Magnificent Obsessions

Magnificent Obsessions:
Honouring the Lives of Hazel Rowley

Edited by

Rosemary Lloyd and Jean Fornasiero

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Hazel Rowley: Petit Déjeuner au Marais.

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HAZEL

JUDITH RODRIGUEZ

In memory of Hazel Rowley, biographer

Light in motion. A blade
swung joyously in battle, as when
to a startled Faculty, she blazed
contempt on a mediocre Dean.
Too good a scholar to keep tapping
at the last prescribed for academic
footwork, too various, too rapid
to repeat for years set lectures.

Full-fledged, her flights abroad
envisioned mastery she admired,
heroes of free thought, the word,
partnership in power. But the dark
fell on her shining, as she fired
anew. And the embers ache.

PREFACE

HAZEL ROWLEY: THE EMINENT BIOGRAPHER (1951–2011)

WILLIAM J. VANDEN HEUVEL

Hazel Rowley wrote four biographies that were published before her untimely death in March 2011. They were amazing in their diversity. Hazel was an Australian, like the subject of her first biography, Christina Stead. A leading critic wrote that Hazel Rowley's book would be recognized as one of the finest biographies ever written about an Australian.[1] It was. And it is. It contributed greatly to the fact that Christina Stead is recognized in her native land as a major literary figure of the twentieth century.

It is a measure of her brilliance that Hazel's second book comprehended a totally different world, the world of African-American despair, hope and destiny. Hazel Rowley's biography of Richard Wright, the enormously talented author of *Black Boy* and *Native Son*, took him from a sharecropper's shack in Mississippi, through the Chicago South Side, to the literary magnetism of the Paris of Gertrude Stein and Albert Camus. Hazel restored his reputation, confronting those who had used the complexity of his politics and his hatred of racism to attack Wright's integrity as an American. Critics hailed what she had done.

Her doctoral dissertation had been about Simone de Beauvoir. Years later she came back to that subject, writing *Tête-à-Tête*, a literary portrait of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre, the extraordinary story of two passionate, free-thinking, existentialist philosophers and writers. Their intense and embattled relationship made for great biography. Hazel told the inspiring, sometimes repellent and unlikely tale of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre more completely and credibly than it had ever been told before.

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[1] Peter Craven in his obituary, published in the *Sydney Morning Herald,* 10 March 2010.

And then in 2010, Hazel Rowley's *Franklin and Eleanor* was added to the endless bibliography regarding the Roosevelts. As Jon Meacham, author of *Franklin and Winston* and a highly praised American biographer, wrote in his review, "Hazel Rowley has brought Franklin and Eleanor alive again in all of their complexity, humanity and greatness."[2] It was as though someone had turned on the light. She described for a new generation a bold and radical partnership as well as a marriage of enduring love.

In her first appearance regarding the book, Hazel spoke on 3 November 2010 at Roosevelt House, a part of Hunter College in New York City. Her audience was transfixed. It was so appropriate that she would tell their story in the house where Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt had lived. She said then that a biographer has to have an open-minded attitude, one of understanding complex relationships, an attitude that respects historical truth. A biographer, she said, had to have an instinct for what she is writing about, an instinct that fills the gap between factual evidence and reality. As the Roosevelts had a special empathy for people in need, for the vulnerable, for the working class of America, for the necessity of a nation committed to social justice—so Hazel had an empathy for them and the broad, engaging and open world in which they—and she—thrived. She understood their struggles to find personal liberation—and in that freedom, to find strength and inspiration, never losing their ideals, never losing their capacity for both personal and human love. Hazel understood those qualities because she shared them.

Stars in the heavens are not long visible to us mortals if only because our own lives have such a limited time on Earth. It is important that we recognize the brilliance of the stars when we see them—and in remembering Hazel Rowley we do that.

[2] Quoted http://www.hazelrowley.com/roosevelt.html (sighted 5 February 2013).

