

## **Tell Tale Signs**

*Janice Williamson*

### **Extrait de Tell Tale Signs**

*Avec beaucoup d'humour voire même d'ironie, l'auteure met en jeu des figures où l'auto-graphe est une pure fabrication, un artifice, un mensonge littéraire. De multiples contrefaçons du / des moi. Mouvoance du moi vivant-lisant-écrivain, le tout forme une image kaléidoscopique où le je est toujours une autre quand elle écrit, qu'elle (se) signe.*

## 1957 feminine ecriture, in english)

Six years old, left handed, she liked cabbage. Arms and legs spread out towards the four corners of the room, she was her father's airplane swirl of low flight patterns on the carpet. After a long boozy dinner, she flew higher, born up by his sprung legs over the harvest-gold tweed sofa. Across the living room, descending, she brushed the hunting-scene curtains her brothers had set on fire last summer.

Time's up for any unwilling Icarus. Her wings crumple to the ground where she loudly reads the odd cavity in her wrist as pain. Her mother agrees temporarily. Four minutes later when the girl crosses the room towards her father, an imperceptible twist of her arm returns small bones into place. Examining her wrist, no longer hollow with memory, her father pronounces, 'There's nothing the matter.' The girl cries to her mother who looks away contemplating her lap. A moment later, recomposed, she explains to her weeping daughter, 'Nothing, just a sprain ...'

(The delirium of identity makes it possible to imagine her wrist as opposed to any other wrist broken in play. Pain and the lies of crumpled bodies sound hyperbolic truth. Another drunken fist hinges the bone.)

Later at the hospital, the girl's x-rays authorize the hairline fracture cracked through the bone. In the absence of her parents, did she sign the release form with her right hand?



Thirty years later at the conference, a writer offers this unpaid signatorial advice: *Fasten on your signature before you hit the decks. You might need it. Just in case, sew it into your pocket or the nape of your neck. Stitch up a little something on your left buttock in light of the others' stars and stripes, big-city or just plain big-fish insignia. Flash it from under a short skirt. Body language like this makes waves of spectatorial applause only sound like appropriation.*

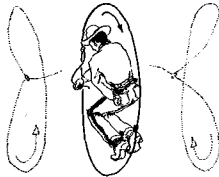
Remove when dancing. Snip. Snip.

(In this eventuality, *how do we tell us apart?*)

**the writer closes the book,touches up her make-up)**

Her husband wanted her to sign the papers right away in case later she wanted what he wouldn't like to provide for her. Her lawyer told her, 'You're a fool.' She agreed and signed. That evening, after dinner, her husband chased her around the kitchen table. Around and around, until she ran out the back door into the night losing her skirt as she scaled the neighbour's fence. In the morning, she and her husband, now composed, loaded up his car and their rental trailer for a trip north across the border to her new home. On the way, he took a 'shortcut' along a different highway. The sun was on their backs, so she knew they were headed in the right direction. She dreamed about signing again with her old familiar name that ended with 'son.'. She refused to talk with him about his work. When he turned away from the wheel to complain of her silence, he pulled over to the side of the road. His cock exposed. He told her. If she didn't. Perform. Or abandon.

Five hours later they reached her new apartment. It was small so they fit only her bed and a small table into the single room, storing her dishes in the fireplace. A small round window streamed with ruby light. He told her all she could do in that room was make love to other men. She did not lie.

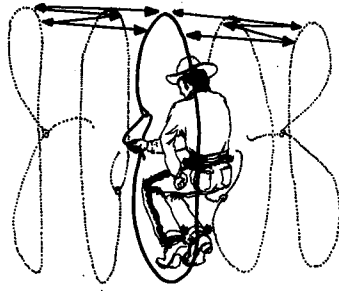


Her earrings are too long to leave behind with her wedding ring. The way the colour of everything turns feline stripped home. How this becomes t then is then his and hat too. How all the world spills into middle of the street Spadina traffic, pedestrians glowering hung up on drugs. She likes to be liked but can't help that everyone treats her like yesterday's Jesus. Speechless, she has no illusions, just effects. It all boils down to this. T kettle empty this and that nothing. Sporting pricey coordinated fashions called 'new exceptional freedom to roam,' she drives the full length of the country day and night stopping only at the loom of primary-coloured tourist sculptures. At Thunder Bay, the dreaming princess tempts her for weeks. Twelve-foot geese, mother's shoes and condo cowboys with hard-ons make up irresistible parking-lot french toast.

## signature, the key fits, turning)

When they made love in the afternoon, his real girlfriend languished in a sterile ward suffering from twentieth-century disease. This betrayal meant that he would never 'enter' her mistress body as though she were made fictive. Therefore, propped up, naked, tied to his iron bed, she tried to surprise him with yoga postures rarely displayed. Nonetheless, while she writhed quietly just beyond his field of vision, he potted and sculpted his way across lofty cat-shit floors.

In the hospital during the early evening they often visit His Love. As though it were true, having not been spoken, they all chime in about the intimacy they share. Sick with the world, His Love's gloved hands draw pictures. Deflowered women and televisions snarl to a graphite tangle.



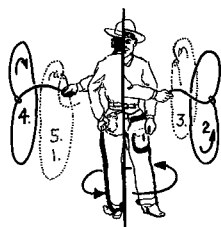
Until the artist burned himself up in polka-dot effigy, his signature had been the chignon woven through the surface of the table stippled pink *faux-marble* with dolls. A portion of his remains are laquered here and onto his fetish painting – her parting gift of slender female nude, a cut-out, air-brushed in *Penthouse*.

