to Dr. Samuel Eliot, president of the Perkins board of trustees. The interview, she said, had misrepresented her by making it appear that she should get all the credit for Helen's education. "And much as Helen is indebted to the Institution," she wrote, "I am much more so, for as you know, I was educated there."⁷⁴

V. MIRRORED SELVES

This contest over Helen Keller between Anne Sullivan and

⁷⁰ KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 265-66.

⁷¹ LASH, *supra* note 6, at 116.

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.* at 117.

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 119. When Michael Anagnos died in 1906, Frank Sanborn, who had been an associate of Samuel Gridley Howe and played a central role in rescuing Annie from the Tewksbury almshouse, wrote a memorial tribute in the *Boston Transcript*. He praised Anagnos as the educator of Helen Keller, likening him to Howe as the educator of Laura Bridgman. This prompted an indignant reply from Helen: "Mr. Anagnos did not educate me. . . . He did not attempt to give me instruction in any subject, for he was never able to use the manual language fluently." *Id.* at 336. Apparently the Boston papers remained faithful to Anagnos and Perkins. A 1920 review of *Deliverance* in the *Boston American* shifts the site of the "miracle" from her Alabama home to Perkins:

The beginning of [her] career occurred here in Boston, . . . and largely through the solicitude of her teachers, under the direction of Mr. Anagnos, son-in-law of Julia Ward Howe, the helpless child grew into attractive womanhood: She was not the only child delivered from cruel fate at the Perkins Institution, but she was without doubt the most remarkable.

BOSTON AMERICAN, July 18, 1920.

the Perkins School repeats a conflict over the relation between Helen and her teacher going back to the moment of the “miracle” and Helen’s discovery of language. Joseph Lash has noted the many times when Annie was suspected, and sometimes accused, of attempting to keep Helen unnecessarily under her control. An earlier writer, Thomas Cutsforth, was quite blunt in his assessment of the relationship. Blind himself, he was a psychologist who wrote an important book in the 1930s on the education of the blind.⁷⁵ He directly criticized Helen’s education for having ignored and distorted her own experience in the service of the culture’s ideals of genteel literary expression, and its normative standards of “auditory and visual respectability.”⁷⁶ Cutsforth also specifically targeted the relationship between Helen and Annie, seeing in it an infantile “capitulation” of Helen’s personality to her teacher’s that continued throughout their lives together.⁷⁷ His criticism has much merit, but it also represents a conventionally masculine vision of a science of personality, with its ideals of “natural” and “independent” development, whereas Helen’s experience is shaped largely by the conventions of the late nineteenth century women’s culture of female friendships, shared sentiment, and social reform.

The nineteenth-century culture of separate spheres for the sexes, according to Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, provides the context for intense and passionate friendships among women, begun in many cases early in adolescence and continuing throughout their lives, undeflected by marriage or geographical distance. “Friendship,” wrote one woman to her friend, “is fast twining about her willing captive the silken hands of dependence, a dependence so sweet who would renounce it for the apathy of self-sufficiency.”⁷⁸ Such a sentiment seems altogether foreign to Cutsforth’s ideals of rationalism and self-reliance. Though the archival evidence analyzed by Smith-Rosenberg reaches only to the 1880s, it is hard to believe that this style of feminine relationship did not continue, though in an altered form, into the early twentieth century. Still, the circumstances of Helen Keller and Anne Sullivan’s relationship were largely unique: Annie was fourteen years older than Helen, and she played her crucial role in Helen’s

⁷⁵ Thomas D. Cutsforth, *THE BLIND IN SCHOOL AND SOCIETY: A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY* (1933).

⁷⁶ *Id.* at 53.

⁷⁷ *Id.*

⁷⁸ Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America* 1 *SIGNS* 1, 25-26 (1975).

development when she was almost three times Helen's age. This would appear to distinguish their relationship from the friendships recorded by Smith-Rosenberg. However, as expressed in their letters and diaries, these friendships often played out the roles of mother-daughter dyads, and it would seem likely that this cultural tradition constructed a context in which Keller and Sullivan, as well as others, understood their relationship.

It is within her dyadic relationship with Annie that Helen's life unfolds, especially in the earlier stages of her development and acquisition of language. Psychoanalytic theory, in its growth since World War II, has sharpened our understanding of early human development and the role of language acquisition, particularly in the context of such a dyadic relationship between mother and child. This is particularly true of Lacanian psychoanalysis and also British object-relations theory, as represented by the work of D. W. Winnicott. Both Lacan and Winnicott address these issues in terms of an early moment characterized by the mother's mirror "role" (Winnicott) or as a mirror "stage" (Lacan), in which the infantile subject discovers itself reflected in the other. In this way both theorists locate the infantile (literally "not speaking") self in "transitional" (Winnicott) or "imaginary" (Lacan) relation with the other, such that the question, "Which is self, which is other?" does not arise. This understanding of the self has an important bearing on Helen Keller as accused plagiarist and "promiscuous" reader, at the moment just before the traumatic accusation, when the question does not yet arise for her, "Which are my words, which are yours?" Winnicott, in fact, is very explicit about this aspect of the transitional: "it is a matter of agreement between us and the baby that we will never ask the question: 'Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?' . . . The question is not to be formulated."⁷⁹

For both Lacan and Winnicott, the *visual* emphasis in the idea of the mirror is a decisive feature, because so much of the theoretical argument about narrative origins comes back again and again to an inaugural *scene*—itself a site for essential *looking*—whether it be a primal scene, or the mirror stage, or some crucial dream or vision. But what of the blind? Winnicott, in his paper

⁷⁹ D.W. WINNICOTT, *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*, in PLAYING AND REALITY 1, 12 (1971) (emphasis omitted) [hereinafter, WINNICOTT, *Transitional Objects*]. One way in which Lacan and Winnicott differ is that Lacan takes the standpoint of the adult psyche inscribed in the domain of the "Symbolic," while Winnicott, a pediatrician as well as an analyst, takes the standpoint of the infant at the threshold of a "transitional" space that is in the process of becoming a semiotic domain. Perhaps this is why Winnicott appears to be the least semiotic of analytic theorists.

on the mother's mirror role, says that "blind infants need to get themselves reflected through other senses than that of sight,"⁸⁰ and for Winnicott the other senses appear to be metaphors of the visual: the infant gets *reflected* by other means, as if the visual were taken for granted as truly mimetic, a privileged access to the real. That Helen Keller is both blind *and* deaf, and stricken at such an early age, adds a profoundly important difference. Though she is cut off from visual and auditory signs and from language itself, her experience suggests that even for a deaf-blind child the inaugural scene may be modeled relationally on what passes between mother and child in the mirror stage, but that it is finally a scene structured in and as language, according to the play and force of the signifier.