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INTRODUCTION

HAZEL, MY SISTER

DELLA ROWLEY

16 November 1951 – 1 March 2011

My sister, Hazel, wanted to be a writer as soon as she learned to write. As a teenager, she wrote short stories and sent them off to publishers only to receive encouraging but regretful letters in return. Undaunted, she wrote a weekly magazine for me and moved on to being the editor of the school magazine. At an early age she began to record minute details of her life: Hazel's personal journals amount to more than 50 years' documentation of her life.

In 1964, when Hazel was thirteen, the family spent a year in Switzerland where my father, Derrick, was on sabbatical leave from the University of Adelaide. We spent most weekends on walking expeditions throughout the Alps and one of Hazel's first published pieces, "Hunting for edelweiss", was written at that time. It is the story of how a descending fog made us lose our way high in the Swiss Alps. We eventually spent the night in an alpine hut with three very serious climbers who considered our clothes and lack of equipment to be rather ill advised. We had begun the walk in shorts, blouses and sandshoes, had no food and were not very proficient in French. The next day they roped us together and took us to the snow line to find edelweiss. I am sure that Hazel's love of travel, languages and walking in the fresh country air began during these walks.

Whether it was research, writing, love affairs, friendships or dislikes, Hazel never wanted to be mediocre or conformist: she embraced life with passion. She learnt French and German and travelled to many countries, making friends all around the world and generously encouraging others to join her adventures.

Most holidays followed a theme that involved social history and plenty of time for writing and recording for Hazel. She always took a large number of books to read, notebooks to record all events and generally a big and heavy camera. Her main interest was "otherness", "the outsiders", those who didn't

fit in, and she considered herself one of them. Hazel always managed to find the interesting stories in people's lives: she was always the person to whom people told their secrets. Hazel had a passion for books and words, and for telling a story. She really threw herself into her subject matter: she lived in the country or the city where her subjects lived, she walked their streets, ate in their cafés and read and researched, and interviewed their relatives. She visited the southern states of America so that she could really understand the Jim Crow days and followed some of Richard Wright's life journey. She visited Brazil to interview the family of Cristina Tavares who allegedly had an affair with Jean Paul Sartre in 1960 (Rowley, 2006). She followed up Christina Stead's old friend, Edith Anderson, who at that time lived in East Berlin. This required an unusual amount of persistence and determination and Hazel was not afraid to ask for interviews nor to travel long distances to meet people in the interest of researching her books and perhaps finding a new angle.

Hazel's writing led her to interview Simone de Beauvoir in Paris in 1976, correspond with Harper Lee, the very reclusive author of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, in Alabama, and to go boating with filmmaker Claude Lanzmann off the south of France.

She valued reliability and always kept her commitments and so even after "nine eleven" (11 September 2001) when Hazel was living in Boston and all aircraft in America were grounded, she still managed to bus up to Canada and fly down the coast to Cuba to meet me arriving from Australia. Hazel organised our time in Cuba so that we were immersed in the lives of Che Guevara and Ernest Hemingway. We peered in the windows of Ernest Hemingway's house, Finca La Vigia, 10 miles outside Havana, kept exactly as it was during Ernest's life, with stuffed animals on the walls and the whisky ready for pouring. And at the Hotel Ambos Mundos in Old Havana, we drank a mojito in memory of Ernest at the rooftop bar, visiting the room where he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and marvelling over his old typewriter.

Hazel always needed a wide group of supporters to keep up with her frantic pace. She drove herself really hard, was intellectually stimulating and exceedingly eloquent, especially when she was angry: there was no stopping Hazel when she was in full flight, no holding her back from saying her truth to someone, even if every one else considered it injudicious. Hazel could not resist! She was fearless, uncompromising, outspoken and passionate, and it didn't matter who got in her way. After a day at her desk, Hazel loved nothing more than going for a long walk, striding forth in her inimitable style and talking, arguing, being provocative and emphatic, and loving being outdoors.

