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Interrupting the Puppet Master: (Un)reliability and Metatextuality in Dave Eggers's *You*

Shall Know Our Velocity

Thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in English

by

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May 2007

ABSTRACT

Interrupting the Puppet Master: (Un)reliability and Metatextuality in Dave Eggers's *You*

Shall Know Our Velocity

By Suzanne R. Samples

In 2002 Dave Eggers (who had just come off of the success of a Pulitzer Prize nominated memoir about the death of his parents and the influx of cash that ensued) published a novel titled *You Shall Know Our Velocity*. Within three years the novel underwent significant alterations that changed the plot's original meaning. Most notably, some of the printings of the novel contain an additional section of text called "An Interruption" written by the best friend (Hand) of the original narrator (Will); this additional text destroys Will's original plot and makes the reader question the reliability of the text. In addition to (un)reliable narration, this thesis will explore how the novel and its journey have made an impact on the social world of publishing through *Velocity*'s editorial changes and metatextuality. I have also included my own creative interruption to demonstrate how difficult it can be to discern reliable narration from unreliable narration.

This thesis is dedicated to Jack, whether he existed or not.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In case I never have the opportunity to make an acceptance speech for Thesis of the Year, I would like to take this page to thank a number of people. I am deeply indebted to my thesis committee: to Dr. Young for chairing my committee and for meticulously reading and suggesting revisions for each draft; to Dr. Rodier for agreeing to help me with this project and with my life in general; and to Dr. Moore for giving me the confidence to begin this project and see it through to the end.

I would also like to thank Lisa Stuchell for sitting with me numerous hours at Starbucks and helping me tweak each and every word; my mom, dad, Sarah, and extended families for their support; Amy Lilly for agreeing to read my thesis in between Harry Potter books; other fans of Dave Eggers who have enlightened me with conversations about his writing; Keegan, Prufrock, and Abbie for their love; my dentist, doctor, personal trainer, and hairstylist for the obvious; and, last but not least, Dave Eggers and God.

Thank you.

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Metatextual Madness and Inconsistency

Fiction, then, was completely liberating. I didn't even *base* any of the main characters on real people, outside of the part where Hand says that a good bowel movement is better than bad sex—a guy I knew from college said that a lot. Otherwise, it's all pretty much out of nowhere.

--Dave Eggers

Marianne Moore's *The Complete Poems* opens with the statement that "omissions are not accidents," but Dave Eggers's first novel *You Shall Know Our Velocity* proves that additions are not accidents either. At least six versions of the novel exist: the first edition and the second printing (both published by McSweeney's, Dave Eggers's own small publishing company), two United Kingdom printings, a version re-titled *Sacramento*, and the Vintage paperback edition. All of the editions differ from one another in both minor and major ways. More specifically, some printings of the Vintage paperback edition contain an additional section of written and photographic material that provokes a different response from the reader than the original linear text. The Vintage paperback edition with the additional section of text in conjunction with the other publications of *You Shall Know Our Velocity* creates a complex and problematic perception of the plot and the text itself.

But before further detailing *Velocity*'s evolving text, it is vital to note the importance of *Velocity* in the already present discussions of editorial, reception, feminist and narrative theories. The blending and application of these theories to this particular text illuminates how an author can control his text from both in and outside. An author can revise a text while it is in the drafting process; however, an author can also employ the peripheral discussions concerning already published material in order to manipulate the text and produce a modified version of the original. These peripheral discussions,

most notably the work's critical and commercial reception, may influence the author to make alterations in order to boost the novel's commercial success and to assert authorial control; but, these alterations may also cause the novel's plot to progress in a different direction than it did before. With the manipulation of texts, however, comes the possible dilemma of different versions; one must ask if the author's internal manipulations cause subsequent versions of the same-titled text to propose a different meaning entirely. And at times, the journey of a text's progression says as much or more about a novel than the plot.

Such is the case with Dave Eggers's *You Shall Know Our Velocity*. In all editions and versions of *Velocity*'s texts, Dave Eggers experiments with metafiction and metanarrative; this narration style draws more attention to the act and art of writing and publication than to the storyline of the novel. In a portion of the Vintage versions of the text, Eggers explores the concept of metafiction even further by using dual narration: two characters, Will and Hand, tell two complex, different interpretations of the same story. Although *Velocity*'s characters and their global, picaresque journey are both fictional and metafictional, the novel's publication journey that the characters comment on is nothing short of nonfiction. Through their personal narratives in *Velocity*, Will and Hand not only tell their accounts of the story, but they, especially Hand, also narrate how the novel moved from self-publication to the mass produced version of the text. Although Will and Hand do not provide the reader with an overt step-by-step process of the novel's production journey, the writing and publication of the novel become evident through Hand and Will's renditions of *Velocity*'s plot.

Background on the plot and characters of *Velocity* illuminates the effects of Dave Eggers blurring writing styles and genres. Before Will, the main narrator of all the novel's editions, dies in a boating accident, he "writes" the manuscript of his weeklong journey around the world with his best friend, Hand. On the trip, they aim to give away \$32,000 that Will earned because he lent his silhouette to a light bulb company for an advertisement. And, according to Will, the trip also allows him and Hand to work through the tragic death of their other best friend, Jack. Along with their comic and sometimes saddening attempts to give away the money to strangers, their journey also reveals the coming-of-age insecurities felt during the change from carefree youth to responsible adulthood. But when Will dies before tweaking the final text, his editor decides to put the manuscript at the mercy of a ghostwriter, who writes the first sentence "EVERYTHING WITHIN TAKES PLACE AFTER JACK DIED AND BEFORE MY MOM AND I DROWNED IN A BURNING FERRY IN THE COOL TANNIN-TINTED GUAVIARE RIVER, IN EAST-CENTRAL COLOMBIA, WITH FORTY-TWO LOCALS WE HADN'T YET MET" (Eggers 1). Because Will cannot name his own manuscript, the ghostwriter also gives the novel its title.

However, in the aforementioned portion of the Vintage editions, after Will's untimely death, the distressed Hand takes a vacation to New Zealand and reads Will's book with the ghostwriter's additions. While vacationing, Hand writes a chapter of his own that he feels corrects Will's too-fictional version of their journey. He calls his chapter an Interruption, and then he sends his writing to Will's editor in hopes that the editor will include the chapter in a future printing. As the author, Eggers allows for the impossible to happen, and the result is twofold: his character Hand "publishes" his own

novel entitled *Sacrament: Hand's Revised Edition* that contains Will's original text, Hand's Interruption, and fourteen color photographs taken by Hand, and then in 2003, Vintage publishes *Velocity* with Will's original narrative, Hand's Interruption, and Hand's photographs.

Placement of Hand's Interruption also contributes to how the additional text alters the plot of *Velocity*. In portions of the Vintage publication, "An Interruption by Francis R. 'Hand' Wisneiwski"¹ makes its bold appearance just when Will has gained the reader's trust and attention. In his Interruption the reader learns that the disgruntled Hand tries his hardest to convince Vintage to keep the title *Sacrament*, but the publisher wins; the book is, of course, published as *You Shall Know Our Velocity!* with a mere mention that it was "previously re-titled" as *Sacrament* from the original title of *You Shall Know Our Velocity*. And although the title page does not mention this, Hand's *Sacrament* had a minor print run of 2000 copies, and of course, Hand wanted more. Although technically impossible, because the Interruption occurs in the portion of Vintage texts, the reader can suppose that the editors of the Vintage text placed Hand's Interruption in a portion of the printings in order to appease the character whom Dave Eggers has equipped with a life of his own.

But when it comes to the dual narration (triple narration if one counts the ghostwriter) of Hand and Will, whom can the reader believe? Will cannot make any further remarks, no one knows anything about the random ghostwriter assigned to finish the book, and Hand remains drunk on "vodka and Orangina" throughout his Interruption (Eggers Vintage 271). Hand is also in denial about Will's death and wants to redeem himself because Will has "cartooned [him] to the point where [he's] half-insane and half-

¹ At times in the different *Velocity* texts, Hand's given name is said to be Justin.

insufferable and always puerile” (269). No easy answer to this question exists, but the reader does have the option of believing a combination of both characters to form conclusions about the plot. After all, Will’s narrative and the Interruption are written in first person, and no omniscient presence appears to offer any solid, completely reliable solutions. And after researching the novel’s transformative history and its intertextuality with scholarly critiques and book reviews, Hand’s Interruption works as a conversation with book reviewers concerning the book’s bumpy birth into the literary world.

However, before I continue, I should get this out of the way, and in one long sentence: in 2001, Dave Eggers published a Pulitzer Prize nominated memoir self-assuredly titled *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*; it seems impossible to write about Eggers without mentioning the memoir (No critic has written about the author or his subsequent works without a couple of paragraphs dedicated to discussing the memoir’s brilliance.)—and, although Eggers has moved on to write other works, his debut novel *You Shall Know Our Velocity* has garnered little critical acclaim and attention since its initial publication in 2002—critics have yet to forcefully tackle the editorial mysteries that the Vintage edition of the novel brings to the discourse of the effects that the evolving *Velocity* has on contemporary literature.

Sarah Brouillette’s use of Gerard Genette’s narrative theories begins to show how Eggers’s writing influences the writing of today. Brouillette considers Eggers’s memoir’s structure and history a “paratext” of *Velocity*, proposing that “A text’s paratext is made up of both peritexts (existing within the bounds of the printed book), and epitexts (those texts that attend and modify the text and its author in the larger marketplace and social world)” (3). In accord with these theories, the different texts of *Velocity* and Hand’s

Interruption are “peritexts” while Eggers’s publishing company McSweeney’s, McSweeney’s accompanying website, the memoir *A Heartbreaking Work*, and the short story titled “The Only Meaning of the Oil Wet Water” from Eggers’s *How We Are Hungry*, a book of short stories published after *Velocity*, are the “epitexts” of *Velocity*. Genette’s terms and Brouillette’s theoretical applications of his terms make it easier to classify and categorize not only the different versions of *Velocity*, but also the peripheral texts that illuminate *Velocity*’s meaning.

Yet when discussing plot and genre conventions, *A Heartbreaking Work* and *Velocity* have nothing explicit in common. *A Heartbreaking Work* relates to *Velocity* as an epitext only because *Velocity* has undergone editorial changes as the memoir did. Although book reviewers have difficulty separating *Velocity* and *A Heartbreaking Work* from one another, a critical comparison of the texts has little to do with what the reviewers try to prove: how the plot of *Velocity* does or does not relate to Dave Eggers’s life. Instead, as Sarah Brouillette writes, “The narrative [of *Velocity*] is classified as fiction, but has interesting significance for those readers familiar with Eggers’s media persona and interaction with literary journalists” (3). Instead of attempting to relate *Velocity* to *A Heartbreaking Work* and Dave Eggers’s biography, a stronger and more critical approach emerges from noting how Dave Eggers’s writing style in both works becomes a loaded critique of the literary world, whether Eggers intends to make it one or not.

Although this thesis does not want to focus on discussing *A Heartbreaking Work*, it is worth exploring how the memoir also evolved over time. Because Eggers’s fans watched and experienced the memoir’s evolution through the mass media, the readers felt

as if they too were part of its publishing process. Simon & Schuster published the hardcover of *A Heartbreaking Work*, and then Vintage took on the paperback which contains an addendum entitled “Mistakes We Knew We Were Making.” As Sarah Brouillette notices “Mistakes We Knew We Were Making” has “extensive inquiries into the process of book and text making...and incorporates a response to the reception of the hardcover book” (8). *Velocity*’s own mid-text addendum by Hand does not simply rehash *A Heartbreaking Work*’s supplement; instead it fictionalizes Eggers’s judgments on the culture of literature.

In fact, to further display the familial relationship between the memoir and the novel, in *A Heartbreaking Work*’s copyright page, Eggers’s writes:

The author wishes to reserve the right to use space like this, and to work within them, for no other reason than it entertains him and a small coterie of readers. It does not mean that anything ironic is happening. It does not mean that someone is being pomo or meta or cute. It simply means that someone is writing in small type, in a space usually devoted to copyright information, because doing so is fun.

But whether Eggers admits it or not, by claiming to not be “ironic...pomo or meta or cute,” he automatically does exactly what he rebels against. Because authors rarely use the copyright page to insert text vital to a work’s plot or symbolism, Eggers’s authorial decision contributes to his overall writing style, making it seem quirky or as Eggers describes it, even “cute.” Although the copyright page writing may entertain “[Eggers] and a small coterie of readers,” the statement that claims nothing “ironic is happening” subverts itself; even if Eggers wants the copyright page to have no effect except “fun” for

him, the writing becomes a topic for cultural explication because of its unique positioning in the text. Eggers's copyright page paragraph becomes "a contradiction or incongruity between appearance or expectation of reality," the very definition of ironic (Murfin and Ray 220). Dave Eggers's quirky style of writing in his memoir splashes its mark onto *Velocity*, which gives critics full permission to at least attempt grasping what all of *Velocity*'s textual inconsistencies possibly mean.

