

# Denis Johnson's Postmodern Lazarus: Transforming Faith in *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the interlocking themes of the psychology of faith and the disintegration of selfhood in Denis Johnson's 1991 novel Resuscitation of a Hanged Man. Reading the work as a modern update of the roman noir, the article proposes that the protagonist's quest for spiritual identity is both enabled and interrupted by a process of constant transformation and self-reinvention which ultimately leads to his demise. Johnson's novel, the article argues, employs standard noir tropes such as the defeatist hero, the deceitful woman, and the enigmatic disappearance to dramatize the unfolding of an existentialist narrative in which the subjectivity of the investigator gets fractured while no case is being solved. It is suggested that the only possibility for redemption conceivable in this novel's universe is that offered by acts of transtextual reading, where quotation is invested with a power to mend the precarious fictional self.*

**Key words:** *Denis Johnson – intertextuality – roman noir – postmodern metaphysics – Lazarus – existentialism – Simone Weil*

To teach us that we are non-beings, God made himself non-being.<sup>1</sup>

He came there in the off-season. So much was off. All bets were off. The last deal was off. His timing was off, or he wouldn't have come here at this moment.<sup>2</sup>

1. Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks*, trans. Richard Rees (London: Oxford U P, 1970) 218.

2. Denis Johnson, *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man*, 1991 (New York: Perennial, 2001) 3. Further references to this text will be given within parenthesis in the main text.

From his novelistic debut *Angels* (1983) to *The Name of the World* (2000), Denis Johnson has been preoccupied with crafting a fiction of the dispossessed, portraying the lives of characters on the fringes of mainstream America.<sup>3</sup> Drug addicts, bank robbers, streetwalkers, and disturbed young men are only some of the creatures who typically inhabit Johnson's stories. The author's oeuvre centers on narratives of crime and violence, yet his work favors characterization over plot, existentialism over pulp psychology. Lyrically dense and emotionally transcendent, Johnson's prose is closer to Don DeLillo's than to that of Elmore Leonard. Described as "the world's greatest living writer" by journalist Nick Johnstone,<sup>4</sup> Johnson has acquired a loyal cult audience, though he has largely escaped the attention of literary critics. In spite of Johnson's inclusion by Harold Bloom in *The Western Canon*,<sup>5</sup> surprisingly little has been published on his work, and it is perhaps symptomatic of this neglect that Kevin McCarron's article on the short fiction of Johnson, Dennis Cooper and Thom Jones devotes a mere page to the former.<sup>6</sup> The sparse commentary that does exist has focused mainly on *Jesus' Son*, Johnson's acclaimed 1992 novel that was adapted for the screen by Alison Maclean in 1999. With a special emphasis on what Robert McClure Smith terms the "spiritual journeying"<sup>7</sup> of Johnson's social outcast, I hope in this essay to be able to help redress the critical under-appreciation of one of the most idiosyncratic voices in contemporary American fiction.

When Denis Johnson's protagonist Leonard English arrives in Provincetown in December 1980, the universe to him may not have collapsed entirely but it has undeniably become somewhat disjointed. Everything appears to be just a little out of sync. Driving on the peninsular highway toward the end of the Cape, English – who appropriately happens to be from Lawrence, Kansas – winds up on a traffic island in

3. See for instance Gail Reitenbach, "Foreign Exchange in Denis Johnson's *The Stars at Noon*," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture and Theory* 47.4 (1991): 27.

4. Nick Johnstone, "When the Smack Begins to Flow," *Uncut* 39 (2000): 68-71 (69).

5. Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994) 565.

6. Kevin McCarron, "'The Crack-House Flicker': The Sacred and the Absurd in the Short Stories of Dennis Cooper, Dennis [sic] Johnson, and Thom Jones," *The Yearbook of English Studies: North American Short Stories and Short Fictions* 31 (2001): 50-61.