Hazel took risks that scared others. She left a safe job in academia at Deakin University in 1996, sold her unit in Melbourne, packed up her possessions into two large suitcases and left for America, never to return permanently to Australia. Her contentious article, published in *The Australian*, "Universities Are Losing on Points" (Rowley, 1996) shows her boldness and her disinclination to hold back. The article begins:

> Forget the passion, embrace the "accountable". Welcome to today's academe.
>
> "Delightful as the pastime of measuring may be," writes Virginia Woolf, "it is the most futile of all occupations, and to submit to the decrees of the measurers the most servile of attitudes." She scorns the idea of "some professor with a measuring-rod up his sleeve".
>
> These days, it's government administrators who wield the rod.
>
> I've been an academic for 12 years. I'm a senior lecturer in literary studies. Research, writing and teaching is what I do best; it's my passion. And I've just taken what they call an "early retirement package".
>
> Why? The new regime is so opposed to the spirit of free inquiry and reflection, imagination or challenge, that it is no longer possible to think creatively, let alone stretch oneself to the limit of one's intellectual capacity. The word from our leaders is loud and clear: "I don't care what you publish. Just publish." God knows who's going to do the reading.
>
> Morale among academics is so low that I often wonder how some institutions manage to stay afloat. A question I have not once been asked by any of my colleagues is: "Why are you leaving?" Instead, it's: "Lucky you. If I could, I'd be out of this place tomorrow."

Academics around Australia applauded Hazel's forthright article and rang her to tell her so. On this wave of fame Hazel left Australia, for she had decided that if she were to make it as a writer she would have to move to a country where a writer could live on their advances (and not do supplementary jobs) and where she would be freer to follow a wider choice of subjects. Her first biography in America was about a black American writer, Richard Wright. Even Hazel spoke of her hubris in undertaking such a project as a white Australian woman. The author's blurb on the back cover was deliberately vague and lacked the usual photograph of the author. Two African-American critics were exuberant in their praise. Imagine Hazel's joy when she later met Jake Lamar, an African American and Richard Wright scholar, who, in his review of Hazel's book for the *Washington Post*, said it was "thorough and engrossing from the first page to the last". He admitted to Hazel that while reading the book he had been unable to tell whether she was black or white and finally he had decided she was Jamaican!

Hazel wrote about well-known people and her next biography was of Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre. This time she focused on a

familiar subject matter, as her PhD had been about Simone de Beauvoir. Unlike her previous works, however, in this one she wanted to look specifically at the unconventional relationship between the famous couple and how they made courageous and radical choices.

Her last biography, about Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, was perhaps her riskiest as she moved away from her focus on writers. So much had already been written about this famous couple. To write another book about them meant Hazel needed new information. Once again she embraced the task with passion, visiting the Roosevelt family home in Hyde Park up the Hudson River (the first of the presidential libraries), Eleanor's own home, Val Kill and Franklin's Top Cottage, travelling to their holiday home on Campobello island in Canada and Franklin's "little white house" and swimming complex in Warm Springs, Georgia. She moved back to New York from Paris, immersed herself in the history and politics of the era, became well-known by Roosevelt scholars and historians and, again, shared all this with her family and friends.

What Hazel did in each of her books, *Christina Stead: A Biography* (1993), *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* (2001), *Tête-à-Tête: Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (2005), and *Franklin and Eleanor: An Extraordinary Marriage* (2010), was to explore the emotional aspect of people's lives—the loves, the passions, the fears, of people who have made great and significant contributions. Hazel was curious about couples who as a duo made each other greater than they were as individuals and what she wanted to discover was whether they lived up to their own philosophies.