The styles and structure of *Velocity* also contribute to the possible meanings of the work's textual inconsistencies. Aliko Varvogli, a professor of English at the University of Dundee, writes that "*You Shall Know Our Velocity* borrows from the genres of road novel and the Bildungsroman," and I would add that the novel borrows from the picaresque genre as well (85). Picaresque novels typically feature the adventures of a rogue "who always manages to escape by the skin of his or her teeth" (Murfin 344). Although Will does not escape his death, he and Hand encounter many adventurous episodes before Will's death that fit the picaresque classification, such as their dangerous foreign soil road trips in rented cars. Picaresque novels "are told from the first-person point of view and have satiric intent," and *Velocity* employs this through Will and Hand's narratives and their American attitudes towards the global economy (344). *Velocity* also metatextually borrows from the picaresque genre; as Will and Hand transform their lives and make their journey around the globe, the novel transforms and makes its own journey through the different editions. Because all of the versions of *Velocity* differ in some way, this leaves the critical reader wondering if and how much the alterations matter. After the first printing, McSweeney's published a disclaimer about the novel's mistakes on its

website. One might hope that the disclaimer ties the novel's discrepancies into a neat bow, but instead it coyly states that:

You Shall Know Our Velocity...has a few typos in it. The main production glitch appears on page 103, where a line has been obscured, due to the interactions with the image on page 102. The text that should appear at the top of page 103 is as follows: 'is thinking. How does he feel his flight? Does he know the dif-' We hope that clarifies things. In many other places, what seem to be production oddities are intentional. The blank pages soon after are as designed. (1)

This explanation does nothing but make the reader wonder more, especially because of Eggers's cantankerous presence in the literary world and because of the modernist ambiguous word choice on the McSweeney's webpage. For example, "a few typos" could mean three, three hundred, or three thousand (1). "In many other places" could mean as little as four or much more; what seems like an answer to editorial discrepancies becomes as much of a red-herring as Hand's Interruption (1).

Regardless of the metafiction and textual inconsistencies, by throwing in "An Interruption" to *Velocity*, Eggers illustrates that he could have written a novel that adhered to the checklist of every literary critic and fan of his previous publications; he could have written *Velocity* as a follow up to the memoir that detailed how travel helped him recover from the tragedies his memoir exhausted, but instead Eggers chose to initially self-publish instead of taking a million dollar advance and chose to experiment with form and structure. What does this really indicate, though? I have to admit, it is not easy to pin a single sentence on a work of textual madness. But as Hand would say, "I

might as well start here”: *You Shall Know Our Velocity*, through its metanarrative and significantly different editions, creates a multifaceted relationship between the author, the text, and the critic (Eggers Vintage 251). The novel and its progress also have a complex application to Peter Shillingsburg’s theory that argues “authors are constrained by their social contexts to produce certain kinds of words that do certain kinds of things” (Shillingsburg *Resisting* 32). Eggers, instead of producing works solely through self-publication or through major publishing companies, chose to do both; instead of using the status of his memoir to propel the success of his novel, Eggers pervaded minor and major publication cultures to experiment with altering his novel not only before publication but also after. The products of Eggers’s experimentation prove Shillingsburg’s theory because without Eggers’s “social context” as a well-known contemporary author and owner of a small publishing company, he would not have had the ability to afford the multiple publications (32). However, by allowing him the various publishing opportunities, Eggers’s “social context” frees him rather than restrains him (32). Even more, Eggers’s addition of Hand’s Interruption and the simple sentence that concludes the Interruption, “The pig symbolizes nothing,” could lead readers to a faulty interpretation; in fact, the pig symbolizes everything, and realizing this adds character depth to Hand and Will, something that reviewers criticize Eggers for (Eggers Vintage 298). The sentence also pokes fun at the metatextual literary techniques that Eggers himself uses.

Eggers’s ability to publish multiple versions of *Velocity* and the differences that arise from the multiple versions and their metatextuality prove why a critical reader should not pigeonhole *Velocity*’s multiple versions as single purposed; the versions show

how the effects of authorial intention can wreak havoc on interpretations of the plot and style. Although editorial, reception, and narrative theory may not provide a simple, clear-cut answer as to why Eggers might do something as flamboyant as change the meaning of *Velocity*'s plot with the Vintage printing, the theories will provide a plethora of possibilities concerning what *Velocity* adds to the current discussion of fluid, evolving texts; the theories and their applications to the novel show how Eggers changes the perception of what, exactly, a finished novel should reveal in format and in meaning.

The Evolving Polyphonic Text and Securing the Puppet Strings

One author might make 3,000 changes in his selection of adjectives and adverbs, for instance—and perhaps improve his book stylistically—without altering his original conception of the work at all; another might make only ten revisions in key passages and change the whole direction of the book.

–G. Thomas Tanselle

Although it is tempting to begin with the reception of *Velocity*, background on editorial theory and the evolution of texts provides a starting point for the analysis of *Velocity*'s textual journey. Using the work of editorial theorists to prove that Eggers uses the Vintage edition of *Velocity* as a discourse between himself, critics, scholars, and fans does have its possible pitfalls and may cause readers to distrust and dismiss the research; after all, because of *Velocity*'s contemporary status, an Eggers critic does not have to drive across the country in order to search special collections to hopefully be able to, as editorial theorist D.C. Greetham notes, “select a document that, on philological or other grounds, seem[s] best to represent authorial intention and, thereafter, to follow the readings of that document with absolute fidelity” (106). Neither does a critic of Eggers have to worry that “One weakness of much literary theory and textual criticism is that practice proceeds without the advantage of a clear taxonomy of texts”; all of *Velocity*'s texts are available, even if difficult to obtain (Shillingsburg “Text as Matter” 56). But so many discrepancies arise from the various texts that investigating the differences creates new meaning that an explication of a single *Velocity* text could not provide.

Both major and minor discrepancies arise between the *Velocity* texts, especially when comparing the McSweeney's and Vintage editions. The minor differences usually occur as typos. Because of the frequent typos, readers should almost view the first edition

McSweeney's version of the novel as a draft or what D.C. Greetham calls a "copy-text" because of its accidental mistakes (110). However, instead of simply fixing and reprinting a corrected version of *Velocity*, Eggers mends the accidentals and then adds Hand's Interruption, which completely alters the plot and therefore meaning of the text as a whole. Therefore, the Vintage version of *Velocity* with Hand's Interruption emerges as a polyphonic or multivoiced text. The Vintage printing may seem like what Greetham deems an "'eclectic' text"—a product of the copy text and the later alterations—but because Hand's Interruption is such a drastic revision, the addition makes the eclectic text an impossibility (110). The McSweeney's text and the Vintage text with Hand's Interruption become two separate novels that cannot be reconciled; even though the main sequence and the plot of both texts are similar (if not completely identical), Hand's Interruption changes the purpose of the Vintage text.

Even if the accidentals do not alter the plot of a text, typos and other miniscule mistakes do generate other problems. Greetham asks "Will the reader who discovered the misprint not only correct it mentally but also change the reading in the text itself, write to the publisher and complain or even edit another version of the text?"; if readers of *Velocity* dive down into Eggers's "tannin-tinted Guaviare River, in East-Central Colombia" in search of the answers to why some of Eggers's changes to *Velocity* significantly alter the meaning of the novel, readers might find Greetham's question locked up in a flooded treasure box that Hand and Will left behind (Greetham 103, Eggers Vintage 1). Readers of the novel will undoubtedly question every typo and mistake, especially because Eggers plays with these notions in his writing, such as the blank pages which textualize the movement of a boat skipping across water. Readers of

Velocity will and should distrust the text, especially because none of *Velocity*'s texts presents the entirely accurate story. Furthermore, Eggers never issued a statement on McSweeney's or otherwise that notified his readers of the major difference (Hand's Interruption) that Hand's *Sacrament* and some of the Vintage texts contain. Unless a reader dives deeply into the matter and reads all editions in search of Eggers's reputed mischievous literary techniques or happens across Hand's Interruption by chance, then the reader may feel content at reading one version or the other and never questioning the addition of Hand's Interruption and its meaning; the story of *Velocity* may entertain the reader, but the novel's larger critique on the writing and publishing process remains unearthed.

One of the literary devices that Eggers uses to comment on writing and publishing is the ghostwriter who writes the first sentence of the novel and battles Hand over *Velocity*'s writing style. Although Hershel Parker does not overtly discuss ghostwriters in his article "Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons," he does assume that:

while a text may have existence as an "identifiable" and "unique" entity, it never is an autonomous entity. During composition a text is contingent on the author, if not on others as well, and before or after publication it is vulnerable to the author, if not on others such as family, editors, publishers, and compositors. (220)

So if the composition and editing process is such a collaborative effort, then why shouldn't an author (and perhaps a character that seems like a suspicious candidate for a fictional extension of the author) blame someone else (the ghostwriter) for remarks about publishing and critics? Hand eschews the ghostwriter as a "disgrace" and blames the

ghostwriter for all that is wrong with the novel (Eggers Vintage 259). But in Hand's *Interruption*, Eggers blurs the lines between reality and fiction, especially by creating this hierarchal facade of ghostwriter (publishing company), fictional characters (Hand and Will), and at the lowly bottom, the author (Eggers). This hierarchy safeguards both Hand and Eggers by making it seem like one should blame anyone but the two of them if pieces of the narrative are amiss, asunder, or anachronistic; however, in reality this hierarchy is reversed with Eggers at the top making the critical decisions.

But, it is the effect of Eggers's decisions that causes tension between the McSweeney's and Vintage editions. Although both the Vintage version and the McSweeney's version of *Velocity* remain alive on the mass market, the McSweeney's edition is more difficult to find and Hand's *Sacrament* is nearly obsolete. Although this could have been Dave Eggers's plan all along, the availability and unavailability of the books also indicates what Robin G. Schulze calls "Textual Darwinism": according to her theory, only the fittest of the Eggers text will survive. Brilliantly basing her research on Darwin's theories of evolution, Schulze writes:

Natural selection works, not in response to an abstract divine ideal of perfection, Darwin insisted, but in response to local, historical environmental changes...A version of a text become unremittingly historical, a product of a particular time and a particular place, designed to meet the needs of that time and place. Texts do not become better or worse, they simply become different as the world around them changes; each version achieves its own kind of fitness. (274-75)

Therefore, each of *Velocity*'s texts becomes a product not only of historical place and time, but also a product of the place and time of Dave Eggers's choice to publish. Where and why he chose to publish certain texts with certain publishers is as equally important as the plot of *Velocity*.

However, Schulze's interpretation of texts not becoming "better or worse" also has a troubling application to *Velocity* (274). Clearly Hand argues that his version is superior, whereas the fictional ghostwriter and publisher do not concur. In a footnote in his *Interruption*, Hand laments that because of Will's death, the publisher "shopped the task of writing a neat opening paragraph to a writer of semi-fictions with a tendency toward the clever setup. The result speaks for itself" (Eggers Vintage 268). Blaming the ghostwriter for the "clever setup" allows for Hand and Eggers to avoid responsibility for criticism of Eggers's writing as gimmicky. This somewhat fictional and somewhat factual discrepancy between the ghostwriter and Hand makes the Vintage version of *Velocity* represent controversy more so than it represents Schulze's fittest text. The Vintage text did evolve from the original and from Hand's *Sacrament*, but the nature of the particular text's evolution produces three entirely different texts with merely a common thread. The texts seem to evolve like a trilogy told from three different perspectives instead of a single text that has slightly changed over a three year period. Still, based on Schulze's fittest text, the Vintage text and its availability rise above the McSweeney's text and *Sacrament* in the literary food chain, simply because Vintage published *Velocity* at a higher volume than McSweeney's did. The media public can purchase the Vintage edition at any bookstore or any website, whereas purchasing the McSweeney's edition or

Hand's *Sacrament* requires either the foreknowledge or a chance encounter to discover that the other versions do, in fact, exist.

Discussions concerning textual discrepancies and characters supposedly responsible for the inconsistencies in *Velocity*'s writing begin to uncover the unreliability of the text. The different versions and fictional authors (Will, Hand, and the ghostwriter) of *Velocity* make believing a singular account of the story a naïve endeavor. Instead of believing one account, more specifically Will's original account of the plot, the various texts allow for interpretations that could potentially all be supported. A collective version of Will, Hand, and the ghostwriter's take on *Velocity*'s plot and style produce a more reliable version of the text than their individual accounts would; although Hand's Interruption in the Vintage text may be unreliable, it allows for all of the key opinions of Will and Hand's journey to come forth.

Whether *Velocity* is reliable or not, Sarah Brouillette notes that Eggers "makes form and content inseparable to an unusual degree, and thus offers himself to readers as a figure with a uniquely informed perspective on contemporary print culture" (3). This statement applies to the editorial changes made to *Velocity* as well as to the novel's function as a product for the mass market in today's "print culture" (3). When the form of *Velocity* changes with Hand's Interruption, the content changes as well, and not in a miniscule or irrelevant way; Eggers's insertion of the Interruption serves as not only an alteration to the plot and form but also to the novel's and author's situation in contemporary literature. Hand's Interruption changes the plot and form as well as Eggers's ability to transcend what some might assume his role to be: author and author

only. By adding Hand's Interruption to the Vintage text, Eggers edits his text after the initial publication, showing that he remains in control of his novel.

Even if readers have seen the evolution of *Velocity*, readers can never discern Eggers's true intention for producing so many different versions of the novel. However, G. Thomas Tanselle suggests that many forms of a text "may have their uses, but only the second can represent (or attempt to represent) the author's intention,"; still, it is difficult to apply such a statement to *Velocity* (69). From the two main separate texts of *Velocity*, the McSweeney's and Vintage editions, readers can garner that Eggers may have had two different intentions for each work; this once again supports that each the Vintage edition and the McSweeney's edition of *Velocity* can stand alone as two separate works. After all, Tanselle later proposes that "the later reading either creates a new work or is an isolated alteration at odds with the spirit of the work" (71). So is the Vintage *Velocity* at odds with the spirit of the original *Velocity* or do the two works complement one another? One could definitely argue that the Vintage *Velocity* aligns with Dave Eggers's contrary spirit. However, because of the entire plot change, the Vintage *Velocity* causes the reader to see Will, the original narrator, as unreliable, thus making the McSweeney's version seem like a farce or stepping stone to the (possible) final Vintage product. After reading Hand's Interruption, the audience's perception of Will changes completely, and therefore the reader is left wondering if any of the characters (and Eggers) can be trusted to tell the entire story.