7. Robert McClure Smith, "Addiction and Recovery in Denis Johnson's *Jesus' Son*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42.2 (2001): 180-191 (181); emphasis in original.

the middle of the night. He is drunk and befuddled, yet the police officer who interviews him lets him go. *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* (1991) is a neo-modernist update of the American *roman noir*; and it begins like so many film noirs with an image of that nocturnal automobile, journeying despondently though forebodingly through the night. An established trope of the genre, we have seen variations of this arch-image in films as diverse as Robert Siodmak's *The Killers* (1946), Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), Joel Coen's *Blood Simple* (1984), and David Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997). And like many of the narratives which define that corpus of films, the novel's plot and mood oscillate between the investigative and the confessional. Having endured his initial mishap, English finds himself in "the last town in America" (7), a place where the fabric of experience soon starts to unravel and transmute in rather unpredictable ways.

*Resuscitation* is a work almost traumatically preoccupied with acts of deciphering, or, perhaps more succinctly, with the desperate need to believe that the world does in fact promise something to decipher (a message to read, a code to crack) in the first place. At the core of Johnson's creative method, this essay assumes, is an aesthetics of addiction driven by a desire to possess and rearticulate other cultural texts, the shards of which relentlessly crop up in the author's own narratives.<sup>8</sup> The first word of the title of Johnson's 1991 novel in fact announces the work's existential matrix, the organic site at which the processes of rejuvenation and transtextuality advantageously converge. Enclosed within the word "resuscitation," it turns out, is that of "citation," a linguistic contingency that at least emblematically relates the miracle of rebirth to the event of quotation. Johnson's protagonist, we learn, once attempted to take his own life by hanging himself, and the narrative of resuscitation which the novel recounts is that of his progressively deranged recovery. But the title of the book also references another and more literal case of resuscitation, that of one John H. Skaggs, whose story English comes across in an 1870

8. Embedded in the novel's diegesis are a number of suggestive hypotexts that in fact both animate and deepen *Resuscitation's* thematic fixations. In that respect Simone Weil's *The Need for Roots* and Søren Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* are perhaps especially salient. The significance of Johnson's text materializes most fruitfully through inter-readings of Weil and Kierkegaard, alongside works which remain unquoted in the novel, such as Robert Bresson's *Diary of a Country Priest* and *Pickpocket* (1951, 1959) and Lynne Ramsay's *Morvern Callar* (2002).

edition of *The New York Times*. Skaggs had been hanged for murder but after his death had become the victim of a failed experiment in which two doctors had attempted to resurrect his body using galvanic batteries. These two doctors, Johnson's narrator tells us, were men who "had already found their footing in the twentieth century, this region of the blind where there was no telling the difference between up and down, wrong and right, between sex and love, men and women, even between the living and the dead" (155). Modernity, as this narrator conceives it, entails undecidability, a threat to the power of distinctions and demarcations. The novel's epigraph by Neal Cassady, "[l]ife goes into new forms," epitomizes this transmutational narrative poetics which undergirds Johnson's narrative throughout. Finally, the novel's title evokes the resurrection of Christ, thus pinpointing the work's religious subtext and its conceptual continuity with the subject of transformation.

Taking its cue from Neal Cassady's statement, *Resuscitation* is a novel which explores the ramifications of acts of transformation and self-reinvention. Once arrived in Provincetown, Leonard English, who is consumed by religious doubts and questions of faith,<sup>9</sup> is soon employed by the elderly Ray Sands as a private detective and disc jockey at a radio station. He meets and falls impossibly in love with a woman named Leanna (who is gay and the lover of the person English is spying on for Sands). Then he flounders in his assignments as a detective, particularly as regards the enigmatic disappearance of the painter Gerald Twinbrook, with whom English becomes so obsessed that his already fragile sense of identity gradually comes to intersect with that of the missing person. Eventually, English's evolving madness culminates in his in-drag assassination attempt on a bishop, spawned by confusion and diminishing powers of discrimination: "Winter into spring into winter. Miss Leanna

9. A significant part of English's backstory involves a suicide attempt, for which he unsuccessfully seeks absolution upon his arrival in Provincetown (12), and which appears to have been triggered by his skewed sense of religiosity. Early in the story the narrator thus contextualizes the nature of English's tantalizing relationship with the ethics of faith:

Somehow the spiritual things, questions like what was really wanted of a person and just how far God would go in being God – he couldn't have said what exactly, but he guessed it was the depth of these conundrums, the way he could spend an afternoon thinking about them and never get anywhere but feel he'd made great strides – *something*, anyway, had dizzied him, and for a while he couldn't function. Stepping off a chair with a rope around his neck and hanging there for a minute had broken the spell. (17)

had turned into Mister. Wafer and wine into body and blood. And people dying – passing from life into meat. All these transformations. They were too much for him” (163).

In various ways all of Johnson’s novels seem to grapple with what Andrew Klavan calls “ineffectual masculinity,” showcasing men who “remain mystified by what they do to themselves.”<sup>10</sup> Where the protagonists of an early novel like *Angels* are caught in the entrapment of a lethargic subjectivity, however, English is a character for whom the texture of existence is infinitely malleable and identity is always mutating into new constellations. For Bill Houston in *Angels*, the future promises to be “exactly like the past”:<sup>11</sup> “he’d reached this absolute zero of the truth, and without fear or bitterness he realized now that somewhere inside it there was a move he could make to change his life, to become another person, but he’d never be able to guess what it was.”<sup>12</sup> If the tone of Johnson’s poetic morphology in the later novel is even darker and more despairing than in *Angels*, its vision is also in a sense more constructive, since it rejects that novel’s suggestion of pre-determination and instead accentuates the belief in the liberating potential of change. It is no coincidence that the titles of two of Johnson’s novels – *Resuscitation* and *Already Dead* (1997) – adumbrate a post-mortem world as a point of departure for the process of narration. These are stories that are concerned not with the after-life but with the “after-death,” with what happens when the self emerges from nothingness and the modes of existence go “into new forms.” In his analysis of *Jesus’ Son*, McClure Smith points out that the notion of recovery (both from addiction and as recapitulation) is “intrinsic to the narrator’s method of storytelling,”<sup>13</sup> and conceptual permutations of the same prefix (revive, recapture, react, return, recollect, rehabilitate, rejuvenate, recuperate) similarly inform the narrative logic of *Resuscitation*.

It is the transformative epistemologies of textual superimposition, however, that provide the paradigm for Johnson’s obsession with processes of metamorphosis. English’s ruminations on cosmic interconnect-edness – “in the general flow of events nothing could be viewed as sepa-

10. Andrew Klavan, “Infernal Combustion,” *Village Voice* 28 Oct. 1986: 51.

11. Denis Johnson, *Angels* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983) 132.

12. *Ibid.* 42.

13. Smith 184.

rate from anything else" (135) – are indeed reflected in the novel's own form. As the act of reading alters perception, so the act of allusion alters that which is being read.<sup>14</sup> Each new intertext that Johnson introduces comes to modify the story he is recounting, and the intertextual density that is thus accumulated ensures a decentered, lateral reading of the novel.<sup>15</sup> This inter-referential pathology which propels the story of English is even made narrationally explicit by a moment of epistolary indulgence. Searching through the files in the missing Twinbrook's office, English comes across a letter written by the artist and addressed to "The Secret President of the United States":

*Under the freedom of Information Act I demand that you comply with my request of August 13, which I have repeated twice monthly since then. I am asking for all the records on the corporations listed below. I will be satisfied with nothing less than all the records in the world. (179; italics in original.)*

Joined by their shared dementia Twinbrook and English appear to be twin psyches, both possessed by a desire to absorb and digest all the texts that exist in the world. Twinbrook's archive fever seems to evoke a pseudo-Eliotian project gone haywire and obese. In the case of English, the transformations facilitated by this voracious citationality ultimately manifest themselves not only psychologically and existentially but even materially. Irrevocably deluded and determined to assassinate a bishop, English dresses in drag toward the end of the narrative: "He wished Leanna's pantsuits weren't so small – in a pantsuit and her brown fedora and this slash of lipstick and these false eyelashes, no one would know if he was a man dressed up as a woman or a woman dressed up as a man" (231). English has become Norman Bates, Travis Bickle, and Mark Chapman all rolled into the same mad persona.

14. The transtextual sweep of the novel is exasperating, comprising numerous references to literature (Coleridge, Lord Byron, Tennyson, Whitman, Eliot, Simenon, Greene, Orwell, Bukowski); to pop music (Elvis Presley, Liza Minnelli's "The Impossible Dream," Shirley Temple's "The Good Ship Lollipop," Bob Dylan's "Sad-Eyed Lady of the Lowlands," George Jones's "One is a Lonely Number," and many other songs and performers); to the movies (Mae West, Marlene Dietrich, *The Red Shoes*, *Lawrence of Arabia*, James Bond); to philosophers (Søren Kierkegaard, Simone Weil); to political figures and organizations (Hitler, John F. Kennedy, Jimmy Carter, The Daughters of the American Revolution, The John Birch Society, The Ku Klux Klan); and to religion (the Bible, Joan of Arc, C.S. Lewis's *Reflections on the Psalms*).

15. At this juncture, keep in mind also Mikhail Iampolski's reminder that it is the reader who is "responsible for creating the quotation as a textual layer." See Mikhail Iampolski, *The Memory of Tiresias: Intertextuality and Film*, trans. Harsha Ram (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998) 51.

The latter reference is hardly accidental. When English turns up in Provincetown and Johnson's narrative begins, the time is December 1980. This world is not like Kansas. English has come to Cape Cod to work as a private investigator for the elusive Ray Sands, while also attempting to come to terms with the originary trauma – the crisis, or event – which indirectly occasions the spiritual exploration whose imprint is the narrative trajectory of the novel.<sup>16</sup> But it soon becomes transparent that English's failed suicide is not the only critical event occupying the space of the novel's backstory. Hovering around the perimeters of this space is another traumatic event, cultural yet personal, which remains unspoken except for the faint enunciatory gestures of the narrative's temporal setting and the protagonist's first name. Or is it merely fortuitous that Johnson's novel is set in the immediate aftermath of the murder of John Lennon and sporting a central character by the name of Leonard who, to boot, falls in love with Leanna the dyke?<sup>17</sup> In 1966, one may recall, Lennon famously contended that the Beatles had become "bigger than Jesus," and if even the man who said that is gone, what is there left to believe in?

This is the question with which English himself wrestles, this is the cartography of doubt which delineates the narrative: "He didn't pray anymore for faith, because he'd found that a growing certainty of the Presence was accompanied by a terrifying absence of any sign or feeling or manifestation of it. He was afraid that what he prayed to was nothing, only this limitless absence. I'll grow until I've found you, and you won't be there" (119). For English, the precariousness of faith seems to court not only despair or a certain existential sickness but even a real psychosis. Moreover, the narration itself goes a long way towards suggesting that madness and faith are transposable entities. In a species of indirect internal monologue the protagonist ponders the reciprocity of the two: "Isn't it a matter of faith marching after the delusion? Isn't that what the saints are proving?" (221). Intriguingly, in this passage the novel appears

16. As Klavan has argued, Johnson's novels are often informed by the metaphor of the underlying mythic journey, or "the heroic descent into the abyss, the attempt to retrieve the repressed from the subconscious and unite the mind's underworld with the self." See Klavan 51. Acts of repression permeate the narrative pre-history of *Resuscitation*: English's suicide attempt, his lapse of faith, and the death of Lennon.

17. Toward the end of the novel Lennon's name does in fact get mentioned when Phil, the cab driver and English's drinking buddy, proposes a toast to "the ghost of John Lennon, dead these several months" (193).

to encapsulate both a kind of transformative faith as well as a particular textual force, which in turn transforms faith itself into the bizarre project of the floundering existentialist. English's conception of faith is intransitive. His devotion is to the capricious energies of processes of becoming, to outrageous, chronically deferred possibility, and in this kind of commitment he is not unlike his employer Sands "who knew how to love without hope" (56). In Johnson's universe faith has no object, and no closure.