Hazel was mostly grateful to her father, Derrick for encouraging her to take risks and allowing her to be different. In her eulogy at his funeral she said:

> Dad was daring. He took risks, and he encouraged us to do so [...].[W]hen I told him that I wanted to leave my academic job and leave Australia and go to the US and write a book about the black writer, Richard Wright, he encouraged me. It was a hell of a risk I was taking at the age of 45, and it made me very nervous, but I sort of thought I knew what I was doing, and Dad could see that. He made me feel a whole lot stronger about it by listening to me, understanding what I was saying, and finally endorsing my decision. Dad taught me to think beyond traditional expectations, to think laterally. I learned that one can gain by being different.
>
> Dad always encouraged us kids with our interests. Music and books for me. We travelled. We met people from different places and cultures—Dad's fellow scientists, postgraduate students, and so on. They would come with us to Coromandel Valley on Sundays, or come to dinner at the house, and we would listen to their stories and realize that Adelaide was a small town in a big wide world. It was a great privilege, this upbringing. Above all, it was fun.

> I feel I've followed Dad's path in many ways—the storytelling, the love of travel, the love of life, and he gave a great deal to others. I hope to follow his example in this.

Who knows what Hazel might have written next? Several times she wrote proposals about the Hollywood Ten scriptwriters and directors who suffered so much during the McCarthy era in the United States. She felt that after September 2001 it became too difficult to get a publisher's advance for this topic, but it still fascinated her. Just before she died, she was thinking of writing a series on independent women and putting herself into the story.

The time between books was always difficult for Hazel—waiting for the publication to come out and then the reviews and responses, and simultaneously searching for a suitable subject for her next work. That is why Hazel's family and friends have chosen to remember her life with the establishment of the Hazel Rowley Literary Fellowship which provides support for biographers to take risks, expand their horizons, discuss ideas and contribute to public intellectual life. It is designed for the time between books that Hazel always found unsettling until she determined a new direction.

I feel extremely lucky to have had a sister such as Hazel. She made me feel special, showered me with presents and always had time for me. Hazel's great gift was to make everyone who had a friendship with her feel very special and feel like she was their best friend—a truly wonderful gift.

October 2012

POEM:
FOR HAZEL

JILL GLOYNE

Footprints, like words on a brand new page
stood out as I walked the beach today.
“But where do they go, the child in me asked,
“when the tide comes in to wash them away?”

I thought for a while and then I knew
that nothing is ever completely lost.
The words we write, the deeds we do,
dance in the light of a memory,
like a spider’s web, hung with dew.

CHAPTER ONE

MAGNIFICENT OBSESSIONS: THEIRS AND OURS

MARY ANN CAWS

In honour of Hazel Rowley, I wanted to say something about both biography and what impassions it, and us biographers.

I've been thinking about how best to respond to Hazel's brilliant and indeed passionate move from single biographies through double ones to her proposed multiple one of the Hollywood Ten. In view of the genre now called relational aesthetics, perhaps we might view hers as relational biographies—of an impassioned sort: how looking at two lives as a double entity can work perspectival wonders.

Hazel concocted such interesting dialogues of double persons in relation: Jean-Paul and Simone, Eleanor and Franklin, and that whole dialogic genre in fact, delights—that is, lights up—the idea of what I am working on at the moment. Which is the very thing, large or small—more frequently the latter—enabling and ennobling our investigation. In my case, I think it is the detail.

For the dialogue I've found most engaging along those lines is that of the person whose life I'm talking about with some strange other—some detail or image or then person who brings out in my subject something I'd not have seen otherwise. I'm interested in strangeness as the tone that impassions all our work, usually about our subject's passions, and—in reflection—ours.

Details are the keystones to the kind of dialogues I find myself involved with most frequently. Glancing over what kind of biographies I have written and wanted to write, what kinds of commissions I have been most excited by, and what kind of essays have most intrigued me and held me, it appears to me that it all has something to do with obsessiveness. That is, the creators with whom I have been involved by choice have each had some impassioning concern which has triggered my own in return, or, better, in exchange. So that is my response to and in *doubleness,* in dialogue with my subject, my

response to the subjects in dialogue with their peculiar fascinations as well as with each other.