To further discuss the effects of Eggers's authorial intent, Brouillette believes that "One of the most interesting aspects of Eggers's authorship is his effort to control all the aspects of his paratextual world, by acting as author, editor and publisher, as self-critic

and self-defender,” but Brouillette’s article was published before Vintage produced *Velocity* for the mass market (10). With the Vintage edition, Eggers pushes Brouillette’s assertion further because he decided to alter the book in such dramatic fashion; if he was already seen as an author who wanted to involve himself with every aspect of his book’s process, then the addition of Hand’s Interruption shows just how actively involved Eggers is with his text. He not only writes the texts, but he also completely *controls* them. Eggers’s textual alterations, even the minor changes, reveal his own journey from author to his role of puppet master: his novel and his characters hang from his hand and wait for his next move.

Of course, Eggers’s social position does contribute to his ability to become so involved with the production of his work. In Brouillette’s article she surmises that Eggers “can only engage in the sort of creative work he does—inventing several different covers for the same book, making readers search for his works in independent bookstores because of his position of relative comfort within the mainstream market he carefully rejects” (14). Without his prior success that catapulted him into literary cult-classic status, perhaps *Velocity* would have remained at 50,000 copies and Hand’s Interruption may have not existed at all. Furthermore, because Eggers initially self-published so few copies of *Velocity* and then later had Vintage publish it, the readers of the eloquently crafted McSweeney’s hardcover (that features the first sentence of the book on the cover) may feel like they know a secret that consumers of Vintage’s *Velocity* may never uncover: that Hand’s Interruption is a possible gimmick, a method of throwing off the reader from the real story of Will’s own heartbreaking narrative.

But we should and cannot forget that along with Hand, Eggers attaches puppet strings to the semi-fictional and metatextual ghostwriter of the Vintage version of *Velocity*. After all, how could Will, who is supposedly telling us himself that he has drowned, write the first sentence of the novel? The McSweeney's edition glosses over that, possibly hoping that readers will forget about the first sentence once they become involved in the narrative. And perhaps some do. However, before further discussing issues of narration, it is important to note that Hand is furious with the ghostwriter for using "cute little device[s]" such as putting the first page on the cover, he's especially mad at the publisher for titling the story *You Shall Know Our Velocity* (and not keeping Hand's title of *Sacrament*), and he's angry with Will for fictionalizing some of the story (Eggers Vintage 267). The ghostwriter emerges as the perfect martyr for Eggers and for Hand: anything that goes wrong can be blamed on the wispy entity that no one knows anything about.

Furthermore, to exhibit his authorial power, Eggers uses Hand as his puppet to reclaim his text. Hand's Interruption is not only Hand's chance to tell his version of the story, it is also Eggers way of announcing that even though he may have taken *Velocity* to a major publisher, he can still revise and tweak the text anyway he wants. With the Vintage *Velocity* Eggers has truly restructured and rethought the work, and carried "its original intentionality in[to] a new context" (Parker 228-29). The text evolves from a quirky story about three friends into an even quirkier method of fictionalizing Dave Eggers's reality.

By putting his name on both the Vintage and McSweeney's versions (even if it only appears on the spine as it does in Hand's *Sacrament*), Eggers claims the revisions

made to the text. But, even though Eggers revises *Velocity's* texts, epitexts that Eggers has no hand in writing also provide valuable information about the novel and publishing in general. This collaboration of epitexts "implies shared responsibility," and the process is still ongoing as readers and critics investigate *Velocity's* texts (Tanselle 50). But although the responsibility may be "shared," it is also expounded upon by Eggers as he acts as not only the writer but also as his own editor and publisher in producing the monovoiced McSweeney's *Velocity*, and then manipulating its evolution into the polyphonic textual product for the mass market.

Hand's Interruption gives the Vintage *Velocity* its polyphonic flair, but interpretations of his Interruption vary. Perhaps another method of interpreting Hand's Interruption is to consider it a revision of the original text of *Velocity* instead of a completely fresh text. But, it is vital to note that two different categories of revision took place. When Eggers revised the typos and accidentals for the Vintage edition of *Velocity*, these alterations are what G. Thomas Tanselle considers "horizontal revisions": they do not change the meaning of the text (58). Tanselle further explains this by arguing that the horizontal revisions are "sporadic tinkering; such tinkering when performed during or soon after the composition of a work, can be expected to fit the general tone and spirit of the whole, but when it occurs much later the results may seem out of place" (59). But because Hand's Interruption obviously alters *Velocity's* text, the Interruption becomes a "vertical revision," which essentially transforms the original *Velocity's* into a fresh work; this major alteration reforms not only the text but also the reader's interpretation of the text (58). Even though self-publishing gave Eggers full control over *Velocity's* original text, Eggers seems to retain his authorial control over the Vintage text as well; this

monopoly over the text allows for this vertical revision to sneak its way into *Velocity*. Furthermore, Eggers's authorial control grants him the option to make a vertical revision if he desires, even if the alteration strikes readers as a detachment from the original text. With the Vintage version of *Velocity*, there is no question that Hand's Interruption is out of place; Eggers highlights the Interruption by placing it near the center of the novel and separating it completely from Will's narrative. Hand's Interruption is meant to be an anomaly in order for the reader to take notice. In fact, the Interruption is so overtly and oddly displaced that it fits the spontaneous nature of *Velocity*'s plot: the form supports the function.

To continue with these assertions, Tanselle contemplates that "What is important, once again, is the nature of the changes, and no mechanical rule—about their extent or their timing" (59). By waiting for a major publisher to distribute *Velocity* with Hand's Interruption, it seems obvious that Eggers banked on timing to make a bigger point than how a novel about a couple of friends traveling the globe can entertain. With the success of *A Heartbreaking Work*, Eggers and the McSweeney's publishing staff had to have known that *Velocity* would sell more than 50,000 copies, yet Eggers waited for the major publisher before inserting Hand's Interruption. By waiting for a major publication before inserting Hand's Interruption, Eggers was able to reach a broader audience with the social critique Hand makes about the publishing industry.

At times, Hand's Interruption in the Vintage text seems like a compromise between the McSweeney's text and Hand's *Sacrament*. The Vintage version is altered from the original text that was without Hand's editing or Interruption, yet the Vintage version does not credit Hand as *Velocity*'s editor and has axed Hand's vibrant color

photos (too expensive to print, I am sure) in lieu of black and whites. The Vintage text may appear to be Schulze's "fittest" text, but without the original *Velocity* and Hand's *Sacrament*, the Vintage text with Hand's Interruption can also be interpreted as the product—an amalgam of what came before it—instead of a text that can truly stand on its own when it comes to critical interpretations. The fittest text may survive, but its worth depends on the reliability of both Will's and Hand's narration.

Yet Hand's Interruption does more than illuminate the unreliability of the text; his Interruption also uses visual rhetoric to clarify (and possibly detract from) Hand's points. Jerome McGann explores the correlation between editorial theory and visual rhetoric in his book *The Textual Condition*. McGann notes that in photographs "language has been structurally translated into visual and oral tokens—as image, or as nonlinguistic sound," (102). Readers of Hand's *Sacrament* and his Interruption must use Hand's photographs that he "sprinkle[s] throughout" to decode the correspondences of the photographs to the written text (Eggers Vintage 282). But before discussing the significance of the photographs, readers should note that a deep shade of red borders Hand's Interruption in *Sacrament*: as not just a "passive observer" but "an active character" and now writer, Hand wants to be sure that the Interruption is noticed, possibly noticed enough to be read prior to Will's original text (Eggers Vintage 282). However, if readers disregard Hand's aspirations, the red borders and the photographs seem haphazard and even pointless; they appear as photographs that one would see in a personal photo album, possibly having meaning to the photographer or owner of the pictures but to no one else, especially a critical audience. To describe a few of the photos, the midday sun illuminates a palm tree; a sunset highlights man-made huts; a yellow truck transports bags of unknown material;

and, a person's elbow cuts into a photo of a wall made of clay colored bricks. Although the photos are mostly of beautiful and sometimes breathtaking scenery—especially in *Sacramento*—the aesthetic quality appears to be the only purpose of the pictures besides Hand's desire for readers to believe him.

Still readers must not forget that Hand feels like he has something to prove; for him, the photographs suggest that he has not lied about anything in his *Interruption*. They offer another textual proof that Will (only because he's dead), the ghostwriter, or the publisher cannot provide. Incidentally, the photographs can also be seen as another one of Hand's tricks; they draw the reader out of his unreliable written text and into the physical realities of his journey. His pictures “are strategically arranged to draw the reader's eye into the book: to involve the reader's visual encounter with the text, in the arguments which the text is making” (McGann 105). When the text presents the reader with the photographs (Hand has placed some together vertical on the page, others are solitary), the reader may glance over the pictures or stop to intently study them. Either way, the pictures interrupt the written text of the *Interruption*. In a sense the photographs become a meta-interruption of the *Interruption*; they compete with Hand's words and do the opposite of what Hand intends, which is to further cement his story. The photographs make Hand less reliable instead of more trustworthy than Will and the publishers.

But Hand includes one photograph that clearly resonates with the written text and with his unreliability as a narrator: the photograph of the black pig on the beach. Although he claims that it “symbolizes nothing,” his constant references to the pig—and especially the included photograph—imply that the photograph, like Hand's *Interruption*, simultaneously means nothing and everything (Eggers *Vintage* 298). The pig deserves

further explanation: while contemplating and writing the infamous Interruption, a pig washes up on the shore near the house that Hand rents. The pig, of course, does not belong on the New Zealand shore; like the Interruption to the original text, the pig is an anomaly to the beach. Neither the pig nor the Interruption is necessary to the beach or text, but the memorable appearances (the pig with its large and black physical shape and the Interruption with its contradictions to the original text) possibly change the interpretations the reader has of both. At first, the reader believes that surely this cannot be a normal beach if a pig just washed upon the shore and surely everything Will mentioned in the original text cannot be completely true, especially if the publisher felt that Hand's Interruption was valid enough to include in the Vintage publication of the novel. Furthermore, by the close of "An Interruption," the pig "is gone," just as Hand's "An Interruption" was not included in the first edition of *You Shall Know Our Velocity* (298).

Although Hand concludes that the "pig symbolizes nothing" to him personally and then tries to convince the reader that it has nothing to do with the purpose of the novel, the picture only reinforces the pig's importance. The pig makes Hand less reliable instead of trustworthy, but the pig, differences between the McSweeney's and Vintage editions, and the application of editorial theories to all possible texts of *Velocity* merely provides a diving board into *Velocity*'s muddy "tannin-tinted Guaviare river" (Eggers Vintage 1). Unreliable narration, and Eggers's ability to be "self-conscious about being self-referential" and also further exhibits his creative yet disturbing role as *Velocity*'s snickering puppet master (Eggers *A Heartbreaking Work*).

“AN INTERRUPTION”

by Suzhand R. Samples, the Burgeoning Eggers Scholar

Monday

At this point in my creation, I deem it necessary to back track a bit, to give you a brief background on what studying *You Shall Know Our Velocity* entails. I never imagined that the text would send me on such a scholarly journey, quite comparable to the one that Hand and Will made (though on a much smaller scale—I had no trouble with the katabatic winds in Greenland), or that I would become so involved with the text that I would consider trying to convert it to a screenplay with the charismatic Wilson brothers acting as Will (Luke) and Hand (Owen).

I will describe my journey to the best of my abilities, although my memory tends to distort and fumble, especially when I've been working for hours on research and writing, beginning in the daylight and ending in the black, suffocating dark. It was the late spring of 2004, and I had gone to visit friends in Lexington, Kentucky. We took a trip to Joseph-Beth, largest bookstore in the area, and I happened upon a cleverly titled book, *You Shall Know Our Velocity!*. Although I usually don't blow fifteen precious dollars on unfamiliar books and authors, I am intrigued by the title, especially because it contains an exclamation point and the first page claims that the writer of the novel is dead as he writes (Eggers Vintage 1).² I purchased the novel and read the first twenty pages before our car pulled out of the parking lot; I also noticed that the cover contains a "Note: This

² I should note that my creative Interruption may or may not need proper MLA citation, but I feel, to quote the old aphorism, I should give the author credit when credit is due.

paperback edition includes significant changes and additions.” That meant nothing to me at the time, but it means something now. It means *everything* now.

I don’t continue reading until I get home to Vandalia (what West Virginia was nearly named when it seceded from Virginia—I prefer to call it Vandalia for aesthetic reasonings). The book caught my attention, but did not hold my attention as much as the Kentucky horse gambling did. At Keeneland that same evening I purchased the text, I bet on a lovely young thoroughbred named Piggot Lalou Shimmree, and I have to say, she brought me quite an influx of cash, although not the \$80,000 that Will’s light-bulb modeling gig brought him. Anyhoo³, after I returned back to the beautiful rolling hills of Vandalia and spent a large part of my winnings on the rare manuscripts detailing the lifestyles of the Promachoteuthis megaptera, I restarted my reading of Eggers. When I reached “AN INTERRUPTION *by Francis ‘Hand’ Wisneiwski,*” which is situated slightly past the center of the book, my perception of the plot and trust in the narrator, Will, shattered. In his Interruption Hand informs the reader that Will has lied about every important event leading up to their journey around the world, the most important lie being “there was no Jack,” Will’s best friend, so “the trip wasn’t a result of any recent death. It wasn’t even a result of some recent cash influx” (Eggers Vintage 267, 272). Because Will’s neurosis centers on Jack, Hand’s claims make it difficult to trust Will’s narrative of the entire trip. However, I noticed that Hand has “been drinking vodka and Orangina,” and I made a note that I cannot trust a drunken narrator anymore than a lying one...and I know this from personal experience (283).

³ I should note that no dictionary I searched considers “Anyhoo” an actual word. I even checked “Anywho” as an alternate spelling, but found nothing. However, I thought “Anyhow” sounded a bit too snooty for the purpose of this “Interruption,” and decided on “Anyhoo” for its breathtaking internal assonance.