In this argument, I am following an important recent effort by Joan Copjec to rethink the specularized subject of film theory.⁸¹ The tendency in film theory, says Copjec, has been to concentrate on the first half of Lacan's hyphenated term, "photo-graph," as in his statement that the gaze is "the instrument through which . . . I am *photo-graphed*,"⁸² while ignoring the second half, the *graph* of photo-graph, and its implication that the visual is graphic, a field of writing:

Semiotics, not optics, is the science that clarifies for us the structure of the visual domain. Because it alone is capable of lending things sense, the signifier alone makes vision possible. . . . And because signifiers are material, that is, because they are opaque rather than translucent, because they refer to other signifiers rather than directly to a signified, the field of vision is neither clear nor easily traversable.⁸³

To an important extent, this understanding of the visual as something to be read is already present in Lacan's early paper on the mirror stage. "This jubilant assumption of his specular image by

⁸⁰ WINNICOTT, *Mirror Role*, *supra* note 15, at 112.

⁸¹ Joan Copjec, *The Orthopsychic Subject: Film Theory and the Reception of Lacan*, 49 OCTOBER 53 (1989). Much of today's film theory, even when it claims to be following Lacan, routinely uses the concept of the "gaze" as just the reverse of what Lacan intends. Copjec's essay is an extended critique of this reversal. In film theory the gaze shows up, for instance, in discussions of gendered spectatorship, as in the "male gaze," a term in the critique of the masculine ego; whereas in Lacan, the gaze is fundamentally a *superego* concept. The gaze, as Lacan says, is "outside." In Freud's early structural model, the ego and the id are intrapsychic functions. Freud adds the superego later, and conceives it as originating in a gesture that internalizes an object from "outside" the psyche, typically the voice of parental prohibition and demand. The theory of the superego marks the beginning of "object relations" theory which, in its fuller development, is Winnicott's point of departure.

⁸² LACAN, *Gaze*, *supra* note 2, at 106.

⁸³ Copjec, *supra* note 81, at 68.

the child at the *infans* stage . . . situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction. . . .”⁸⁴ That is, the mirror-image assumed by the child *anticipates* a future coherence and unity of the bodily self that it presently lacks, and anticipation implies thought, imagination, an ability—however rudimentary—to interpret. Though the child is *infans*, without speech, it does not mean that she is without a basic competence for responding to visual signs. The infant’s primal appropriation of a self-image already indicates an ability to read and therefore recognize the self-as-image or self-as-sign. But this recognition is not once and for all: Lacan’s mirror “stage” is not only a stage of development but also the stage on which the ego will continue to play at assuming a coherent, unified image of an otherwise fragmented body ego (*corps morcelé*). Lacan’s attempt to locate this moment of play “even before the social dialectic”⁸⁵ cannot escape the shadow which that dialectic already casts across the imaginary relation of the mirror, imparting to the ego its “fictional” direction.

The importance of the visual in this experience, not just as a metaphor, but as a specific mode of perception, is borne out by Selma Fraiberg’s work with congenitally blind infants. Some blind infants show signs of autism; typically, they form no attachments and appear to have no sense of *self* and *other*, no concept of an object, either in the “outer” world of people and material things or in the “inner” world of bodily function and feeling. One ten-year old boy repeats over and over again the question, “Where is . . . ?” referring to the names of various people and material objects. His questions, however, do not attribute an existence elsewhere to the people and things named. Instead, they function as incantatory demands for the reappearance of objects that are not so much absent as “lost.”⁸⁶ Of course, blind infants do acquire a concept of an object, but it typically comes later in their development than for sighted infants, and it requires a conscious effort from parents to compensate for the blindness with an abundance of auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic communication.

⁸⁴ LACAN, *Mirror Stage*, *supra* note 14, at 2.

⁸⁵ *Id.* at 4.

⁸⁶ SELMA FRAIBERG, *INSIGHTS FROM THE BLIND: COMPARATIVE STUDIES OF BLIND AND SIGHTED INFANTS* 37 (1977).

VI. WATER AND A BROKEN DOLL

It is with this understanding that I want to read Helen Keller's dramatic moment of acquiring language as an inaugural scene structured like—but necessarily and critically different from—the visual. After she was stricken, Helen lived in a world of silence and what she remembered years later as “a tangible white darkness.”⁸⁷ Still, even before Anne Sullivan first started working with her, at age seven, Helen had acquired a limited sign language, a system for pointing to present objects and indicating immediate wants like eating. She seemed able to negotiate her world quite well, and to distinguish among different people and objects. Apparently, she was even aware of mirrors. Anne Sullivan's first letter, three days after her arrival in Alabama in 1887, tells how she let Helen put on her bonnet and then watched, amused, as the girl tilted her head from side to side in front of a mirror, “just as if she could see.”⁸⁸ This does not mean, however, that she had learned to conceptualize the visual experience of the mirror, even before she learned language. It was mimicry, a game of repeating the postures and gestures of those around her, with no understanding of them as sight or sound or *sign*.⁸⁹ Helen recalls:

Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was a no-world. I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious, yet conscious time of nothingness. I did not know that I knew aught, or that I lived or acted or desired. I had neither will nor intellect. I was carried along to objects and acts by a certain blind natural impetus.⁹⁰

In a letter to William James, she says she can remember acts from her pre-verbal days—“shedding tears, screaming, kicking”—but cannot recall any feelings that went with them.⁹¹ Maybe this is why she does not recall the early “battle royal” with Annie over her eating habits. Cut off from sight and sound, Helen has no grasp of language as a conceptual medium, not until the famous moment in the well-house when Annie pumps water over one hand and spells the word “w-a-t-e-r” in the other. With the dis-

⁸⁷ KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 35.