At first, my concern with obsessiveness seemed to me to be about a detail or several—as in one of my favourite books, Daniel Arasse's *Le Détail,* in which you see, for example, a fly crawling up a seventeenth-century leg extended in some painting, or a splotch on a flowered skirt. Yet these details do illumine the whole, in fact, altogether rendering it viable and readable. It is just that they cannot always be seen with the naked eye, or the eye untrained, the mind unsuspecting. We don't always *notice.*

It is very frequently an intuitive guess that will open the door to the text or the painting for us, in some kind of special strangeness. It is very frequently an intuitive leap toward an image that will open the door to the text to the painting for us, with its transformative power. This is the primary tenet of the surrealist also. Let me first quote Gaston Bachelard, the philosopher of surrealism as he was called, on the kind of transformation that can take place, within the "phenomenon of the poetic image when the image emerges in consciousness like a direct product of the heart, the soul, the human being seized in actuality" (xiv).

Louis Aragon defines the "vice called surrealism" as "the unruly and impassioned use of the stupefying image […] for each image each time forces you to revise the whole Universe. And there is for each person an image to find which will blot out the whole universe" (6). So that is what I will be, and have been, and will always be, no doubt, looking for.

So the various obsessions of these creators I care so about, and ours, sometimes simple and relational, sometimes multiple, place them and us in dialogue with something whose singularity, whose peculiarity, gives the tone to their work. All the time I was editing Joseph Cornell's diaries and source files, I found his manic attachment to sweet foods superbly engaging. His passion for Horn and Hardart's pies and cakes, his obsession with hard candy, described a mad diet, the perfect key to his mad genius-like boxes, so many often sweet and always crazed constructions.

As an example of my perhaps crazed constructions of brief biographies, I'll begin with Marcel Proust, who himself obsesses many of us, how not?[1] The way he relates to Robert de Montesquiou (look at those strange gloves in the painting by Boldini[2] in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris!), to his mother and the mosaic in St Mark's in Venice, the way he relates to everything, especially,

[1] All the following obsessed and obsessional quotes are taken from Caws 2003.

[2] See the Musée d'Orsay's website: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/painting/commentaire_id/count-robert-de-montesquiou-17788.html?cHash=c8b96845ae&tx_commentaire_pi1%5Bfrom%5D=841&tx_commentaire_pi1%5BpidLi%5D=509.

perhaps, the Fortuny cloak which he takes from Vittore Carpaccio and places on the shoulders of Albertine, in *The Fugitive*. Listen to the way he describes it to Madame Straus: "There is quite a flowering of bell mouthed chimneys, as beautiful as a shower of tulips, and I would not be surprised if it had helped to inspire some of Whistler's little Venice pictures." Whistler and his work created another obsession: he asks Marie Nordlinger to tell her friend Charles Freer, whose collection of Whistler's was the finest in the world, "that my room contains in its intentional nudity only a single reproduction of a work of art—Whistler's Carlyle, whose cloak is as serpentine in its folds as the gown of Whistler's Mother." And, meeting Whistler at the home of Mallarmé's mistress, Méry Laurent, he had actually, as he says, "appropriated his elegant gray gloves, which I've lost since." But—ah, so Proustian of him—he refuses to let Mme Straus lend him her very own Fortuny coat, preferring to think only about the painting. That's one of the sorts of obsessions I mean, with a single object of contemplation. Another of Proust's obsessions that fascinates me is that with the concept of the series, for example, Monet's "forty-eight sonnets", as he puts it, of water lilies, or his twenty-eight paintings of Venice. The various parts of the series make up a perfect whole, like Monet's paintings of the Rouen cathedral at various hours of the day. And, says Proust, his own book is constructed like that, of parts: "I dare not say ambitiously like a cathedral but quite simply like a dress." We might indeed like to construct our biographies like that, so simply…