Practicing her full lotus headstand, she talks to the wall about his dead misery. The female nude stretched across the canvas repeats herself: *My left hand reaching beyond the frame indicates that I am eating pine nuts because I cannot resist helping myself to myself. In 1978, my thighs were thick with almonds. I have never been thick with want.*

**collaborating, reader and writer think of nothing)**

In a neo-colonial hotel on a hot Nassau evening, they dined with the aging no-longer-drunk musical comedy star who was redecorating his house with rare wood-carved panels. The gentry folly of his home echoed with the privilege of 'Camelot,' the refrain which zig-zagged across the continent on his trail. Snapping at his heels, content to settle for an appendage of the great one, two women approached her in the washroom and asked her whether she was a movie star. 'Which one?' she asked, curious. They couldn't remember, but they wanted her autograph 'anyway.' 'Just in case.'

That night she realized that simulating notoriety required a complete transformation of her character. She had to take herself as seriously as others would if they did. If she were no longer ignored, she had to keep up appearances and avoid sounding superficial. Later she would have to be perceived as experiencing the good time others accomplished. Would this day labour require better pay? Would psychoanalysis work through her relation to failure and power? She wanted to play a loved one returned from the dead. On a plastic beach chair, he did so convincingly. She felt herself fill up with love. Would he examine himself too carefully in the glare of her sunglasses?



Unlike Virginia Woolf, i am not the least phlegmatic. Even though i refuse to smile on command, i have, they say, a rare though subterfuge personality. Call it – 'darkly veiled ironic wit.' i prefer to watch all things unfold, even myself at this very moment when my fingers move across the page, my letters bursting liquid crystal blue brilliance. i spell out this call to you. i am writing writing myself into being as though there were no tomorrow to appeal to you dear reader. and you. and you. Though tomorrow may not be the bright blue idea which brings us into being.

## his memorial service speaks volumes)

Inside the covers of all of the deceased writer's Peter Handke books, there was no signature. However, on each page of *Self-Accusation* there were fine, numbered, fat HB-lead pencil lines under H's words. I read:

- |                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 1 I came into the world            | 10 I learned to be able                |
| 2 I became                         | 11 I lived in time                     |
| 3 I moved                          | 12 I was able to want something        |
| 4 I moved my mouth                 | 13 I made myself                       |
| 5 I saw                            | 14 I was supposed to comply with rules |
| 6 I looked I learned               | 15 I became capable                    |
| 7 I learned                        | 22 I expressed myself                  |
| 8 I became the object of sentences | 23 I expressed myself in movements     |
| 9 I said my name                   | 24 I signified                         |

38 I did not regard the movement of my shadow as proof of the movement of the earth. I did not regard my fear of the dark as proof of the earth. I did not regard my fear of the dark as proof of my existence. I did not regard demands of reason for immortality as proof of life after death. I did not regard my nausea at the thought of the future as proof of my nonexistence after death. I did not regard subsiding pain as proof of the passage of time. I did not regard my lust for life as proof that time stands still.

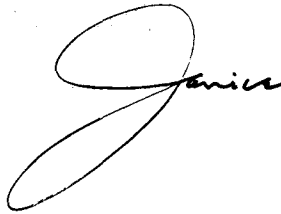
Number 38 was not underlined but deserves quotation in memory of her beloved dead friend, the director with the pencil and the same haircut as Peter Handke, the writer, who wrote *40 I went to the theatre*. Which he did.

**she learns to look both ways)**

Unearthed in an island jungle dig where Mayan ruins were once exposed, two jade beads made their way in his pocket to Pickering Jewellers where they were pierced with a post linking irregular gold nuggets and, after his drowning, given to his daughter and his wife. One of them lost hers at the drive-in. The other at Ghost Lake.

*Every pebble looks alike along the shoulder of the road. A crack runs right up alongside the asphalt parallel to a white line (broken) running all the way to Banff. At one hundred and twenty kilometers per hour, the hood of the car rattles like wings taking off so I slow just in case. Out of the car, 'Ghost Lake' sign to my right, car at my left, mountains focused in between. No problem so we get back in the car and ... 'Drive,' she said all along the highway. Reaching down she notices her necklace, broken open, jade beads gone. Dangling brass beads drop off one by one*

Though it was February, it was almost hot walking along the roadside. Waiting for the jade bead to return to her hand from its resting place here or there, she sucked a stone humming her song.



He told her a loop-hole was an opening where small arms could be fired. It also permitted observation. He let on there was a trick he had been meaning to teach her, but she was too slow to catch on. That's what he said and that's why he never did. That's why in the Cochrane bookstore filled with spirit-line paintings and winter *count*stories, she bought her own *Will Rogers' Rope Tricks*.

Over the years she imagines she will appreciate the reversible qualities of knots. Her roping begins with the spin of a flat look. She avoids 'The Wedding Ring,' and 'The Butterfly' but eventually masters 'The Reverse Ocean Wave.' She hears that in Spanish, the wave goes around to the right. On a good day here on the prairies, the rope balloons and floats in sun dogs above her head, refusing Will's roping dream of a *perfect circle around an imaginary center*.