⁸⁸ *Id.* at 245.

⁸⁹ In a letter written a year later, Annie repeats the same incident but does not mention a mirror. Instead, she says what she learned later: that Helen tilted her head from side to side with a hat on in imitation of her aunt Ev. LASH, *supra* note 6, at 51.

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 347.

⁹¹ *Id.* at 346.

covery that water is a word,⁹² she turns jubilantly to the objects around her, demanding their names, consuming the world as language. An exhilarating moment of discovery and liberation, it is, however, a good deal more complex than I have indicated so far.

Helen remembers that, just before the scene in the well-house, she grew frustrated at Annie's repeated attempts that day to get her to understand the word "water," and she angrily threw her doll on the floor. It was a porcelain doll, one that Annie had given her on her arrival in Tuscumbia, and it shattered into many fragments.⁹³ All that Helen says she remembers feeling at the time was the sadistic pleasure of sensing the fragments at her feet. However, when she returned from the well-house scene, filled with her discovery of language, she immediately remembered the doll, felt her way to it, and tried to piece it back together. "Then," Helen says, "my eyes filled with tears; . . . and for the first time I felt repentance and sorrow."⁹⁴

As one thinks of how to read this scene, it is important to recognize how Helen herself does *not* read it. Though she is often sentimental, she does not say that a sense of loss was the price she paid as a child to acquire the power of language. She is not mourning a fall into language from the realm of the Lacanian "imaginary." On the contrary, according to her narrative, language is what enables her to feel loss and sorrow understood as a positive, civilizing experience. In a movement of deferred meaning, language abruptly restructures both the memory of a primally destructive act and the "I" that remembers it, an "I"

⁹² Actually, "water" is one of a few words that Helen remembers having learned before her illness. "I continued to make some sound for that word after all other speech was lost. I ceased making the sound 'wah-wah' only when I learned to spell the word." KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 25. Significantly, she remembered the word but not its force as language.

⁹³ The doll appears only in Helen's version of the episode, not in Annie's. Helen's account of the whole episode is quite brief compared to Annie's in her letters to Mrs. Hopkins. Her three-page chapter in *The Story of My Life* omits the "battle-royal" in the dining room and condenses a month of intense work into just a few days. Annie's narrative in her letters, from the moment of her arrival to the miracle in the well house, fills almost fourteen pages. So, Helen's account may not be as reliable as Annie's, especially since Annie wrote hers immediately as events happened, while Helen wrote hers some thirteen to fourteen years later in 1900-01. (Helen did write an earlier autobiographical sketch which appeared in the January 4, 1894, issue of *The Youth's Companion*, but she does not mention breaking the doll there.) Still, even though the broken doll appears only in Helen's published account, it seems appropriate to take it as a significant element in her experience. If it is the doll she says it is, the one that Annie gives her when she arrives in Tuscumbia, then it serves to link Helen Keller with the young girls at Perkins, whose gift it was. It also serves to link Helen with Laura Bridgman, who was a sewing instructor at Perkins in her late fifties in 1887; she made the doll's dress and sent a note with it "to my sister in Christ." LASH, *supra* note 6, at 49.

⁹⁴ KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 36-37.

precipitated at that moment as a speaking subject and propelled forward into narrative as she revises—or, more exactly, conceives—her past. Helen remembers in fact that she learned many words that day, among them mother, father, sister, teacher; and she remembers, too, that she went to bed that evening anticipating, for the first time, the arrival of the next day.

And what about the broken doll? It seems a likely strategy to interpret it as a Winnicottian transitional object, a sign of the child's capacity to symbolize continued union with the (m)other while that union is in the process of being broken. But if this doll functions as a transitional object, it does so in a special way. For it seems as if at the age of six or seven, Helen, because she lacks access to the signifying and conceptual properties of language, cannot move beyond the primitive phase of the transitional. And, indeed, her lack of language is an enormous frustration to her. Years later, she remembers how she would stand between two persons who were conversing and touch their lips. Unable to understand, she nevertheless tried moving her own lips but without effect, and she would end up kicking and screaming until she was exhausted.⁹⁵

The fate of the transitional object, says Winnicott, is simply to be discarded: "It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It [just] loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread out . . . over the whole cultural field."⁹⁶ For Winnicott, the development out of the mirror stage is a direct line of growth, and transitional phenomena, as they continue to play out the mirror role of the mother's face, remain entirely dyadic in form: there is no gap, no disruption, no third term (which Lacan locates in language and the domain of the Symbolic). Nevertheless, Winnicott does offer another way to understand the process in his paper, "The Use of an Object." There he proposes a critical step in the child's development from relating to objects, to the *use* of an object, a step that means repositioning the object "outside the area of the subject's omnipotent control. . . ."⁹⁷ Significantly, such repositioning means the destruction of the object, a destruction occurring on the boundary between fantasy and reality, which the object either does or does not survive. As for Lacan, in his later statements about the gaze, he appears to revise his earlier theory of

⁹⁵ *Id.* at 27-28.

⁹⁶ WINNICOTT, *Transitional Objects*, *supra* note 79, at 5.

⁹⁷ D.W. WINNICOTT, *The Use of an Object and Relating through Identifications*, in *PLAYING AND REALITY* 86, 89 (1969).

the mirror stage (or recognize, perhaps, a neglected dimension of it). The idea of the “photo-graph”, as something at once visual and written, indicates that the imaginary is already configured in the shadow of the symbolic, and the mirror already traversed by the signifier.