Without much doubt, the most challenging and overall most compelling personage I was asked to deal with was the very, very great Henry James. His peculiarities far outdistanced those of anyone else around. Just think of his relation to Constance Fenimore Woolson, who was so attached to him that she thought he might follow her to Venice (mad woman!) She hurled herself, despairing, from a window in Venice, and of course he missed her funeral. A very few days after, he went to stay in the Casa Bondetti, the very same boarding house she had stayed in, chose to live in the same room as hers, slept in the very same bed she had slept in, and destroyed some of her papers. Then he piled her black dresses into a gondola he rented, asked to be rowed out to the lagoon, and threw them in the water, where they floated to the surface. One had to be pushed down with an oar.…

It gets more peculiar, if possible. In Fenimore's library, in James's book entitled *Essays in London*, there is a note about the actress Fanny Kemble by Fenimore, who once said to her, after their introduction by James: "I am sorry Mr. James has introduced you to me. I shall be obliged to tell you now, that I shall not speak to you, or look at or be conscious of your existence even, during the entire evening" (Edel 3: 368). In the book itself, the inscription "Constance Fenimore Woolson from Henry James," written in pencil, was

erased, but the name Henry James remained legible. The obsession with self-effacement remains no less legible. And no less fascinating.

In saying anything at all about the most celebrated of anyone I have ever written on, I will insist right off that Virginia Woolf seems to me to have been from the very beginning obsessed above all with the material and the timing of writing. Everywhere in her diaries, letters, and works, there is some sort of reflection on writing instruments: inks and pencils, and also on the speed of the transcription.

This is of course not in any way strange, given her identification with the woman painter in *To the Lighthouse,* Lily Briscoe. Here is the focus of the thing, the real reason for the words and the works. In moments of her discouragement or unintensity, Lily comes through, to herself and to us, as motivated by her vision: "she remembered, all of a sudden, as if she had found a treasure, that she too had her work" (Woolf 1979: 98).

My own favourite among Virginia's clear obsessions with writing materials is that of the pencil in "Street Haunting," used as a major excuse for her wandering about the city of London at twilight…You can feel the light dwindling outside as the illumination of the writing takes over.

When this illumination extends to the writing and receiving of letters, a major part of Virginia Woolf's life, I keep thinking of one of her most extraordinary stories, "The Lady in the Looking-Glass", with its intrusion from outside, as the letters brought invade the private inside space of the house.

Woolf speaks, in a letter to her sometime lover Vita Sackville-West, of the subtlety and nuances of coloured inks: "I must buy some shaded inks—lavenders, pinks, violets—to shade my meaning. I see I gave you many wrong meanings, using only black ink…No, No, I must buy my coloured inks…But no: I must get my coloured inks" (Woolf 1979-85: IV, 561-2). Here, as elsewhere in Virginia Woolf, the repetition marks her obsession with the material of communication.

Her close friend and lover Vita Sackville-West, whose writings I assembled with the encouragement of her son Nigel Nicolson, had her own obsessions, with one love after another, and primarily, I would say, not just with Violet Trefusis (who adored her and clung to her pathetically), but with Virginia Woolf. Upon her desk in the tower at Sissinghurst rests, even now, the photo of Virginia…. And, when Virginia drowned herself, Vita was convinced that—had she known the extent of Virginia's despair—she might have saved her, whom she loved. And I, of course, like many of Bloomsbury readers, have remained obsessed by Virginia's *Orlando* as Vita. How not?

One of Virginia Woolf's most memorable relations is that to the highly unusual and supercomplicated painter and writer, Carrington, the most self-

effacing person I have ever encountered in writing. Carrington was herself haunted by her relation to Virginia, whom she loved, as it were, too much. And then, shortly before Carrington killed herself, Virginia went to see her, worried about Carrington's state of mind.

Carrington, generally feeling herself a failure, is obsessed by her falling short about many things, some in relation to Virginia, who writes, on 12 March 1932, in her diary, of her last visit to Carrington. She quotes Carrington: "I sent a telegram, but I do everything wrong. I thought you didn't get it […]. I did everything for Lytton. But I've failed in everything else." We had tea & broken biscuits" (Woolf 1979-85: IV, 81-2). The brokenness of the biscuits is heart-breaking, as is—for many of us—much about Carrington.

