

## **Scholar-Autobiographical Turns:**

### **Sarah Kofman's *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat* as Theoretical Life Writing**

#### **Abstract**

This article opens with the argument that past and present readings of Sarah Kofman's corpus have largely ignored the highly theoretical moments found in her autobiographical works. I first provide a brief overview of the inconsistencies found in common readings of Kofman's autobiographical texts, and follow with a close reading of *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat* that connects this autobiographical text to a number of Kofman's theoretical texts. New conclusions stemming from my intertextual reading of Kofman's autobiographical and critical texts benefit the ongoing expansion of Kofman criticism in particular, and scholar-autobiography studies in general.

**Keywords:** Sarah Kofman; scholar-autobiography; *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat*

## Scholar-Autobiographical Turns:

### Sarah Kofman's 'Rue Ordener, Rue Labat' as Theoretical Life Writing

Sarah Kofman has not, it seems, been definitively classified as a scholar from any single academic field. Indeed, critics such as Kelly Oliver and Penelope Deutscher point out that Kofman has been a “consistently elusive figure, well known but hard to classify within Nietzsche studies,” and, more intriguingly, is “little discussed among psychoanalytic theorists despite the overwhelming role of psychoanalytic theory in her work, and equally difficult to classify from a feminist perspective, despite the feminist themes in her work” (*Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman* 2). Furthermore, not only is reference to Kofman’s work generally absent from psychoanalytic criticism, but a brief look at Kofman scholarship reveals that current criticism is itself replete with gaps. Kofman’s vast subjects, including literary deconstruction, autobiography, and art criticism, are often surpassed by examinations of her autobiographical work, and particularly as this work is perchance a reflection of (or *on*) her lived experience.

One of the most sought-after answers related to Kofman’s work is often not contained within her texts themselves, but rather has to do with her real-life suicide. Kofman’s suicide is frequently understood as a point of reference in readings of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. Christine McDonald, Michael Stanislawski, and Vivian Liska, for instance, turn to *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* as a kind of literary precursor to Kofman’s death. Verena Andermatt Conley asserts that the final lines of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* (1996), which are highly different in content to the text’s opening, leaves the reader “perplexed, wondering if indeed the death of Mémé [Kofman’s caretaker in hiding during the deportation of Paris’ Jews] prompts also the

subsequent suicide of the author in October of 1994, shortly after the publication of *Rue Ordener, rue Labat*” (115-56). Such reductive readings take much away from *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. Reading the text as a kind of “suicide note”—Kofman’s “last words” as Liska puts it—has done little more than provide closure to readings of her work which appears to bring about a secure sense of completion: a final analysis. As I propose in the following pages, from the standpoint of autobiography studies and, in particular, intertextual and even cross-disciplinary practices, it is rather more profitable to turn *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* and other autobiographical texts on their obvious textual predecessors, like *Smothered Words* (1998), *The Childhood of Art* (1988) and *Freud and Fiction* (1991). Reading these and other critical texts of Kofman’s alongside her autobiographical work brings about new impressions which broaden the scope of her repertoire and in doing so clarify, deepen, and in some instances modify her intellectual conclusions. In conforming to Kofman’s theoretical arguments while reading her autobiographical work, the latter emerges with as much intellectual vigor as do her previously published scholarly texts. I begin the following section with an examination of the purported literary elements in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, followed by a criticism of current conceptions of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* as literature. I then propose a reading of the text which integrates Kofman’s approach to aesthetics found in her scholarly works into a new study of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. This study brings to light the possibility for intertextual readings of her autobiographical text and her previously published scholarship.

### ***Rue Ordener, Rue Labat: Breaking Points***

In “The Dark Continent of Literature,” Stephen Shapiro proposes that “[o]ne of the most important conventions [in autobiographical writing] is the structural

metaphor of the ‘turning point’” (438). Citing “turning points” in the texts of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Yevgeny Yevtushenko, Shapiro claims that these writers “are drawing their lines very clearly for the sake of dramatic impact and narrative perspective. In a life as lived, of course, turning points do not appear so carefully marked or so readily detachable from the web of daily experience. Life’s long arcs become sharp angles of literature” (439). Although *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat*, I propose, follows along the lines of Shapiro’s claim in its “sharp” points and shifts in narrative, the text is also replete with characteristics that complicate his notion of an autobiography’s “turning point.” Examining Shapiro’s claims about autobiography, and other scholars’ conceptions of Kofman’s autobiographical techniques, brings about a new reading of *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat*.