Before Helen smashes the doll—and certainly before she returns to mourn it—the doll, I think, presents the possibility of something, or someone, existing in relation to her, from beyond the perimeter of her paranoid isolation, but it is not a truly transitional object. Winnicott makes a distinction, in fact, between the truly transitional object, which is always “more important than the mother, an almost inseparable part of the infant,”⁹⁸ and another object that acts as a comforter in the mother’s absence but is readily discarded on her return. Helen’s doll, I believe, does not function as a transitional object, at least not until she returns and tries to piece it back together. Only when she recognizes its brokenness as a sign of her brokenness, that is, only when she recognizes it *as a sign*, does the doll then become—retroactively and, in loss, irrecoverably—a transitional object. Grief and regret become possible, then, in a space made transitional by language. Annie, in a letter written the same day, in April 1887, records that the first thing Helen did after the moment of discovery was drop to the ground and ask for its name, as if moved to acknowledge for the first time that this most elemental substance, the ground as material and concept, might actually exist apart from her and have a name—or exist *because* it had a name. First water, then earth: one almost expects air and fire to follow. What does follow, according to Annie, are words denoting boundaries and ways of negotiating them: “[d]oor, open, shut, give, go, come.”⁹⁹

Regarding doors and their liminal properties, as both barriers and openings, Helen records important memories of two incidents before the well-house scene. When she was about four, she discovered the use of a key and one day locked her mother in the pantry. No one was nearby, and Helen remembers sitting outside on the porch steps laughing as she felt herself being jarred by her mother’s pounding on the door. The incident lasted for three hours. Then, again, soon after Anne Sullivan arrived, Helen locked her in her room and hid the key, refusing to tell anyone where it was. Finally her father had to get a ladder

⁹⁸ WINNICOTT, *Transitional Objects*, *supra* note 79, at 7.

⁹⁹ KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 257 (alteration in original).

and bring Annie out through a window. It seems as if only when Helen enters the world as language, which she does immediately after an act of violence akin to Winnicott's destruction of the object and Lacan's castration of the subject, that she then gains access to others, as *other*, and thus also enters the terrain of desire.¹⁰⁰ In a note added to her letter the next day, Annie records that when she got in bed that evening, Helen came into her room and "stole into [her] arms of her own accord and kissed [her] for the first time. . . ."¹⁰¹

VII. THE STORY OF MY LIFE

In writing her chapter on "The Frost King" episode, Helen Keller tells how she has been changed by the trauma of being accused of plagiarism and compelled to appear before a court of investigation. Several years after the event, she can describe her younger efforts at authorship as exercises in "assimilation" and "imitation." As she writes, she locates herself in time, in the midst of a "not yet completed" process, between the traumatic past and a moment in the indefinite future when she might really become a writer, someone who has learned to "marshall the legion of words which come thronging through every byway of the mind:"

It is certain that I cannot always distinguish my own thoughts from those I read, because what I read becomes the very substance and texture of my mind. Consequently, in nearly all that I write, I produce something which very much resembles the crazy patchwork I used to make when I first learned to sew. . . . Trying to write is very much like trying to put a Chinese puzzle together. We have a pattern in mind which we wish to work out in words; but the words will not fit the spaces, or, if they do, they will not match the design. But we keep on trying because we know that others have succeeded, and we are not willing to acknowledge defeat.¹⁰²

Writing has become difficult, and Helen has come to understand how slippery and stubborn words can be, the impossibility of gaining a perfect fit. Not only is what she writes a "patchwork,"

¹⁰⁰ Compare Ovid's Narcissus and his lament about his image in the water:
To make it worse, no sea, no road, no mountain,
No city wall, no gate, no barrier, parts us
But a thin film of water. (3. 448-450)

There is no way from the "I" to the beloved because there is nothing *between* them. OVID, METAMORPHOSES 71 (R. Humphries trans., Indiana UP, 1955).

¹⁰¹ KELLER, STORY OF MY LIFE, *supra* note 4, at 257.

¹⁰² *Id.* at 67-68.

but so is the text and “texture” of her mind: it too is the patchwork whose substance is language. Insofar as she grasps this truth, Helen Keller subverts Foucault’s panoptic model of knowledge and discipline. “The Panopticon,” says Foucault, “is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.”¹⁰³ The idea of being able to see *everything*, to achieve a *totality* of knowledge, is something that Helen’s assent to the difficulty of language exposes as a characteristic Foucauldian hyperbole. In a diary entry for January 30, 1892, when Annie has just told her that her writing is suspect, Helen writes, “I thought everybody had the same thought about the leaves, but I do not know now.”¹⁰⁴ Once again, in order to discover herself as a thinking subject, she must discover and acknowledge her difference and her incompleteness. For Helen this amounts to a liberating position of doubt, although in response to the pain and unease of it, she constructs a narrativized self located between a traumatic origin and a future perfection, between fall and recovery. It is on this basis that she constructs herself as a narrative subject, a subject of writing.

At the end of her chapter, after affirming that what she has just written is “all the facts as they appear to me,”¹⁰⁵ and after disclaiming any desire to defend herself, Helen begins a new chapter:

The summer and winter following the “Frost King” incident I spent with my family in Alabama. I recall with delight that home-going. Everything had budded and blossomed. I was happy. “The Frost King” was forgotten.

When the ground was strewn with the crimson and golden leaves of autumn, and the musk-scented grapes that covered the arbour at the end of the garden were turning golden brown in the sunshine, I began to write a sketch of my life—a year after I had written “The Frost King.”¹⁰⁶

Of course, “The Frost King” is not forgotten at all. In a typically expressive gesture, Helen appropriates the language of the purloined text, impossibly visual in its signification,¹⁰⁷ and begins to

¹⁰³ DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH, *supra* note 16, at 201-02.

¹⁰⁴ KELLER, STORY OF MY LIFE, *supra* note 4, at 356.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.* at 69.

¹⁰⁶ *Id.*

¹⁰⁷ Except for the one detail: the musk scent of the grapes (and possibly the warmth of the sun).

write what will be the text that the reader is in the process of reading. What she makes her own, and makes of herself as speaking and writing subject, is the threshold moment of her entrance into language. That is “the story of [her] life.” In fact, the first version of her autobiography, which she publishes in the January, 1894, number of *The Youth's Companion*, just two years after the “Frost King” incident, is given a very simple but definitive title: “My Story.”¹⁰⁸ In the process, “Helen Keller” becomes the name for a liminal moment of transition from darkness to light, silence to speech, bondage to liberation, repeated and commemorated in both what she writes and what others write about her.