The image of Carrington will continue to haunt her: "Talk of Carrington: how long shall we talk of Carrington?" (Woolf 1979-85: IV, 85)

And, later, "A saying of Leonard's comes into my head 'Things have gone wrong somehow.'[…] I saw all the violence & unreason crossing in the air: ourselves small; a tumult outside: something terrifying: unreason. Shall I make a book out of this? It would be a way of bringing order & speed again into my world" (Woolf 1979-85: IV, 103). Speed, there is Virginia once more, caring most terribly about the speed of her living and writing—often she compares her writing to mounting a horse, taking off at a gallop.

Carrington herself had what I think of as an obsession with secrecy. She loved to correspond with many lovers at a time, hiding one text from one of them from another, those from Gerald Brenan from Lytton, even at the price of having two envelopes, one for the secreted text. She never exhibited or sold a painting….Virginia commissioned some of her drawings, but to the outside world, Carrington did not relate as an artist. Just so, her paintings have in them a sort of secret, I believe…

Her most extraordinary painting, the portrait of Lytton Strachey, she wanted above all not to show to anyone else: she desired, most desperately, to keep what she most cared about, most hidden. She writes to Lytton, on 1 January 1917 (Carrington: 52), starting the year off by wondering what he will think of it.

> I sit here, almost every night—it sometimes seems—looking at your picture, now tonight it looks wonderfully good, and I am happy. But then I dread showing it. I should like to go on always painting you every week, wasting the afternoon loitering, and never, never showing you what I paint. It's marvellous having it all to oneself. No agony of the soul. Is it vanity? No, because I don't care for what they say. I hate only the indecency of showing them what I have loved (Carrington: 181).

There is always a *them* outside her private self, haunting her. And then her own judgement prevented her action and agency. She avoids what she knows is the most important thing, her painting, and continues to dwell on her non-doing: "For really I used every excuse not to do any proper painting. It's partly I have such high standards that I can't bear going on with pictures when I can see they are amateurish and dull" (Carrington: 464).

We know that this self-effacingness is often characteristic of women—not wanting to advance ourselves; and yet, Carrington seems to me to carry this to unexpected lengths.

The two most recent biographies I did, both as brief as can be, both had as their subjects two of the very least self-effacing of artists: Picasso and Dali. As for Picasso, there is no ambiguity at all. He was, overall and definitively, in love with his self-portraiture. We have his portraits from very young to very old, when a skull represents, quite entirely, his being. No problem: his eyes and their "Mirada fuerte", as John Richardson so memorably and accurately put it, are the first thing you notice in any of his photographs or self-portraits. He is first and foremost a painter, seeing.

My fascination with one of his works is never-ending, and it concerns three creators: himself, the photographer Dora Maar who loved him, and Apollinaire, whom he loved. His fear of death, it is said, caused him, superstitiously, to not put Apollinaire's head on the statue he had been commissioned to execute in his honour, so he substituted that of Dora Maar. The first one cast, in bronze, had to be replaced, for—believing the stories that Maillol had urinated upon his statues to give them a proper patina, Picasso had done the same with Dora's head. That the head was stolen, then replaced, makes this peculiar story more peculiar. Still.

But, unquestionably, my last subject, Salvador Dali, takes the non-self-effacing cookie. Dali was obsessed by many things, including Salvador Dali, but also—and, in a somewhat odder fashion—with sea urchins. His favourite celebratory meal consisted entirely of sea urchins, a *Gatorado.* His repeating concern with Millet's *Angelus* is super well-known, and pointedly clear. Above all, of most interest to me, was his overriding obsession with the poet Garcia Lorca. "I consider you the only true genius in the world," he writes to Lorca.

And again:

To My Beloved
If I didn't give you a sign
of my love and friendship
in truth, my love,
I'd hardly seem attentive.
Have the goodness, therefore, to accept my offer: