

Hot Affects, Cold Theory

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My Wife and Family received me with great Surprize and Joy, because they concluded me certainly dead; but I must freely confess, the Sight of them filled me only with Hatred, Disgust and Contempt; and the more, by reflecting on the near Alliance I had to them.... And when I began to consider, that by copulating with one of the *Yahoo*-Species, I had become a Parent of more, it struck me with the utmost Shame, Confusion and Horror.

Jonathan Swift

Viscerality is the perception of suspense. The space into which it jolts the flesh is one of an inability to act or reflect, a spasmodic passivity, so taut a receptivity that the body is paralyzed until it is jolted back into action-reaction by recognition. Call it the space of *passion*. Its elementary units are neither the absolute perspectives of movement-vision nor the vectoral fields of proprioception proper, but rather *degrees* of intensity. The space of passion constitutes a quasi-qualitative realm adjacent to the quasi corporeal.... Passion, then, is best understood less as an abstract space than as the time-stuff of spatial abstraction. Call the coupling of a unit of quasi corporeality with a unit of passion an *affect*: an ability to affect and a susceptibility to be affected. An *emotion* or *feeling* is a recognized affect, an identified intensity as reinjected into stimulus-response paths, into action-reaction circuits of infolding and externalization—in short, into subject-object relations. Emotion is a contamination of empirical space by affect, which belongs to the body without an image.

Brian Massumi

I BEGIN WITH QUOTATIONS that, while far apart and ostensibly unconnected, map out certain territories covered by Martha C. Nussbaum and Robert Rawdon Wilson, hinting at the range—the sometimes dazzling array—of approaches offered in their two quite distinct books dealing with deeply felt emotions as revealed in various degrees of intensity, passion, viscerality.¹ The quoted passages, whether from sites of political satire

1 In this review, I shall be primarily concerned with Nussbaum's and Wilson's books. Each writer raises a large number of issues on many levels. I can comment on only a few of these. Elsewhere, I should want to consider the manner

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works in the areas
of Shakespeare and
Jacobean Drama,
eighteenth-century
drama and prose, the
nineteenth-century
novel, women's writing
in the eighteenth and
nineteenth centuries
and the history
of the novel.

or cultural theory, mark strong emotions with suggestively spatial qualities. While the Swiftian discourse constructs a visceral disgust or horror at human society, thus distancing Gulliver (stabled—yet unstable—with the horses) outside the familial domain, Massumi's recent exploration of the affect's spatial architecture describes passion contaminating empirical space; each surveys subterranean seams, charting much that goes on beneath the surface terrain. So with Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought* and Wilson's *The Hydra's Tale* which develop theoretical models for the emotions, the rhizoid complexities underneath apparently uncomplicated surfaces that become ever more manifest.

Nothing is more illusory than simplicity.² Both cultural practices and doctrines, whether religious or political, impose the proposition that many experiences, all the most important ones perhaps, happen suddenly without mediation. In much the same way, knowing the truth of an event (being able to say, "This, and only this, has happened") is often taken to be intuitive. Things and actions *just are*. The world's myriad assaults fall upon passive and conditioned human subjects. Although many reasons have been given to account for human passivity in experience, the contemporary model generally holds that either culture or ideology, or both, has made us such. Much contemporary thinking on the problems of moral action and thought, even accounts of immediate stimulus-response sequences, holds that the human actions are strictly determined by the cultural machine that incorporates them. This machine may be of two kinds, and in some analyses it can be seen as being both at once: either one is embedded within a distinct system of cultural practices that initiates and regulates behaviour or else actions are determined from within by an invisible ideology, largely inaccessible to analysis, that structures all experience, including stimulus-specific reactions.³ Nussbaum and Wilson

in which many of these issues are handled by other authors, including Brian Massumi. Many of the problems that Nussbaum and Wilson treat show up, with rather different solutions, in other writers.

- 2 Both the books which I discuss in this review take positions that vigorously deny simplicity, both to human thinking and to human affects, even when reality's uncomplicated nature may seem obvious. Nussbaum and Wilson each, in quite dissimilar ways, develop theoretical models for emotions that show them to be, no matter how strong the illusion of simple spontaneity and immediacy, multi-layered and rhizoid.
- 3 The invisible worm, or secret castle, view of ideology derives from Louis Althusser with support from Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Ideology is not a "set of ideas," still less a personal belief-system, but rather an unconscious, and unexamined, condition of experience. Catherine Belsey puts this position

each argue the opposite position: ideas are accessible and may be known, and the motivations for action are always complex, knowable and (through either experience or introspection) modifiable.

I must clarify major distinctions between these two books from the outset. Nussbaum and Wilson cover some of the same ground, but they are not hunting the same quarry. As her sub-title indicates, Nussbaum argues a model for understanding emotions. In this argument, disgust figures significantly as an illustrative case. It is, however, only one of several emotions, including anger and grief, which she places within her comprehensive theory of the emotions. Wilson's specific concern is with disgust, and in particular the distinction between "in-the-world" disgust and its representations in art, film and literature. In *The Hydra's Tale*, a theory of the affects, not wholly dissimilar from Nussbaum's, plays a significant role. Both authors take strong, even adventurous, positions with respect to the development and expression of emotions, and both deny a simple, or naive, understanding of emotional response. As a consequence, their books are conceptually intricate and argumentative. The problem of theory runs through both books like an incandescent trumpet motif. Nussbaum, a philosopher, evolves her position out of a wide, analytic view of the work of other philosophers. She refers to her own thinking as an "eudiamonistic" ethics, holding that emotions have a history in each individual mind and are elements in judgment-making. That is, a part of theoretical thinking about the emotions is the insistence that they are intellectual components in value-judgments. In calling it neo-Stoic, she provides her theoretical position with an ancient lineage. Wilson, a liter-

with considerable elegance: an ideology is not "a separate element which exists independently in some free-floating realm of 'ideas' and is subsequently embodied in words, but a way of thinking, speaking, experiencing" (5). The Althusserian model of ideology, anathema to any modernist or philosophical pluralist, played a central role in the debate (or such) between Richard Levin and Gail Greene, and many others, on the pages of *PMLA* in 1988. Levin's and Greene's essays are reprinted in Kamps. Neither Nussbaum nor Wilson take anything like an Althusserian position. Wilson, apparently respecting without ascribing to the position that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue, adopts their anti-Althusserian view in *A Thousand Plateaus*: literature is "an assemblage. It has nothing to do with ideology. There is no ideology and never has been" (Wilson 334 n. 83). Maybe Wilson's rejection of Althusser is based not entirely upon accepting Deleuze and Guattari, but more upon his argument that important affects, such as disgust, are metamorphic (not rigidly implanted in the cortex of an unconscious structure). Furthermore, accepting Althusser, or the narrow ferocities of neo-Althusserians, would eliminate argument (though allowing critique) and render the project of his book patently absurd.

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ary scholar, takes an exploratory stance towards questions of theory. He refers to himself as a pluralist who likes “to see things open to very different questions” (334 n. 85).⁴ This predilection for pluralism shows up in his analysis of positions that have been advanced to explain the phenomenon of disgust and its cultural uses. Identifying five basic models, Wilson refers to the moral-legal view that disgust underlies, and in some sense makes possible, law; the social constructionist position that early conditioning determines adult emotional reactions; the Freudian view that disgust reflects, and reiterates, early experience of prohibited scenes; the view in Sartrean phenomenology that disgust responses are the imagination of “ambiguous” or transitional states; the position that Deleuze and Guattari argue (deeply established, as Wilson points out, in the French libertine tradition, from de Sade to Bataille) which sees the experience of disgust as an opportunity to explore, through transgression, personal identity and self-awareness. There is a problem in Wilson’s study about the relationship of one theoretical model to another and the potential inter-working of the “array” of models. Still, it strikes this reviewer as evident that the discussion of theory in both Nussbaum and Wilson is fresh, no doubt unfashionable, and vastly provocative.

Perhaps no genuinely naive views of the emotions are available, but if one were, it would be stated something like this: an emotion is a function of the human instinctual system, conditioned but not generated by past experience, which expresses itself in an immediate and spontaneous reaction to a stimulus. Disgust, according to this S-R model, would occur in reaction to a visual or olfactory stimulus (putrescence, say, or a foul odour of rot) which prompts a visceral response of gagging, accompanied by a wrinkling of the mouth and pursing of the lips—Wilson calls this the “disgust face”—after which vomiting quickly follows. Other emotions, including anger and pity, hate and love, would be similarly immediate, often explosive, in their expression. However, simple S-R models of human behaviour always prove, Nussbaum claims, to be “inadequate as predictive and explanatory accounts” (94). They have been largely replaced by more complex S-O-R models, where “O” stands for the bodily organism. Once the “O” is inserted into the equation, everything becomes vastly more complex than it was (and nothing was ever simple). Nussbaum argues

4 “Most theory these days in literature departments,” he writes, “is hyper-deductive, top-down and as slenderly cast as a Toledo rapier.” He continues to discuss the role of gurus in English departments and the arcane skill of “measuring the Mandarin’s fingernails” (334–5 n. 85).

that there are invariably “cognitive elements” that constitute “an essential part of the emotion’s identity” (34). These cognitive elements include “aboutness,” intentionality, belief and evaluation (33). Living bodies are “capable of intelligence and intentionality” (25) and it is this complexity, rather than a hypothetical instinctual system, that is evident in emotional expression. The human mind, she observes, possesses “a complex archaeology” (36) in which deeply-buried beliefs, false assumptions and misconstructions all play roles. Obviously, a great deal happens whenever a human person “feels” or experiences an emotion: the past, including all its archived falsities, shadows the present. Nussbaum largely assumes a developmental model for the human emotional structure. In one of her many literary moves, she refers the argument back to the adventures of “the child” who braves on-going experience to achieve a mind capable of holding both present demands and past shadows together in a single affectual response.

Freud links one of the “strong” emotions, disgust, to shame as an enforcer of moral rules. Religious, political and social institutions cultivate disgust, and employ it to re-enforce a range of prohibitions and cultivated, or culturally instructed, hatreds. Both Nussbaum and Wilson understand disgust as a shape-shifting emotion with public as well as private dimensions, constant only in its social and psychological functions. Wilson describes it as physical and visceral, at once “roiling” and “hydravarious,” two repeated terms borrowed from other writers (William Ian Miller and Salman Rushdie), impacting the human person at very fundamental levels and showing itself in nausea, gagging and vomiting. Despite its ostensible immediacy, a “gut” reaction to stench and ooze, disgust is nevertheless highly conditioned. Wilson doubts the view of both moralists and experimental psychologists that there must be natural disgust objects, such as faeces or, according to Kristeva, menstrual blood. Disgust displays itself so variously, and in such “disparate intensities,” that a universal object, some one thing (such as faeces) to which all disgusting phenomena can be referred, hardly finds adequate demonstration in laboratory experiments or moral pronouncements. Indeed, he writes, “if you wanted to explore the scope of disgust as a universal affect, it might make more sense to investigate what anthropologists have said than to listen exclusively to psychologists” (13). Professional travellers, and burrowers into unfamiliar cultures, anthropologists always report that disgust, if present, is different from the home experience, from the European or North American norms. Neither faeces nor blood, neither rot in general nor death-rot in

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particular, would sustain the claim that it was a universal disgust-object under an anthropologist's scrutiny.

Nussbaum pays less attention than Wilson to the roiling particulars of an investigation into disgust (not that she would fail to marshal them if required) and more to the ways in which disgust is embedded into the human consciousness of isolation and identity. Disgust, she writes, "wards off both animality in general and the mortality that is so prominent in our loathing of our animality" (203).⁵ This purpose, which Nussbaum seems to posit as universal, becomes deeply encoded in culture, as social formation and education, so that the consciousness of disgust not only sets us "at a distance from our animality and mortality," but it also distances us from "other persons and groups" (347). Thus disgust "tends to spread itself ... promiscuously over people and groups" (204). It has a great deal of socio-cultural work to do. This constitutes one of Nussbaum's central points. The role of disgust in creating boundaries cannot be over-stressed. Disgust, in all its "hydravarious" and "hypertrophic" multiplicity, builds all manner of boundaries and helps to maintain, and re-enforce, them through rhetorics of exclusion, negative imaging and propaganda. "There are many kinds of filth," Wilson writes. "Blasphemy, racism and sexism,