The relation, though, between what she writes about herself and what others write about her is not always clear, and this lack of clarity is fundamental to the construction of “Helen Keller.” The decade or so of Helen’s early experience with publication, from 1892 to 1903, traces a narrative of disclosure and concealment, acknowledgement and denial, in her project of authorial self-inscription. First, there is the involuntary publication of “The Frost King” in early 1892 followed by the traumatic accusation of plagiarism and her passionate denial. Then comes the publication of the brief autobiographical sketch, aggressively and recuperatively titled “My Story,” as if declaring that her only real subject, the only subject no one could accuse her of plagiarizing, is her “self,” which, paradoxically, is the self that she writes into existence in writing her autobiography. Tellingly, the editor of *The Youth's Companion* declares that the story was “[w]ritten wholly without help of any sort . . . and printed without change.”¹⁰⁹ Next, after writing several further sketches as freshman compositions at Radcliffe for Professor Charles Copeland in 1900-01, Helen publishes “The Story of My Life” in six installments in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1902,¹¹⁰ which the *Journal* introduces as “Helen Keller’s Own Story Of Her Life, Written Entirely by the Wonderful Girl Herself.”¹¹¹ Then, with some revision, this is published in book form the following year with the same title, *The Story of My Life*. But the book is a composite, and the full story is a collaboration, such that the lines are blurred between biography and autobiography.¹¹² In addition to Helen’s

¹⁰⁸ Helen Keller, *My Story*, YOUTH'S COMPANION, Jan. 4, 1894, at 3.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

¹¹⁰ Helen Keller, *The Story of My Life* (pts. 1-5) LADIES' HOME J., Apr.-Sept. 1902.

¹¹¹ *Id.* pt. 1, at 7.

¹¹² Joseph Lash, originally commissioned to write a biography of Helen Keller timed

autobiography, the book has a section containing her letters and another section put together by John Macy, the editor, including Anne Sullivan's all-important 1887 and 1888 letters to Mrs. Hopkins, plus Macy's own account of Helen. This is an expansion of two installments he contributed to *Ladies Home Journal* as a supplement to Helen's autobiography, under the title, "Helen Keller as She Really Is."¹¹³ So, the change in titles, from "My Story" in 1894 to *The Story of My Life* in 1903 traces an important but subtle change in Helen's claim of authorial autonomy. The first title announces a story that belongs doubly to Helen Keller, as both a story *of* her and a story *by* her. The second title announces something more complex: a story *of* her but one for which the article "the" in the phrase, "The Story," fails to disclose an author. This change was no doubt too subtle to be noticed, perhaps not even by Helen and Annie themselves, for the public has tended to take at face value the inscription of "Helen Keller" as author on the title page.¹¹⁴ Of course, the writer of the accusatory text, "Miss Sullivan's Methods," makes much of the book's status as a "composite reminiscence,"¹¹⁵ but most readers, eager to see Helen as the heroine of her own narrative, have tended to overlook this and think of the whole book as Helen's own, thus confirming her status as *author* of the book that narrates her achievement of an author's status in the first place.

VIII. DEAF-BLIND WRITING AND THE PRODUCTION OF "HELEN KELLER"

In early 1905, anticipating her marriage to John Macy, Annie wrote a letter to a friend, in which she sums up the finances that supported Helen and herself. Besides a trust fund yielding them \$840 a year, there was the income from Helen's books and articles. On this score, Annie feels it necessary to set the record straight:

Of course you know that whatever Helen writes represents my labor as well as hers. The genius is hers, but much of

for the 100th anniversary of her birth in 1980, quickly determined that "[i]t is impossible to write a book about Helen Keller that is not also a book about Annie Sullivan. . . ." LASH, *supra* note 6, at 3.

¹¹³ John Albert Macy, *Helen Keller as She Really Is* (pt. 1), LADIES' HOME J., Oct. 1902, at 11.

¹¹⁴ John Macy, though, is quite clear about the implications: "She cannot know in detail how she was taught, and her memory of her childhood is in some cases an idealized memory of what she has learned later from her teacher and others." KELLER, *STORY OF MY LIFE*, *supra* note 4, at 224.

¹¹⁵ *Methods*, *supra* text accompanying note 40.

the drudgery is mine. The conditions are such that she could not prepare a paper for publication without my help. The difficulties under which she works are insurmountable. Someone must always be at her side to read to her, to keep her typewriter in order, to read over her manuscript, make corrections and look up words for her, and to do the many things which she would do herself if she had her sight. I make this statement because Helen's friends have not always understood what the relations between her and me really are. They have thought her earning capacity independent of me, and one person at least has hinted that financially she might be better off without me. Helen feels very differently and when the book contracts were made, she insisted that they should revert to me on her death. It is also her wish to divide equally with me, during her life, all the money that comes to her as our joint earnings. I am willing to accept one third.¹¹⁶

In this passage, Annie interprets the primary triangle that binds Helen and herself together, underscoring what for her are its adverse implications: there is Helen the "genius," Annie the "drudge," and a world that is bent on valuing them accordingly. Her own estimate of Helen's genius is, in large part, what prompted Annie to idealize Helen's youthful abilities as a writer, and to stand unyieldingly by her denial that Helen was reading Canby when she wrote "The Frost King." What comes through in Annie's account, though, is the generosity of both women toward one another: Helen's wish to divide her income equally with Annie, and Annie's deferential willingness to accept only a third ("Does this seem a just arrangement?" she asks in the letter).¹¹⁷ What also comes through is the sense that both women understood how they were collaborators in the production of "Helen Keller," although the relative importance of each one was inevitably in question.

Responding to the public's variable estimate of the two women, John Macy sarcastically joked that one half the world "believes Annie Sullivan is just a governess and interpreter, riding to fame on Helen's genius," while the other half believes Helen is "only Annie's puppet, speaking and writing lines that are fed to her by Annie's genius."¹¹⁸ The two women were constantly negotiating the way they were perceived, and Helen was always alert to correct any lack of recognition for Annie. When they met

¹¹⁶ LASH, *supra* note 6, at 329.