That summer, I decided that I was going to retract my acceptance to Harvard Law School and return to my alma mater to study literature. In my research class, the professor (who had just returned from an anthropological study on the Mbuti of the Ituri Rainforest) assigned the class to write a “scholarly article,” and I chose *You Shall Know Our Velocity!* as my focus. Research began, and I ended up purchasing four additional copies of the novel: a first edition that has “First Edition” printed on the inside back cover, a first edition that does not have “First Edition” printed on the inside back cover, a second printing that contains a note that reads “This sticker is removable. Also: this version of *YSKOV* has been edited by the author; thus, it’s shorter than the first printing. It has also been copy-edited by professionals, so should be largely without error this time around,” and a version printed in the United Kingdom. The differences between the various editions gave me a migraine; what was this Dave Eggers character trying to accomplish? Are mistakes purely mistakes, or do they mean something? Why did he feel that it was necessary to go back and include “An Interruption” to the original story? Does the pig that Hand rants about in “An Interruption” really “symbolize nothing” or does it symbolize everything (Eggers Vintage 298)?

And then, of course, I began my research for secondary sources in the dusty chambers of the library. (I could have easily used a computer, but I have always preferred material books and pages versus the immaterial contents of the “World Wide Web,” Hand’s main method of digging up research.) I located various book reviews and criticisms, only to realize that the phrases sounded oddly familiar. And then it hit me: this Dave Eggers used his text as a weapon against the critics, if they, in fact, cared enough to read the book a second time (or a third time or a fourth time). Of course, if you don’t

fully believe me, and I could understand if you didn't, I have included plenty of footnotes, photographs, and a "Bibliography & Works Cited" section at the end of this thesis for your perusal.

Wednesday

Little did I know that turning in my scholarly article would lead to a project quite this size. I have dabbled in writing the longer paper—haven't we all?—but this monstropolous⁴ task has begun to drive me out of my own "holy damned mind" (Eggers Vintage 254). Two years have passed since I first purchased *YSKOV* and began my scholarly journey with Will and Hand, and occurrences have occurred that make it difficult for me to continue my interaction with Eggers's fine text. As any good reader would, I have shared my exuberant love of the novel with friends, but I feel that I am getting ahead of myself again.

I should tell you that immediately after I read the journey of Will, Hand, and Jack (Jack? Did Jack really exist? I do not know and perhaps never will, because solid, accurate information is not on hand. Puns completely intended). I took a semester away from education and returned to Lexington, Kentucky. I admit that it had nothing to do with *YSKOV*, and everything to do with the fine young thoroughbred that brought me my own influx of cash. This is difficult for me to admit to you—especially since written proof of my admittances will be forever documented in the graduate college's online

⁴ As literary legend goes, Zora Neal Hurston and Zadie Smith are the only two widely published writers to use the word "monstropolous" in a piece of work. Although my name does not begin with a "Z," it does contain one, so I feel that my use of the word is at least somewhat justified.

database, as well on Amazon.com for purchase—but my guilt and shame hovers over my conscience blacker than Hand’s washed up pig.

I lost the money. All of it.

On my first visit to the Keeneland Racing Track since my official Lexington, Kentucky residency, I was horrified to discover that my beloved darling Piggot Lalou Shimmree had fractured a back leg during Derby practice. Upset by the horseracing world’s devastating loss, I spent the day at the tracks betting on horses that a ginger haired coffee shop owner named Jake—who stunned me with his sparkling smile and swore that the tan line around his left ring finger was from a lost Super Bowl Championship ring—assured me would rake in the big bucks. After a few (okay, maybe a few to the power of a few) mint juleps, I entrusted Jake with a good portion of my earnings to bet, and then I never saw him again. I worked up the courage to drive myself to Charlie Brown’s—a delightful restaurant slash bar where the patrons sit on plush couches and recliners—and drowned myself in an entire pitcher of rum and coke. I woke the next morning, sprawled on one of the couches with fifty-one dollars and seven cents to my name.

Friday

Following the loss of my money, chance at love with a Super Bowl champion, and Piggot, my sweet little moneymaking good luck charm, I forced myself to get a job at a spicy little fast food Italian restaurant chain. My job—mixing a garlic butter recipe in a tub large enough for me to stand inside and disappear—required much concentration and time, but not enough time that I wasn’t able to write two novels and produce one short film. Their titles, if you’re interested:

Everything You Want to Know About Marcel Proust But Are Too Afraid to Ask

The Art and Sport of Baton Twirling



Bleak.

But I have to say that *Bleak.*, the short film, needs editing and perhaps a stronger female lead. The middle also drags a bit, but it does adhere to my overall artistic vision. But through all of my hardships and artistic endeavors, I began to miss the green rolling hills of Vandalia, my home, my heart, my soul. Oh how I missed the crisp air and old time mountain music.

Somehow my copy of *YSKOV* made it with me during multiple apartment moves, but I did misplace it for a period of time—well, “misplace” is a term I use to deny that I let a certain someone borrow it—but now it is in my possession once again and will remain there until my death when I will bequeath it to R.V.A.K. (She knows who she is.) The time period in which *YSKOV* was temporarily displaced occurred during a bout of

physical and mental illness that I have yet to truly recover from and do not wish to discuss.

Still I must remember my vow to authenticity and reliable narration, and I feel that as the reader, you deserve to know the story in its honest entirety. As a young and fiercely independent woman, I somehow fell victim to a grey⁵ eyed boy (reason I do not refer to him as a “man” soon to follow) who faked interest in *YSKOV* in a desperate attempt to get my attention. When I began the master’s in English program, I was subject to locally owned coffee shops, discussions about love poetry, and literary magazine vodka parties. Now I know better.

He used me, you see. He used me like a paper towel, a forgotten Post-It™ note.⁶ There was this other girl, a friend of his with a smushy face and hair the color of an off-brand red crayon, who had feelings more than friendship for him. Instead of being forthright and honest with her and relaying that he did not harbor similar feelings for her in return, he instead plotted us against one another in a game of romantic chess.

Of course I am digressing, getting off-track with this creative little jaunt of an interruption of an interruption, but now that I’ve started the discussion of Grey Eyed Boy (whose given name does not escape my lips even in a vengeful utterance), I feel I must finish it. One morning while we were lying—I’m not positive of the correct form of “lie” here, but the form I have employed does make a cute little Freudian slip considering the circumstance—in bed, he woke me and told me that after two weeks of *talking, seeing each other* (dating being too concrete of a term), he felt that we had nothing to talk about and that we didn’t know each other at all.

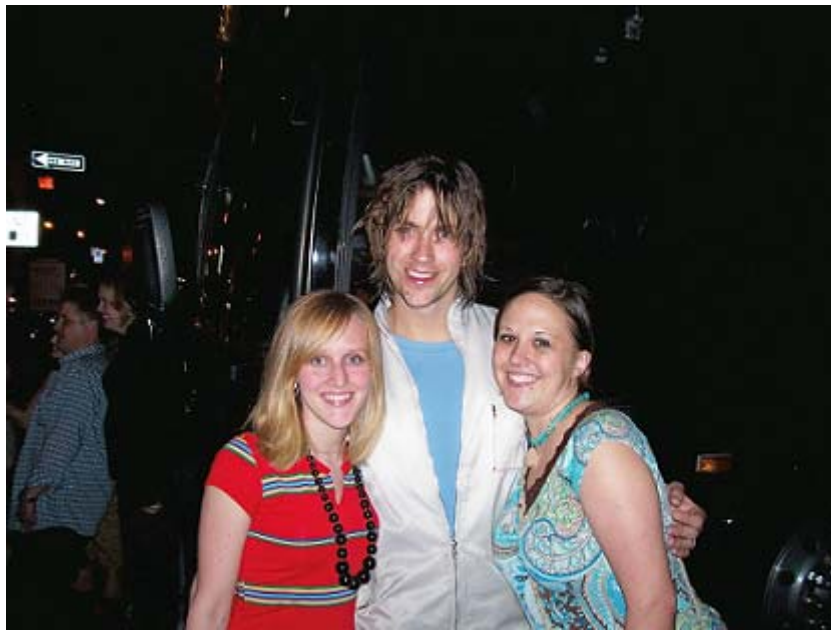
⁵ For reasons unknown to myself, I prefer the British spelling of “grey.”

⁶ In my spare time these days, I am working on an alternative to the Post-It™. Patent pending.

I listened to a lot of Jeff Buckley during the dark period that followed.

Through spurts of gossip, I learned that Smudgy Face Crayon Haired Girl had told Grey Eyed Son of a Bitch that I had a(nother) boyfriend who was living in Samoa on a tour with the Peace Corp. She told everyone she could find that I was the sluttiest of the slutty sluts, vehemently disregarding the vow of sexual abstinence that I began at twenty-one and still hold fast to today.

A week later my mind awoke but I could barely open my eyes; I could not even swallow a drink of water. Two paper cuts took the place of my eyelids and water balloons the place of my cheeks. Believing I had severe allergies, I trudged to classes, the library, and wrote a fifteen page paper in one night. I wrote journal entries and subsequently burned them in my bathroom sink. I went to class, I wrote and wrote and wrote. I had an article published on the Physician's Daily website concerning a smallpox outbreak in the Bronx. I went to a benefit concert with my sister—though I can't remember what was benefiting—and fell asleep during the lulling interlude.



The following Monday I marched myself to student health for a cold pack and fell asleep in the waiting room.

Mononucleosis is not supposed to happen to a perfectionist graduate student with three weeks left in the semester to write two more thirty page papers and plan an AIDS prevention tour of East Africa, but it did allow me to contemplate the worthlessness of Grey Eyed Boy and Smudgy Faced Crayon Haired Girl as I watched *The Price Is Right* from my mattress that I drug from my bedroom to the living room floor with my last smidgen of strength. In the following weeks, I corresponded from home with professors and employed a friendly homeless woman to drive me to the doctor, grocery store, and to concoct salt water for me to gargle.

I recovered nicely, but some things remain difficult: triathlons, camping trips to The Bush, and marathon shopping sprees. I limit the amount of laps I swim in the pool to 137 and the pages I write to two per day, one and three quarters if I start to wind down.

Sunday, A Different One

Though I should be working on the critical aspects of this thesis or reading Emechata's *The Rape of Shavi* for my independent study, I could not pass on a spontaneous venture to North Carolina for the first birthday party of Miranda and Caliban, twin cousins of mine from my mother's side—my only cousins from my mother's side—that were born twenty-four years after my entrance into this cruel,

calculating world. My life's likeness to Will's, especially with the twin cousins⁷, astounds me sometimes.

Babies are entertaining, even when they do mundane, everyday activities like eat. Caliban—Cal as we call him—takes his eating quite seriously while Miranda uses her food to make breathtaking finger paintings on the glass table. The pureed squash brings to mind a glorious, orange sunset, and the cottage cheese with raisins makes a darling little lamb complete with eyes. I talk to Miranda about what I refer to as the “Magnificent M’s”—Monet, Manet, Munch—and tell her that one day, she’ll break through and turn the trio into a complete square. I tell her that doctors and lawyers make too much money, and that writers and artists are underpaid and worse yet, Mizundahstood. Her father glares at me.



⁷ Will sends postcards to young, twin female nieces named Mo and Thor, but Hand argues that “There were twin girls in Will’s life, but they were babies when this trip took place—no more than two years old. Did he mention them on the trip? He didn’t once. Did he write notes on postcards to anyone? He didn’t” (Eggers Vintage 279).

Cal gleefully giggles and gurgles—alliteration is the one literary device I love leaving in letter—as I take his stuffed reindeer and attack his toes; Miranda prefers to study and admire the rare yellow diamond in my ring, a gift from the Prime Minister of Ukinawra. I redact my earlier speech to her, for not all writers and artists (and activists, I might add) are fortunate enough to receive the lavish praise and gifts that I have over the years. I say, You should be an attorney...or a surgeon if you want money to buy diamonds! and her father snatches her up before she has the chance to put her mouth on my necklace and pull, which would surely choke me to death.

After dinner I wash Miranda and dress her in a red onesie with a ruffle down the back and a denim dress a checkered pleat. Cal, Miranda, and I play in their Superyard™ playpen until their mother laughs and tells me that I need more practice because Miranda's onesie is on backwards. I attack Cal's toes with the plush reindeer, and he giggles and smiles at me with his four tiny teeth before throwing the reindeer out of the Superyard™ and killing it.

I need to write more, but I smell like baby.

Tuesday

Buyer's Remorse, Purchaser's Regret, Feeling Guilty Because I Spent Over \$100 on a Signed Copy of Hand's *Sacrament* in order that I may find The Truth. I consider how many used paperbacks I could have bought for that, but I need to know if anything in Hand's official version reads differently than all other 35, 189 versions of the novel. Someone tries to convince me to resell it once I finish my thesis and sell millions of

copies of it on Amazon, but I know I will never bring myself to part with it once I get it in my grubby hands.

When *Sacrament* arrives in the mail, I must admit that I'm a bit disappointed that Dave Eggers has signed it and not Hand himself. Hand seems rather real, rather alive to me at this point. My boyfriend calls me from a phone station in Samoa; he's concerned that I'm going to leave him for Dave Eggers one day. I try to convey to him that if I ever met Dave Eggers, the first thing I would do would be to take one of my many *YSKOV* copies and chuck it cleanly toward his big head. Then if he recovered and if he could forgive me, he would probably feel too threatened by my writing prowess to pursue any type of romantic relationship. I say those things to be comforting, but he either hangs up on me or runs out of minutes on his international phone card.

Tuesday, The Same One

I fear that the words I write will not convey the stronghold that *YSKOV* has over me. I fear that no one will understand the significance of the work, because I will not write my analysis and synthesis of the novel and its looming epitexts academically enough for the general academic public. I fear big dogs with Kujo-like frothing mouths. Although I have been published—multiple times, though I'm not sure if the thirty-six publications on Poetry.com count, although they are registered at the Library of Congress—I still fear that I will never be fully accepted into the bourgeoisie world of brilliant professors who have taught me all that I know. (With the exception of the insect

mating theories I acquired in Botswana and the knowledge of highly covert government conspiracies that I picked up from *someone* in the C.I.A., of course.)

