SIC 10

Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Literature but Were Afraid to Ask Žižek

russell sbriglia, editor

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SIC

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Russell Sbriglia, Editor

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Introduction: Did Somebody Say Žižek and *Literature*?

Russell Sbriglia

Slavoj Žižek between Theory and Post-Theory

Were one to ask a random literary critic or theorist what Slavoj Žižek knows about literature, the answer would more than likely be some variation on "not much." Indeed, if posed such a question himself, Žižek might very well answer, "Nothing!" Take, for instance, his recent "confession" that, when it comes to literature, "it is here that one encounters the very bottom of my bad taste." As evidence of such bad taste, he volunteers his opinion that "Daphne du Maurier is a much better writer than Virginia Woolf," an opinion likely to strike even the most strident of anticanonists as definitive proof that Žižek knows nothing about literature.[1] One might even imagine such critics responding in the form of the following line from the Marx Brothers' *Duck Soup*, one of Žižek's favorite classic Hollywood films: "This man may talk like an idiot, and look like an idiot, but don't let that fool you: he really is an idiot!"

Upon a closer look, however, perhaps there is more to this supposed idiocy than meets the eye, a resounding "something" to this seeming nothing after all. Conceding that du Maurier "tells stories without truly being a writer," for her works are marked by a "melodramatic excess," a "pathetic directness," and an overall "lack of style," Žižek nonetheless insists that this lack of literariness is less a fault of du Maurier's prose than a "formal effect of the fact that [her] narratives directly, all too directly, stage the fantasies that sustain our lives."[2] Žižek, of course, is here speak-

ing of fantasy in a psychoanalytic sense. As he explains, "far from being opposed to reality," fantasy is for psychoanalysis "that which provides the basic coordinates of what we experience as 'reality.'"[3] In the words of Jacques Lacan, the thinker to whom Žižek frequently swears dogmatic fidelity, "everything we are allowed to approach by way of reality remains rooted in fantasy."[4] And yet, as Žižek points out, in order to perform this function, our fantasies "ha[ve] to remain hidden, to exert [their] efficiency in the background."[5] Hence Freud's insistence that "if what [subjects] long for the most intensely in their phantasies is presented to them in reality, they none the less flee from it."[6] What Žižek finds "so compelling" about du Maurier's novels, then, "especially when compared to the aseptic politically correct feminism," is their "properly shameless, often embarrassing, direct staging of fantasies." Therein lies "the secret of the[ir] undisputed tremendous power of fascination."[7]

Among the most common accusations leveled at Žižek by his detractors—one that I will address more thoroughly below—is that his use of artworks (especially films) is "purely hermeneutic," that the works he invokes serve as merely "incidental illustrations of an already installed machine."[8] At first glance, such would seem to be the case here: importing the works of du Maurier into his "reading machine," the "terrible matrix" that he "appl[ies] . . . to everything," Žižek predictably discovers that the "secret" of their power lies in their illustration of the psychoanalytic axiom that our everyday lives are structured by fantasy.[9] And yet, when one looks more closely, it becomes clear that Žižek's reading of du Maurier is far more complex than this. In the first place, implicit in the connection that he draws between the melodramatic excesses of her works and their embarrassingly direct staging of fantasies is an argument regarding the relationship between fantasy and form—an argument that suggests that melodrama is the form both by and through which literature most directly stages (and accesses) our fantasies.[10] What's more, such a laudation of du Maurier's works despite—or, more precisely, *because of*—their melodramatic "unliterariness" participates in the project of steering literary critics away from the simple "But is it any good?" question—a question that long led works of melodrama to be dismissed as utterly devoid of aesthetic merit and thus utterly unworthy of serious consideration.[11] In the second place, what Žižek ultimately finds "so compelling"—not to mention enjoyable—about du Maurier's fic-

tion is what, in de Manian fashion, we might characterize as its "resistance to theory," in particular its immunity to the pull of psychoanalysis, its refusal to fit neatly into its own era's psychoanalytic weltanschauung.[12] Noting that the advent of so-called applied psychoanalysis fundamentally "transformed artistic literary practice," Žižek points out that whereas the works of an author like Eugene O'Neill "already presuppose psychoanalysis," those of du Maurier do not.[13] The "oblivion" to which du Maurier's works have been consigned, then, is for Žižek above all a result of their anachronicity, their "radical[ ] untimel[iness]."[14] Hence his claim that, "after reading a book by [du Maurier], it is difficult to avoid the vague sentiment of 'it is no longer possible to write like that today.'"[15] Thus, rather than belonging to the modernist era during which they were written, du Maurier's works more properly belong to the Victorian era, "the era limited, on the one side, by Romanticism and its notion of radical Evil ('pleasure in pain') and, on the other side, by Freud, by the direct impact of psychoanalysis on the arts."[16] As such, they occupy the "space of the heroic innocence of the Unconscious in which irresistible passions freely roam around."[17]

Far from confirming claims that Žižek's interest in works of literature lay solely in their exemplarity, in their ability to function as "allegories of theoretical doctrines," this reading of du Maurier—one that touches on issues of taste, style, form, periodization, and even reader response—demonstrates not only Žižek's interest in but also his respect for literature's singularity.[18] Yet such readings, of which there are many throughout his oeuvre, have gone largely unremarked by literary critics. Such an oversight may to some degree be a result of the fact that while Žižek is unabashedly theoretical, we are currently living in what a number of critics have agreed is a "post-theory" era.[19] Whereas the 1970s saw the Yale school of deconstruction grow out of the work of Jacques Derrida, and the 1980s saw the New Historicism grow out of the work of Michel Foucault, from the 1990s onward theory, at least in the United States, has, in the words of Nicholas Birns, remained "a formation frozen in place." More than that, theory has all but "broken up."[20] This is not to say that there has been a shortage of theorists. On the contrary, Birns points to contemporary figures like Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Judith Butler, Jacques Rancière, and Žižek. Such figures, however, are ultimately "theorists without 'theory,'" "something like giant, mountainous islands,

monumental yet at a standstill, looming over a sea of untheoretical historicists and anti-theoretical literary journalists."[21]

Of all these figures, Žižek presents the most interesting—and perplexing—case with respect to literary studies. As Birns points out, "though everyone in the humanities kn[ows] Žižek's work, it [has] not produce[d] readings the way the work of his predecessor theory stars had."[22] Indeed, to place a bit of pressure on Birns's pronouncement of theory's death, even if there is no longer an active network or clearly discernible school of theory in the Anglo-American academy, the influence of many other of the aforementioned theorists on literary studies has been considerable. Agamben's work on language, "potentiality," biopolitics, and exceptionalism, for instance, has spawned a number of studies, spanning virtually all periods of literary history, while Butler's influence on literary criticism and theory, an influence difficult to overstate, is reflected not only, or even primarily, by books and articles that engage her work directly, but also, more notably, by the very fact that her work has had arguably the single greatest influence on the trajectory of cultural studies over the past two decades, transforming disciplines such as women and gender studies (including third-wave feminism), queer studies, and disability studies, as well as reinvigorating more ostensibly literary avenues of inquiry such as speech act theory and performance studies.[23] When it comes to Žižek, however, though he is indeed universally known, his work, as I will address below, has had a much greater impact on film and media studies than literary studies.

This is not to say that literary critics have ignored Žižek altogether. Terry Eagleton and Geoffrey Harpham, two of today's leading literary critics and theorists, have written on Žižek at length.[24] Furthermore, there have been a handful of explicitly Žižekian approaches to literature, the most extensive of these being Shelly Brivic's *Joyce through Lacan and Žižek*.[25] Yet when looked at more closely, these direct engagements with Žižek's work prove just as exemplary of the two main problems one encounters when attempting to address its relevance to the study of literature as does the relative dearth of such work itself. The first of these problems is the impression that Žižek, whose penchant for using pop cultural artifacts to illustrate some of the most recondite principles of philosophy and psychoanalysis has led him to be crowned "the Elvis of cultural theory," is interested only, or at least primarily, in film. The sec-

ond is the impression that Žižek, in his self-professed dogmatic fidelity to Lacanian psychoanalysis, is merely an ambassador of Lacan, a figure whose heyday in literary studies has long since come and gone. Thus, Eagleton and Harpham are far more interested in (and far more beguiled by) Žižek's analyses of film (and of popular culture more generally) than of literature, while the very title of Brivic's book (to say nothing of its cover, which features a sketch of Lacan and Joyce face-to-face, absent Žižek) is indicative of the degree to which he deploys Žižek not as a thinker or theorist in his own right but as a mere interpreter of Lacan.[26] I will address the former problem—let's call it "the film problem"—at length below. For now, the latter problem—let's call it "the Lacan problem"—is more pressing.