¹¹⁷ *Id.*

¹¹⁸ *Id.* at 319-20.

Dr. Maria Montessori in 1914, and she told Helen that she had learned from her “as [a] pupil learns from [a] master,” Helen quickly replied that the compliment should have been paid to Annie.¹¹⁹ Then, in 1931, when they were both to be awarded honorary degrees by Temple University, Annie stubbornly refused to accept hers, complaining that she was unworthy of the honor.¹²⁰ Years later, in the stage production of William Gibson’s play, *The Miracle Worker*,¹²¹ this dynamic had its effect even on the actresses playing the roles of Annie and Helen. Of course, the title of the play refers to Annie, not Helen, but this was often lost on a public eager to cast Helen as the heroine of her own drama. Many years later, Gibson remarked ironically that the play’s reception was such that its title should have been *The Miracle “Workee.”*¹²² Ann Bancroft, who played Annie, became distressed by the way audiences at the final curtain barely noticed her after the first round of applause, while they continued to cheer Patty Duke for her performance as Helen.¹²³ Nella Braddy, Annie’s biographer, sympathized with Bancroft, telling her how “people would trample [Annie] so as to get at Helen.”¹²⁴

Again, it is John Macy who cuts through the public’s perception of rivalry, and identifies “the unanalyzable kinship” that was “the foundation of Helen Keller’s career.”¹²⁵ Writing in 1902, when he was already a collaborator in their enterprise, having served as editor and compiler of *The Story of My Life*, he saw in Annie a special skill:

[Sullivan’s] skill in presenting material, some of which she does not try to retain herself, but allows to pass through her to the busy fingers of her pupil; her instinct in striking out the inessential; her feeling, which is now a matter of long experience, for just the turn of thought that Miss Keller needs at the moment. . . .¹²⁶

What is striking about this description, by a man who may have already been in love with Annie, is the way it recalls Winnicott’s description of the mother’s mirror role in meeting and reflecting the infant’s needs. This is evidenced by the way Annie filters out

¹¹⁹ *Id.* at 418.

¹²⁰ *Id.* at 596.

¹²¹ WILLIAM GIBSON, *THE MIRACLE WORKER: A PLAY FOR TELEVISION* (1957).

¹²² WILLIAM GIBSON, *MONDAY AFTER THE MIRACLE: A PLAY IN THREE ACTS* viii (1983).

¹²³ LASH, *supra* note 6, at 762.

¹²⁴ *Id.*

¹²⁵ Macy, *supra* note 113, at 12.

¹²⁶ *Id.* See also, LASH, *supra* note 6, at 295-96. Macy omitted this passage from the version published in Helen’s 1903 book, *The Story of My Life*, see *supra* note 4.

the “inessential” and instinctively provides Helen with what she needs “at the moment,” thus shaping and translating the world to correspond with the shape of it already implicit in Helen’s unique perceptual capacity and her desire.

What is in question here is a rivalry between two different ways of reading this moment: Winnicott’s and Lacan’s. Or perhaps, rather than a rivalry, a complementarity.¹²⁷ On the one hand, it is as if Lacan’s focus on the *otherness* of the specular image, its contribution to the paranoid development of the ego, positions him to account for the rivalry between Helen and Annie, a rivalry that finds resolution only in Annie’s repeated gestures of deference and Helen’s reciprocal (and reparative) insistence on full recognition for Annie. On the other hand, it is as if Winnicott’s focus on the *sameness* of the specular image—the baby seeing herself in her mother’s face, because what the mother looks like when she looks at the baby is related to “what she sees there”¹²⁸—positions Winnicott to account for the enduring, intensely intimate and dyadic relationship between the two women. This is a relationship in which the absent visual modality is replaced by touch, what Helen describes as mediating all her thought and experience, the hand that touches her in the dark.¹²⁹ Although Winnicott and Lacan are describing virtually the same phenomenon, where they differ is that Lacan, in his account of the mirror stage, never describes the infant as touching or being touched or held by her mother. Lacan alludes to this mode of mother-infant relating only as the contrasting ground for the infant’s perceptual precocity: her “motor incapacity and nursling dependence,” or generally, her “organic insufficiency.”¹³⁰ Maybe it is a question of developmental timing. Writing after Lacan, Winnicott acknowledges his influence but says that the mother’s face is “*the precursor of the mirror.*”¹³¹ Still, Lacan is clear about the imaginary, pre-Symbolic character of the mirror stage, to the extent that it *can* be described as pre-Symbolic,¹³² and this

¹²⁷ An alternative way to configure the relation between Winnicott and Lacan is, in Shoshana Felman’s phrase, a “missed encounter” between languages. They are both “products of their respective languages. Each works with, and takes into account, the concrete functioning of his own language. That is to say that they are both effects of the knowledge of their own languages.” SHOSHANA FELMAN, *THE LITERARY SPEECH ACT: DON-JUAN WITH J. L. AUSTIN, OR SEDUCTION IN TWO LANGUAGES* (Catherine Porter trans., 1983).

¹²⁸ WINNICOTT, *Mirror Role*, *supra* note 15, at 112 (emphasis omitted).

¹²⁹ See *supra* text accompanying note 8.

¹³⁰ LACAN, *Mirror Stage*, *supra* note 14, at 2, 4.

¹³¹ WINNICOTT, *Mirror Role*, *supra* note 15, at 111 (emphasis in original).

¹³² See *supra* text accompanying notes 81-85.

would situate Lacan's and Winnicott's theories as both dealing with the same developmental phase. But it is Winnicott who explicitly focuses on the mother's function in holding and handling the infant, and presenting objects to her, as he addresses the mother's mirror role. And, significantly, he limits his observations only to *sighted* infants.

The difference between the bodily presence of the mother in Winnicott's theory and her virtual absence in Lacan's theory is already well understood, as are the implications of this difference. Madelon Sprengnether, for instance, sees it as implying decisively different relationships between mother and infant.