5 Nussbaum gives little attention to the world's plethora of disgusting objects and acts. She draws upon Miller's book for detail, and she might even be said to assume Miller as an accurate descriptive text. (Wilson, though largely respectful, takes a critical, occasionally mocking, view of Miller's work.) Nussbaum's 1999 article provides a close reading of Miller. Both Nussbaum and Wilson (as does Miller) draw upon Paul Rozin's several co-authored articles on experiments in the psychology of disgust. Wilson might seem to give too much attention to the empirical range and diversity of disgust. He displays, as he notes, a "genuine enthusiasm, almost teen-age in its spontaneity, for slimy, deliquescent rot." And so, while his book may not be an "exercise in gonzo cultural theory," it does occasionally appear to be precisely that (xii). Nussbaum concentrates upon psychological and social purposes and, in the cases of disgust and shame, social consequences, such as hatred, exclusion and torment. Wilson, though not uninterested in these topics, is much more concerned with definitions, available theoretical models and the differences between disgust in the actual world and in representation. Both Nussbaum and Wilson engage in "gonzo" tactics. Nussbaum opens her discussion with an account of her mother's death and her own response. Personal details suffuse her book. Wilson begins each chapter with an autobiographical tale that serves to "place" him in the study of disgust and brings in further personal detail (as well as fiction, in the form of fables and yarns) to illustrate points. I was left with the clear impression that both books, though fiercely concerned with argument, were expansive and (in a good sense) conceptually dense. The personal accounts, or gonzo moves, work well. Wilson's "enthusiasm" for detail can be a bit overpowering. Still, as he claims (or perhaps admits), "evidence always shows its provenance as argument's kidnapped child" (xxvii).

to cite three examples that strike many people coldly to the heart, are types of filth whose representations run paracursively throughout the history of literature” (89). Nussbaum, though she might not disagree with this proposition, would no doubt insist that they “run” through human society long before they reach expression in literature. Both writers agree that group hatreds are peculiarly hurtful and destructive to free, democratic life. The corrosive propaganda of social formation (the rhetorics of hegemony and exclusion) identifies set-apart groups and subjects them to abuse and may even deny them participation in public life. Hatreds such as racism, misogyny, homophobia and anti-Semitism have been, and are, supported by appeals to disgust. For example, “disgust properties are traditionally associated with women, as receivers of semen and so closely linked, through birth, with the mortality of the body... [W]omen in more or less all societies have been vehicles for the expression of male loathing of the physical and of the potentially decaying” (348–9). Similarly, she argues, Jews and gays have been associated, to their great detriment and pain, with deliquescence and slime. “The idea of semen and feces mixing together inside the body of a male is,” she writes, “one of the most disgusting ideas imaginable—to males, for whom the idea of nonpenetrability is a sacred boundary against stickiness, ooze, and death” (349). Nussbaum thinks that misogyny possesses a “logic” that exemplifies how other social prejudices work. They are, she writes, “hypertrophic” versions of shame and disgust (350). A social apparatus, a machine the workings of which are largely hidden, imposes distorted accusations of disgust—eliciting shame—upon women and other similarly disadvantaged members of a community. While Wilson sees the problem in much the same way, he goes further than Nussbaum in his analysis. Addressing male attitudes towards menstruation, he illustrates his discussion from works of literature, such as William Faulkner’s *Light in August*, and film, drawing especially upon David Cronenberg’s *The Brood*, to display the peculiarly strong, mythological mind-set of male misogyny. Thus, he observes that Anna Wulf, the central character in Doris Lessing’s *The Golden Notebook*, is “most within the grip of mythological forces when she most feels shame. These mythological pressures, expressed from within a male imaginary, characterized by negative images and gender-hostile jokes, lend Anna her abject self-image ... while the alien image rules her imagination, shames acts as an enforcer” (285). Nussbaum seems less interested in how misogyny is felt, and more in its corrosive social consequences. Wilson is also interested in the concept of abjection, in particular as Julia Kristeva has defined it. The condition of being abject, a cognitive position that Nussbaum ignores,

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entails “feeling disgusting in the eyes of others, of having been cast off, discarded like waste, and individually isolated as an object of loathing and nauseous revulsion” (239). Menstrual blood, or at least male reactions to it, lies at the core of this revulsion.⁶

Though he does not argue for a model of psychological development, Wilson considers boundaries to be both unnatural and unstable. Whether any boundaries are natural is a different question. Wilson argues that they are arbitrary (as artificial as cartographic borders) and always open, always subject to continuing transformations. Nussbaum considers boundaries, though having evolved through the individual’s development, to hold more or less steady in an adult’s mind which seems, in her thinking, largely stable. This distinction points to a major difference in the two scholars’ treatments of the boundary problem. Wilson argues that boundaries are subject to change, both in the individual’s life and in society as a whole (as, say, after a period of revolution such as, in his view, the opening up of value structures during the ’60s). He evidently shares Nussbaum’s tragic sense of the social hurt that arises through exclusion and rhetorical caricature, but takes a long view of these matters. Things do change, and do sometimes get better, but his optimistic fatalism does not go very far towards suggesting courses of action. Nussbaum wants to improve society by urging more reading, more study of art and the humanities, more attention to powerful textual models of compassion and love. Wilson seems to think that, in the absence of revolution, conceptual analysis (that is, education) will do the trick, at least on the level of the individual being’s always-metamorphic experience. The cold theory paradigm seems to counter the hot (or warm) affect at this juncture.

