

Introduction: The Essay; An Attempt, a Protean Form

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“Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more Ye myrtles brown...”

Wait! Cut! Where’s that voice coming from? Who’s speaking? Isn’t this a forum on the essay? You there, in epigraph, are you a persona or a speaker? An echo? A voice? A character? Speak up, for you are now addressing the World Wide Web.

VOICE: “Good madam, I am merely a mouthpiece. I was...”

No, no, dispense with the dialogue! This is a forum on *the essay*, not drama. And why were you speaking in lyric?

[*Enter messenger with a letter.*]

What’s this? From one of our fictional correspondents, no doubt. [*reads*]

“Dear Editor,

I have always thought those fine lines of Milton’s ‘Lycidas,’ which you have chosen as a fit motto for this paper (if I may so term it that), would make a fine introduction to a discourse on the nature of the



essay. For of all literary forms—and within that more catholic and comprehensive category, we must include all philosophical speculations, historical disquisitions, literary-critical lucubrations, as well as learned treatises upon commonplace subjects (the elbow, for instance, or the walking stick) and commonplace dissertations upon learned subjects, such as prevail in our universities today—I say, that of all literary forms, the essay is the most enigmatical.”

Motto. Milton. Enigmatical ... there must be a grain of sense buried in here somewhere.

“For one must confess that Milton’s weariness, so exquisitely expressed in that *yet once more*, is strangely palpable given that the young, untried poet is only just beginning his career. When we turn to the myrtle and laurel shrubs for illumination, however, we find that, with them come trailing all those ‘graces’ and ‘muses’ that once favored the lyric essayist. We are emboldened to assert an analogy: just as the lyric poet faces the weight of a tradition extending back through Pindar to Archilochus, so too, the prose essayist must, upon each setting out, reinvent a form that has no fixed conventions, that is as protean as its many performers.”

True, the essayist is no mere scribbler.

“Yet, I conjecture that what is really at stake in your motto is, to speak plainly, the sentiment of the author of the introduction. For that author must also confront, *once more*, a question that has yet to be answered, that conceivably can not be answered, and that, for all one knows, *should not* be answered, much less asked.”

What is the essay?

“A remedy may be to deflect the question and ask: what is the essayist? The ‘essay’ (a denomination bestowed upon it by the noble Montaigne) signifies ‘an attempt.’ However, in English, the archaic term ‘assay,’ while phonetically identical, is orthographically more suited to the original meaning of the term. Be that as it may, risk is inherent in any trial or attempt, and hence the essayist ‘goes under cover,’ we might say, in various guises of fictionality.”

The epistle? dialogue? epigraphic voice?

“These feints are easy to identify, for they are distinguished by those typographical red flags, quotation marks.”

[*agitated and looking around*] Where did those come from? Who put them in?

“A more respectable convention is the essayistic ‘persona,’ which I advise you to discuss later, and which must be differentiated from both ‘narrator’ and ‘character.’ At times, the two can be one. Consider Charles Lamb’s ‘Elia,’ whose name is an anagram for ‘a lie.’ Elia, as lie, is both metaphysical and metaphorical, though the anagram itself is a species of false wit.”

Joseph Addison, *The Spectator* no. 62.

“Even without the protective vestments of fictionality, an essayist may deploy subterfuge by ‘merely setting down some ideas on paper in no particular order,’ or ‘wandering for the sake of wandering.’”

See Samuel Johnson’s *The Rambler*.

“Even failure itself can be a mask. There is an excellent essay to this effect in your own forum, Michael Wood’s ‘[No Success Like Failure](#).’”

The Borges piece. We forgot the subtitle in the PDF.

“The fact that a stylistic and thematic obsession with failure is evident in the essays of the celebrated surrealist, suggests that the form has not lost touch with its ‘amateur’ heritage. Professional essayists, if we may refer to academic practitioners in this manner, reveal no stylistic concern with failure, although the topic of late has become of interest to literary critics. Even when they endeavor to ‘play’ (in the deconstructionist sense), their aim seems to be a theoretical ‘rigor’ that prohibits any published form of failure and results, all too often for your average reader, in *rigor mortis*.”

Alas, scholarly rigor need not be opposed to pleasure.