Lacan *avec* Žižek; or, A Miserable Little Piece of the Real

Given the titles of many of Žižek's books—titles featuring phrases such as "everything you always wanted to know about Lacan," "an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture," "Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and out," and "how to read Lacan"—it is little wonder that Žižek is often thought of as, above all, an ambassador of Lacan. Lacan, of course, is no stranger to literary critics. His "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter'" (1955), "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious" (1957), and "The Signification of the Phallus" (1958), to name but a few of his more iconic *écrits*, have long been recognized as key works of structuralism, even poststructuralism. Indeed, in the American academy, Lacan is most often classified alongside contemporaries like Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Hélène Cixous, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva as a fellow (post)structuralist. Kristeva is perhaps the most notable in this regard, as the title of her first book in English, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (1980), is indicative of the semiolinguistic bent that Lacanian psychoanalysis was given by its early exponents.[27] In a sense, Kristeva and company had good reason for taking Lacan in this direction. Claims such as "the unconscious is structured like a language," "the subject is divided by language," "a letter always arrives at its destination," and "there is no metalanguage" beg linguistic, if not exactly literary, analysis. From this perspective, critics who know little about Žižek other than his dogmatic fidelity to Lacan-

ian psychoanalysis might well be tempted to view his work as little more than repetition with a minimal difference. What's more, in our current theoretical malaise, one characterized by an overwhelming feeling of exhaustion with the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Ricouer), the "semiotic challenge" (Barthes), and the "death" not just of the author (Barthes) but of the subject more generally (Derrida, Foucault, Butler), a return to Lacan is likely to strike most critics as the worst case of theoretical recidivism, a "defense of a lost cause," as Žižek himself would put it.[28]

However, as a number of the essays in this collection demonstrate, Žižek's Lacan is quite different from the poststructural Lacan with which literary critics have long been most familiar. In fact, Žižek often calls the very concept of poststructuralism into question, pointing out that, in itself, poststructuralism has never existed in France but is instead an invention of the Anglo-American "academic gaze," a gaze that brings together figures who are "simply not perceived as part of the same *épistème* in France."[29] Thus, in contrast to the poststructural Lacan of the sliding of the signifier, Žižek's Lacan is the Lacan of the Real—the Real being the third and most notoriously elusive of Lacan's "three orders" of psychic experience (the other two being the Imaginary and the Symbolic). As Žižek argues, when read according to the teaching of the later Lacan, the Lacan of the Real, the so-called logic of the signifier lies beyond both semiotics (what Žižek often refers to as "the 'structuralist' problematic") and hermeneutics.[30] Indeed, from the vantage point of the Real, the signifier is not to be read linguistically or semiotically but *objectively*, as a "traumatic kernel" or "stain" that resists symbolization (for it is impossible to enunciate the Real; hence Lacan's insistence that "there is no metalanguage") yet for that very reason sets the process of symbolization in motion. This recalcitrant, traumatic kernel of the Real is what Lacan termed the *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire.

As the unsymbolizable, unassimilable traumatic kernel at the very heart of the subject—the "*object in subject*" that is "in the subject more than the subject"—the Lacanian *objet petit a* holds the potential to steer literary criticism away from the hermeneutical dead ends in which it has all too often found itself of late and toward the difficult work of interpretation.[31] As Žižek notes of the incommensurability between hermeneutics and interpretation, whereas the hermeneut believes that everything can be translated into meaning, even distortions, the psychoanalyst

holds that "*meaning as such results from a certain distortion*," namely, the distortion caused by the subject's disavowal of the *objet petit a*.[32] In this Žižek follows Lacan, according to whom the goal of interpretation is "to isolate in the subject a kernel, a *kern*, to use Freud's own term, of *non-sense*."[33] For Žižek, then, psychoanalytic interpretation differs from hermeneutics insofar as its goal is not to glean meaning by tracing the differential/diacritical relationship between signifiers, but rather, as Lacan puts it, to discover "to what signifier—to what irreducible, traumatic, non-meaning—[the subject] is, as a subject, subjected."[34]

Žižek's focus on the *objet petit a*, the non-sensical object-in-subject that not only subjectivizes the subject but also brings about a rupture in the symbolic order, can likewise help return literary criticism to an engagement with what, to invoke an old formalist term, we might characterize as the "defamiliarization" occasioned by the literary work. In fact, defamiliarization is a precise aesthetic analogue of the psychoanalytic process of sublimation, that process whereby, as Lacan defined it, a common, everyday object is "elevated to the dignity of the Thing" (*das Ding*), reified into a sublime object.[35] Given the centrality of the sublime to Žižek's work—a centrality no better exemplified than by the fact that Žižek, through his focus on the *objet petit a*, associates sublimation with subjectivity as such—it is surprising just how little literary critics and theorists, among whom the sublime has long been one of the most privileged aesthetic categories, have had to say about it. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that, in keeping with the Lacanian logic of sublimation, Žižek's sublime objects are more apt to be "miserable 'little piece[s] of the Real'" than the "boundless, terrifying[,] imposing phenomena" typically cited by theorists of the sublime (e.g., stormy oceans, volcanoes, lofty waterfalls, majestic mountains—all of which Kant cites as examples of sublime objects in his *Critique of Judgment*).[36] In short, to apply Žižek's characterization of the films of David Lynch to his own work, the Žižekian sublime is a "ridiculous sublime."[37]

Žižek frequently sees works of literature as animated by and grappling with miserable/ridiculous sublime objects. In Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, he identifies as sublime objects both the infamous purloined letter and the puddle of detestable putridity into which the undead title character of "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar" deliquesces upon impossibly (and metalinguistically) pronouncing his own death.[38] He

finds an even more systematic pursuit of sublime objects in the works of Henry James, examples of which include the eponymous Aspern Papers, the secret meaning of author Hugh Vereker's novels in "The Figure in the Carpet," and the anxiously anticipated event that paralyzes the protagonist of "The Beast in the Jungle."[39] Other literary sublime objects identified by Žižek include the king's second body in Shakespeare's *Richard II*; the voice of the Monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; the eponymous count of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; the grandmother's voice in Proust's *The Guermantes Way*; the beam that almost kills Flitcraft, the protagonist of Sam Spade's parable in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*; the "black house" in Patricia Highsmith's story of the same name; Godot in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*; the forbidden place "beyond the barrier" in Stephen King's *Pet Sematary*; the eponymous perfume of Patrick Süskind's novel; Anton Chigurh in Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*; and many more.

Such a catalogue of Lacanian *objets petit a* brings us to the very heart of Žižek's "Lacan problem," a problem that Rex Butler confronts head-on when he asks, "Is it not possible that Žižek's own books are merely, as he himself puts it, an 'introduction to Lacan through popular culture' or 'everything you always wanted to know about Lacan (but were afraid to ask Hitchcock)'? That is to say, is there any point in actually reading Žižek?"[40] For the contributors to this volume, the respective answers to these questions are an emphatic "No!" and "Yes!" This is the case for two reasons. In the first place, as noted, Žižek's Lacan is a thoroughly original Lacan. Even if Žižek contributed nothing else to the study of literature, his disarticulation of Lacan from poststructuralism by way of his focus on the Real would in and of itself merit attention to his work from literary critics. For as a number of the essays here collected demonstrate, not only can literature help us to think the Real—as it clearly helps Žižek to do—but, more importantly for the field of literary studies, so too can the Real help us to think through (and with) works of literature and the literary in general. In the second place, as Žižek makes clear at the very outset of his first book in English, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), the ultimate purpose of his Lacanianism is "to accomplish a kind of 'return to Hegel'—to reactualize Hegelian dialectics by giving it a new reading on the basis of Lacanian psychoanalysis." For the only way to "save Hegel," Žižek insists, is to read him "through Lacan."[41] Thus, in

order to properly understand Žižek's philosophical project, literary critics must take into account not only his Lacanianism but his Hegelianism as well—a Lacano-Hegelianism whose "transcendental materialist" core can aid us in both theorizing and practicing new modes of literary critical ethics, politics, humanism, and materialism.[42]

Hegel *avec* Žižek; or, A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity

Adrian Johnston opens a recent book on Žižek by noting that "one of Žižek's most startling claims is his assertion that the Cartesian conception of subjectivity à la the cogito (especially as radicalized by Kant, Schelling, and Hegel) is, contrary to the prevailing intellectual consensus, anything but obsolete and outdated."[43] The consensus to which Johnston here alludes is the poststructural "death of the subject." An extrapolation of the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Louis Althusser, according to which the subject is merely a by-product of sociosymbolic matrices and ideological state apparatuses, poststructuralism sees the subject as an epiphenomenon of differential discursive networks.[44] Indeed, though the influence of the semiolinguistic vein of poststructuralist thought has waned in recent years, a number of "posthumanist" movements, among them various strains of affect theory, ecocriticism, animal studies, and object-oriented ontology, have carried on the poststructuralist project of placing the subject under erasure. Thus, another reason for Žižek's lack of adherents in literary studies may very well be his humanism.