The theological conundrum which engenders English's deeply deviant behavior points to a recurring interest in Johnson's work, an overwhelming epistemological impasse reminiscent of that which disconcerts the Antonius Block character in Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957): "Faith is a torment, did you know that? It is like loving someone who is out there in the darkness but never appears, no matter how loudly you call."<sup>18</sup> The title of a previous Johnson novel, *The Stars at Noon* (1986), nicely captures this inherent irony of "looking for something you 'know' is there but cannot see," to use Reitenbach's phrase.<sup>19</sup> The confrontation with such a stark uncommunicativeness, with an unblinking indifference of such a magnitude, requires strategies of evasion and distortion. In an imaginary plane conversation with the dead Twinbrook (an exchange which eerily seems to prefigure the meeting between Tyler Durden and Jack in David Fincher's 1999 film *Fight Club*), English contemplates the design of Twinbrook's paintings, concluding that "[t]he reason you don't paint them the way it really looks is because you're *afraid* of it the way it really looks" (227; italics in original). This is, apparently, also a pertinent explication of the way in which English's mind seems to work, that is, by operations of unremitting displacement. It would appear that the dictates of faith and the almost preposterous demand for a kind of grace depend on that sense of distance that only periphrasis (and the impermanence of the malleable) can provide. Existence and its object must be glanced at circuitously, obliquely. So the painter cannot paint it "the way it really looks" because that would be to confront the depths of a particular existential fear, overpowering and slightly Kierkegaardian.

18. Ingmar Bergman, dir., *The Seventh Seal*, Svensk Filmindustri, 1957.

19. Reitenbach 34.



In reflecting on the subject of transmutationality one can scarcely avoid questions of identity, difference, and sameness. Kierkegaard's *The Sickness unto Death* begins with the suggestion that the resistance toward desiring to be the self one is results in despair, in spiritual sickness.<sup>20</sup> The politics of transformation, however, is anathema to the stickiness of ontology. In the post-spiritual vortex of late modernity every self is other, and estrangement is not what it used to be. Embracing alterity is always there as a potentiality. Leonard English, for instance, is rather oblivious to the eventual dissolution of his own masculinity. Some of the most felicitous tropes for this condition, in my view, are Leo Charney's notions of *drift* and *the empty moment*. According to Charney, a philosophy of drift – which entails the idea of “living with the empty present” – has come increasingly to define the experience of modernity.<sup>21</sup> A character like English virtually embodies what one may see as a vagrant modality of being (not unlike Gilles Deleuze's understanding of the nomadic).<sup>22</sup> With regard to Charney's point of view it is not difficult to discern the repercussions of this sense of drift for the deterritorialization of subjectivity:

In the empty moment, what you call identity ceases to be continuous, linear, apparent. It's hazy and insubstantial, a jumbled, fragmented surface. It skips around from one time to another, from one place to another. It refuses to respect the need to keep one moment consistent and continuous with the ones that precede or follow it.<sup>23</sup>

If there is a teleological dimension, however half-baked, to English's theological meanderings, it involves transcending the empty moment. But, Charney's musings aside, what exactly is the empty moment? First of all, the empty moment signifies an unendurable silence, much like the “deafening absence” in Derek Walcott's poem “Missing the Sea.”<sup>24</sup> In *Resuscitation*, English at some point asks himself these questions: “What if there's really nothing? Suppose I'm all there is? What if there's only a

20. Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death* (1849), trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980) 13.

21. Leo Charney, *Empty Moments: Cinema, Modernity, and Drift* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998) 7.

22. See for instance Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone P, 1988).

23. Charney 64.

24. Derek Walcott, “Missing the Sea,” *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999) 645.

child telling himself a story, and the story is the child, and the child is me?" (120). Secondly and more complexly, the empty moment also entertains a more affirmative status as the cocoon of the aleatory. In other words, the empty moment is that which facilitates transformation and invites otherness.

Despite all this, part of English's predicament is that he wants to be like Simone Weil, who went to Spain to join the Republican front in 1936 and who, two years later in the Benedictine abbey at Solesmes, claimed that God had summoned her.<sup>25</sup> English yearns for Weil's sense of uncompromising commitment, which he believes is the only thing that will grant him absolution and grace. At the same time English, in all his anguish and frailty, also emblemizes the kind of individual Weil probably has in mind in *The Need for Roots*, published posthumously in 1949, where she states that "[to] be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul."<sup>26</sup> Thus we may begin to comprehend the fundamental friction which unhinges English's psyche, that between modernity's sense of deracination and Weil's promulgation of rootedness. As I have earlier indicated, Johnson's protagonist is a close relative of the quintessential film noir drifter, a figure who could very well be the generic incarnation of Charney's nomadic subject. But the corollary of the concept of drift is hardly compatible with Weil's rigorous ethics.<sup>27</sup>

Maybe ironically, in the end English is rooted at last. The final sentence in the book reads "[h]e liked being hungry and in prison" (257).<sup>28</sup> A rather bleak ending which recalls that of *Angels* (in which the main protagonist likewise ends up in jail), this conclusion suggests that English's redemption comes in the form of an austere Weilian asceticism. "My conversion hasn't happened yet," English tells Leanna when she comes to visit him in prison. "Honey," she replies, "you are the most converted

25. She refused however to be baptized into Catholicism. An idealist and mystic, she succumbed to tuberculosis and died in London in 1943.

26. Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties toward Mankind* (1949), trans. Arthur Wills, Preface by T.S. Eliot (Boston: The Beacon P, 1952) 43.

27. *The Need for Roots* is divided into chapters like "Obedience," "Responsibility," and "Order." Duties, Weil claims, come before rights.

28. Does this sound familiar? The following is from Matthew 25, 42-43: "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not."

person I'll ever meet" (256). What kind of contention is this? What is it that Leanna really means to say? Is her statement affirmative or accusatory, or in fact both? What she has acknowledged is the logical culmination of English's metamorphosis, the Johnsonian answer to the question of how "the human inclination toward transcendence" survives in "a context of spiritual catastrophe."<sup>29</sup> Hungry and in prison, English has finally become his own redeemer, his own Christ. This is the ultimate act of transformation, faith withdrawing into itself, the believer and his object seamlessly merging. English has taught himself how to disappear completely.

In its most basic sense the concept of resuscitation implies new beginnings. It is also a miracle, an act of mercy, and a gift; perhaps the definitive gift. And yet a feeling of disenchantment seems occasionally to accompany the act of starting afresh. After all, to be resuscitated is simultaneously both a gift and a particular kind of refusal: if one has been granted a new beginning it also means that one has been denied deliverance. When asked about the next world, Martin Scorsese's Lazarus in *The Last Temptation of Christ* laconically states that "I was a little surprised, there isn't that much difference."<sup>30</sup> But he is certainly not overjoyed to be brought back. In "I've been a mess," Mark Eitzel of American Music Club conveys a similar awareness of dejection and disillusionment when he sings the line "Lazarus wasn't grateful for his second wind/for another chance/watch his chances fade like the dawn and leave."<sup>31</sup> What may account for this resistance, this malaise, is the insight that all the project of resurrection really means is that one has been presented with yet another opportunity to make all the same mistakes over again. English's entropic quest for grace lays bare the dismal reality of this condition.

Has the promise of an authentic kind of redemption been altogether exhausted by Johnson's examination of moral coordinates? It is to the curative meaning of the resuscitation trope that I want to turn in closing this essay. Perhaps what needs to be focused on is the restorative rather than the resurrective aspect of the trope. The term resuscitation, after all,

29. Smith 181.

30. Martin Scorsese, dir., *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Universal Pictures, 1988.

31. American Music Club, "I've been a Mess," *Mercury*, Reprise, 1993.

designates a re-awakening from a state of unconsciousness and apparent death. I have previously noted that hidden within the word "resuscitation" is the word "citation," which effectively condenses the thematic saliency of Johnson's aesthetics of transtextuality. It might be through such an approach that the process of recuperation can take place. In Johnson's fiction, Smith argues, "the pleasures of narcotics are replaced (or displaced) by the equivalent pleasures of textuality. The pathology of addiction is thus merely driven underground, desire mutating into the pursuit of signs and the gorgeous perversions of narrative."<sup>32</sup> As transformative practices, reading and quotation denote activities that are intrinsically recuperative. The resuscitation of the hanged man in *Resuscitation of a Hanged Man* begins precisely at the moment we pick up the book and start to read, an effort for which Jorie Graham's ekphrastic account of Luca Signorelli's fresco *Last Judgment: Resurrection of the Body* may provide an apposite metaphor:

It took him days,  
           that deep  
 caress, cutting,  
           unfastening,  
  
 until his mind  
           could climb into  
 the open flesh and  
           mend itself.<sup>33</sup>

32. Smith 190.

33. Jorie Graham, "At Luca Signorelli's *Resurrection of the Body*," *The Dream of the Unified Field: Selected Poems 1974-1994* (Hopewell, New Jersey: Ecco P, 1995) 48.