I even fear that my clever little interruption of an interruption will not be seen and understood as both mocking and as a *homage* to Hand, whose writing style I have found “a comfortable enough contrivance to live within. It shapes my words and circumscribes my task” (Eggers Vintage 254). I have only now realized the *beautemus*—I also have a degree in Latin, magna cum laude, Yale 2001—metatextuality of phrases like “a comfortable contrivance to live within. It shapes my words and circumscribes my task” (254, again). I consider changing the title of my thesis to “A Comfortable Enough Contrivance to Live Within,” but then I realize I have nothing to change it from.

Tuesday, Yet a Different One

I haven't heard from my Peace Corp. boyfriend in Samoa, so I assume that he is either dead or has broken it off with me. I open up a bottle and start drinking, hoping that in one of my past drunken stupors I have switched the Lysol bottle and the whiskey bottle so that I will pass out in my apartment only to be found dead four months later when my lease is up and my landlord hasn't heard from me. Imagine the stench.

The phone rings and my hearts beats an aria in my chest, but it's only the rep from Oprah's Book Club. Some people don't know when to leave well enough alone. Will write more tomorrow if not dead from consumption of poison.

Still the Same Tuesday

As I write this, I wonder why semi-suicidal plans never work; even worse is that I keep drinking and drinking but cannot seem to get drunk. It always happens when I don't want it to—church communion, after the Piggot/Super Bowl champ incident, that sort of thing—but when I want to drown my miseries by excessive drinking, I cannot. It seems that in all of the things in life in which I have excelled, I cannot do something as simple as get drunk and write a thesis. I am wondering if a drunken state would improve my thesis. Probably so.

Wednesday

It has rained for four days straight and it is beginning to mess with my head. I mostly do not notice or care much about the weather, but this rain reminds me of Hand in New Zealand, and I am starting to wonder if there is some sort of connection, some sort of significance that I am missing here. My insecure state of mind, my neurosis, my shakiness in the head, whatever you want to call it, may have less to do with the rainy weather and more to do with the strange incidents of someone rifling through my car on a weekly basis. They never take anything, only rearrange, scatter, move papers about. I always know that they have been there because they leave the glove compartment open. I begin to clean out my car when I find a yellow checkbook, not mine. It belongs to a B. L. and Melissa Rikedale⁸ of Barboursville, Vandalia, a good fifteen miles from my residence.

I consider the possibilities; either B.L. and/or Melissa has/have been responsible for the rifling of my car, or their checkbook was stolen by the person responsible for

⁸ Names have been changed in case they are, in fact, innocent.

sifting through my belongings. I hold onto the checkbook for awhile, considering it my only evidence that I am not ready to turn over to the local police just quite yet.

To further feed my growing paranoia, when I am searching for a tube of toothpaste, the mirror that forces me to look at myself before taking the drugs behind the door falls off into my hands, nearly hitting me in the head. That would have surely caused a concussion. I start to wonder if B.L. and/or Melissa have entered my home through the faulty kitchen window. Of course they would have to know about the rickety fire escape stairs and know that my window doesn't lock, but if they have been watching me for a long enough time, they could have figured it out. Maybe they left the checkbook as a warning that rifling through my car is just the beginning of their stalking me. Maybe I have something that they want. (Okay, so the yellow diamond mentioned earlier is really from an island in the Barboursville Mall. The city-state of Ukinawra only exists in my upcoming novel, although I have hopes that it will one day become an actual place: free upscale health care, a race of people who have the ability to close their eyes and travel anywhere at will, and streets made of money that no one has any use for. Publication pending.) I consider going to Walmart and writing out checks as Melissa, but I think about what would happen if I got caught—would I go to jail, be able to convince a jury that I was suffering from multiple personalities and thought that I really *was* Melissa Rikedale of Barboursville? Would school supplies and a chicken wing cooker be worth jail time?—so I place the checkbook on my mantle and make an attempt at sleep.

Wednesday

Although I have much enjoyed the creativity that this interruption of an interruption has allowed me, I am beginning to think that I need to trudge back to the dusty chambers of the library and continue my research on the subject of narration and the visual rhetoric of the Skittles package. More research has been done on the subject than one can possibly imagine; how I will relate it to my thesis will be a challenge, but one that I am definitely up to.

As I wrap this up, I think about a story that dear Dr. McTulley told me about one of her former classmates who also had an interruption in her thesis. This woman, whom I will call Joan because I do not remember her government approved name, decided to slam the faculty at her institution in the middle of her work, just to see if anyone would notice. No one did until Dr. McTulley decided to find Joan's thesis and read it to keep her from being bored at work.⁹ It is devastating to think that only one person appreciated Joan's creativity and hard labor (even though I'm sure it was bitter and unfair to those who helped her achieve her academic goals), and I can only hope that mine will reach many more than poor Joan's did.

With the convenience of the World Wide Web, however, I am confident that my words will reach many. As I mentioned before, I do not use it for research, but I know that others do and will. Already I have seen this happening; after beginning a discussion on a web log about *YSKOV*, one kind (and perhaps one of a kind) fan of Dave Eggers named Dave Bennett from Carleton, California wished for me to include his words in my

⁹ Though I am not sure of the exact year, this was clearly before the entrance of Myspace and Facebook into the collegiate world.

masterpiece interruption. I have decided to include it here as something to chew on, something to talk about, discuss amongst yourselves:

The best thing about that novel (*YSKOV*) is how different it was from hardcover to paperback, after being previously retitled '*Sacrament*', without the entire Hand-written (ha!) chapter in the middle. Every novel is a sacrament. The hardcover books asks why we travel. The paperback asks why we write fiction.

My two cents.

What a clever little bastard. But I do agree that every novel is, in fact, a sacrament, and once I have figured out why, I will fully lay down the theory. But for now I must immerse my head in the dense words of others and return later with the answer to why we write fiction. I am sure there is a reason floating out there somewhere in the sea of letters, words, characters, and literary devices, and one day I will find it. Perhaps one day we will all find it; perhaps we will not.

My interruption symbolizes nothing.

Hand's Interruption: A Staging Ground for Critical Conversation and Dancing

Puppets

I think the book as a whole is a sacrament of sorts, a physical representation, of too many things otherwise ephemeral—a social demonstration of a partly unknowable internal state, a messy combination of Twain's shapeless string of absurdities, and something like that state of secular grace I was talking about earlier. Maybe all books are sacraments.

--Hand, from his Interruption

An old adage states that writers get to live twice, but the different versions of *Velocity* suggest that Dave Eggers gets to live even more. Although part of *Velocity*'s charm, Hand and Will's unreliable narration should trouble the reader. Without Hand's Interruption, the reader has no reason not to trust Will, but with Hand's Interruption, which accuses Will's story of being incomplete to the point of completely false, the reader finds it difficult to trust either one. As I mentioned before, Hand gets drunk on "vodka and Orangina" while he writes his Interruption, and because of his death, Will is not available for fictional consultation after the first McSweeney's version of *Velocity* was printed (Eggers Vintage 291). Neither an alcoholic narrator nor a dead narrator can be reliable; a reader should not put full trust in the memory of a living and sober narrator. However, the reader should take into account not only the unreliable narrators and their conflicting stories, but also Will and Hand's different motivations behind their versions of the journey. Since the different versions of *Velocity* contradict one another, the characters' motivations and the effects that their motivations have on the plot become of utmost importance.

Mieke Bal, author of *Narratology*, argues that

objectivity is, in fact, a form of subjectivity in disguise...If 'truth,' or even probability, is no longer a sufficient criterion to make narrative

meaningful, only motivation can suggest probability, thus making the contents believable, plausible. That is why motivation is an aspect of realist narrative rhetoric. (37)

Will's narrative, at first, seems more objective than Hand's. After all, because Eggers chooses Will to narrate the story in first person, the story *You Shall Know Our Velocity* belongs to Will; it is his tale, told from his point of view. Because of the "I," the reader is willing, it seems, to give Will the benefit of the doubt; even if his memory is unreliable, readers put faith in Will's ability to tell us the story, that is until Hand's Interruption.

In his Interruption, Hand reveals to the reader what he wants us to believe is his motivation: to set the record straight. But why? Most of *Velocity*'s original readers have made their interpretation of Will's text, and even if the text has left them with questions, *Velocity*'s readers could simply reconcile their questions through analysis or criticism, leaving many possible interpretations of the text likely. Hand's decision to interrupt the text at a pivotal moment (right before Vintage publishes *Velocity* for a larger audience), implies that as a fictional character, he feels slighted and in the shadow of Will. By writing an Interruption that will considerably stick out from the original *Velocity* text (especially if Vintage would have left the red border around the Interruption that Hand's *Sacrament* contained), Hand knows that the spotlight will be on him instead of Will or any other character. Whether he sets the record straight or not, Hand's motivation sometimes transcribes as selfish and even unnecessary. Instead of clearing matters up or making Will less believable and himself more believable, Hand's Interruption makes the reader doubt everything the text and combination of texts has to offer; neither Hand nor Will can be seen as a reliable narrator telling the true story of their journey, especially

because Hand writes that he does “object to much of this original text because frankly [he doesn’t] know why the little bastard—and he was shorter than the 6’1” he claims—didn’t just tell the damned story the way it was” (Eggers Vintage 274).

But before a further analysis of the characters’ motivation, readers should remember that when discussing narration and the characters of *Velocity*, reality and fiction are easily confused. This causes Hand and Will’s notion of “blurry fiction” to become yet another metatextual moment (Eggers Vintage 281). Hand’s narrative role goes further than him just being a character with a bit of dialogue; he claims to be actively involved with the publishing process, a process that occurs completely outside of the text. Although the process occurred/occurs outside of the text, what is eventually produced leaves the reader clues about the publishing process of *Velocity*. For example, the title page of the Vintage *Velocity* reads:

Dave Eggers

You Shall Know Our Velocity!

{*previously retitled as Sacramento*}

This brief mention of a retitling, even if the reader has only seen the Vintage version of the text, suggests that the Vintage text has made its own journey along with Hand and Will’s fictional one. However, the journey of the book cannot be classified as simply fictional or truth; instead, because the fictional character Hand has claimed to have his hands in the publishing process, it becomes semi-fictional or the “blurry fiction” that Hand extrapolates on in his *Interruption* (Eggers Vintage 281). Hand claims that Will’s text “tells the plain truth eighty-five percent of the time,” but gives the reader no reason

to trust that his words are correct one-hundred percent of the time either (Eggers Vintage 281).

This interpretation suggests that perhaps Hand is not only a fictional character but also an extension of the author. As a fictional character, Hand does not really publish *Velocity*, but Eggers does. Readers could argue that as the author, Eggers abuses Hand's character by masking his authorial critiques of the original novel's reviews as Hand's semi-fictional complaints about the finished product. But, if Hand's motivation is to be thrust from sidekick to main character, the effects of Eggers's motivation are a bit more complicated. Although Eggers could have had multiple motivations for creating so many different versions of *Velocity*, the products of his motivations should not be limited to complicating the text through its metafictional moments; nor should the effects be limited to his attempts at blurring the fictional journey of Will and Hand with the factual publication journal of the novel. Hand's Interruption also becomes Eggers's way of carrying on a conversation with those who read and commented on the original McSweeney's text, especially those that appeared in prominent news sources such as *The New York Times* and *The New Statesmen*.

Once again the informed reader versus the uninformed reader becomes of utmost importance. If the reader solely invests herself in the minutiae of the Vintage version of the text and takes Hand's word as gospel, then the reader has no reason to doubt Hand and no reason to assume that Eggers has manipulated the character of Hand to say what as the author he wants to say. Using Hand to speak for him almost makes it seem as if Eggers wants an easy out: he can blame the character, try to convince people that Hand's Interruption is purely fictional, and therefore take the blame off of himself as the author.

Meanings and evidence from Eggers's constant manipulation of Hand, who writes what Eggers could have said (albeit less effectively) in an interview or even personal essay, is obvious to the reader who has read more than one version of *Velocity*: the ghostwriter is not the only thing that is "dual-sided" (Eggers Vintage 259). In the Interruption, readers should not ignore the intended or unintended meaning, but should instead use the naivety of the unformed reader and the knowledge of the informed reader to confirm Eggers's ability to appeal to both types of audience. This solidifies his talent as a writer and makes an artistic statement that he writes what he wants, when he wants, and how he wants.

Although Eggers manipulation of Hand to converse with the critics may startle (Although he's not the first or last author to challenge a critic, Eggers certainly takes challenging his critics further than most.), Eggers metatextually covers the possibility that a reader could critique his decision to become Hand's puppet master. Hand mentions that while cleaning out Will's storage he finds "a box of puppets, all of them ancient, certainly something [Will'd] inherited himself"; clearly this implies that Eggers knows how he wants Hand's Interruption to come across to the readers, if only they invest enough time into the multiple texts and the reviews to figure it out (Eggers Vintage 266). The puppets, yet another metatextual moment, suggest that although Hand believes he controls Will's puppets (and story), as the author Eggers controls him. Eggers noticeably manipulates the character to exact his vengeance on the reviewers; even the name "Hand" implies that Eggers uses the character as his puppet to do his dirty work. However, his manipulation only further proves his authorial control and illustrates his artistic statement. But because Hand, as Eggers's puppet, alludes to the critics' reviews, the informed reader can conclude that whether or not Eggers writes for himself or for the

critics, he *must* have read the reviews in order to retaliate in this way. The allegations found in the Interruption imply that Eggers cares, if even just a little, about what the critics have to say about his art form. The Interruption also suggests that Hand has read the reviews, which is technically impossible; the Interruption, when viewed as a conversation piece with the critics, continues to blur fantasy with reality and the author with his character to the extent where they are virtually inseparable from one another.