A number of scholars have approached Kofman’s text as linear, chronologically framed, and without disruption. Vivian Liska, for instance, broadly defines the text as a “traditional autobiography” (Liska 11), which, “contrary to [Kofman’s] praise of the fragmentary and rhapsodic form [in the texts of Nietzsche and Hoffmann]” is a story “telling a continuous, coherent sequence of events... The book tells the story of Berek Kofman’s deportation to Auschwitz, of his death there, reported by witnesses... and of its aftermath for the little girl Sarah who was then eight years old” (7). Christie McDonald writes that *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* is “a searing, magnificent account of her childhood” (“Sarah Kofman: Effecting Self Translation” 185), suggesting that it illustrates a particular style of dramatic literariness. Andermatt Conley is perhaps the Kofman scholar most accurately intent on classifying *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* as literary text that does not follow along the lines set forth by Shapiro and elaborated by Liska and McDonald. She proposes that Kofman’s text can be read, at least in its form, “as a sort of fairytale of a child born

into a difficult history” (153). Classifying *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* as a “novella,” a “fiction,” and a “utopian novel,” Andermatt Conley describes it as a highly literary text whose form and “psychoanalytic resonance” follows the classical notion that “equates autobiography with children’s literature... and a kind of proto-feminist narrative that can be likened to a French tradition of stories and storytelling” (153). Andermatt Conley’s reading brings to light a number of issues concerning *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* as a potential fiction; two such notions relate directly to the above discussion of Stephen Shapiro’s article. The first is his assertion that the autobiographical text’s “turning point” is a necessary element in autobiography, for the movement of real life cannot be converted into writing without a distortion of form, if not an alteration in contents. Andermatt Conley also, however, points to the textual turns the text takes, supporting the concept of the text as fictional in that it “folds onto itself and seems to be born through its own spatial inversions—by an itinerary that reaches back into itself, that crawls into the womb that it at the same time constructs. In creating this literary space, Kofman incorporates herself into it” (157). Andermatt Conley’s conception of the deconstructive inward turn of the text as one of its central characteristics is helpful in beginning to understand the disjointedness of *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat*, but an inaccuracy in her interpretation lies in her emphasis on an exact “turning point” of the text, which she cites as Chapter 12, entitled “Metamorphose.” What she calls the “central chapter,” the midway chapter amidst twenty-three “memory flashes,” she argues essentially “divides the work into two halves” (157). The space between the “two halves,” she concludes, marks “the impossibility of resolution” (157) of Kofman’s choosing between her real mother and her caretaker in hiding, Mémé.

Michael Stanislawski also assigns critical importance to the textual position of Chapter Twelve in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. He writes: “[I]t is not at all by chance that the longest section... called ‘Metamorphosis,’ comes precisely at the middle of the book—the pivot of the narrative” (152). Of this turn, accurately signified by the chapter’s title, Stanislawski argues that the chapter’s content “is the ‘metamorphosis’ that the chapter title speaks... and the chiasmatic descent into the second half of the autobiography begins” (164). Both Stanislawski’s and Adermatt Conley’s examinations bear quite different conclusions from those of Shapiro, and I intend to break out of each of these three of these critical modes.

Shapiro notes the habit of many autobiographers to employ the use of multiple small chapters in their writing in order to cope with the false sense of chronology brought about by attempts to recollect and further reconstruct lives lived. “Many autobiographers,” Shapiro writes,

have avoided the problem of strict narrative stitchery, without sacrificing continuity, by resorting to the use of many chapters, complete in themselves and not requiring the tedious explicit linkages and bridge passages of traditional narrative. The spaces between passages or chapters are like cinematic transitions that simultaneously signal discontinuity and continuity. (440-441)

Kofman’s brief chapters in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, can also be read as a symptom of the simpler problem of bringing order to chaos. Memory, it has been said repeatedly, defies organized representation.<sup>1</sup> It is this dilemma which drives autobiographers—often without their own conscious awareness and despite their efforts to evade this difficulty—to write disjointed narratives: “The chaotic density of experience defies direct representation; the strategies of indirection must be used to stimulate, to give

the illusion of a life being lived or relived” (438). But Kofman’s text seems to call forth a different examination of its irregular pattern of narration. If we look to her text, *The Childhood of Art*, we will find that the disjointed form and twenty-three short chapters in *Rue Orderner*, *Rue Labat*, perform a similar function as that of repetition in art. Art as a “double, an internal division of the self from the self, a repetition” (*The Childhood of Art* 129) and the “phantasmal constructions of memory traces” (129) analogized by hysteria, memories, and art, all three of which “put the past into play by distorting it” (129) are manifested through the following discussion of the form and content of *Rue Orderner*, *Rue Labat*.