Both scholars contend that disgust and shame, in all their variations, help to establish boundaries. Nussbaum, though she does emphasize the importance of a developmental psychology, sees boundaries largely in

6 Although Wilson devotes all of his final chapter to the experience of feeling abject, he does not accept Kristeva’s position that menstrual blood is, along with faeces, the conceptual foundation of abjection in male mythology. He cites surveys that show vomit to be the most disgusting object among both women and men. Later, he writes, “I have never felt certain that I understand the reasons for insisting upon the menses as a fundamental category of the abject.” He wryly concludes that “Kristeva and her followers, such as [Suzette A.] Henke, may have ideological reasons for their cock-eyed insistence” (400 n. 47). Like all the chapters in *The Hydra’s Tale*, the final chapter begins with an autobiographical tale. This one concerns a tormented, self-destructive friend from his undergraduate days at the University of Chicago whose father had anally sodomized him. This is a searing account of male-on-male sexual abuse.

terms of their rigid social restrictiveness. They protect individuals and groups from contamination by setting apart an “other” that is dangerous, at once filthy and venomous, in its capacity to pollute. Thus, for Nussbaum, disgust-sanctioned boundaries help create the social phenomenon of group hatred. Disgust shapes boundaries in public life, a shifting but invariant function in all human society, because, she writes, it is connected with “the human desire to be nonanimal. Its links with misogyny, anti-Semitism, and other forms of group hatred throughout history give us still more reason to be suspicious of its public role” (423). While assigning them more or less similar social roles, Wilson takes boundaries to be open to change and, like disgust itself, extremely metamorphic. Society, oppressive in its collective animosities, will inevitably debase an excluded person, someone found to be “disgusting,” and view her, in Nussbaum’s phrase, as “a slimy slug, no better than excrement” (424). Disgust, then, is an emotion to conquer and control since it blocks both compassion and love. Looking across a culturally-enforced disgust boundary towards some known “other,” the imagination becomes exiguous and ungenerous. Yet compassion and love, the “subtle interplay” between two imperfect beings (196), are precisely what human beings need more of, not less.

Nussbaum’s emphasis upon compassion and empathetic attention to human neediness loops back to the importance she assigns to a developmental model of the emotions. Clearly, if disgust is a learned behaviour, promoted by various social apparatuses to exclude and torment others, then it can be modified, if never quite eliminated, by a revised educational process. An education system that promotes, however unwittingly, strategies of exclusion (and ultimately group hatred) will create a “dead citizenry, prey to the aggressive wishes that so often accompany an inner world dead to the images of others” (426). In *The Hydra’s Tale*, Wilson is much less concerned than Nussbaum with the development of emotions. He does not advance a developmental model and when he does refer to psychology, it is usually to Freud and to the psychoanalytic tradition, especially Kristeva and the feminist commentators upon her work. (For example, Wilson frequently turns to the *abject*, a key concept in Kristeva’s work, and devotes all of his final chapter to the distinction between it and self-disgust. Nussbaum does not mention the term.) Since he puts a great deal of weight on shifts in experience, and consequent modifications in the way that disgust is felt and expressed, it is likely that Wilson does assume the mind’s development, but it often seems that his position, at least within the context of this book, is exclusively functional. He makes it plain that he considers social repression a great evil and the elimination of