Furthermore, in order to scatter his innuendos throughout “An Interruption,” Eggers equips Hand with elitist-toned writing voice that mimics that of a literary critic; Hand even goes so far as to apologize for his tone “when there is a tone to [his] tone, which [he] blame[s] on De Profundis, which [he] was reading on the plane” (Eggers Vintage 255). Perhaps Eggers uses Hand to aim and fire his most memorable potshot toward *New York Times* writer Michiko Kakutani, who praised *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* for how its structure supports the meaning of the novel, but then later criticized Eggers in *You Shall Know Our Velocity* (the first edition) for “simply using narrative innovations for their own sake” (Kakutani E7). As Hand contemplates life and prepares the Interruption for the publisher, he writes that “Of course I’m mimicking the structural device of the book as a whole, and I’m finding it a comfortable enough contrivance to live within. It shapes my words and circumscribes my task” (Eggers Vintage 254). Once again, the reader can take the statement as intended or unintended, but it is hard not to picture Eggers writing that sentence with a smarmy grin on his face, one hand on the keyboard, and the other hand pulling Hand’s puppet strings. Eggers knows that clichés become clichés for a reason: the pen truly is mightier than the sword.

And although the details of Hand's *Interruption* speak directly to specific critics, on a broader level Hand's *Interruption* shows how an author can defend his writing through writing; but even if Eggers accomplishes manipulating his creation, it affects the novel on different levels: a textual level and a social level. On the textual level, Hand's *Interruption* obviously and sometimes painfully changes the entire meaning of the text. Even if a reader has not examined the McSweeney's edition of *Velocity*, in the Vintage version Hand's *Interruption* does not occur until page 250¹⁰. After 250 pages of Will's narration, the reader has, well, grown attached to Will and attached to his version of the journey. And, the basis of this attachment definitely has to do with sympathy for Will because he has lost his best friend Jack, a character that Hand claims did not exist except as a "stand-in" (Eggers Vintage 267). Hand then argues that Will's Jack was merely a "creation of friend-fiction, an amalgam of a bunch of people we know, and then an idealization of that amalgam" which leaves the reader questioning Hand and presents another metatextual instance of the "blurry fiction" that Hand himself promotes (268, 281). So what if Jack was a fictional creation of Will's? To the reader, before Hand's *Interruption*, the book is, of course, a fictional tale, so why go to the trouble to tell us that it is not and ruin the sympathy and admiration that we have built up for the characters of *Velocity*?

These questions lead into the social implications of Hand's *Interruption*. Hand attempts to tell his audience that Will

feared what people would say, to tell you the truth—he feared that people would accuse him of being reckless, misguided, stupid, showy, preachy,

¹⁰ In my Vintage *Velocity*, anyway. Who knows, it could vary in others.

whatever. There were a thousand pitfalls to writing it as fact, because quite frankly, from a distance, it appears to be a monumentally silly idea.

But the strange thing about this business is that nonfiction, when written well, is unequivocally more powerful than fiction, because if all details and evocations are equal—meaning, if the writing brings alive the people and places described with equal skill, then the story that is true will evoke a stronger response in the reader...But this is the opinion of a man who knows nothing, and it's an opinion that I throw at you to make you angry. (275-76)

During textual moments such as these, Eggers, as the manipulating puppet master, uses Hand's words to voice his own opinions as an author. The reviewer Christopher Tayler notices in the British version of *Velocity*, towards the end readers "get an impression of a writer talking to himself, perhaps in a funny voice, with his characters as visual aids or glove puppets," and Hand's mention of the puppets plays off Tayler's conviction (24). Although this moment relates to the *Velocity* text, it also can be read as a comeback to the critics and reviewers, namely all of them, who cannot get far enough past Eggers's memoir to write a review of his novel. For example, in Michiko Kakutani's review of *Velocity*, she writes that in *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*:

Mr. Eggers was not simply using narrative innovations for their own sake, but [that] those techniques were a potent and utilitarian defense mechanism, a means of achieving detachment while alchemizing pain and loss...[Hand and Will] lack the flesh-and-blood density, the ferocious individuality of the real-life people in *Staggering Genius*.

In fact, *Velocity* as a whole is a much slighter, more perfunctory performance than that earlier book—less inventive, less daring, less affecting and less intense. (E7)

After reading the reviews, Kakutani's review in particular, Hand's statement about the power of nonfiction over fiction takes on a different meaning, especially because of Hand's sarcastically high-brow yet apologetic tone when he makes these claims. Moments like these support that Hand is a fictional extension of Eggers because of Eggers's self-conscious writing style he perfected in *A Heartbreaking Work*; Eggers's writing style is characterized by self-criticism that he anticipates from his readers: he writes about his own writing what he believes his readers think as they read. The critic John Leonard writes that "Some of us are old enough to be nostalgic for the days when smart writers solved their self-consciousness problems before sending a book to the printers" and that Eggers should "trust himself" instead of "forever taking [his] own temperature" (9). Eggers equips Hand with this self-consciousness throughout the *Interruption*, which further connects the author to his character. But of course, this is the writing of the playfully complex Dave Eggers, and there is more than one layer to the statements about fiction and nonfiction in Hand's interruptive claims. For one, he writes that nonfiction is more powerful than fiction, yet he is a fictional character. If *Velocity*'s audience sees the character Hand as that, simply a fictional character, then a fictional character claiming that nonfiction is more powerful than fiction comes across as ludicrous. On the other hand, if we see Hand as a characterized extension of the author Dave Eggers, then the claim takes on a different meaning: it proves how Dave Eggers

uses his fiction to satirically lampoon these claims of the critics and banter with them about the purpose of fiction and writing fiction.

But the bantering doesn't end with *Velocity*; instead it continues with an epitext of *Velocity*, the McSweeney's website that Eggers founded. A writer named Colin McEnroe wrote and submitted a clever essay entitled "I Am Michiko Kakutani" that McSweeney's published on the site. Although Eggers did not write "I Am Michiko Kakutani" himself, the comical piece exhibits how Eggers's conversation with the critics did not stop with Hand's *Interruption*: it continues on with fans of the novel and other writers. The essay does not specifically mention *Velocity*, but that it was published on Eggers's website shows a continuation of the conversation that Eggers began with the critics when he wrote the original version of *Velocity*; they retaliated, as he knew they probably would, he retaliated, and the story continues.

The "I Am Michiko Kakutani" essay deserves a mention because it mocks the critic in a more overt way than Hand's *Interruption* does. (Of course Eggers does not mention names of literary critics in Hand's *Interruption*. He's not *that* contrary.) Hand's *Interruption* has a more generalized overview of the reviews, while this essay argues that Colin McEnroe and his buddies created the entity of Michiko Kakutani, and that it started as an "innocent college prank" that has "gotten seriously out of hand" (par. 1). McEnroe then writes that as Kakutani, he is "tired of being the skunk at the American literary garden party. Do you know what it took out of me to grab a whip and a chair, to go into a steel cage and get this whole Toni Morrison tiger under control" (par. 6)? Clearly Eggers and the McSweeney's subculture poke fun at Kakutani and other literary reviewers, but by doing so they almost succumb to what they claim to reject; after all, recognizing the

power of reviewers such as Kakutani shows that they are at least paying attention to what literary reviewers have to say about the work.

But enough picking on Michiko Kakutani. To continue with Christopher Tayler's review of *Velocity* in the *London Review of Books*, he closes his review with the sentence "Self-obsession is Eggers's subject as well as his method, but it tends to hollow out his characters; Will, Hand, and Jack never really come to life; in Eggers's world people are just 'extras, paid to drive to and fro'" (24). However, Eggers solves this with Hand's Interruption because it further develops his character. After reading the original McSweeney's *Velocity*, the audience craves more of Hand's wild, cartoonish gestures that bring a comedic element to the novel. For example, it is Hand's plan to tape a portion of Will's money to Senegalese donkeys, but of course, readers see it through Will's narration:

The donkey plan was Hand's. As we drove, hair still wet, we looked for donkeys standing alone so we could tape money to their sides for their owners to find. We wondered what the donkey owners would think. What would they think? We had no idea. Money taped to a donkey? It was a great idea, we knew this. The money would be within a pouch we'd make from the pad of graph paper we'd brought, bound with medical tape. On the paper Hand, getting Sharpie all over his fingers, wrote a note of greeting and explanation. That message [accompanied by three lightening bolt streaks in the original text]: HERE I AM ROCK YOU LIKE A HURRICANE. (Eggers Vintage 94-5).

Will at least credits Hand with the uproarious plan, but this is the type of characterization that in part convinces Hand to write his Interruption: to make more of himself than a flat, comedic character. Before explicating Hand and Will's donkey experience further, in response to Christopher Taylor's comment that *Velocity's* characters do not ever "come to life," Hand's Interruption does more than show how he can come to life: his Interruption shows how he can explode, causing remnants of the novel to disengage even more than they already have throughout Will's narration (24).

Yet the donkey passage is worth dwelling on for other reasons beside showing Hand's comedic yet flat characterization; the passage serves as a symbol of the paradox that Hand and Will represent: two American males generous enough to give away money but careless and contrary enough to waste paper and tape the money to an animal. They have also romanticized giving away the money without considering that the people they try to give it to will find it offensive. Taping the money to the donkeys allows for Will and Hand to do what they intended to do without exhibiting misunderstood and possibly untoward behavior, but they do not consider or perhaps care about the most likely outcome: that the money will fly away and no one will ever find it. The money will be wasted, but Will will leave Senegal feeling a sense of achievement; getting rid of the money always seems to trump giving it to people who willingly need and accept it. Will and Hand are too wrapped up in the ephemeral moments of their trip to anticipate all of the possible outcomes that literally throwing away Will's money will cause, and more often than not, effort feels like Will's selfish wish and nothing more. But, because Hand and Will cannot locate any donkeys standing without people nearby, they eventually give "up taping money to animals" and are "now looking for people. Anyone to unload the

money on” (Eggers Vintage 99). “Unload,” a loaded word, suggests that Will and Hand want to free themselves of the money without considering the best avenues to do so.¹¹ Like much of Eggers’s writing, the giving subverts and becomes a getting for Hand and Will; they are not on this journey around the world to help those in need, but to help themselves come to terms with their friendship and their individual psyches.

Between its humorous lines, the passage not only makes a relevant statement about the relationships of world economics to selfish and even personal behavior, it also gives the reader more clues to Hand’s character and his possible motivations for his Interruption. Although Will and Hand never tape the money onto the animals, Hand seems more enthusiastic than Will about the process as he actively scrawls the rock-n-roll lyrics onto the paper. Later in Hand’s Interruption, we see (literally through a photograph and also through Hand’s words) that the pig has washed up on the beach where he is staying and writing; Hand’s association with animals, especially animals like a pig and a donkey, symbolizes his own behavior, which is at times obnoxious, dumb, and inappropriate.

Although the motivations of Hand, Will, and Eggers may seem indiscernible, the pig that Hand discovers on the beach in New Zealand as he writes his Interruption, the pig that he claims symbolizes “nothing,” helps indicate the implications of both Hand and Eggers’s motivation (Eggers Vintage 298). Eggers’s/Hand’s addition of “An Interruption,” and the simple sentence that concludes “An Interruption,” “The pig symbolizes nothing,” could lead readers to a red herring interpretation; in fact, the pig symbolizes *everything*, and realizing this adds the character depth to Hand and Will that

¹¹ I am impressed, however, that Hand and Will are not inseminating various females and then leaving the women to change dirty diapers as the characters in Kerouac’s *On the Road* tend to do as they gallivant across North America.

the reviewers criticized the McSweeney's *Velocity* for not having (298). The sentence also pokes fun at the literary techniques (such as the aforementioned Interruption and the blank pages that symbolize a boat skipping over water) that Eggers himself uses (Eggers Vintage 298).

If the reader views the pig as a symbol of Hand's "Interruption" or as a symbol of Hand himself (because Hand, like the "Interruption" and the pig often becomes an anomaly to the main plot; in a sense, Hand *is* the interruption), the negative connotations attached to the word pig imply that one cannot fully trust Hand. People see pigs as dirty and ugly creatures, almost lepers of the animal kingdom. Humans eat them and most usually do not keep them as pets because most see them as filthy creatures only good for bacon or ham. Therefore, if readers can attach these connotations of the word "pig" to the Interruption, then readers will begin to see Hand's Interruption as skeptical and unreliable, especially because according to Will's narration Hand embellishes and Hand constantly gives the reader reasons to doubt him through phrases where he describes himself as "losing his holy damned mind," "illuminating the manuscript," "going soft and weird," and states that the ocean is "starting to warp" him and he's "had a bottle and a half of Pinot Grigio" (along with the vodka and Orangina) (Eggers Vintage 254, 256-257, 291). Furthermore, the reader cannot even fully trust that a pig actually exists on the sand; Hand includes a picture of the pig in the text, but since he is known as someone who "gets most of one's information from the internet," it becomes second nature not to trust Hand and to assume that the picture could have come from the internet as well (162).

Hand continues his clarification of his statement about the pig, writing that it is the “one that washed ashore behind the house” (Eggers Vintage 298). The reader must wonder why Hand feels the need to discuss the pig— he mentions the pig seven times and includes a picture of the animal in his forty-seven page “Interruption”—with this frequency, forgetting the pig is unlikely. The need to constantly reaffirm this detail makes Hand seem even less trustworthy, as if he must convince the reader over and over that he’s telling the truth when his repetition accomplishes the opposite of what he hopes.

Hand describes the morning as “dry and clear”—most of his time spent on the island has been clouded with rain, and the “dry and clear” morning signifies that he might make a fresh start in his life without Will and through the cathartic process of writing the Interruption (Eggers Vintage 298). Hand’s understated mountaintop experience with the newness of the morning continues as he steps “onto the deck” (298). Hand doesn’t stand on the sand with the pig, but above it. He gathers his final thoughts for his Interruption as he stands on the deck and looks out onto the ocean; however, his moment on the deck also symbolizes his isolation—Will died, Hand’s island girlfriend Sonje went back to Auckland to see her husband, and Jack (if the reader believes that Jack, in fact, did exist), is still dead. The naturally social Hand (or Eggers as the puppeteer) has no one to perform for but the reader, the sole audience of the Interruption.