Whereas [Winnicott's] theory stresses maternal presence (and plenitude) through the concept of mother-infant fusion, Lacan downplays the role of the biological mother to the point where she barely seems to exist in a corporeal sense. . . . The mother's [Winnicottian] role as an agent in the process of reflection means that her responsiveness to her infant has a profound influence on its subsequent development. The more she resembles a [Lacanian] mirror, in fact—passive, distracted, or withdrawn—the less her infant is able to use the image she provides. Such a circumstance, according to Winnicott, fosters the emergence of pathology.¹³³

An important aspect of Sprengnether's argument is that she clarifies the extent to which Winnicott's theory is a critique of Lacan's. The critical difference is between the *reflective function* of the mirror and its *material being*. If the mother does not just reflect her infant "like" a mirror, but also resembles the cold, material otherness of its surface, then for Winnicott the mother-infant relationship becomes alienating and paranoid.

However, as far as I can tell, what is important in Lacan's theory is the absence of the tactile, of mutual touching and holding, for the development of infantile perception and knowledge (it is crucial for blind infants).¹³⁴ Philosophically, it has always been the habit of skeptical theories of perception, which deny the reality of the phenomenal world, to emphasize touch and downplay sight. Typically, such theories use the scratch of a blade or the tickle of a feather as their example: what is perceived is not so much the object as the sensation that it excites on the surface of the body.¹³⁵ In contrast, Lacan emphasizes the visual in his

¹³³ MADELON SPRENGNETHER, *THE SPECTRAL MOTHER: FREUD, FEMINISM, AND PSYCHOANALYSIS* 183, 185 (1990).

¹³⁴ See *supra* text accompanying note 85.

¹³⁵ See HANNAH ARENDT, *THE HUMAN CONDITION* 114 n. 63 (1958). Arendt argues that

central concepts of the gaze and the mirror stage, and he is apparently indifferent to bodily modes of perception, the “proximity” senses of taste, touch and smell (which virtually excludes Helen Keller from his theory). In this way, he exchanges a modern philosophy of doubt for a post-modern philosophy of paranoia.

What this suggests, I think, is a fundamental relationship between sight and touch that the post-Saussurean—and Lacanian—theory of the sign does not account for. For the developing child, the word “dog” (or rather, “doggie”) comes to be grasped and repeated from out of the surrounding envelope of sounds, images, textures, tastes, and smells within which a child awakens to herself as a subject of *this* culture and not another, a member of *this* family, a child of *this* mother—whose voice, worded or not, comes combined with the touch, taste, and smell of her body, and the kinesthetic pleasures of being held, rocked, and carried in her arms. Lacan, it seems, reads Saussure from the vantage of his earlier association with surrealist artists and photographers. Consequently, his theory of the sign or, more exactly, the *signifier* (with the signified not as the referent of the signifier but its effect), seems to be based on a visual aesthetics strongly inflected by a paranoid positionality. There is, in Saussure’s theory, the familiar “arbitrariness” of the sign. That the furry animal which has four legs and wags its tail is named *dog* or *chien* or *hund* or *perro*, depending on the language, shows that the signifier has no natural connection with the signified, since what the sign unites is not a word and a thing, but a sound-image and a concept (signifier and signified). As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen points out, however, the more consequential principle in Saussure is the “value” of the linguistic sign.¹³⁶ The value of the sign is understood as the sum of its divergences from other signs: meaning is determined by *difference*.

[Moreover,] . . . there is strict adherence between the signifier and the signified, and if this is so, it is because, in accord with

it is not just any instance of the sense of touch that a skeptic uses to disprove the reality of the perceived world, but the special instance in which the sensation of touch excites or pains the body to the extent that the mind is distracted from the object in question and focused instead on the sensation itself. So, she quotes Descartes, on the unreality of “secondary” qualities: “The motion merely of a sword cutting a part of our skin causes pain but does not on that account make us aware of the motion or the figure of the sword. And it is certain that this sensation of pain is not less different from the motion that causes it . . . than are the sensation[s] we have of color, sound, odor, or taste.” *Id.* (quoting Descartes, *Principals, Part 4*, in *PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS* (Haldane & Ross, trans., 1911)).

¹³⁶ M. BORCH-JACOBSEN, *LACAN: THE ABSOLUTE MASTER* (Douglas Brick trans., 1991).

the theory of value, they vary in concert within a linguistic system with which they are in solidarity (hence the despair of translators, who know only too well that [*boef*] will never have exactly the same *meaning* as [*beef*], even if they refer to the same *thing*.)¹³⁷

The despair of the translator marks both the limit and the power of language—the weight and specificity of the culture that it speaks. Such despair points to the unique materiality of the culture, the voices and fragrances, textures and flavors, and the singular play of light and dark and color, that come to be recognized and named by the developing subject. At the beginning of such recognition, according to Winnicott, there is not just the image of the mother, as if in a mirror, but her body too, experienced with all the same specificity of the senses. Winnicott's model of the infant in her mother's arms, the two gazing into one another's eyes, portrays a simultaneously visual and tactile perception of the object. This is where language begins, where the infant begins to exercise a capacity to recognize the self-as-image or self-assign. The beginnings of language and knowledge are, at the very least, tactile as well as visual.

In Diderot's account of the blind man of Puisaux, the man often speaks of mirrors. Asked to define one, he offers the felicitous intuition that it is an instrument that enables us to touch our faces at a distance (says Diderot: "Had Descartes been born blind, he might, I think, have hugged himself for such a definition").¹³⁸ In this we are not far from the moment when Helen awakens to the fact and power of language, as she feels water flowing in one hand while in the other hand she feels Annie spelling the word for water. My guess is that maturation for the sighted means a fading of the connection between the tactile and the visual, with the tactile remaining as an unfelt but active grounding of knowledge, perception, and desire. For the blind, and specifically for the deaf-blind, like Helen, touch and perception remain strongly related: touch *is* perception; which means that for Helen it will take a "battle-royal" to get her, as an alingual child, to acknowledge the boundaries between self and other that her blind groping continually transgresses. Later, it will take the trauma of being accused of plagiarism to get her to

¹³⁷ *Id.* at 174.