“Is today’s newspaper writer or political columnist an amateur, or even an essayist in the sense we are discussing? How do ‘writerly’ techniques quadrate with the transparent authorial stance we expect of political journalism? Can the political and the literary go together after their stormy courtship in the eighteenth century and awkward breakup in the nineteenth? What is the relation between ‘Knowledge, Politics, and the Arts,’ as the subtitle of *Republics of Letters* (the journal in which I am honored to appear) would have it, with respect to the essay? Your forum is most fortunate in having Alex Woloch address these very concerns in ‘[Orwell and the Essay Form: Two Case Studies](#).’ Readers are beholden to you for your choice of contributors.”

Indeed, editors rarely get the credit they deserve.

“I am gratified to find that your forum also includes the illustrious author of *Essayism: Conrad, Musil, and Pirandello*. Who, but he, could tackle the question of the essay in relation to the existential novel? Who else would have the gumption to examine the essay form in relation to the devastations of World War? It may be pertinent to ask: can a humanist tradition accommodate an industrial-capitalist machine sustained by bureaucracy, systems of mechanical reproduction, and weapons of global, anonymous mass destruction? But I digress. I refer you to Thomas Harrison’s insightful treatment of the ‘existentializing’ of the essay form: ‘*The Essayistic Novel and Mode of Life: Robert Musil’s The Man without Qualities*.’”

Acutely ironic! Harrison was the only one of our contributors to complete his essay on time, and left the existentializing to others.

“To conclude, I urge you to keep in mind that the category of the essay famously includes writing as diverse as Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and Pope’s witty, didactic poems in heroic couplets (*An Essay on Man*, to wit, or *An Essay on Criticism*). I trust that your introduction will thoroughly interrogate the nature of the essay in all its formal modalities, generic developments, purposes, postures, possibilities, pranks...”

[*crumpling up the paper, and tossing it aside*] Managing editors!

[*Mary Kim enters.*]

AUTHOR: Who was that correspondent? Can anyone with a keyboard intrude here?

KIM: “Technically, no, if you are referring to the web address for the introduction. But yes, if you have in mind the forum. Our submission guidelines can be found through the main page of the journal. They involve a peer-review process.”

AUTHOR: How can I get started on this introduction when I am swamped with letters from correspondents who think we’re still living in a coffee house?

KIM: “Have you received others? If so, they haven’t been copyedited.”

AUTHOR: After all, our computers are now *mapping* the Republic of Letters, not reading them! Who, I ask, reads letters any more these days? Not to mention *belles lettres*?

VOICE: “*Belles lettres*, humph! Do we need *French* to sauce the idiom of the *English* tongue? Why *belles*? Wherefore *lettres*? Why brand ye fine writing with *belle*? With *Belles*? *Belles lettres*, a most *sophisticated* locution. A *graceful* locution. I cannot but think that so *stylish* a locution ...”

AUTHOR: Please remove that voice, or character, from this introduction!

KIM: “Do you mean the HTML version?”

VOICE: “A *whole lip* is necessary to that locution.”

KIM: “Or the PDF?”

VOICE: “Nay! The borrowed pomp, the silken foppery of a style that overleaps itself is bound to fall flat on the other side of ambition.”

[*Voice deleted.*]

AUTHOR: Thank you! That Voice was far too antiquated.

KIM [*aside*]: “And would have been hard to proof according to house style.”

AUTHOR: As everyone knows, the essay was the product of Enlightenment. Where would today’s essayists be without the Tatlers and Spectators of the world? Without the Will’s, the St. James’s, the Button’s, the White’s? Without the *beaux*, scratch that, the Bickerstaffs? Without the perukes, peri-wigs, headpieces, petticoats? Without snuff, without the Spectator’s Pipe?

[*Enormous crash*]

AUTHOR: What now? What is that heavy book?

[*Mary Kim picks up the fallen prop and examines it.*]

KIM: “It appears to be a Parisian fifth edition of Montaigne’s essays.

[*reading*] Augmentée d’un troisième livre et de six cents additions aux deux premiers.”

AUTHOR: Let me see. [*taking book*] Good quarto copy. But sadly bound in red morocco. Profaned by gilt leaves.

[*Enter Sarah Bakewell.*]

BAKEWELL: “Montaigne is not to be known by his bookbinder! His fame issues from a universal and magnanimous mind. [*to Author*] Your literary history of the essay is faulty. Montaigne was a Renaissance man, not a Tatler.”

[*Enter Dan Edelstein, Editor, Republics of Letters.*]

EDELSTEIN: “He was, a French Renaissance man.”