Then suddenly, instead of the pig, a “low mound” remains on the beach (Eggers Vintage 298). The allusion to burial and the covering of the pig signifies that Hand has indeed gotten some closure regarding Will’s death through his trip to the island and through his reading and “revision” to *Velocity*. Hand writes that the only reason “Jack is there” in Will’s narrative is “so Will could write about pain,” and the pig on the beach

appears in Hand's Interruption so that he can deal with Will's death; the dead pig both symbolizes Will's death and distracts Hand from the pain of his loss (Eggers Vintage 296). Whether or not the pig really exists does not matter in a sense; Hand needs to process Will's death, and if projecting a buried pig onto a beach does the job, then the reader feels the need to appease him. He then says that he's "not sure if someone buried it there, or if the sand just built up around it" (298). His speech becomes visibly uncertain at this point with the "not sure," and for the first time, the reader can see Hand as vulnerable, someone who, in fact, does not know all the answers. This does not make him more credible, but more likeable and relatable to the reader.

Credibility remains a pressing issue of the Vintage edition of *Velocity*. The last sentence of the Interruption, "The pig symbolizes nothing," has honestly, caused me much despair (Eggers Vintage 298). Taken literally, the sentence seems like Eggers's revenge on the critics and his final statement written in the voice of his puppet, Hand; Hand is mad at the ghostwriter for using "cute little device[s]" such as putting the first page on the cover, he is mad at the publisher for titling the story *You Shall Know Our Velocity* instead of *Sacrament* (267). As Eggers's puppet, Hand's issues with the text and potshots at the literary world spring to life in sections like "This is something Mark Twain wrote, or Samuel Clemens wrote, or whatever: 'To string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they are absurdities, is the basis of the American art'" (268). In reviews of the first edition of *Velocity*, critics noted that Eggers's first work of fiction was influenced by Twain, yet they criticized it for stringing "incongruities and absurdities together" (268). For example, Roz Kaveney writes in the *Times Literary Supplement* that

“Dave Eggers has learnt a lot about storytelling from Mark Twain” (21). In addition, Christopher Tayler notes in the *London Review of Books* that Will “falls over, too, at the author’s convenience, and contemplates the deeper origins of his gloom. This seems mechanical after a while” to which Hand replies that he has:

never seen Will cry, though I know he has, and I have never been near him when he’s done anything like this, and if there were ever someone who would not bawl in public on the ground, in front of strangers, for it was their judgment he worried about most—it was Will. (280)

In other words, if Will’s breakdown never happened, no one can criticize it. Hand also recognizes the reviewer’s tendency to criticize the first sentence on the McSweeney’s website cover. Kaveney writes that it appears Eggers “could not wait to start the story” and Hand, no doubt with an eye-roll, retorts that “something must have given [Will] that sense of urgency about things” (Kaveney 21, Eggers Vintage 269). Hand’s specific language carries on the conversation with the reviewers, as if he is directly replying to them. Hand’s final phrase, “The pig symbolizes nothing,” subverts itself, especially because earlier Hand mentions that “there’s no chance [the pig’s] there by chance”; those four words are evidence enough that Hand and his puppeteer are up to something that amounts to more than a mound of sand over a dead animal that allegedly means nothing (269, 298).

However, the quirky Eggers may not even care if these critics read Hand’s Interruption in the Vintage edition and noticed his attempt to continue the debate. But, by throwing in the Interruption, Eggers illustrates that he could have written a novel that would have pleased everyone; instead he chose to write the novel the way he wanted.

Still, his message, told through Hand, implies that he cares enough to comment on the criticisms of not just his novel, but perhaps novels in general. After all, the nature of reviews is not to give a universal interpretation but an opinion on the text they have in front of them.

At this point many questions remain unanswered. Hand's harangue can mean nothing, something, or nothing and something. To the uninformed reader, Hand is a pompous yet loveable character who boasts obscure trivia as brilliant knowledge, a character "half-insane and half-insufferable and always puerile"¹² who perks up the novel where he "personally found the plot, or whatever it was, to begin waning" (Eggers Vintage 269, 251). To this audience, Hand's writing is an avenue for him to rant and rave. But to the informed reader, Hand's comments refer to the success of Eggers's memoir in a blurring of character and author. Hand agrees with the critics by saying that "nonfiction, when written well is unequivocally more powerful than fiction," but then accuses the critics of desiring fiction because they have "decadent" minds (276). And in typical Hand and Eggers's fashion, Hand then safeguards Eggers by stating that it "is the opinion of a man who knows nothing" (276).

Although Dave Eggers comes across as Hand's puppet master, the novel symbolically begins with Will drowning and ends with Will jumping into a swimming

¹² Although Hand constantly includes obscure trivia, books, and cultural figures as part of his discourse in order to make himself seem more reliable when, in fact, it has the opposite effect, a number of his facts do check out—Robert Pershing Wadlow was recorded as "the tallest man ever, born in Alton, Illinois," and the kiwi of New Zealand do have "a long curved beak" (see appendix for cross-references) (Eggers Vintage 258, 253, *Wikipedia*). However, I could not find any information on "Teirno's microbe-hunter book"—there is an African author who goes by the name of "Tierno Monénembo," but he writes mostly on genocide (*Wikipedia*). The primary text on microbe-hunting entitled *The Microbe Hunters* was written by Paul de Kruif and first published in 1923 (Nabel 80). Although my sources for this information were *Wikipedia* and a random website found from a search engine, not considered scholarly in most circles, "the result speaks for itself" (Eggers 268).

pool with his mouth wide open; the act of Will jumping into the pool open mouthed not only brings to mind puppetry gone awry—it also alludes to the title of the book and the mythology that *You Shall Know Our Velocity* conveys. During their romp around the world, Will and Hand come across a character named Raymond. (Hand states in his Interruption that Raymond’s name is actually Sean, but that is the only part of Will’s Raymond subplot line that Hand disagrees with (Eggers Vintage 279)). Raymond tells Hand the story of his ancestors, the Jumping People, who “were more or less native to Chile” (368). These ancestors known as the Jumping People, as the scholar and anthropologist Les Zanusmapsne explains, believe that they were born with the voices and souls of their ancestors in their blood (12). In other words, the intangible aspects of their ancestors, such as their memories, dreams, and emotional states, were passed down through families by blood, specifically by the mother’s umbilical cord (Zanusmapsne 12). The Jumping People did not consider this a curse, but something to be proud of; Hand compares it to carrying around a mountain in one’s soul, a mountain that one would want “to be strong and dense, because that means your family has lived lives of great experience” (Zanusmapsne 13, Eggers Vintage 369).

Zanusmapsne’s research does not suggest reincarnation—nor does Hand as he confidently states that “it’s not a reincarnation kind of thing”—but more of seeing the self as an amalgam of past and present souls: Hand describes it as being “a voice in the chorus” (Zanusmapsne 13, Eggers Vintage 370). But why are they called the Jumping People? The answer is simple: “Ages ago these people, a thousand years ago or whatever, were bird-worshippers” (Eggers Vintage 372). Zanusmapsne adds:

Tripudius Populus, commonly known as the Jumping People, were totally enamored with aerial navigation, much more so than other primordial tribes. The first ornithologists on record, *Tripudius Populus* scrutinized the anatomy of the *Phaethon rubricauda* as well as the velocity of the *Phaethon rubricauda* in flight in order to discern the best method of aeronautics for themselves. They experimented with human dyspnoea and compared to that of the ornithology subjects they would capture for investigation purposes. Tripudius Populus's passion for becoming airborne was nothing short of the North Carolinian Wright Brothers. Unfortunately, Tripudius Populus did not have the resources of modern technology, thus leading to the abrupt and unfortunate self-genocide of the entire tribal peoples. (13)

His explanation of the Jumping People solidifies the passion that Hand conveys to Will. By showing the scientific research done on the Jumping People, Zanusmapsne gives more credibility to Hand. Zanusmapsne continues with a more scientific extrapolation¹³, but Hand explains the Jumping People in layman's terms:

To them it was about air intake. They figured—you know, come to think of it, their science was pretty naïve, but it was ambitious in a way. They were really trying to figure things out. So they theorized that the birds were taking something from the air that they weren't, or processing it

¹³ The article by Les Zanusmapsne, a nice anagram of Suzanne Samples, is purely a work of fiction. It was created and included to show how easily authors like Eggers vacillate between fact and fiction. The Jumping People never actually existed. However, *Tripudius Populus* does translate to Jumping People; my Latin minor did come in handy. Although a fictional anthropologist does not really give Hand more credibility, I personally believe Hand wanted to give his character a bit of a boost. Plus, the article was created on April Fool's Day.

differently, or something. They saw these birds as vessels for gases, like balloons, with the wings just guidance tools. So they figured that they could be vessels for gas, too Lighter than air. So they started jumping. (Eggers Vintage 373)

The Jumping People fascinate Hand beyond belief. Hand pontificates that he and Will need to become more like the Jumping People because of their free spirits and life philosophies, especially the message that the Jumping People leave on a cave wall for Spanish conquistadors to see. You guessed it: “YOU SHALL KNOW OUR VELOCITY” (377)! Hand “bellowed” the phrase into “the cold exhausted city” of Riga, as if he and Will have already been doing their best to imitate the Jumping People as they hop from country to country, ignorant yet attempting to figure out just how the rest of the world works and how, exactly, they fit into its scheme (377).

In sense the Jumping People are another symbol of puppetry; as they jump open-mouthed to their death, they resemble puppets dropping, their mouths manipulated by a puppet master so they can speak, or in Eggers’s case, write. But Dave Eggers does not bring out his marionettes only at the end to dance and close the curtain on his novel. Foreshadowing of the puppetry takes place as early as page 137 when Hand and Will decide to swim after dark in Senegal. They encounter an eccentric woman named Annette who, as the trio swims, observes that they are “just a bunch of heads...Just [our] heads. Frightening!” (Eggers Vintage 139). The water literally separates their heads from their bodies, as if the liquid has decapitated them. Will then makes an odd confession to this woman that he barely knows; he tells her that sometimes he thinks “about swimming without any legs” (139). In this section of the novel, Will and Hand’s disjointed bodies in

and above the water mimic the disjointed nature of the strange occurrences that they have had so far, most notably with Annette; it is as if they have no control over what happens to their physical bodies and their ultimate destiny. Furthermore, Annette tries to convey to Will and Hand that “We must see each setting and moment as whole. Different, independent. A staging ground” (141). The phrase “staging ground” immediately puts Will on edge. He wonders “*Why does she keep saying ‘staging ground’?* I will ask her. *No, don’t.* Why does someone whose English is imperfect know a term like this ‘staging ground’?” (141)? In the context of the fictional situation, Annette’s comment about the staging ground makes Will uncomfortable; however, her comment also puts the reader on guard as we begin to see Dave Eggers’ intentions for his characters: to push, pull, and manipulate them in any possible way that he can.

In the context of *Velocity*, a staging ground, or a location where someone plans or initiates an idea, contains a dense metatextual meaning. One can argue that all novels, even all pieces of art, are types of staging grounds: the author begins with a blank page and can create and combine any combination of letters he or she wants to convey meaning. With *Velocity*, however, the phrase hints at Dave Eggers’s admission that his fictional characters must live and die at the mercy of their author. Although an author must manipulate his or her characters to some extent in order for them to come alive at all, the question becomes does Dave Eggers carry his manipulation too far? At times, the allusions to manipulation and puppetry almost come across as bragging about his authorial privileges, and this causes the reader to distrust the narration even more. An example of this occurs when Hand questions whether or not “we achieve a state of elevation, as we read and write? That’s probably a stretch” (Eggers *Vintage* 297).

Readers can take “we” as a general pronoun or as a slip in Hand’s writing indicating that although he is the character, Eggers not only creates his thoughts but also *dictates* them. If the thoughts of Will and Hand are overshadowed by the authorial intentions of Dave Eggers, it becomes difficult to trust the author and the characters: Dave Eggers, at times, needs to let loose of the marionette strings and let his characters develop to their true potentials without his manipulation. However, without Eggers’s manipulation and integration of himself into his characters, Hand would fall flat. And, as Hand believes, the characters Eggers produce fulfill “a social demonstration of a partly unknowable internal state, a messy combination” that represents both life and writing (296-297).

The Multiple Meanings of Ink Wet Texts: *Velocity*'s Never Ending Journey through Epitexts and Feminist Critique

“You don't know what you're talking about.”
--Pilar to Hand in “The Only Meaning of Oil Wet Water”

Perhaps the authorial manipulation of Hand and Will slows their development, and this is why *Velocity* is constantly being revised and added to. In fact, when Eggers published his book of short stories, *How We Are Hungry*, he included a story entitled “The Only Meaning of the Oil Wet Water” (yet another *Velocity* epitext) that features the relationship between Hand and Pilar, a minor character from *Velocity* who appears and disappears within a page of the novel. In *Velocity* “Pilar, olive toned and in high school dazzling and much-coveted, had given [Will] one night, after she and Jack were no more, though it was obvious then that it was Jack who she cared for and [Will] was a consolation, an approximation” (Eggers Vintage 20). Will's self pity overshadows the problem with Pilar's sudden entrance and exit: that to Will and Hand, she is seen as nothing more than a sexual object for them to use. Examining Pilar and Hand's masochistic treatment of her also enlightens the audience about Hand's character and his reliability as a narrator.

Eggers writes Pilar as a character who is aware of her status of a sexual symbol in both *Velocity* and “The Only Meaning”; in some ways Pilar embraces her status and comes across to the audience as a powerful female, but at other times Eggers treats Pilar as a throwaway, cardboard character placed in the novel and story as nothing more than an outlet for Will and Hand's sexual pleasure. Eggers metatextually presents Pilar to the

reading audience just as he presents her to Will and Hand: as a puppet for men's sexual pleasure and objectification.