Yet just as Žižek's Lacan is not the typical (post)structuralist Lacan, neither is Žižek's humanism of the typical variety. Grounded on the idealist radicalization of the Cartesian subject, according to which the subject is precisely the irreducible gap between the Kantian "I" of transcendental apperception and the Cartesian "thing that thinks" (*res cogitans*)—a gap that Hegel simply characterizes as "the negative"—Žižek's theory of the subject is not a metaphysics of presence but rather a metaphysics of absence or voidance. Following the German Idealists, the subject is for Žižek not self-present and self-transparent (as it was for Descartes, who believed that self-consciousness [the *cogito*] renders self-present and self-transparent the "thing" in me that thinks [*res cogitans*]); on the contrary, the subject is radically "out of joint" with both itself and the world. Yet

whereas for poststructuralists this out-of-jointness undermines (or, to adopt the common poststructuralist parlance, *deconstructs*) the subject, for Žižek, as for Hegel, this very out-of-jointness *is* the subject. As Hegel memorably asserts in his preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it is by "looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it" that the subject is subjectivized.[45] This is why Hegel identifies the subject—"the interior of [human] nature," "*pure Self*"—as "the night of the world," an "empty nothing which contains everything in its simplicity."[46] For Hegel, the subject emerges when self-consciousness itself becomes conscious of the fact that what at first appears to it as an abstract, external threat (that which he calls "substance") is actually immanent. Hence Žižek's insistence that the subject is "the infinite power of absolute negativity."[47] Contrary, then, to the poststructuralist claim that all subjectivity, plagued by such a void (or, to again adopt the common poststructuralist parlance, an *aporia*) ultimately unravels as it descends down an *abyme*, for Žižek, following Hegel, this *abyme* is the subject at its purest.

It should now be apparent just how far Žižek's humanism is from the typical liberal variety. For Žižek, the subject is human only insofar as it is monstrous, marked by an "indivisible remainder," "a terrifying excess which, although it negates what we understand as 'humanity,' is inherent to being-human."[48] The idealist cogito exposes this monstrosity at the heart of the human by rendering manifest that which remains latent in Descartes: namely, the association of thinking with madness (and diabolism). As Žižek explains:

> In the pre-Kantian universe, humans were simply humans, beings of reason, fighting the excesses of animal lusts and divine madness, while only with Kant and German Idealism is the excess to be fought absolutely immanent, the very core of subjectivity itself. . . . [T]his is why, with German Idealism, the metaphor for the core of subjectivity is Night, "Night of the World," in contrast to the Enlightenment notion of the Light of Reason fighting the darkness all around. . . . So when, in the pre-Kantian universe, a hero goes mad, it means he is deprived of his humanity—that is, animal passions or divine madness have taken over—while with Kant, madness implies the unconstrained explosion of the very core of a human being.[49]

This equation of humanity with madness and monstrosity bears considerable affinity with Romanticism, a movement in many respects the

aesthetic correlative of philosophical idealism. It should thus come as no surprise that Žižek finds in Shelley's *Frankenstein* one of the best representations of the idealist subject—a subject represented not by the novel's eponymous mad scientist, Victor Frankenstein, but by his monstrous creation. In a novel filled with sublime moments, surely the most sublime of all is that in which Frankenstein's monster begins speaking in the first person, telling the pitiful tale of his lonely existence thus far. As Žižek explains, in subjectivizing the monster, giving him a voice, Shelley doesn't simply "'humanize' the Thing, demonstrating that what we thought was a Monster is in fact an ordinary, vulnerable person"; on the contrary, not only does the monster/Thing "retain . . . its unbearable Otherness," but, more importantly, "it is *as such* that it subjectivizes itself."[50] This, claims Žižek, is what is so sublime—uncanny, even—about the monster/Thing, that it is "even more 'ourselves,' our own inaccessible kernel, than the Unconscious," "an Otherness which directly 'is' ourselves, staging the phantasmatic core of our being."[51] As Žižek otherwise puts it, troping on a common theme from science fiction, the monster/Thing is a materialization of something from "inner space."[52] This is why it must be disavowed, for to encounter it brings us too close to the Real, too close to that from which, though it lies within us, we must remain at a distance if we wish to participate in the symbolic order—that is, "reality," "everyday life." Novels like *Frankenstein* are thus important for Žižek because they not only give expression to the disavowed Thing from inner space, thereby representing the Real, but also dramatize its disavowal, thereby confronting us with the fantasmatic nature of our reality, with the fantasies we construct in order to shield ourselves from the traumatic core of the Real.

The greatest relevance of the above to literary criticism and theory most obviously concerns the category of the sublime, a category in Žižek's work whose aesthetic dimensions and consequences, as noted above, have yet to be fully apprehended, let alone addressed, by literary critics. And yet, as is the case with his (re)interpretation of Lacan according to the logic of the Real, the implications of Žižek's return to the Hegelian subject extend beyond aesthetics and into the realms of ethics and politics as well. Consider, for instance, the recent "ethical turn" in literary criticism, a turn for which the most important thinker has been Emmanuel Levinas. The goal of Levinas's philosophical project

is to establish ethics, rather than ontology, as "first philosophy." As Levinas argues, "ethics precedes ontology," for the subject comes into being only when brought face-to-face with an Other whose radical alterity opens within the subject an "idea of the Infinite" that stems from the subject's responsibility for the Other.[53] This face-to-face encounter with the Other, claims Levinas—an encounter that not only "recalls my responsibility" to the Other but also "calls me into question"—renders the Other "my neighbour."[54]

As Žižek sees it, what is missing from Levinas's ethics of the neighbor is the inhuman dimension of humanity itself, a dimension not captured by the face-to-face relationship.[55] To illustrate this point, Žižek cites the figure of the Muselmann, the "faceless" "living dead" of the Nazi concentration camps.[56] As he points out, the Muselmann figures as a kind of "zero-level neighbor," for when confronted with the Muselmann, "one cannot discern in his face the trace of the abyss of the Other in his/her vulnerability, addressing us with the infinite call of our responsibility," but only "a kind of blind wall, a lack of depth." What the Muselmann thus reveals, Žižek claims, is that the Levinasian association of Otherness with the face is an act of "domesticat[ion]" and "gentrifi[cation]," one that signals "yet another defense against the monstrous definition of subjectivity."[57] Once again, Žižek turns to a literary text to further illustrate his point: Kafka's "The Cares of a Family Man."

"The Cares of a Family Man" is a brief sketch concerning a figure known simply as "Odradek," an oddly shaped, spool-like "creature," which, because it is "extraordinarily nimble," cannot be subjected to "closer scrutiny." Yet this creature bears human characteristics as well. For instance, the narrator claims that one can have a dialogue with it/him: "'Well, what's your name?' you may ask him. 'Odradek,' he says. 'And where do you live?' 'No fixed abode,' he says and laughs."[58] For Žižek, what is emblematic about Odradek is the fact that it/he "becomes human only when he no longer resembles a human being (by metamorphosing himself into an insect, or a spool, or whatever). He is, effectively, a 'universal singular,' a stand-in for humanity by way of embodying its inhuman excess, by not resembling anything 'human.'"[59] Contra Levinas, what Odradek demonstrates, Žižek claims, is the properly universalist dimension of the ethical relation, the fact that "the first relationship to an Other is that to a faceless Third":

> The true ethical step is the one *beyond* the face of the other, the one of *suspending* the hold of the face, the one of choosing *against* the face, for the *third*. . . . [T]he elementary gesture of justice is not to show respect for the face in front of me, to be open to its depth, but to abstract from it and refocus onto the faceless Thirds in the background. It is only such a shift of focus onto the Third that effectively *uproots* justice, liberating it from the contingent umbilical link that renders it "embedded" in a particular situation. In other words, it is only such a shift onto the Third that grounds justice in the dimension of *universality* proper. . . . Thus, truly blind justice cannot be grounded in the relationship to the Other's face, . . . in the relationship to the neighbor. Justice is emphatically *not* justice for—with regard to—the neighbor.[60]

In identifying the faceless third as the primordial ethical relation, Žižek champions a transcendentalist ethics, one that, following Kant, is universal only insofar as it is expressly *not* based on any empirical (what Kant would term "pathological") conditions or motivations (any "contingent umbilical links" to particular situations, as Žižek puts it)—conditions or motivations that the encounter with the Other's face clearly brings into play.

As Žižek sees it, Levinas's grounding of ethics in the face-to-face encounter with the Other is merely one instance (albeit a paradigmatic one) of the general tendency throughout the humanities to attempt to "think the essence of humanity outside the domain of subjectivity," for the very notion of subjectivity (i.e., self-consciousness, self-positing autonomy), so we are told, "stands for a dangerous *hubris*, a will to power, which obfuscates and distorts the authentic essence of humanity."[61] What Žižek's work demonstrates is that characterizations of the idealist subject as self-conscious and self-positing/autonomous in any common sense of these terms betray a rather poor understanding of Kant and Hegel. Indeed, one need only point to Hegel's thesis regarding the "cunning of reason" to demonstrate that the type of subjectivity posited by German Idealism is far from autonomous or absolutist in any facile sense.[62] Contrary, then, to the putatively ethical quest to decouple subjectivity from humanity, Žižek's quest is instead the idealist–psychoanalytic quest to find the "point at which we enter the dimension of the 'inhuman,' the point at which 'humanity' disintegrates, so that all that remains is a pure sub-

ject."[63] Such a quest, one that adheres to an altogether different ethical imperative than that put forth by Levinas and company—namely, that one not give ground relative to one's desire—is precisely what Lacan undertakes in his magisterial interpretations of literary figures like Sophocles's Antigone, the Marquis de Sade's Juliette, and Paul Claudel's Sygne, all of whom Žižek, following Lacan, upholds as examples of "the 'inhuman' subject."[64] For just as Frankenstein's monster both represents and dramatizes the disavowed Real, so too do these figures represent and dramatize not only the plight of the pure subject, but also the radically emancipatory potential such a subject possesses.[65]

Žižek's invocation of Lacan with respect to the "pure subject" brings us to the synthesis of Lacan and Hegel so characteristic of and integral to his work. In reading the two alongside one another—or, more precisely, in reading Hegel *through* Lacan—the transcendental-idealist subject becomes the Lacanian "barred subject," a subject represented by Lacan via the matheme $. As Žižek explains, the move from the Cartesian to the Hegelian subject is "simply the move from S to $." Whereas the Cartesian subject is "a full, substantial identity, identical to a particular content which is threatened by [an] external pressure"—a pressure that in Descartes is represented via the figure of the "evil genius" (*le malin génie*)—the Hegelian subject is an abyss, a "void of absolute negativity to whom every 'pathological,' particular positive content appears as 'posited,' as something externally assumed and thus ultimately contingent." The move from S to $ thus entails an understanding of the immanent genesis of subjectivity, an understanding achieved via the process of tarrying with the negative, the act of "identify[ing] myself to that very void which a moment ago threatened to swallow the most precious kernel of my being"; for it is by tarrying with the negative, the act of negative self-relating, that the subject discovers its immanent genesis, discovers that the "evil genius" lies not without, but within.[66] This shared emphasis on the immanent genesis of an abyssal subject is for Žižek the ultimate coincidence of Hegel and Lacan.[67]

To return, then, to an issue raised above, Žižek's originality lies less in his dazzling applications of Lacan (and, to a lesser extent, Hegel) to popular culture and the attendant leveling of the distinction between lowbrow and highbrow, theory and example, that such applications affect (though this is indeed one of the more remarkable aspects of his work)

than in his anachronistic positing of a Lacanian Hegel in order to develop what Johnston perspicuously characterizes as "a transcendental materialist theory of subjectivity."[68] As many of the contributors to this volume aim to demonstrate, such a transcendental materialism has much to impart to the field of literary studies, a field long dominated by a discursive/cultural materialism that more often than not views metaphysical and materialist concerns as mutually exclusive.[69] Before providing a brief overview of the ways in which the essays here collected place Žižek's work in dialogue with the concerns of contemporary literary criticism and theory, however, it would be helpful to first consider a few examples of Žižek's own interpretations of literature—interpretations that, in contrast to his interpretations of film, have thus far received scant attention.

The Pervert's Guide to Literature

Despite the above examples of Žižek's engagement with works of literature, as noted at the outset of this introduction, the second major problem concerning Žižek's relation to literary studies is the widespread belief among literary critics that Žižek is interested only, or at least primarily, in film. Given Žižek's frequent references to and unmistakable enthusiasm for film—an enthusiasm evidenced not only by his own films, *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema* (2006) and *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), but also by books such as *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's "Lost Highway"* (2000), *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski between Theory and Post-Theory* (2001), and the collection of essays from which the title of this volume is derived, *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Lacan (but Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock)* (1992)—such a view is to some degree warranted. Indeed, the fact that the majority of scholarly work done on Žižek has been in film and media studies would seem to bear this out.[70] Yet in addition to film, Žižek, as I have already begun to demonstrate, also frequently turns to works of literature, both lowbrow and highbrow, canonical and noncanonical, to illustrate his claims. What's more, contrary to what is arguably the most common accusation leveled at him by his critics, Žižek doesn't simply "use" works of literature (and film) as "allegories of theoretical doctrines," "incidental illustrations" of an "already installed" Lacano-Hegelian "machine."[71] Rather, as Colin Davis correctly points

out, Žižek more often than not "finds in the text a knowledge which is the same as—rigorously of equal value to—that of psychoanalysis, even if that knowledge is formulated differently." Indeed, we could say that this is Žižek's greatest gambit, that "popular culture might know what high theory has not yet understood," the result being that he reads the two *through* one another "without one being treated as 'theory' and the other as 'example.'"[72]

A mere cursory glance through Žižek's many books will reveal that, contrary to prevailing impressions, interpretations of literature feature nearly as often as interpretations of film. A handful of examples will serve to illustrate this point. For starters, in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek reads *Hamlet* as "a drama of *failed interpellation*," for what prevents Hamlet from acting on the command of his father's ghost to avenge his murder (without, as the ghost also stipulates, in any way harming his mother) is not, Žižek claims, any uncertainty regarding his own desire, but rather an uncertainty regarding his mother's desire, an uncertainty that Lacan would characterize as the problem of the *"Che vuoi?"* As Žižek explains,

> The key scene of the whole drama is the long dialogue between Hamlet and his mother, in which he is seized by doubt as to his mother's desire—What does she really want? What if she really *enjoys* her filthy, promiscuous relationship with his uncle? Hamlet is therefore hindered not by indecision as to his own desire; it is not that "he doesn't know what he really wants"—he knows that very clearly: he wants to [a]venge his father—what hinders him is doubt concerning the *desire of the other*, the confrontation of a certain *"Che vuoi?"* which announces the abyss of some terrifying, filthy enjoyment. If the Name-of-the-Father functions as the agency of interpellation, of symbolic identification, the mother's desire, with its fathomless *"Che vuoi?,"* marks a certain limit at which every interpellation necessarily fails.[73]

That Hamlet's inaction is due not to a lack of knowledge but, rather, to doubt concerning his mother's desire is an argument upon which Žižek builds in *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?* Focusing on the way in which "act and knowledge" form a "tragic constellation" throughout the play, Žižek reads Hamlet alongside Oedipus, noting that whereas the latter accomplishes the act (that is, killing his father) because he doesn't

know what he is doing, the former, by contrast, knows all too well who killed his father, yet it is precisely this knowledge that renders him unable to go through with the act (that is, killing his uncle and avenging his father). Indeed, in a point that harbors considerable implications for the study of genre, Žižek implies that the "excessive knowledge" borne not only by Hamlet but also his father—for, contrary to the father in the famous Freudian dream, Hamlet's father "mysteriously *knows* that he is dead and even how he died"—renders the play closer to melodrama than tragedy, the latter of which is premised not on "some unexpected and excessive knowledge" but rather "some misrecognition or ignorance."[74]

A second example: in *Looking Awry*, Žižek argues that, upon closer examination, it would be more accurate to characterize Kafka's *The Trial* as a postmodernist novel than a modernist one. Žižek begins his analysis of the novel by rehearsing the typical modernist account of it, one that takes the enigmatic, inaccessible nature of the Court as the sign of an "'absent God.'" While Žižek concedes that the proponents of such a reading are correct to consider the novel's universe one of "anxiety," this anxiety, he claims, is triggered not by God's absence, but by His presence. As he explains, "the formula of the 'absent God' in Kafka does not work at all: for Kafka's problem is, on the contrary, that in this universe God is *too present*, in the guise of various obscene, nauseous phenomena."[75] To illustrate this point, Žižek turns to the pivotal court scene in which Josef K.'s defense is interrupted by an act of public sex—an obscene act that, ironically enough, proves identical to the law of the Court itself. For though K. believes that the Court will be anxious to have order restored and the sex offenders ejected, what he finds instead is that the members of the gallery are "delighted" by the act—so much so that they prevent him, in all his "seriousness," from breaking it up.[76] What this surprising approval of the obscene act reveals, Žižek claims, is that, far from operating according to the rational logic of argumentation (as K. assumes), the Court operates according to the irrational, superegoic logic of jouissance, a traumatic enjoyment that lies beyond the pleasure principle. Indeed, Kafka "flood[s] the juridical domain" with jouissance, and this deluge of enjoyment is for Žižek proof that the "theological lesson" of *The Trial* is not that of modernism, which posits the world as "a crazy bureaucratic machine turning blindly around the central void of an absent God," but that of postmodernism, which posits "a world in which

God—who up to now had held himself at an assured distance—has gotten too close to us."[77]

That *The Trial* is more postmodernist than modernist is a claim that is apt to give most literary critics (especially those of a historicist bent) pause, for the fact that it was written between 1914 and 1915 and published in 1925 would seem to render it without question a *modernist* text. Yet by reading the novel for its illustration of the obscene law of the superego—the law of jouissance—Žižek's point is precisely to call into question the "reduc[tion]" of "the opposition between modernism and postmodernism" to "a simple diachrony." For if the lesson of postmodernism is God's nauseating proximity, his "inert, obscene, revolting *presence*," then, regardless of its composition and publication dates, the fact that *The Trial* captures this abject presence by way of "a blind machinery to which nothing is lacking insofar as it is the very surfeit of enjoyment" renders it, perforce, "already postmodernist."[78]

A third example: in both *The Parallax View* and *Less Than Nothing*, Žižek reads the iconic phrase from Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener"—the eponymous scrivener's "I would prefer not to"—as the "gesture of subtraction" par excellence.[79] Less a "refusal of a determinate content" than a "formal gesture of refusal as such," for Bartleby does not say that he "*doesn't want to do it*" but rather that "*he prefers (wants) not to do it*," Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" is for Žižek a "holophrastic" act of *Versagung*, a "signifier-turned-object, a signifier reduced to an inert stain that stands for the collapse of the symbolic order."[80] As such, it constitutes a "refusal of the Master's order"—a refusal that instructs us "how [to] pass from the politics of 'resistance,' parasitical upon what it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside the hegemonic position *and* its negation."[81] Such a "politics of subtraction"—a "Bartlebian politics," as he commonly dubs it—harbors for Žižek the same "divinely violent" potential as the civil disobedience of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Melville's contemporary, Henry David Thoreau.[82] Indeed, Bartleby does for a radically emancipatory politics what Antigone, Juliette, and Sygne do for a radically emancipatory ethics.[83]

A fourth and final example: in *The Parallax View*, Žižek provides a magisterial close reading of what is arguably Henry James's greatest novel, *The Wings of the Dove*. Carefully parsing the different ethical di-

lemmas facing each main character—Milly Theale, Merton Densher, and Kate Croy—Žižek illustrates that while James, in accordance with the impetus of modernity, refuses to "retreat to old mores" by espousing belief in a "transcendent ethical Substance" that (pre)determines our ethical judgments in advance, he likewise refuses to embrace the "ethical relativism and historicism" characteristic of most modernist art.[84] For, as Žižek convincingly demonstrates, the novel's "true ethical hero" is the one most often "dismissed as either a cold manipulator or a mere victim of social stances": Kate Croy.[85]

Beginning with Milly, Žižek argues that although her decision to bequeath her fortune to Densher might appear altruistic, the ultimate proof of her supposed sainthood, this gesture is in fact far more manipulative than Kate's plot to have Densher feign love for Milly so that Milly will bequeath her fortune to him (thus leaving him wealthy enough to marry Kate). As Žižek explains, Milly's so-called ethical sacrifice is a fake insofar as she intends it to ruin the link between Kate and Densher. Though she bequeaths her fortune to them, she "at the same time mak[es] it ethically impossible for them to accept her gift": if, on the one hand, they accept her bequest, then they will be "marked by an indelible stain of guilt and moral corruption"; if, on the other hand, they take what would seem to be the moral high road and reject it, then "[*their*] *very rejection will function as a retroactive admission of* [*their*] *guilt*." Thus, whatever Kate and Densher decide, "the very choice Milly's bequest confronts them with makes them guilty."[86]

Moving on to Densher, Žižek asserts that although we might be tempted to view his rejection of Milly's bequest as "moral growth," in actuality he is "Milly's perfect counterpoint," for, like Milly's supposed ethical sacrifice, Densher's sacrifice is also a fake, a testament to the fact (discerned by Kate) that although he didn't really love Milly while she was alive, he loves her in death, "a false love if ever there was one."[87] What's more, Densher is further indicted by his self-professed "test" of Kate's delicacy (i.e., seeing whether she will open the envelope containing Milly's bequest), a test ultimately less reflective of Kate's moral compass (or supposed lack thereof) than his own "hypocritical attempt to sell avoidance, escape, as an ethical gesture, to sell the refusal to choose as a choice" (a point reinforced by Densher's admission to Kate that his primary "desire" is "to escape everything").[88]

This brings Žižek to Kate, the only one of the three, he insists, to perform a truly ethical act: namely, deciding to leave Densher. As he explains, Kate rightly dismisses Densher's supposed ethical rejection of Milly's money as phony, for he does so "not because he doesn't love her" and is therefore "unworthy of her gift," but, on the contrary, "because he *does* love her." The paradox here, one of which Kate is all too aware, is that "it is precisely by refusing Milly's money that Densher attests his fidelity to Milly's fantasy."[89] Complicating matters even further is the choice with which Densher, because he loves Milly, confronts Kate: either she marry him without the money or refuse him and keep the money herself. Rejecting both of these options, Kate, Žižek points out, imposes her own, "more radical" choice: she will take Densher with the money or nothing at all, for "she wants neither 'Densher without money'" (a choice that, again, would entail acceptance of the terms of Milly's fantasy) "*nor money without Densher.*" It is for this reason, Žižek claims, that Kate is the novel's "true ethical hero," "the only ethical figure in the novel," for she willingly gives up both Densher and the money.[90]

In all four of the above instances, the literary texts that Žižek engages do not serve as mere "illustrations" or "allegories" of the principles of German Idealism or Lacanian psychoanalysis. On the contrary, such engagements not only address (as well as complicate our understanding of) fundamental literary concerns—concerns including (but not limited to) questions of genre, periodicity, and characterization—but also demonstrate how specific works of literature and the literary in general can help us to envision and think about more emancipatory forms of ethics, politics, and aesthetics. As any serious encounter with Žižek's work will reveal, complex literary engagements such as these are not the exception but the rule.

The purpose of this volume, however, is not to rehearse Žižek's readings of particular works of literature, a maneuver that would only serve to further specious claims that Žižek's work contains "no invitation to further work by others," that he writes "not to open up a field of investigation but to establish for the reader the truth he has already achieved."[91] On the contrary, the aim of this collection is to examine what in Žižek's work invites—or, as its contributors maintain, demands—engagement from literary critics and theorists, be those engagements ones of acceptance or rejection, affirmation or negation, addition or subtraction. The

essays collected here are therefore committed to considering what Žižek's work has to offer literary criticism and theory both in general, by way of theoretical engagements with the field of literary studies itself, and in particular, by way of Žižekian interpretations of specific literary texts. The book is thus divided into two parts: Theory and Interpretation. The former considers Žižek's contributions to a number of branches of literary inquiry, including semiotics (by way of his critique of poststructuralism and his attendant positing of a "Real Lacan"), aesthetics (by way of his theory of the "ridiculous sublime"), historicism (by way of his championing of "historicity" over and against historicism), ideology critique (by way of his call to shift our mode of understanding ideology from the "symptomal" to the "fetishistic"), postcolonialism (by way of his critique of identitarianism and his attendant championing of "concrete universality"), and ecocriticism (by way of his critique of contemporary ecological consciousness and his attendant call to become "even more artificial," even "more alienated" from Nature). The latter part, which includes an essay by Žižek himself, uses his methods and insights to interpret literary texts from a range of different historical periods, nations, and genres, including Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and *Richard II*, William Burroughs's Nova Trilogy, Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, and Gaétan Soucy's *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes* (*The Little Girl Who Was Too Fond of Matches*).

This is not to say that a hard-and-fast distinction between "doing theory" and "practicing criticism" exists throughout these essays.[92] On the contrary, Jamil Khader's essay in part I on Žižek's critique of postcolonialism looks at the memoirs of Rigoberta Menchú, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *Crossing Borders*, as well as Michelle Cliff's novel *No Telephone to Heaven*, while Louis-Paul Willis's essay in part II on Soucy's *La petite fille qui aimait trop les allumettes* looks at Žižek's theorization of the Real as itself triadic in nature, comprised of an "imaginary Real," a "symbolic Real," and a "real Real." Likewise, Andrew Hageman's essay in part I on Žižek's critique of contemporary ecological consciousness looks closely at Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (*Rossum's Universal Robots*), the text that coined the term *robot* to signal artificial human beings/laborers, while Paul Megna's essay in part II on Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* looks closely at Žižek's theorization of the "undead," sadomasochistic nature of courtly love. The distinction between the essays that constitute

these two parts, then, lies not in any gap between theory and interpretation but rather in the degree to which theory or interpretation is the primary focus.

It is the sincere hope of the contributors to this volume that, like Žižek's own work, it will invite further work from other literary scholars. You've had your anti-Žižek fun, and you are pardoned for it. Do not be afraid; join us!

Notes

1 Slavoj Žižek, "Žižek," in *The Žižek Dictionary*, ed. Rex Butler (Durham, NC: Acumen, 2014), 275.
2 Žižek, "Žižek," 275–76.
3 Žižek, "Žižek," 276.
4 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, *Book XX: Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972–1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), 95.
5 Žižek, "Žižek," 276.
6 Sigmund Freud, "Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, vol. 7 (London: Hogarth, 1953), 110.
7 Žižek, "Žižek," 276.
8 David Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek: Say Anything," David Bordwell's Website on Cinema, April 2005, http://www.davidbordwell.net/essays/zizek.php; and Richard Stamp, "'Another Exemplary Case': Žižek's Logic of Examples," in *The Truth of Žižek*, ed. Paul Bowman and Richard Stamp (New York: Continuum, 2007), 173.
9 See Benjamin Noys, "Žižek's Reading Machine," in *Repeating Žižek*, ed. Agon Hamza (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 72–83. The claim regarding Žižek's "terrible matrix" comes, ironically enough, not from a Žižek detractor but from Žižek's close friend and fellow communist philosopher Alain Badiou. Conceding the transformative effect that Žižek's "brilliant interpretations of everything" have had on the field of psychoanalysis, Badiou nonetheless voices concern over what he deems the "hermeneutical attitude" of Žižek's brand of psychoanalysis. As he puts it, "it becomes a sort of matrix. I say to him often, because he is really a friend, 'you have a matrix, a terrible matrix, and you apply your matrix to everything.'" "Human Rights Are the Rights of the Infinite: An Interview with Alain Badiou," by Max Blechman, Anita Chari, and Rafeeq Hassan, *Historical Materialism* 20, no. 4 (2012): 184. Contra Badiou (as well as Bordwell, Stamp, and others), I argue later in this introduction that, like Lacan's, Žižek's brand of psychoanalysis is ultimately antihermeneutical.
10 Such an argument is proximate to that of Lauren Berlant, who examines the role that American melodramas from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Now, Voyager* to *The Life and Loves*

of a She-Devil have played in "cultivat[ing] fantasies of vague belonging as an alleviation of what is hard to manage in the lived real—social antagonisms, exploitation, compromised intimacies, the attrition of life." Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 5. And yet, as this quote suggests, there nonetheless remains a difference in orientation between Berlant and Žižek: whereas Berlant is interested in how melodrama stages fantasies that shield us from "the lived real"—what Žižek, following Lacan, would call the "symbolic order"—Žižek is interested in how melodrama stages fantasies that allow us to participate in the "lived real" in the first place by shielding us from the traumatic order of experience that Lacan termed "the Real."

11 See Jane Tompkins, "'But Is It Any Good?' The Institutionalization of Literary Value," in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 186–201.

12 See Paul de Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

13 Žižek, "Žižek," 276–77.

14 Žižek, "Žižek," 275.

15 Žižek, "Žižek," 275–76.

16 Žižek, "Žižek," 276.

17 Žižek, "Žižek," 277.

18 The phrase "allegories of theoretical doctrines" is from Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek."

19 See, for instance, Valentine Cunningham, *Reading after Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); Nicholas Birns, *Theory after Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory from 1950 to the Early Twenty-First Century* (Buffalo, NY: Broadview, 2010); and Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge, eds., *Theory after "Theory"* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

20 Birns, *Theory after Theory*, 291.

21 Birns, *Theory after Theory*, 291, 293.

22 Birns, *Theory after Theory*, 293.

23 For work on Agamben and literature, see, for instance, William Watkins, *The Literary Agamben: Adventures in Logopoiesis* (New York: Continuum, 2010); William V. Spanos, *The Exceptionalist State and the State of Exception: Herman Melville's "Billy Budd, Sailor"* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Spanos, *Shock and Awe: American Exceptionalism and the Imperatives of the Spectacle in Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court"* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013); Anke Snoek, *Agamben's Joyful Kafka: Finding Freedom beyond Subordination* (New York: Continuum, 2012); Aaron Hillyer, *The Disappearance of Literature: Blanchot, Agamben, and the Writers of the No* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); and a number of the essays collected in Justin Clemens, Nicholas Heron, and Alex Murray, eds., *The Work of Giorgio Agamben: Law, Literature, Life* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

Essays that explicitly apply Butler to literature are numerous. See, for instance, Sophie Croisy, "Re-imagining Healing after Trauma: Leslie Marmon Silko and Judith

Butler Writing against the War of Cultures," *Nebula* 3, nos. 2–3 (2006): 86–113; Amaleena Damlé, "Gender Performance in the Work of Judith Butler and Cristina Peri Rossi's *La nave de los locos*," *Dissidences* 2, no. 4 (2008): 1–16; Ernesto Javier Martínez, "On Butler on Morrison on Language," *Signs* 35, no. 4 (2010): 821–42; Hina Nazar, "Facing Ethics: Narrative Recognition from George Eliot to Judith Butler," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 33, no. 5 (2011): 437–50; Inge Arteel, "Judith Butler and the Catachretic Human," in *Towards a New Literary Humanism*, ed. Andy Mousley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 77–90; and Denis Flannery, "Judith Butler's Henry James," *Henry James Review* 32, no. 1 (2011): 12–19. Examples of implicitly Butlerian approaches to literary and cultural studies are likewise numerous, but some of the more notable works include Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Alterity Politics: Ethics and Performative Subjectivity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); and Nadine Ehlers, *Racial Imperatives: Discipline, Performativity, and Struggles against Subjection* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

24 See Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivac, Žižek and Others* (New York: Verso, 2003), 196–206; and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "Criticism as Symptom: Slavoj Žižek and the End of Knowledge," in *The Character of Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 81–108. See also Denise Gigante, "Toward a Notion of Critical Self-Creation: Slavoj Žižek and the 'Vortex of Madness,'" *New Literary History* 29, no. 1 (1998): 153–68; Tim Dean, "Art as Symptom: Žižek and the Ethics of Psychoanalytic Criticism," *diacritics* 32, no. 3 (2002): 21–41; and Colin Davis, "Žižek's Idiotic Enjoyment," in *Critical Excess: Overreading in Derrida, Deleuze, Levinas, Žižek and Cavell* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 108–34.

25 Shelly Brivic, *Joyce through Lacan and Žižek: Explorations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). See also Ken Jackson, "'All the World to Nothing': Badiou, Žižek and Pauline Subjectivity in *Richard III*," *Shakespeare* 1, nos. 1–2 (2005): 29–52; Robert Rushing, "What We Desire, We Shall Never Have: Calvino, Žižek, Ovid," *Comparative Literature* 58, no. 1 (2006): 44–58; Thomas F. Haddox, "On Belief, Conflict, and Universality: Flannery O'Connor, Walter Benn Michaels, and Slavoj Žižek," in *Flannery O'Connor in the Age of Terrorism: Essays on Violence and Grace*, ed. Avis Hewit and Robert Donahoo (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), 231–40; Tereza Stejskalová, "Žižek's Act and the Literary Example," *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* 2, no. 2 (2011): 55–74; and Étienne Poulard, "'After the Takeover': Shakespeare, Lacan, Žižek and the Interpassive Subject," *English Studies* 94, no. 3 (2013): 291–312.

26 Though Eagleton, in discussing Žižek's "almost comic versatility of interests," notes the nods to Kafka, detective fiction, and vampire novels throughout Žižek's work, he clearly considers it more characteristic of Žižek "to leap in a paragraph from Hegel to *Jurassic Park*," from Kant to *The Flintstones*, or from Lacan to the films of David Lynch

than to leap from any of these key thinkers to literary works or figures. Harpham likewise makes passing references to Žižek's use of literary texts to illustrate key philosophical and psychoanalytic principles—among them, Graham Greene's *The End of the Affair*, Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and, most notably, Sophocles's *Antigone*—yet he is far more interested in exposing what he takes to be the antidemocratic/totalitarian "character" of Žižek's work than in examining any possible contributions it might make to the study of literature. What's more, although he notes Žižek's "heav[y] invest[ment] in a number of discourses, all of which seem to be immediately available to him," it is his work in film studies that Harpham chooses to single out, noting that such work "alone would qualify him as a leading film scholar and theorist." Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent*, 197, 202; and Harpham, "Criticism as Symptom," 87.

27 As Kristeva explains in her preface to *Desire in Language*, the aim of what she calls "semanalysis" is to "draw out [the] consequences" that "the breakthrough accomplished by Lacan in French psychoanalysis" holds for "different practices of discourse (in literature and particularly in the novel)." Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), viii. For Žižek's most extensive critique of the semiolinguistic version of Lacanian psychoanalysis, see "The Limits of the Semiotic Approach to Psychoanalysis," in *Interrogating the Real*, by Slavoj Žižek, ed. Rex Butler and Scott Stephens (New York: Continuum, 2005), 113–40.

28 See Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2009). The two "lost causes" Žižek here seeks to defend are Marxism and psychoanalysis, the "only two theories" in our postmodern, seemingly "post-ideological" era, he maintains, that "imply and practice . . . an engaged notion of truth" (3).

29 Žižek, "*Da Capo senza Fine*," in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, by Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 2000), 243. For further commentary from Žižek on the "nonexistence" of poststructuralism, see Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2004), 45–48. For further commentary from Žižek on the misidentification of Lacan as a poststructuralist, see "The Quilting Point of Ideology: Or, Why Lacan Is Not a 'Poststructuralist,'" in *The Most Sublime Hysteric: Hegel with Lacan*, trans. Thomas Scott-Railton (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 195–208; and "The Eclipse of Meaning: On Lacan and Deconstruction," in *Interrogating the Real*, 190–212.

30 Important to note here is that Žižek doesn't deny that a structuralist strain runs throughout Lacan. As he points out, the "second stage" of Lacan's teaching is indeed structuralist in orientation. His point, however, is that the third and final stage of Lacan's teaching, that of the Real, marks a complete break with the second stage, one that retroactively destructuralizes, so to speak, Lacan's earlier work. See Žižek, "*Das Ungeschehenmachen*: How Is Lacan a Hegelian?," in *The Most Sublime Hysteric*, 70–82. The paradigmatic instance of Žižek's use of the Real to retroactively destructuralize Lacan is his (re)interpretation of the latter's "Seminar on 'The Purloined Let-

ter'" in "Why Does a *Letter* Always Arrive at Its Destination?," in *Enjoy Your Symptom! Jacques Lacan in Hollywood and Out*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 1–32.

31 The quotation is from Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso, 1989), 113.

32 Žižek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Woman and Causality* (New York: Verso, 1994), 27.

33 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, *Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1978), 250.

34 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 250–51. Dean effectively glosses this point as follows: "For interpretation to point not toward meaning or signification but 'beyond . . . signification' pushes interpretation—paradoxically enough—beyond the framework of hermeneutics. Rather than making sense of trauma, psychoanalytic interpretation draws attention to its resistance to sense." Dean, "Art as Symptom," 34.

35 Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, *Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: Norton, 1992), 112.

36 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 207.

37 See Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's "Lost Highway"* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000).

38 For Žižek on the purloined letter as *objet petit a*, see "Why Does a *Letter* Always Arrive at Its Destination?" Like Lacan, Žižek cites Poe's Valdemar as a prime example not only of the *objet petit a* but also of what Lacan termed the *lamella*, an indestructible partial object that goes on living despite being deprived of its support in the symbolic order—an undead object, which Žižek, in his inversion of the Deleuzean figure of the "body without organs," would term an "organ without a body." See, for instance, Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2008), 180–81.

39 See Žižek, "Kate's Choice; or, the Materialism of Henry James," in *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 125–44.

40 Rex Butler, *Slavoj Žižek: Live Theory* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 13. For more by Butler on this question, see his introduction to *The Žižek Dictionary*, "Less Than Nothing to Say: An Introduction to Slavoj Žižek," ix–xx.

41 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 7. That Lacan is for Žižek ultimately (in the words of Ian Parker) "a machine for reading Hegel" is a point more recently reiterated by Žižek himself. Asked whether he uses Hegel to reactualize Lacan or the other way around, Žižek answers, "I would say the other way around. What really interests me is philosophy, and for me, psychoanalysis is ultimately a tool to reactualize, to render actual for today's time, the legacy of German Idealism. . . . [U]ltimately if I am to choose just one thinker, it's Hegel. He's the one for me." Hence Parker's claim that "even when Žižek is writing about Lacan, it is actually Hegel who is in command." Parker, *Slavoj Žižek: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2004), 112, 108; and Žižek, "Liberation Hurts: An Interview with Slavoj Žižek," by Eric Dean

Rasmussen, *Electronic Book Review*, July 1, 2004, http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/endconstruction/desublimation.

42 The use of the term *transcendental materialist* to characterize Žižek's brand of Lacano-Hegelianism comes from Adrian Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology: A Transcendental Materialist Theory of Subjectivity* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2008). Marx, of course, is also important to Žižek's work, especially his critique of ideology. See, for instance, the opening chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?," in which Žižek interprets Marx's theories of commodity fetishism and surplus-value as having laid the groundwork for key psychoanalytic concepts like fetishistic disavowal (Freud) and surplus-enjoyment (Lacan). What's more, in recent years, Žižek has become more unabashedly Marxist in his political orientation, leading the charge for a "return to communism." And yet, for Žižek, Marx is always subordinate to Hegel. That is to say, contrary to typical Marxist praxis, according to which Marx's materialism is read as a corrective to Hegel's idealism, for Žižek, as he boldly asserts in *Tarrying with the Negative*, "the time has come to raise the inverse possibility of a Hegelian critique of Marx." Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 26. For an example of such a critique, see the introduction to *The Parallax View*, "Dialectical Materialism at the Gates," in which Žižek distinguishes between dialectical materialism and "the much more acceptable, and much less embarrassing, 'materialist dialectic'" informing virtually all twentieth-century Marxist thought (4–5). For an extended examination of Žižek's Hegelian critique of Marx, see Todd McGowan, "Hegel as Marxist: Žižek's Revision of German Idealism," in *Žižek Now: Current Perspectives in Žižek Studies*, ed. Jamil Khader and Molly Anne Rothenberg (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013), 31–53.

43 Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, xxiii. As Žižek asserts at the outset of *The Ticklish Subject*, "a spectre is haunting Western academia . . . the spectre of the Cartesian subject" (xxiii).

44 For Žižek, although the poststructuralist is certainly the most vocal advocate of the death of the Cartesian subject, virtually all other contemporary thinkers—even those who position themselves as antithetical to poststructuralism—are guilty of the same rejection, including (to use Žižek's own classifications) "the New Age obscurantist," "the Habermasian theorist of communication," "the Heideggerian proponent of the thought of Being," "the cognitive scientist," "the Deep Ecologist," "the critical (post-) Marxist," and "the feminist." Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, xxiii.

45 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.

46 Hegel, *Hegel and the Human Spirit: A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805–6)*, trans. Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 87.

47 Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 23.

48 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 22. Žižek adopts the term *indivisible remainder* from Hegel's contemporary and fellow idealist F. W. J. Schelling. See Žižek, *The Indivisible Remainder: An Essay on Schelling and Related Matters* (New York: Verso, 1996), 75.

49 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 22.

50 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 365. See also Žižek's claim that "the Gothic novel is a kind of critique *avant la lettre* of the Kantian insistence on the unsurmountable gap between phenomena and the transcendent Thing-in-itself," for in these novels "apparitions . . . are precisely . . . *Things that think*." Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2002), 220.

51 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 368.

52 See Žižek, "The Thing from Inner Space," in *Sexuation*, ed. Renata Salecl (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 216–59. Worth noting here is Žižek's reliance on the famous "stolen boat" episode from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* in order to illustrate the emergence of the thing from inner space. As Žižek claims, this episode demonstrates that, "far from being a simple descendant of the Kantian Thing-in-itself, the Freudian 'Thing from Inner Space' is its inherent opposite: what appears to be the excess of some transcendent force over 'normal' external reality is the very place of the direct inscription of my subjectivity into this reality. In other words, what I get back in the guise of the horrifying-irrepresentable Thing is the objectivization, the objectal correlate, of my own gaze—as Wordsworth puts it, the Thing is the 'sober colouring' reality gets from the eye observing it." Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 151–52.

53 Levinas often uses the slogan "ethics precedes ontology" to characterize his philosophical project. According to Levinas, the face of the Other opens within the subject an "idea of the infinite" insofar as it "exceed[s] *the idea of the other in me*," "at each moment destroy[ing] and overflow[ing] the plastic image it leaves me, the idea existing to my own measure and to the measure of its *ideatum*—the adequate idea." Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 50–51.

54 Levinas, "Ethics as First Philosophy," in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Séan Hand (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1989), 83.

55 Žižek, "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence," in *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*, by Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 158.

56 Žižek here relies on Primo Levi's characterization of the Muselmann as "faceless" throughout his autobiographical account of Auschwitz, *If This Is a Man* (a.k.a. *Survival in Auschwitz*). See Levi, *If This Is a Man*, in *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, ed. Ann Goldstein, vol. 1 (New York: Liveright, 2015), 1–205.

57 Žižek, "Neighbors and Other Monsters," 161–62.

58 Franz Kafka, "The Cares of a Family Man," trans. Willa Muir and Edwin Muir, in *The Complete Stories*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1971), 428.

