

Corpus:

fictional 'exposures'

Shannon Burns

Discipline of English

School of Humanities

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Abstract

Corpus is a postmodernist *Künstlerroman*, with multiple and repetitious narrative streams that have, at their source, a series of secrets which may or may not be read as versions/doubles of an originating exposure. *Corpus* engages in and invokes autobiography and the act of appropriating or being appropriated by others' stories. It simultaneously employs notions of origin and self at the same time as rejecting their significance. Its focus is a kind of 'inner life'. *Corpus* is very much a hybrid or collage of forms: novel/memoir/short story/notes/fragments, which ultimately collapse into each other. It keeps a distance (ironic, comedic, idiotic) throughout, but there are also emotional pay-offs. Its structure has several notable characteristics: parts of "The Body"—the second section—are designed as doubles or versions of the same story, with differing points of thematic emphasis. "The Body" is additionally comprised of inner and outer narratives, where Shaun is constructed and deconstructed by multiple narrators. The first and third sections of *Corpus*, entitled "Creature" and "Fouching", mirror the inner/outer structure of "The Body", but "Fouching" is additionally comprised-of or interrupted-by a series of narrative streams and fragments. Different fonts in "Fouching" allow readers to easily follow a particular narrative stream as far as they like before doubling back and focussing on the others. This is designed to give the reader a sense that everything is happening, and continues to happen, at the same time. As with the repetitions in "The Body", the *partial* intention is to give the reader a feeling of being trapped inside a narrative loop, like someone suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but the modifications inherent to these types of repetition simultaneously *invoke* (without actually producing) the prospect of transcendence—a way out of the nightmare of the self and its stories. The inclusion of a prop—the flint spark lighter—concretises what is perhaps the most significant narrative stream of "Fouching" and *Corpus* as a whole (the revelatory sister/father story). If readers burn the book they become doubled themselves: by raising the lighter to the page the reader is implicated in both the creation of the text and its (apparent) originating exposure, as well as its/Shaun's apparent desire to be purged of itself/himself.

As well as addressing many of concepts and conceits offered above, the exegesis is concerned with the ethics and aesthetic usage of trauma, informed by the post-Holocaust sensibilities of various philosophers, but chiefly Theodor Adorno, and the

implications of Freud's universalising treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, paying particular attention to various forms of textual and authorial concealment, exposures and doubling that occur in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and linking them to those same features in *Corpus* (where remembering and forgetting, confinement and liberation, transcription and erasure, re-enactment and purgation occur in the simultaneous acts of writing, reading and burning). Like the creative work, the exegesis is comprised of a series of exposures, where the theoretical mask behind the fictional masquerade emerges in all its hideousness.

Declaration of Originality

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institute to Shannon Burns and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

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Corpus:

writing 'trauma'

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Abstract

Corpus is a postmodernist *Künstlerroman*, with multiple and repetitious narrative streams that have, at their source, a series of ‘_secrets’ which may or may not be read as versions/doubles of an ‘_originating’ exposure. *Corpus* engages in and invokes autobiography and the act of appropriating or being appropriated by others’ stories. It simultaneously employs notions of ‘_origin’ and ‘_self’ at the same time as rejecting their significance. Its focus is a kind of ‘inner life’. *Corpus* is very much a hybrid or collage of forms: novel/memoir/short story/notes/fragments, which ultimately collapse into each other. It keeps a distance (ironic, comedic, idiotic) throughout, but there are also emotional ‘_pay-offs’. Its structure has several notable characteristics: parts of “The Body”—the second section—are designed as doubles or versions of the same story, with differing points of thematic emphasis. “The Body” is additionally comprised of ‘_inner’ and ‘_outer’ narratives, where ‘_Shaun’ is constructed and deconstructed by multiple narrators. The first and third sections of *Corpus*, entitled “Creature” and “Touching”, mirror the inner/outer structure of “The Body”, but “Touching” is additionally comprised-of or interrupted-by a series of narrative streams and fragments. Different fonts in “Touching” allow readers to easily follow a particular narrative stream as far as they like before ‘_doubling’ back and focussing on the others. This is designed to give the reader a sense that everything is happening, and continues to happen, at the same time. As with the repetitions in “The Body”, the *partial* intention is to give the reader a feeling of being trapped inside a narrative loop, like someone suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, but the modifications inherent to these types of repetition simultaneously *invoke* (without actually producing) the prospect of transcendence—a way out of the nightmare of the self and its stories. The inclusion of a prop—the flint spark lighter—concretises what is perhaps the most significant narrative stream of “Touching” and *Corpus* as a whole (the revelatory sister/father story). If readers burn the book they become ‘_doubled’ themselves: by raising the lighter to the page the reader is implicated in both the creation of the text and its (apparent) originating ‘_exposure’, as well as its/Shaun’s apparent desire to be purged of itself/himself.

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Note: This book is best read in a darkened room, its pages illuminated by the fire of a flint spark lighter. But since this is likely to prove impractical, the reader could just *imagine* that they’re reading the book this way.