In "The Only Meaning of the Oil Wet Water," Eggers writes the story from a third person limited perspective; the audience has access to Pilar's thoughts but only through Hand's actions and his dialogue. However, Pilar remains objectified throughout the short story. Eggers describes her as "At thirty-one she was still unmarried and Hand was one of her few old friends also still unmarried, and the only attractive old friend she'd never slept with" (*How* 23). Just from the description, Pilar comes across as both desperate for a husband and promiscuous; the beginning of the phrase, "At thirty-one she was still unmarried," implies that at as a woman at thirty-one, Pilar should feel the need to settle down with a man (23). "The only attractive old friend she'd never slept with" suggests that Pilar displays lascivious behavior; however, Hand's sexual escapades are portrayed as laudable and they are not scrutinized.

The exploitation of Pilar's sexuality and supposed desperation continues as she thinks about Hand and when she will sleep with him. (Eggers writes her as a woman who will, without question, sleep with Hand.) Before Hand and Pilar meet in Central America, she considers that Hand is "still alive, and not only still alive, but *here*" (Eggers *How* 26). This description of Hand makes Pilar seem as if she would have sexual intercourse with Hand simply because he is a breathing male that she happens to know, further making her seem desperate enough to travel thousands of miles to copulate with the only living friend left in the Hand, Will, and Jack friendship triumvirate. As "The Only Meaning" continues, in addition to the narrator exploiting Pilar's sexuality, Hand also openly

criticizes Pilar's behavior in regards to her gender. Although Hand claims that he does this because he cares about her, he feels it necessary to go:

into great detail about what the men in the town had been doing when she'd been walking by. There was the guard in front of the bank, who carried a semiautomatic rifle and, according to Hand, looked Pilar up and down and inside out each time they went into the bank or passed by. How does she decide not to wear a bra? Hand wanted to know this. Not to alarm her, he said, but men covet certain women, women they see everyday. So perhaps it would behoove her—he used this word—to do more to disinvite the gaze of these men. (47)

Before Hand chastises Pilar's behavior, she feels free and in control; she even wants to protect Hand from sharks, thinking that she “wanted him not to be attacked by sharks. She wanted to sit on him” (46). Afterward, however, Pilar must deal with the double dilemma of Hand's possessive behavior and the “gaze” of the men that Hand sees watching her as they travel down the street (47). As Hand watches the men watch Pilar, she becomes trapped by the looking.

In her essay “Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey addresses this type of gaze and looking by using psychoanalytic theory to demonstrate how the unconscious of patriarchy has structured film, which in turn reflects reality. Mulvey defines the term scopophilia—the pleasure in looking—and applies it to the active male/passive female either/or binary model. Mainstream film combines spectacle with narrative, but if the female is always the object of erotic desire, her narrative loses force (Mulvey 433-440). Although “The Only Meaning” is a short story and not a film,

Mulvey's theory proves applicable, especially with *Velocity* and "The Only Meaning"'s excessive metatextuality and allusions to puppetry. While Hand chastises Pilar for walking the Central American streets braless, he urges her "to do more to disinvite the gaze of these men" (Eggers *How* 47). Hand places the onus of the scopophilic gaze onto Pilar, as if she can stop the looking of the men just by altering the way she dresses. Once Hand realizes how angry Pilar is with his criticism—Pilar becomes "speechless. She was furious and confused and ashamed and wanted to club him and kick him and jump on his head"-- Hand tries to appease her by saying that he cares about her, but the damage has been done: Hand has revealed his piggish, chauvinistic self and Dave Eggers has further cemented his inability to write a convincing female character, something that the reviewers of *Velocity* criticized him for doing in the novel (Eggers *How* 45).¹⁴

After Hand's judgment of Pilar, she sticks out her lower teeth:

like a piranha's. She knew she did this. She was angry that it was now this way with them, and so soon: she was not free. She would be given advice, or whatever it was. They paddled and she focused on the broken hillside. She put Hand in a new category. He was *that*. This was this, and nothing more. (47)

Eggers's portrayal of Pilar as an angry piranha does nothing to convince the reader that as an author, he writes the female sex fairly. Furthermore, although she becomes angry with Hand, Eggers never gives her the voice to tell him so; Pilar continues on with the vacation as if she takes Hand's advice and continues the remainder of her vacation living by his rules. Still, Pilar's internal dialogue, especially the way she ends two ambiguous

¹⁴ John Leonard, critic for *The New York Times*, argues that *Velocity* was written as if women are "all either schoolmarms or saloon girls" (9).

sentences with “He was *that*. This was this, and nothing more” do more than show her heated feelings toward Hand: they continue the metatextuality that Eggers has displayed in *Velocity* and continues to flaunt in “The Only Meaning” (47). “*That*” describes Hand’s chauvinism without explicitly stating it; it is almost as if Eggers does not want to grant Pilar the words to explain Hand’s attitude because doing so would empower her too much. “This was this, and nothing more” simultaneously describes Pilar’s relationship with Hand (she, of course, wants a relationship and not an expected and certainly commendable one night stand, according to Hand anyway), and Eggers’s obsessive metatextuality.

But maybe I am not giving Dave Eggers enough credit when it comes to his portrayal of the female sex. Pilar (the name itself means worthwhile, a pillar of strength), is the only character in *Velocity* and “The Only Meaning” who links Hand, Will, and Jack, if he did, in fact, exist. Which brings up an interesting point; in “The Only Meaning,” Will is mentioned briefly, further making “The Only Meaning” a continuation of *Velocity*. When Pilar and Hand search for a place to eat dinner, a single sentence describing Hand also becomes a memorial paragraph to Will: “[Hand] had traveled widely in the past few years, since a trip with a mutual friend of theirs, now dead, had brought him halfway around the world in a week” (Eggers *How* 29). Although according to *Velocity* Pilar and Jack “dated” and his death supposedly “brought her transformation” from an athletic build to a “rangy” skeletal build, neither she, Hand, or the narrator overtly mention Jack in the short story (Eggers *Velocity* Vintage 19). The narrator, however, concludes that Hand and Pilar:

were alive, though neither of them could have predicted with certainty that at their age they would both be alive—people flew on airplanes and drove cars after many drinks, and every time they were away from each other or their family or friends, it seem very likely to be the last” (Eggers *How* 33).

The subtle mention of their deceased friends, especially the line “drove cars after many drinks,” suggests that Jack did exist; in *Velocity* Jack dies when a semi with a presumably drunk driver runs over his car (*How* 32). Pilar brings these facts to life, the facts that threaten to disprove the supposed lies of Will that Hand tries to disprove in his Interruption.

So does this mean that everything Hand says in his Interruption is completely true or false? Not exactly. In fact, it just adds to the already present textual inconsistencies that *Velocity* and its different versions present to the reader. Apparently after Will and Hand’s trip and after Hand’s furlough to New Zealand, Hand takes a job with Intel in Nicaragua. The narrator concludes that “this was the sort of arrangement he always landed—well paying, low-commitment, impossible to explain” (Eggers *How* 20). After the journeys (both emotional and physical) that Hand has endured, he still refuses to grow up; he confesses to Pilar that “in the past twenty-four hours he’d spaced her arrival,” he maintains a “look of country madness that everyone who knew him noted,” and he refuses to speak in English without a “guttural Spanish accent,” even though “Pilar wished he would stop” (*How* 27, 29). His unreliable narration in *Velocity*’s Interruption is only reinforced by his personality ticks and immaturity that he displays in “The Only Meaning of the Oil Wet Water.”

And even though the narrator of “The Only Meaning of the Oil Wet Water” is unknown, the writing style of the story is hauntingly similar to the style of *Velocity*, especially Hand’s Interruption. When Hand and Pilar arrive at their hotel in Costa Rica, wild horses dot the lawn; these wild horses remind readers of Hand’s pig. The horses seem bizarre, out of place, and insignificant to the plot. But are they? The narrator describes the horses at length, declaring that:

At the hotel, two were sitting in the grass, as if they’d been waiting, patiently but with pressing business, the white one glowing faintly like a star on the ceiling of a child’s bedroom. The third and fourth were standing on the road, by the hedge, their dark hair shining. (Eggers *How* 32)

The immediate tendency is to attempt an analysis of what the horses symbolize. Horses, especially ones that run wild, signify freedom. In connection to Hand and Pilar, the horses reflect their trip; Pilar, a meticulous planner, works as a dermatologist and “loved her life” even though “the only transcendent experiences she’d had began with provocation of her skin” (*How* 20, 44). The description relays to the audience a clue about Pilar’s character, but it also objectifies her by arguing that her only pleasure comes from sex and not from her job, friends, or hobbies. She cautions Will and Hand before they take their trip by inquiring why they do not “really do the trip right, like take a summer or something? You won’t see anything” (Eggers *Velocity* Vintage 20). But in “The Meaning of the Oil Wet Water,” Pilar wants to take risks and chances; she even wants to go to Nicaragua because it “sounded dangerous” (Eggers *How* 21). Because four horses sit on the grass, readers of *Velocity* and the short story find themselves associating

the horses with the four main characters: Will, Hand, Jack, and now Pilar. Discerning which horse represents which character, however, becomes trickier; let us assume that the white horse represents Hand because of its “star” (*How* 20). Pilar believes Hand to be somewhat of a star, someone who has “a world full of beautiful future leaders, each with a thousand fulfillable promises” (*How* 34). But, we must remember that the white horse is not compared to an actual star, but a plastic one “on the ceiling of a child’s bedroom,” which makes the horse (and Hand) seem like false, produced versions of a glowing celestial being (*How* 32). Presumably the other horse in the grass symbolizes Pilar; we do not know anything about the horse except that it sits with the white one, much like Pilar accompanies Hand but is only known as a sexual object. The black horses, undoubtedly a representation of death, signify Will and Jack, the two deceased friends. (Or, perhaps, the symbol of one passed friend and one character invented by the passed friend.) But of course, as in Hand’s Interruption when “The pig symbolizes nothing,” in “The Only Meaning of Oil Wet Water,” the narrator attempts to convince the audience that “The horses had no symbolic value” (*Velocity* Vintage 298, *How* 32).

So now what? If the horses—which are a step up from a pig; Hand’s growth as a character can be shown through the animal evolution from his Interruption to the short story—and the pig truly symbolize nothing, then why put them in a story at all unless to show that they really do symbolize something or that fiction does not require symbols in order to convey a particular point? Both the pigs and the horses may not symbolize particular themes in the story, but they do symbolize the effects of the texts: that Dave Eggers can use not only his characters but also his texts in the puppet show he puts on for his readers and critics alike. Nothing he writes has a singular, “Only” meaning, but

polyphonic meanings that extend out from the originals texts and into the paratexts that *Velocity* has created around itself.

Conclusion: The Puppeteer's Final Bow? Probably Not.

YSKOV has many cryptic strands which seem to hint mysterious depths of subtext.
--Christopher Tayler

If nothing else, the textual inconsistencies show Eggers's ability to blur the lines between social structures and the art of writing. Without his combined status as an author who has been a finalist for a Pulitzer and an author who maintains his own small publishing house, Eggers would not have been able to carry on the conversation with the critics as he did with Hand's *Interruption*. Furthermore, the metatextuality allows for Eggers to further manipulate his characters so that he can carry on this conversation implicitly in his texts instead of relying on traditional sources such as interviews. Eggers uses his art to make a statement, but only those who have continued along the novel's entire textual journey may notice the use of metatextuality and its effects. The reader who only reads the McSweeney's first edition may feel vicariously satisfied at Will's final statement of "We lived!," and the reader who stops at the Vintage edition bookstore purchase will remain bewildered (Eggers Vintage 371). Even if the structural devices that Eggers uses seem gimmicky or kitschy, they do work to support the structure of the plot and add depth to Hand and Will, even if one has to read four different printings to draw these conclusions.

Although *You Shall Know Our Velocity* is a single text, the inconsistencies of the various publications and the text's evolution show that publishing does not have to be a one-time chance at achieving what the author sets out to accomplish; the reader can acquire more knowledge about writing and the publishing industry from the differences in the various physical texts than he or she can by reading one version of a novel one

time. The different versions of a novel can create one meaning together that they cannot create separately. Altering a novel's physical text can also modify the characters, the plot line, and the reception of the content. However, the social position of an author can make a difference in the process; not every author has the economic means to spend so much effort ensuring that various texts have differences between them. When it comes to novels such as *Velocity*, the Vintage version and Hand's *Sacrament* destroy the original plot so much that they must be seen as a new text: the changes in Hand's *Interruption* are too drastic to align with the original, linear novel. Whether Hand can be trusted or not remains controversial; readers will never know the accurate version of the story because one does not exist. But, Hand's charm as a character and Will's death leaves readers no choice but to believe at least part of his story, even if it is fiction about fiction.

One also has to wonder if Eggers had it planned this way all along; surely a new high-caliber author would not publish his first novel with blatant screw-ups such as "typos, dropped text, and left-in editorial notations" (Watman 93). The mistakes seem too perfectly orchestrated in the grand scheme of *You Shall Know Our Velocity* to be errors, and each new discrepancy uncovered points more toward the idea that Eggers wants the last word, and maybe, just maybe, he gets it. In closing, it should be noted that Eggers leaves the official last page of *You Shall Know Our Velocity!*, numbered as page 401, blank in the Vintage text. Perhaps Dave Eggers is not finished yet.

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Appendix One: Cross-References from Footnote Twelve



Appendix Two: The Textual Journey of *Velocity*

Title	Publisher	Year of Publication	Interruption
<i>You Shall Know Our Velocity</i>	McSweeney's (US)	2002	No
<i>You Shall Know Our Velocity</i>	Hamish Hamilton (GB)	2002	No
<i>Sacrament</i>	McSweeney's (US)	2003	Yes
<i>You Shall Know Our Velocity!</i>	Vintage (US)	2003	Yes
<i>You Shall Know Our Velocity</i>	Penguin (GB)	2004	No