59 Žižek, "Neighbors and Other Monsters," 166. Žižek's allusion to Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* here is no accident. As he notes in *The Parallax View*, in the original German text, the term that Gregor Samsa's sister, Grete, uses to refer to her brother-turned-insect is *ein Untier*, a term often translated as "a monster" but whose literal translation is "an inanimal." As Žižek concludes, "what we get here is the opposite of inhuman: an animal which, while remaining animal, is not really animal—the excess over the

animal in animal, the traumatic core of animality, which can emerge 'as such' only in a human who has become an animal" (22).

60 Žižek, "Neighbors and Other Monsters," 183–84. As Žižek puts it in *The Parallax View*, "just as in Kant's philosophy, the sublime Noumenal, when we come too close to it, appears as pure horror, man 'as such,' deprived of all phenomenal qualities, appears as an inhuman monster, something like Kafka's Odradek. The problem with human rights humanism is that it covers up this monstrosity of the 'human as such,' presenting it as a sublime human essence" (342).

61 Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*, 15. Posthumanism takes this project even further insofar as its goal is not to rethink or reclaim "the authentic essence of humanity" but to rethink—or, more precisely, call into question—humanity's central position in the "Great Chain of Being."

62 The "cunning of reason" is a theory of Hegel's that holds that great men, in following their own individual passions, intending only their own interest, unwittingly act as agents of the universal Idea/Reason, carrying out the will of the "World-Spirit," which ruthlessly dispenses with them once they have fulfilled their role in advancing world history. See Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1956), 30–33.

63 Žižek, *Interrogating the Real*, 15.

64 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 42. That one not give ground relative to one's desire is for Lacan the ultimate "ethics of psychoanalysis." As he asserts, "from an analytical point of view, the only thing of which one can be guilty is of having given ground relative to one's desire." Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 319.

65 Žižek's interpretation of Lacan's reading of *Antigone* is crucial here. As he explains in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008), Lacan's interest in Antigone resides in her demonstration of "the paradoxical reversal by means of which desire itself (i.e., acting upon one's desire, not compromising it) can no longer be grounded in any 'pathological' interest or motivation, and thus meets the criteria of the Kantian ethical act, so that 'following one's desire' overlaps with 'doing one's duty'" (195). Antigone is thus an indispensable figure for Žižek insofar as she reveals that "what is truly traumatic for the subject is not the fact that a pure ethical act is (perhaps) impossible, that freedom is (perhaps) an appearance, based on our ignorance of the true motivations of our acts; what is truly traumatic is freedom itself, the fact that freedom IS possible, and we desperately search for some 'pathological' determinations in order to avoid this fact" (196).

66 Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, 27–28.

67 As Johnston puts it, by likening the Lacanian barred subject to the Hegelian subject qua negativity, Žižek's entire project could be characterized as "an effort to raise Lacan to the dignity of the philosophical tradition." Johnston, *Žižek's Ontology*, 13.

68 See Johnston's preface to *Žižek's Ontology*.

69 In Americanist literary criticism, the work of John Carlos Rowe best exemplifies the cultural materialist insistence on the mutual exclusivity of metaphysical and materialist concerns. This is especially true of Rowe's *At Emerson's Tomb: The Politics of*

Classic American Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). Consider, for instance, Rowe's following critique of the dominant approach to Poe throughout the twentieth century, the psychoanalytic approach: "The translation of his literary works into the language game of psychoanalysis has accomplished precisely what Edgar Allan Poe had hoped: the substitution of an immaterial world for the threatening world of material history" (48). What Žižek's redeployment of psychoanalysis via the logic of the Lacanian Real does to such a point is invert it, for when read according to the Real, not only is psychoanalysis *not* a mere language game (i.e., an avatar of structuralism), but, what's more, it is the *immaterial* fantasy world that proves the most threatening. Indeed, as Žižek argues, it is the very process of "traversing the fantasy" that returns us to the material world. See, for instance, Žižek's commentary on Lacan's reading of Freud's dream, "Father, can't you see I'm burning?" As Žižek explains, "the dreamer is awakened when the Real of the horror encountered in the dream (the dead son's reproach) is more horrible than the awakened reality itself, so that the dreamer escapes into reality in order to escape the Real encountered in the dream." Žižek, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime*, 17.

70 The most comprehensive account—and application—of the relevance of Žižek's work for film studies is Matthew Flisfeder's *The Symbolic, the Sublime, and Slavoj Žižek's Theory of Film* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

71 Bordwell, "Slavoj Žižek"; and Stamp, "'Another Exemplary Case,'" 173. Dean, in "Art as Symptom," likewise takes Žižek to task for his (alleged) reduction of works of art to mere "illustrat[ions] of psychoanalytic concepts" (39). Noting not only the putative lack of "conceptual space for any consideration of aesthetic effects or their significance" (23) throughout his work, but also his unwillingness to "concede even *relative* autonomy to the aesthetic domain, either in principle or in practice" (30), Dean claims that Žižek's reduction of the aesthetic constitutes an "ethical problem" insofar as it "eradicates dimensions of alterity particular to art, making any encounter with the difficulty and strangeness of aesthetic experience seem beside the point" (23). For a less polemical—and more precise—version of all of these critiques, Bordwell's included, see Walter A. Davis, "Slavoj Žižek, or the *Jouissance* of an Abstract Hegelian," in *Death's Dream Kingdom: The American Psyche since 9/11* (London: Pluto, 2006), 75–117.

72 Davis, *Critical Excess*, 109–10. Hence Davis's claim that although Žižek is "deeply immersed in Lacanian thought and vocabulary," Lacan "does not figure as the *knowledge* which popular culture *illustrates*." Rather, Žižek's work effects a "crossover" between Lacanian psychoanalysis and popular culture in which "each elucidates the other" (111). As Žižek himself explains at the outset of *Looking Awry*, "what is at stake in the endeavor to 'look awry' at theoretical motifs is not just a kind of contrived attempt to 'illustrate' high theory, to make it 'easily accessible,' and thus to spare us the effort of effective thinking. The point is rather that such an exemplification, such a mise-en-scène of theoretical motifs renders visible aspects that would otherwise remain unnoticed." Such a procedure, Žižek correctly points out, "has a respectable line of philosophical predecessors, from late Wittgenstein to Hegel." Žižek, *Looking Awry:*

An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 3.

73 Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 120–21.

74 Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)Use of a Notion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 2011), 12. Žižek also provides a fascinating antihistoricist reading of *Hamlet* as a play whose narrative precedes the Oedipus myth.

75 Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 146.

76 Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa Muir, Edwin Muir, and E. M. Butler (New York: Schocken, 1992), 46. In a related point, Žižek likewise notes that, rather than being "simply absent," the Court is in fact "present under the figures of obscene judges who, during night interrogations, glance through pornographic books." Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 146.

77 Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 150, 146, 151, 146.

78 Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 145, 146, 151, 146. For Žižek, the foil to Kafka's *The Trial* is Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. As he explains, although *Finnegan's Wake* is in many respects an "unreadable" book, for it cannot be read in the same manner as a normal, "realist" novel, its "illegibility" nonetheless "functions precisely as an invitation to an unending process of reading, of interpretation." Hence Joyce's famous claim that he wrote the novel "to keep the critics busy for three hundred years." *The Trial*, by contrast, is "quite 'readable'": "the main outlines of the story are clear enough," and "Kafka's style is concise and of proverbial purity." And yet "it is this very 'legibility' that, because of its overexposed character, produces a radical opacity and blocks every essay of interpretation." Žižek, *Looking Awry*, 151; and Joyce, quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 703.

79 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 382; and Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 1007.

80 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 384, 381, 385.

81 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 381–82; and Žižek, *Less Than Nothing*, 1007.

82 For Žižek's uses of the phrase "Bartlebian politics" (or "Bartleby politics"), see *The Parallax View*, 342–43; *Violence*, 214; *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 409; and *Less Than Nothing*, 1007. For Žižek on the resonances between the "divine violence" of Gandhi and Bartleby, see *The Parallax View*, 342–43; and *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 474–75.

83 As Žižek asserts, Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" is "strictly analogous to Sygne's *No!*" *The Parallax View*, 384–85.

84 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 126, 130, 127, 126.

85 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 132.

86 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 130–31.

87 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 131–32.

88 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 137; and Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, ed. J. Donald Crowley and Richard A. Hocks, 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), 404, 406.

89 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 138, 132. As Žižek explains, in "a properly Kierkegaardian moment," the ethical itself (that is, the rejection of Milly's money) is the temptation to be resisted (132).

90 Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 139.

91 Harpham, “Criticism as Symptom,” 84.

92 As Žižek often notes, Marxism and psychoanalysis are both simultaneously theories and practices. As he puts matters at the outset of *In Defense of Lost Causes*, for instance, “in both of them [Marxism and psychoanalysis], the relationship between theory and practice is properly dialectical, in other words, that of an irreducible tension: theory is not just the conceptual grounding of practice, it simultaneously accounts for why practice is ultimately doomed to failure. . . . At its most radical, theory is the theory of a failed practice” (3).