socially-restrictive boundaries a benefit. (His opposition to all capital punishment leaks through his dispassionate account of execution, in particular electrocution: “Executions, even clean ones, stink” [137].) Nonetheless, there is a significant correspondence with Nussbaum’s position. Wilson distinguishes between affects, such as disgust, that operate on a level of conditioned visceral response, and compound affects, such as contempt, that operate on an intellectual level, incorporating imaginative additions and edging towards theatrical performance. Disgust is a psycho-visceral affect; contempt, a psycho-intellectual compound. Contempt builds upon visceral disgust much as “outrage builds upon anger or nostalgia upon simple homesickness,” but it is never reducible to it (185–6).⁷ Even in the most everyday experience, the mind is always in play. Nussbaum thinks that the imagination, especially in literature and music, is exceptionally important since it allows for fellow-feeling and meaningful responses to neediness. Imagination’s role in making moral judgments constitutes an important aspect of Nussbaum’s “eudaimonistic” ethics. Emotions, suffused with imagination, abet the human person’s “flourishing” (31). Wilson thinks that the imagination actually helps to construct ordinary experience. Hence it is not only a question of how the imagination tells stories or creates works of art, but also how it interfuses everyday experience, making sense out of it and re-casting it into vivid shapes. The imagination creates “scenarios” based upon, and in response to, the events that happen to, and confront, the individual. She (in some sense) thinks the world in the terms that her imagination sets. A “disgust scenario,” for example, may emerge. Sometimes, as seems to be the case when people want to view executions, these small mental playlets of pain, nausea and disgust may be desired. Most often, deeply encoded by cultural conditioning, they (appear to) simply happen. Tattoos are among Wilson’s primary examples.

7 Wilson makes a determined effort to distinguish his approach to disgust from that of William Ian Miller. In his *Anatomy of Disgust*, Miller does not draw a distinction between disgust and contempt. (In effect, he treats them as one identical emotion or, at their most distant, close “cousins.”) Considered as a compound psycho-intellectual affect, contempt involves a vast array of “shadows,” including not only memories of past experience but also learned literary responses. His denial of, or perhaps inability to see, a distinction between disgust and contempt, anticipates Miller’s most glaring shortcoming (according to Wilson): he also denies, or merely ignores, the human capacity for acting and make-believe and, most important, to engage in these activities in the actual world in real time. Miller largely ignores literature and art, and though he does comment on some of Orwell’s non-fiction writing, he grants no place in his discussion to the imagination per se.

Tattoos are interesting because they are on the human skin, often in private places (on or near the genitalia, say), but they are also works of art. A tattoo is available for aesthetic as well as sociological analysis. A tattoo may arouse visceral disgust, either because of its content or because its mere presence on a person's skin indicates that a religious or social taboo has been broken. It may also inspire a very positive response because the craftsmanship of its design and execution, for its originality and its daring. It hardly ever seems possible to view a tattoo without calling upon previous intellectual experience or without mentally acknowledging other works of art. (It *is* possible: Wilson cites Flannery O'Connor's story, "Parker's Back," as an example of a person, in this case Parker's wife, Sarah Ruth, who literally cannot see a tattoo with religious content.) Viewing a tattoo, even if it is entirely a negative experience, causing anxiety and fear, is never a simple matter since it requires a person to call upon both her cultural and her aesthetic background. Wilson gives two instance of striking facial tattoos. One is a fable describing a young man (with a spider tattooed upon his forehead) seeking an academic appointment. Despite his brilliance—his horizon of potential accomplishment—the young scholar is not offered the job. The other example comes evidently from Wilson's personal experience in Australia and recalls his encounter in a pub with a man who has had a spider tattooed in the corner of his right eye, the web spreading down his cheeks to disappear beneath his collar. Deeply disturbing and intimidating, this latter tattoo is "a mode of personal graffiti that probably suggests, and will certainly be read as suggesting, a number of socio-pathic values, such as alienation, disdain, outrage and hate" (167). The emotions connected to the tattoo, both in the wearer's (if "wearing" the inky imprint is the right term) intention and in the author's viewing, are intricate, building upon several emotions and a complex experience of cultural values. The tattoos suggest what Wilson argues generally about compound emotions: they build upon visceral reactions, drawing strength and complexity from a wide range of previous experience—including art—and may perform representations of emotions that are not actually felt. Nothing is simple, and certainly not anything (whether act or image) as apparently simple as a tattoo.

Both Nussbaum and Wilson are concerned with the ways that disgust creates multiple conceptual boundaries. These are not simply divisions between individuals and groups, though these may be the most hurtful and—from the standpoint of public life—the most troublesome. Some boundaries operate only on intellectual levels and divide one intellectual activity from another. (Apparently universal in human society, this is a

