

The Interruption is not an Interruption
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[Scene 1]

EMILY ANDERSON: Let me think. Let me think of a page. I could either start at the very beginning, or I could start... I could read this section that's about interruption. Just in isolation. I feel like there's something there about what you're saying about work emerging from the everyday. And being honest about that. I guess that's what I'm trying to do. Let's embrace that. Let's not try to hide it and resent it as something other. And also especially right now for me, let's not try to rail against it. The more I fight it, the more just upset and depressed I get about it. I'm just trying to think about the interruption as not only providing me with material that's the only material I have right now, but the interruption really being no different than the way I've always worked just, you know, perhaps more accentuated in some ways.

[Scene 2]

EMILY ANDERSON: Okay. Hey, good morning. So this is the Anderson house.

CHILD 1: Hi.

EMILY ANDERSON: And we're just going to share some thoughts on what it's been like to work at home. We're here at our breakfast table. This is our breakfast table. And this is where we've been doing all our work since quarantine. So, do you guys have any thoughts about what it's been like?

CHILD 1: I hate quarantine.

EMILY ANDERSON: Yeah, I think that's fair. And what kind of stuff have you been doing for work during quarantine?

CHILD 1: Lots of stuff.

EMILY ANDERSON: Such as?

CHILD 1: Stuff.

EMILY ANDERSON: And what about you, Dun? What kind of stuff have you been doing during quarantine?

CHILD 2: I don't know.

[Scene 3]

EMILY ANDERSON: Interruption, Woolf asserts, has shaped the types of literature women write. One of my favorite Woolf contentions is that interruption has pushed women more frequently toward the crafting of "prose and fiction" rather than poetry or plays, since when one is writing fiction, "less concentration is required." Yet even crafting fiction under such conditions amazes Woolf. She describes Jane Austen doing all her writing in sitting rooms, subject to casual interruptions, driven to

hide her manuscript under blotting paper every time a visitor entered. Austen's contemporary Maria Edgeworth also wrote in this manner, surrounded by the siblings and half-siblings who made up her father's large brood (22 children he had finally, by four different women, a man prolific in every sense). These women wrote through chaos, though Austen and Edgeworth, like Woolf, never had kids of their own. In my life, I've finished many a memo, reader's report, work email, lesson plan, and book review in a similar manner, at the dining room table, tilting my computer screen away from my boys. (This essay, too, their activities and presence in its very warp and woof.)

[Scene 4]

EMILY ANDERSON: This is where we spend most of our time and I think everyone here would agree it's getting a little bit claustrophobic. EMILY ANDERSON: Right. I think you're fishing crucial. We've also been doing a pretty good job. Right now we've got breakfast that we're finishing up and then we've got some worksheets and drawings that we're going to work on when we're done. We've got some art projects that are happening. We've got all our school supplies right here.

[Scene 5]

EMILY ANDERSON: Interestingly, my multitasking has not yet transformed me into an Austen, much less a poet. It has, however, moved me to consider how the condition of "interruption" that Woolf indicates as characteristic of a woman's life is not inimical to creativity, full-stop. Far from lamenting the narrative of chaos that surrounds them, women writers often mourn the isolating effects of the writing life. "I remember once . . . I was just in the solitary, melancholy state you describe, and I used to feel relieved and glad when the tea-urn came into the silent room, to give me a sensation by the sound of its boiling," Edgeworth writes to a woman writer friend. "Would *Pride and Prejudice* have been a better novel," Woolf muses, if Jane Austen had not had to do all her writing in a communal space? Interestingly, she feels that it would not.

I have such musings about my writing, too. For all my moments of resentment, I know I've wasted many an hour solo, in a room with a door that is tightly closed. I know, too, that I rarely feel more lonely than when I am uninspired. Writing is hard work, even when conditions are "perfect," and perfect conditions have a way of making me feel guilty when the work is hard. What does it mean for a writer when, given time and opportunity, the words still won't come? How much easier to attribute a lull in writing to external agency or another's needs: the fact that the washing machine has gone off, or a child is crying, or a cup has spilled.

[Scene 6]

CHILD 2: We break pens.

EMILY ANDERSON: Let's see over here. On the side of the table. Oh, we've got the all-important coffee. Banquo's ghost sitting in the chair there.

And a random assortment of... a couple *New Yorkers*. That's a book I have to review. Let's see. It's actually good for me to look at these piles because I don't know what's in them. Okay, so that's a book that's overdue for a book review. This is supposed to be a good children's book. This was recommended to me by a friend to read for when I have world enough in time.

Poems of Robert Frost over there. *Ex Libris* an essay collection by Anne Fadiman. Those who know me know I love that. *Leaves of Weirwood*, that's for kids. What are those? Calligraphy markers. My iPhone.

CHILD 2: Can I have your iPhone?

EMILY ANDERSON: No. Sight words. Site words, always good.

[Scene 7]

The table is like the symbol of community, you know, for my family, but also for my kind of like any extended family, friends, you know, I always love this image of, you know, a gathering place, like wanting to kind of bring people together and...and the kind of obvious connection, I suppose, is that, you know, hopefully writing can do that too. You know, writing is, to stay on the food analogy, is like, you know, a watering hole or like, you know, a feast. A Moveable Feast, but like something that is meant to create community, as opposed to

I guess another image would be one. I try to avoid in my own teaching, but you know the expert who stands up there and punt on pontificates to a crowd of silent admirers.

[Scene 8]

I think along with this myth of the cult of individual genius we have this myth of kind of geniuses being something that's isolated and sits God-like on high and meditates and then kind of produces and hands down these beautiful multicolored perfectly formed you know bubbles of aesthetic perfection.

[Scene 9]

KID: Can I have my stuffed animal?

EMILY ANDERSON: Yeah, you can have your stuffed animal. So I don't know how that compares to everyone else's work environment, but that's pretty much how it is here. Oh, and breakfast today...let's showcase breakfast, breakfast was good. We have waffles, hash browns, and peaches.

KID 2: And buttons!

EMILY ANDERSON: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Bye.