¹³⁸ Diderot, *supra* note 17, at 71-72. See also HULL, *supra* note 18, at 65-66 ("I am often surprised that my sighted friends know something when it is still so far off. The blind have to remember that it is just as if the sighted were touching their faces all the time.").

acknowledge similar boundaries between her words and the words of others.

If Winnicott is the theorist of the moment when touch and sight are merged in the dual unity of the mother-infant mirror relationship, then Lacan is the theorist of the moment when touch and sight are divided and the subject, left on her own to experience the disparity between her perceptual and motor capacities,¹³⁹ discovers herself divided between her physiological incompleteness and the formal completeness anticipated in the mirror image. What Lacan says of this stage of infantile development applies directly to Helen's development as a speaking and writing subject. It "is experienced as a temporal dialectic that decisively projects the formation of the individual into history. The *mirror stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation."¹⁴⁰ Hence Helen's sense of herself as a writer located between present incompleteness and future mastery. Hence also the fundamental theme of her writing, the liminal moment of liberation, from darkness to light, silence to speech—but mediated always by tactile signs, by *touch*. This is the "Helen Keller" that Helen and her collaborators produce in her writing and public appearances.

Helen's own performance as "Helen Keller" took many forms. Besides her fifty-year career as a public lecturer, she and Annie spent a year and more performing the well house "miracle" on the vaudeville circuit all across America, scoring a triumph at the Palace Theater in New York. She also starred in a movie, entitled *Deliverance*, which was produced in 1919 by Francis Trevelyan Miller, a man who was part historian, part P. T. Barnum. Early in the planning stages, he assured potential backers that "its possibilities far exceeded the *Birth of a Nation*."¹⁴¹ Helen enthusiastically agreed with his conception as she expressed her hopes for the film:

It will help me carry farther the message that has so long burned in my heart—a message of courage, a message of a brighter, happier future for all men. I dream of a day when all who go forth sorrowing and struggling shall bring their golden sheaves home with them in joy. I dream of a liberty that shall find its way to all who are bound by circumstances and poverty. As the dungeon of sense in which I once lay was

¹³⁹ Another crucial difference: for Winnicott there are no infants *per se*, only infants and mothers.

¹⁴⁰ LACAN, *Mirror Stage*, *supra* note 14, at 4 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴¹ *Id.* at 473.

broken by love and faith, so I desire to open wide all the prison-doors of the world.¹⁴²

In the movie, the young Helen's miracle moment in the well house is played by a child actress. Helen appears as herself in the later scenes, many of them offered as inspirational tableaux, capped by a final spectacle with Helen on a white horse, "blowing a trumpet and leading thousands of shipyard and factory workers, people of all nations, toward 'deliverance'."¹⁴³

Clearly, what Helen writes herself into is the discourse of conversion narrative, which continually reaffirms her in the role of "Helen Keller," the subject of her own liberation. However, she always credits the aid and love of others, and of Anne Sullivan in particular (notably in *Teacher*, the clearly reparative biography that she published in 1955).¹⁴⁴ It is always the collaborative moment, symbolized by the touch of one hand to another between Anne Sullivan and the deaf-blind otherness of Helen Keller, that audiences and readers have warmed to. In a way, Steven Spielberg's *E.T.* functions for audiences today in much the same way as Helen Keller did for audiences in the first decades of the century—with the crucial difference that *E.T.* can see and hear. That Helen, in *Deliverance*, was not only the subject of a film but *played herself before the camera*, must seem strange if only because she was cut off absolutely from experiencing the film and its representation of her.¹⁴⁵ But the importance of Helen Keller for contemporary theory is not at all diminished by her lack of sight and hearing. Her lack, on the contrary, puts directly into question our thinking about the cultural consequences of the camera, which has transformed modern social life during the last century

¹⁴² *Id.* With my attention concentrated on perception and language, I have had to neglect in this essay the fact that Helen was an active socialist during this period. See generally HELEN KELLER, *OUT OF THE DARK: ESSAYS, LETTERS, AND ADDRESSES ON PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL VISION* (1913).

¹⁴³ LACAN, *Mirror Stage*, *supra* note 14 at 481.

¹⁴⁴ See generally, HELEN KELLER, *TEACHER: ANNE SULLIVAN MACY* (1955).

¹⁴⁵ Even more of a puzzle, perhaps, is how she thought of herself as posing or performing *for a camera*.

The director together with Annie devised a system of stamping on the floor to convey his instructions to her. First Polly Thomson or Annie spelled into her hand what she was supposed to do in the next series of 'takes' and the effect they were trying for . . . The director [George Foster Platt] often was unable to hold back his tears as he tapped out 'be natural' and Helen, who could not see the result, tried gamely to fulfill his wishes. . . . Frequent flickers and starts of feeling seemed to be registering little inner electric shocks. Her gestures were equally expressive. But to synchronize gesture and feeling was a laborious process.

LASH, *supra* note 6, at 480.

and a half.¹⁴⁶ Lacanian theory is especially well suited to understanding a culture saturated by the technology of the visual and its political and commercial exploitation, its production of high-gloss figurations of an alienated, alienating, and paranoid ideal ego (what is the difference, on TV, between George Bush on the news and Joe Montana in an ad for Nuprin?). But Lacan's intense focus on the visual, and his relative indifference to the more directly bodily forms of perception and knowledge, the "proximity" senses typified by touch, make his theory less useful as a tool for *revising* the paranoid structure of contemporary culture. Helen Keller's experience as a deaf-blind writer offers a different perspective. As Kafka says, writing is a way of shutting our eyes and, under the circumstances, that may be a reasonable thing to do.

¹⁴⁶ The cinematic camera now combines the technology of sight *and* sound. For the occasion of this essay, however, the emphasis is on sight, even though this tends to do less than justice both to Helen Keller's experience and to our own experience of a culture immersed in film and video. See generally KAJA SILVERMAN, *THE ACOUSTIC MIRROR: THE FEMALE VOICE IN PSYCHOANALYSIS AND CINEMA* (1988).