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condition mirrored by the radical division of universities into competing disciplines, and budget-driven departments.) These boundaries distinguish one activity from another or make one undertaking legitimate, another illegitimate. Wilson seems peculiarly concerned with conceptual boundaries and the powers of human culture to create and maintain them. Reading *The Hydra's Tale*, it might seem that there emerges a view of the world as in(de)initely bounded, one boundary laid upon another, one grid superimposed upon an ever-growing palimpsest of other grids. The human body, for example, is crossed and re-crossed by conceptual boundaries. Wilson sees it as divided into a vast array of zones, each deeply mythologized. Nussbaum thinks that the body is divided, though not, it seems, to the extent that Wilson does. The mouth, she comments, is “an especially charged border” (202). Wilson, on the other hand, claims that all the bodily parts, even when they are absent, having been replaced by prostheses, are mythologized. Seemingly, his preferred examples are the eyes and the genitalia, but he leaves no doubt his argument would reject any notion of one part being more “mythological” than another.⁸ Given the concern for boundaries that both Nussbaum and Wilson evince, it is puzzling that neither has much to say about religious boundaries, about taboos and doctrinal prohibitions. Boundaries both protect the individual person from external dangers that threaten her and also protect (from her intrusions) certain places, elevated in significance by religious or cultural associations. The latter situation invokes the concept of taboo, the sacred precinct protected from her unauthorized touch (or mere presence) by powerful sanctions.⁹

8 Wilson acknowledges Bataille at several points. He accepts that even the big toe bears its mythological weight, including Bataille’s famous commentary upon it. Miller anticipates Nussbaum in thinking that a “multitude of taboos” qualify the mouth (a point which Nussbaum may take from Miller since her account of disgust is indebted to him). Wilson takes Miller to task for claiming that the anus is “significantly” more democratic than the mouth. The anus, Wilson counter-argues, is “massively over-determined with multiple taboos regulating the places, methods and conditions of excretion as well as the possibilities of sexual excitement. Like the eye or, indeed, the phallus, it is a mythological part” (392 n. 2). It makes little sense to insist that one anatomical part (the phallus, say), is more “mythological” than another (the vagina). Wilson does claim Miller is “spot on” in arguing the “female anus may not bear the surcharge of significance” that the male one does since in being anally penetrated a woman is being penetrated “as a man ... her anus is being used as if she were a he being used as a she” (Miller 101). I suspect that Wilson would have been more consistent had he resisted such facile agreement.

9 Neither Nussbaum nor Wilson devotes much space to the discussion of religious disgust. Wilson, who discusses the highly personal sense of self-disgust and the

Although religion and taboo may not figure significantly in their discussions, both Nussbaum and Wilson explore some of the many ways in which art emerges from society, reflects it and comments upon it. The boundaries between art and its social matrices are complex and, at least in Wilson's view, not altogether obvious. Both writers use literature to illustrate problems (Wilson also creates his own stories, interspersing them throughout his book, even in the endnotes) and to suggest solutions. Wilson is clear, even at times to the point of dogmatism, that things in the world and their representations in art are distinct. Many people, moralists (such as Miller) especially, seem to flatten out the differences between things and their representations. This may be because they cannot see the differences (though, as Wilson observes, this is only "Aesthetics 101"), but it is more likely because they want to ask the same questions or even because they are unwilling to ask different questions. The marker for having crossed a boundary between the actual and a fictional world lies in the discovery that one must ask a different set of questions. Moralists, and lawyers too, seem to cross the boundaries into fictional worlds even while denying that they have crossed. Nussbaum, who offers deep and analytic readings of several literary texts, continues to ask the same questions that she asks of the actual world. Wilson prefers to pose textual questions, or

awareness of contamination leading to abjection, does not take seriously the problem of a person having become disgusting *because* she has violated a taboo and polluted a sacred precinct. He then expresses some regret for not having had the space for this problem: "I have not found the opportunity to pursue in any depth the relation of the disgusting to the sacred ... [the] sacred area, the precincts of a deity or a religious tradition that contains a *mysterium* projecting its 'numinous dread' or awe" [Rudolph Otto] upon all those who stand outside and are prohibited from crossing" (xxvi). One can only question why he didn't find that opportunity which was surely there for the grasping—but then, after a book of 445 pages, perhaps Wilson cannily plans a hydravarious sequel. Nussbaum displays no interest in the sacred nor in the concept of religious taboo. (She does discuss the theological vision of a higher love, and its attainment, in her superb reading of Dante [557–90]. Scattered, though distinctly minor key, references to religion recur throughout *Upheavals of Thought*. When she does mention religion, it is within the context of examining social norms.) Always secular is her sense of boundaries as social constructs that protect the individual or the group from contamination. Wilson devotes considerable space to the discussion of religion, in particular Islam, in his analysis of blasphemy and the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie (198–210) and to Christianity in his discussion of Modernism. (He describes Modernism as a paradigmatic instance of conceptual disgust which constitutes—for traditional Christians as well as Muslims—a "perverse geometry.") He makes it clear, however, that he views religious doctrine as, at best, further evidence for the creation of fictional worlds in ordinary life and, at worst, dangerous.