BAKEWELL: “Montaigne’s personal essays —you may call them belletristic, if you please—first appeared in 1580, a full seventy-two years before the first coffee house ever opened in London. Montaigne lived in a château, not a café.”

EDELSTEIN: “That he did. I maintain that the Renaissance began with the French invasion of Italy in 1494. I have, in fact, been contemplating a prequel to my recent book, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy*, to be titled, *The Renaissance: A Genealogy*.”

[*Author sets quarto down, next to Edelstein’s café au lait.*]

AUTHOR: Coffee, a distinct feature of European Enlightenment, stimulated the mind. It provoked political as well as intellectual debate. Your own Voltaire was supposed to have consumed five to six dozen cups of coffee a day. In *Le Caffé*, his comedy in five acts, he depicts society through the lens of the coffee house.

EDELSTEIN: “You mention Voltaire in the same breath as your English ‘coffee houses,’ but they can hardly be compared with Le Procope. You must be aware that this Parisian café is still serving coffee. The ghosts, not only of Voltaire, but also of Marat and Robespierre can be heard there in conversation. [*aside*] I have not confessed this to the press, but it was they who suggested my title. Perhaps I should consult them regarding a sequel, *The Revolution: A Genealogy*.”

AUTHOR: Are you aware that by the time Procope opened, there were well over three thousand coffee houses in London? They were so popular that Charles II, preferring his ale-houses, tried to close them down. But he had no more luck with his royal proclamation than the Ottoman Emperor Murad III in Constantinople, when he tried to banish coffee to behind closed doors of private homes.

EDELSTEIN: “Perhaps King Charles had good reason. He was, after all, bred in France. I hardly think the first shacks serving coffee in the dirty labyrinth of St. Michael’s Churchyard can qualify as cafés. The first café, *properly so-called*, was founded by Pasqua Rosée in Paris in 1672.”

AUTHOR: That establishment was nothing more than a lemonade stand!

[*At this affront, Edelstein reaches for his cup of Peet’s coffee, but accidentally knocks it over.*]

BAKEWELL: “You have spilled coffee all over Montaigne! [*to Author*] And in debating the origins of Enlightenment, you have lost track of the essay.”

AUTHOR: I have heard somewhere that Montaigne’s best reader, according to Nietzsche, was Shakespeare.

VOICE: “Divine Bard! All hail, Great master!”

AUTHOR: That Voice again. I thought it had been deleted.

[*Enter Mary Kim.*]

KIM: “We tried, but to eliminate it at this point would have incurred extra charges and caused the possibility of technological hiccups.”

VOICE: “I come. To answer thy best pleasure.”

AUTHOR [*aside*]: This must be what comes of teaching Shakespeare at the same time as writing an essay.

KIM: “And it would have risked delaying publication of the forum.”

AUTHOR: Then there’s no help for it. I must incorporate the Voice. [*writing*] Voice, as a distinct feature of essayistic style, need not be a unifying presence. To the contrary, it can be disorienting and interruptive.

VOICE [*battling web server*]: “Aroint thee, fiend, aroint thee!”

AUTHOR: Its psychological valences range from the phantasmatic to the uncanny. In the language of Marxism, we may call it a “spectral” presence.

VOICE: “Venture not, I pray thee, upon Theory! We have no ground in common.”

AUTHOR [*scribbling more furiously*]: According to the Hegelian formula of tautology, voice represents an absolute contradiction, an objectal stand-in for the subject, or, to put this another way, a subjectival “impossible existence.” With this in mind, authorial identity in the essay may be defined as the co-dependence of voice, as “a remainder of the real,” and “the pure void of subjectivity.” Phenomenologically, in other words, voice is a bone.

[*Electronic ping.*]

KIM [*looking around*]: “The Voice seems to have disappeared of its own volition.”

AUTHOR: As expected! Still, had I not vanquished it with the eloquence of Slavoj Žižek, it might have been productive to compare the Voice to other forms of alternate subjectivity. The feminist Abject, perhaps, or the postcolonial Other. It might have been even more worthwhile to assess its possibilities with relation to those subaltern metonymies of presence, mimicry and hybridity.

KIM: “It would be better to return to the essay. Our web designer is a freelancer, and his schedule is unpredictable.”

EDELSTEIN: “You mention Shakespeare, but Montaigne’s influence is far more evident upon his countryman, René Descartes. By writing in French rather than Latin, Descartes was striving to reach a wider audience.”

BAKEWELL: “If you consult my essay, ‘*Reverie and Ambush: On the Influence of Montaigne*,’ you will find that Montaigne complicates our understanding of influence.”

AUTHOR: Yet Montaigne’s most lasting influence on literary history was through Francis Bacon. For both writers, the essay was a trial at self-reflexive thought that brought the reader into a space of mental intimacy with the author. Like Montaigne, Bacon filled his commonplace books with quotations from classical authors and arranged them under topical headings. His own “essays” on commonplacical subjects reflect this practice: “Of Regimen of Health,” “Of Expense,” “Of Discourse,” “Of Negotiating,” “Of Followers and Friends,” “Of Suitors,” “Of Studies,” “Of Factions,” “Of Ceremonies and Respects.”

BAKEWELL: “A juxtaposition of Bacon’s ‘Of Studies’ with Montaigne’s ‘Of Experience’ would make a good pedagogical exercise. [*to Kim*] My classroom experience teaching Montaigne was the inspiration for my essay.”

AUTHOR: On the title page to the first collected edition of his essays in 1597, Bacon dubbed his writings “Councils” as well as “Essays,” and this move was of incalculable importance to the periodical essay form that sprang up later.

KIM: “We may be getting somewhere at last.”

AUTHOR: The journalist John Dunton conceptualized the first important literary-political periodical in Britain in Baconian terms as councils or advice to readers. His *Athenian Mercury*, begun in 1690, was based on the pseudo-fictional “Athenian Club,” which responded to “letters” from readers in essays that comprised the serial numbers of the journal. Following in Dunton’s footsteps fourteen years later, Daniel Defoe named the literary column of his political weekly, “*Mercure Scandale: or, Advice from the Scandalous Club.*”

EDELSTEIN: “Perhaps you might simply refer readers to the introduction to your anthology, *The Great Age of the English Essay.*”

AUTHOR: Because the Athenian public played a participatory role in democratic self-government, the stylization of these ur-periodical-essayists as “Athenian” suggests that they are both “Learned” and “Conversable.” That distinction derives from David Hume, specifically his essay, “Of Essay Writing.” When Richard Steele began publication of *The Tatler* on April 12, 1709, he did not explicitly call *his* essays “councils,” but he clearly thought of them that way. He told readers where to leave mail, and he responded to correspondents, whether real or fictional, in epistles woven into his essays. He also introduced the Tatler’s Club.

[*Enter Sophie Gee.*]

GEE: “A delightful assembly! I have always preferred the snobbish ‘Sir Geoffrey Notch,’ obsessed with his family tree and coat of arms, to ‘Major Matchlock,’ with his head forever buried in the Battle of Nasby, or the rakish ‘Jack Ogle.’”

AUTHOR: Steele shared “The Tatler” persona with his friend Joseph Addison (and, in a rare instance, John Dryden), but, unlike its successors, their Tatler had a name: “Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq.”

GEE: “The brainchild of Jonathan Swift.”

AUTHOR: Yes, that’s right, modeled on the astrologer and almanac writer lampooned in Swift’s pamphlets, the real-life John Partridge. As a persona, Bickerstaff *could* lay claim to fictional identity as a character—but a complicated one, based not on his implication in narrative, but rather on a set of highly self-conscious, serialized essays in conversation with one another, and with real people. To invoke the name Bickerstaff, as Steele does in the opening number of *The Tatler*, therefore, is to challenge the vitality of the living (unthinking readers who believe themselves “alive”) and, perhaps more to the point, to suggest the vitality of fictional identity.

KIM: “This is good.”

AUTHOR: Since the fictional Bickerstaff was supposed to circulate in the public sphere, the caffeinated Republic of Letters, he resists being seen as a hermetic fictional entity, or novelistic character trapped in a plot.

GEE: “Perhaps the essay is a plot trapped in a character.”

AUTHOR: Steele datelined his papers from the various coffee houses he frequented, a newspaper technique inherited from foreign correspondents on the continent, and he reported the “news,” redefined as something of more than passing interest. The Tatler had a fair counterpart, one “Phoebe Crackenthorpe,” or The Female Tatler. Whether or not *this* Tatler was female (some have proposed Bernard Mandeville as the man behind the mask), the persona had her own Female Tatler’s Club. It consisted of mixed company, which met in her “apartment” and ranged the social scale from dukes and duchesses to a spruce merchant, and one sea captain’s wife from Wapping named Mrs. Topsail. Eventually, the Tatlers generated a profusion of personae in the world of letters whose identity, however, remained at the level of abstraction. A representative list would include:

- The Tory Tatler
- The Guardian
- The Female Guardian
- The Gentleman
- The Country Gentleman

The Comedian, or Philosophical Enquirer
 The Genius
 The Fool
 The Flapper
 The Entertainer
 The Devil
 The Busy Body
 The Humourist
 The Quiz
 The Spinster
 The Trifler
 The Speculator
 The Free-thinker
 The Devil
 The Lover
 The Wife
 The Prompter
 The Parrot
 The Loiterer
 The Lounger
 The Humanist
 The Censor
 The Connoisseur
 The Lay Monk

Most notable, of course, was “The Spectator,” who had his own “Spectator’s Club.”

GEE: “Ah yes, with the bumbling but beloved Squire, Sir Roger de Coverley! And the rakish Will Honeycomb...”

AUTHOR: Like the Tatler, the Spectator had a fair better half, in this case, “The Female Spectator” by Eliza Haywood.

GEE: “*Her* club is more nondescript. There is the Wit named Mira, the wise Widow of Quality, and the Virgin, daughter of a wealthy merchant.”

AUTHOR: Beyond the Female Spectator, there was the “American Spectator” (as Ben Franklin was known), the “Scottish Spectator” (Henry MacKenzie), and “The New Spectator, with the Sage Opinions of John Bull.”

EDELSTEIN: “Do not neglect the French Spectator! Or *Le Spectateur français* by Pierre de Marivaux. I do not recall a French Spectator’s Club, but the journal circulated in the 1720s, the era of salon culture, to which I have traced Enlightenment.”

AUTHOR: While the Spectator spectated, other colorful personae could be found speculating, buzzing, mirroring—in the case of Samuel Johnson,

idling, rambling, adventuring—on the pages of the periodical essay. Although typically the periodical persona accommodated more than one author, there were some, such as James Boswell’s “The Hypochondriack” and Oliver Goldsmith’s “The Citizen of the World,” which housed only a single author. This was often the case with authors who contributed columns to periodicals other than their own—in the case of Boswell, *The London Magazine*, or of Goldsmith, *The Public Ledger*. Above all, these early essayists sought to instill aesthetic and ethical values, to cultivate the taste and behavior of their readers, to delight, to elevate, to instruct...

GEE: “Wait a minute! What about Swift? Where is he amidst all this Whiggish ideology? If you consult my essay, “**Such Opinions Cannot Cohere**: Swift’s Inwardness,” you’ll find that Swift provides a site of resistance to the neutral and disinterested subjectivity cultivated by the Spectator. Swift was a powerful essayist who did more than give Steele’s Tatler his name of Bickerstaff. He offered a model of essayistic personality steeped in eccentricity, extremity, even madness.”

EDELSTEIN: “I really don’t see what any of this has to do with the French Enlightenment.”

GEE: “From a Swiftian point of view, the rational, Enlightenment subject appears as a walking form of regulated insanity.”

[Enter Mary Kim.]

KIM: “Sorry for the delay, but here is the forum’s ‘Table of Contents,’ along with a fresh cup of Peet’s coffee.”

EDELSTEIN: “A timely intervention!”

AUTHOR: Before you examine it, allow me to apologize for the gap in the middle, where the Romantic essayists should be.

KIM [*in lowered voice, to Edelstein*]: We had committed Deidre Lynch to an essay on Leigh Hunt, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb, but with the move from Toronto to Cambridge...

EDELSTEIN: “Not to worry, not to worry! Let’s see. [*eye alighting upon George Orwell*] Orwell. Isn’t that a *nom de plume* for an Englishman?”

KIM: “Eric Arthur Blair.”

[Enter Alex Woloch.]

EDELSTEIN: “But wasn’t Orwell born in British India?”

WOLOCH: “Yes, and he served later as an imperial policeman in Burma, the home of his maternal grandmother.”

EDELSTEIN: “He counts as postcolonial.”

WOLOCH: “Even back on the English mainland, Orwell remained somewhat of an outsider, circulating among the urban throngs in disguise.”

GEE: “Like Boswell in London!”

WOLOCH: “Orwell was more of a minor character than Boswell. He started off incognito, but he rapidly gained in character space, and formed his own linguistic network. The multivalent, and frequently multivocal, essay, in quite different ways than the novel, foregrounds the strife of ‘the one versus the many.’”

EDELSTEIN [*scanning TOC*]: “Any other Englishmen?”

KIM: “There’s Swift, but he was Irish.”

EDELSTEIN: “Good.”

KIM: “Jorge Luis Borges was South American—Argentinian, actually.”

EDELSTEIN: “I see Georg Lukács...”

KIM: “Hungarian.”

EDELSTEIN: “Musil.”

KIM: “Austrian.”

EDELSTEIN: “And Montaigne, at the head of the list, of course is French. I’m delighted to see that we have represented a range of different national literatures, cultures, and languages. [*addressing computer monitor with elevated voice*] Perhaps we can now expand the literary history of the essay beyond the parameters to which it has been so long, and so miserably confined.”

AUTHOR: No, no, cut! We need a better conclusion.

[*Enter Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht.*]

GUMBRECHT: “I don’t want to sound biased, and I have no investment in this beyond the intellectual, but why not finish the introduction with a quotation from Lukács? You will find a number of them in my essay: ‘*Essay, Life, Lived Experience: The Early Georg Lukács and the Situation of Literary Criticism Today.*’”

KIM [*aside to Edelstein*]: “An essay that has already been translated into Hungarian, Spanish, Russian, German, and, most recently, Portuguese.”

GUMBRECHT: “Lukács reenergizes the tension between what you call the ‘Learned’ and the ‘Conversable.’ In German, we refer to the *wissenschaftlich* and the *rhapsodisch*. However, the latter has more negative nuances deriving from a peculiarly German association of the essay genre with authoritative traditions and institutions. The various nuances, modes, and options of the essay form, as you discuss them, so well, my dear, have been lost upon the German intellectual. In our Philosophical Reading Group...”

[Enter Thomas Harrison.]

HARRISON [*to Gumbrecht*]: “My brother Robert is in that Philosophical Reading Group with you, and he tells me that Lukács was a great disappointment in relation to Musil.”

GUMBRECHT [*bristling*]: “Well, in the essays of 1910, which we did *not* discuss, Lukács demonstrates profound flexibility as a thinker. And his theoretical orientation in the Austro-Hungarian interpretive tradition gives him a critical distance on the very problematic of separation between the scholarly and the ‘merely intellectual.’”

[Enter Michael Wood.]

WOOD [*smiling*]: “Perhaps what is needed is a paradox.”

HARRISON [*to Author*]: “Musil’s *Posthumous Papers of a Living Author* provides an incisive gallery of paradoxes.”

AUTHOR: Thank you, everyone, thank you! [*aside to Kim*] Can you please convey our contributors, along with Professor Edelstein, to a fresh pot of coffee?

[*Kim ushers them out of the introduction. Author scratches head, seems lost, then looks down and writes.*]

AUTHOR: One hopes that what readers take away from this forum is not the idea that those two disparate forms of discourse, the Learned and the Conversible, should become one. The point is not to eliminate the scholarly from the Conversible, or the conversational from the Learned. Nor, is it to collapse one into the other. Specialized knowledge is the result, both necessary and advantageous, of disciplinary division, and its forms of expression must continue to exist. Rather, let us accept that the tension between the Learned and the Conversible is *constitutive* of the essay form. In the end, a proper theory of the essay may be symbolic—but whether it is better to seek a “translucence” of the Learned in the Conversible, or of the Conversible in the Learned, we will leave as an open question for a future number of the forum, devoted to Coleridge.



[*Re-enter Mary Kim in haste, stirrer in one hand, packets of Equal in the other.*]

KIM: “We haven’t discussed that.”

AUTHOR: I just made it up.

KIM [*knitting brow*]: “Perhaps you ought to make clear that all perspectives and opinions in this introduction are your own, and that all dialogue is purely fictional.”

AUTHOR: Good idea.

KIM: “Then can we call it a wrap?”

AUTHOR: Let’s just add a final link here: “[The Essay: An Attempt, a Protean Form.](#)”

[Kim hands coffee accoutrements to Author, clicks on link, and vanishes into virtual reality.]

AUTHOR: She’s gone! And with her, the text of the introduction. A