

# LITERARY SUBJECTIVITY

*A Lacanian Approach to Authoriality*

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# POSTCARDS FROM DESOLATION

ROW

*Twelve Stories*

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Ph.D.

2013

**CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP**

*I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.*

*I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.*

**Signature of Student:**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. J. ...', written in a cursive style.

**Date:** 07 November, 2013

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## *Previous Publications*

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Sections of this thesis have been published elsewhere. ‘The Cuckold, and Me’ was first published in *HEAT* (2009); ‘Gutted, for Carl Solomon’ was first published in *Going Down Swinging* (2010); ‘A Clean Heart’ was first published in *Island* (under the title ‘A True Heart’) (2011); ‘The Supermarket Play’ was first published in *Text: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* (2011); ‘A Near-Death Interruption’ was first published in *Mascara Literary Review* (2011); ‘L’Inconnue de la Plage’ was first published on The Lifted Brow blog and then in *The Lifted Brow eBook* (under the title ‘Intravenous’) (2012); ‘The Rat in the Wall’ was first published in *Hide Your Fires* (2012); ‘Of Rivers and Blood’ was first published in *Overland* (2012); and ‘The Ghost of Electricity’ was first published in *Going Down Swinging* (2013, forthcoming).

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## *Abstract*

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At the heart of this thesis is a seemingly simple set of questions: What is a reader? What is an author? And what relation do these two figures bear to one another? Taking as my starting point Roland Barthes's 1968 'Death of the Author' manifesto (and the subsequent amendment Barthes makes to this idea only a few years later), I draw on the work of Jacques Lacan to suggest we might come to think of the reader and author as one and the same figure, albeit at different stages of their psycho-literary development. Distinguishing between reality and the real, Lacan accounts for certain moments of symbolic rupture by introducing a second-order real: a jouissance after the letter. I propose that such moments occur in literary texts when the author manages to shrug off subjectivity and return, if only for the briefest instant, to readerly jouissance. Complementing this study of the real's continued encroachment on the symbolic is a discussion of the subject's progression from reader to author—in other words, the subject's shift from real to symbolic. As I show, the push toward authoriality is promoted in the first instance by the breakdown of a reader-author unity analogous to the child-mother unity seen in Lacan's writings and seminars, which introduces the necessary dimension of desire. In the final chapter of the thesis, I suggest ways in which this application of Lacan's theory can be used to support current creative writing pedagogies.

Exploring themes of identity, sexuality, masculinity, intertextuality, religion and family, the twelve stories included in the creative suite deal in some way or another with writing itself. Although no explicit link is made between the theoretical and creative components of this thesis by way of an exegesis, there is a noticeable relationship between the ideas espoused in the first section and the self-reflexive development of the

stories' narrators. Relying heavily on irony, pastiche and humour, these twelve stories complement the theoretical component by attempting to demonstrate the psychic interconnectedness of the reading and writing experiences.