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questions that could not, reasonably, be asked outside a fictional world. One example of the difference between them on this point can be found in their analysis of a particular chapter in James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Both Nussbaum and Wilson discuss *Ulysses*, each considering carefully chapter four, the Calypso episode which ends with Leopold Bloom defecating in the outhouse, the jakes. Within the realm of naturalistic conventions, Joyce describes this moment of human biology in considerable detail. It is an event that, Nussbaum remarks, will cause "those who react with disgust to bodily functions and their products" to find *Ulysses* "one of the most disgusting books in the world" (691). Nussbaum takes Bloom's morning bowel movement to be part of the book's "astonishing concreteness," a concrete element of life and Bloom's day (688). Wilson reads the passage's underlying complexities differently, expressing a particular interest in "the way Joyce writes this simple passage describing a bowel movement as a way to originate his character, Leopold Bloom. It introduces a trait, anality, that will emerge during the novel's development as a significant characteristic" (104). He goes on to trace the several ways in which Bloom's anality is expressed in the food he eats (inner organs that leave a "fine tang of faintly scented urine" upon the palate), his preoccupations with "the lower bodily stratum," the way he sleeps with Molly (head to "plump mellow yellow smellow" rump) and even in such apparently small details as the bar of soap he carries in his pocket "all that famous day" (105). Crossing a boundary means having to ask different sets of questions. Art and literature, however valuable as illustration to support argument, pose problems, and hence questions, that the actual world does not recognize.

While in her comment on a putatively visceral reaction to a textual event ("one of the most disgusting books in the world") Nussbaum seems to stage the pathologically fastidious reader's final reaction of disgust upon finding out about Bloom's adventures asquat the cuckstool, Wilson reads the scene not so much as an occasion ripe for disgust as a cool opportunity for characterization. Although both writers are concerned with literature, offering analysis of literary texts past and present, Nussbaum in this instance moves the focus away from the discursive construction towards an in-the-world encounter with a disgusting thing. What is apparent here in the very language used by Joyce—replete with multiple meanings, moving in rapidly shifting directions—is the artful play in this fictional encounter with the disgusting. Wilson is particularly interested in theoretical aspects of play, make-believe, gamesome discursive acts and works of the imagination. He revisits the possibility of an offended person pretending disgust, curling his lips and wrinkling his nose in mock

disgust, in an expression of moral disdain. In his final note, Wilson quotes one critic who, reviewing Miller's book, observes that writing about disgust without mentioning modern literature was rather like completing a study of mass destruction without mentioning anything subsequent to the Charge of the Light Brigade. Nussbaum also sees the imagination as exceptionally important, a necessary condition even, for the possibility of compassion. Her discussions of literary texts from Dante to Joyce (457–714) are particularly rich. She does not, however, examine the possibilities of make-believe and Let's-pretend in the actual-world play of the emotions. Wilson returns repeatedly to the working of the imagination (to which he devotes all of his fifth chapter), but he is largely concerned with its operation in actual life in the creation of small, personal fictional worlds. People can hardly experience the world without bringing their imaginations into play. Nussbaum is interested in great works of art, particularly in literature and music. She views imagination as the means that one person has for feeling empathy, and hence compassion, for another. Masterpieces provide instruction in, and models of, the possibilities of compassion. Since she does not investigate the ways in which imagination helps to construct actual quotidian experience, Nussbaum's notion of an "archaeology" of the emotions is not the same as Wilson's model of compound affects. Even within a model of developmental psychology, however, it should be possible to allow the mind's capacity for integrating distinct emotions ("disgust-alienation," say, or "desire-compassion") into compound forms.

Upheavals of Thought and *The Hydra's Tale* are complementary studies. They touch on several similar topics and they each advance an intricate view of the emotions. Each book ranges widely, exploring a multiplicity of complex ideas. Unlike many other books on human affects, each knows the difference between an actual emotion and its representation in literature and art. Each possesses an elaborate scholarly apparatus and an extensive bibliography. Both books open up challenging, often gripping and always provocative, narratives for anyone interested in human emotions, in the representations of these emotions in art and literature, or in the theory of the human response to the actual world.

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