### ***Rue Orderner*, *Rue Labat* as a Self-Inflicted Work of Art**

In *The Childhood of Art*, Kofman asks: “[C]an childhood memories be distinguished from fantasies?” Through a symptomal reading of Freud’s *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, in which “Freud actually constructs one of the painter’s fantasies,” (*Childhood of Art* 61) Kofman asserts that Freud’s interpretation is virtually impossible, since, according to Freudian theory itself, “fantasies themselves are produced from material acquired from one source or another” and thus “can barely be distinguished from memories” (61). The “meaning” of one’s past experience, Kofman continues, “is always given after the fact” and thus “[s]cenes from the past act in deferred fashion” (62). When a child lives through an experience, “he does not understand it” but only captures it “when it is relived, at which point he fantasizes the memory...” (62). All indications that the events depicted in Kofman’s text may be read “as lived” experiences are proven false by Kofman’s theoretical claims, for even Freud’s conception of memories, Kofman argues, “no longer has anything to do with the logic of representation” (*Childhood of Art* 62). The “memory fragments”

purported by scholars to represent Kofman's experience in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, then, are akin to fantasies—"originary substitutive formations that supplement the lack of meaning in past experience" (62). Inasmuch as the work of art is analogous to hysterical symptoms and childhood memories—as Kofman indeed maintains—*Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* is a fascinating subject of interpretation. For while the text appears to convey traces of Kofman's childhood experiences, it also fails to fill in its own "traces":

Since the raw material of memory traces is unknown in its original form, solving the riddle of psychic productions consists neither in digging up the past as if it existed anywhere but in its mere traces, nor finding its prefabricated meaning in the unconscious. The riddle is thus a false one, because meaning is nowhere to be found. Solving the riddle, therefore, consists not in retrieving an original full meaning that never existed, but in sorting out the distortions, distinguishing the originary substitutive formations from the later ones. (64)

A Kofmanian interpretation of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* therefore necessitates the seeking out of possible distortions in the text—finding these distortions, or disfigurements, entails tracing the "moments" in the text in which Kofman "uncovers" or "unmasks" details through employment of textual "citational grafts," including quotation marks and footnotes.<sup>ii</sup> Following Gregory Ulmer (who follows Derrida), Kofman's use of these peritexts, the upcoming section makes clear, makes *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* a highly interpretable literary text.

### **Finding "That" ("Ça") in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat***

The seemingly minor "ça," (translated by Anne Smock as "that") in the opening lines of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* has been pondered over by a number of



Kofman scholars. Christina McDonald reads “ça” as the testament to Kofman’s life in hiding during the Holocaust; Michael Stanislawski reads the term as an illustration of “the push and pull over her and within her, between her real, Jewish mother, and the non-Jewish mother who saved them both” (Stanislawski 153); and Vivian Liska demarcates “ça” as a reference to Berek Kofman’s deportation and death. I argue here, however, that the “ça” (hereafter written as “that”) in these lines is both a literal reference to Kofman’s father’s broken fountain pen, and an allusion to the impossibility of writing “that” autobiographical text—the one that contains the purportedly non-fictional account of Kofman’s early experiences. With Derrida as her primary aid, I propose that Kofman uses quotation marks to indicate the hiddenness of all that has prompted her to write this text, as well as all of her works that came before. She also, I argue, follows Derrida’s assertion that the meanings afforded by signs are infinitely changed when they are positioned between quotation marks.

In *Margins of Philosophy*, Derrida describes the analogical capability of all signs:

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be cited, but between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is not an accident or anomaly, but is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called ‘normal’ functioning. What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way? (Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* 320-321)

Kofman's "that" is properly explained by Derrida's claim that the content expressed within a set of quotation marks need not heed a final calling or signification, but rather by virtue of its enclosure and its inherent expression of a meaning outside of its appearance, contains no attainable—even if recognizable—signification. The height of Kofman's positioning of herself as a philosopher and autobiographer can be found between and within these quotation marks. Kofman's obscure "that" is all but obscure on the one hand, that is, it is a clear reference to the fountain pen resting before her, pleading with her to "write, write"; but by virtue of its being cited, on the other hand, it is incapable of contextualization, for the "that," as long as it has been written in quotation marks, renders it meaningless and uncontextualizable.

To further Kofman's textual connection to Derrida, it is important to look to Derrida's "Of Spirit,"<sup>iii</sup> focuses on Martin Heidegger's belated omission of quotation marks from around the word "spirit" in his "Rectorship Address" (1933)<sup>iv</sup>. According to Derrida, six years separated Heidegger's *Being in Time*, in which the word "spirit" appeared in quotation marks on every occasion, and the "Rectorship Address," in which the word was written repeatedly without markation. What is important in Derrida's "Of Spirit" for the present study of Sarah Kofman's "that" in the opening lines of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* is Derrida's sketch of "the law of quotation marks," which follows:

It's the law of quotation marks. Two by two they stand guard: at the frontier or before the door, assigned to the threshold in any case, and these places are always dramatic. The apparatus lends itself to theatricalization and also to the hallucination of the stage and its machinery: two pairs of pegs hold in suspension a sort of drape, a veil or a curtain. Not closed, just slightly open. (463)

Derrida's imaginative description of the placing and lifting of quotation marks relates to Kofman's work in a number of unsuspecting ways: Firstly, Kofman's use of these marks around "that" support the Derridian claim that quotation marks serve as "curtains" around a central drama, played out only with the lifting of the marks, as was the case of Heidegger's omission of the marks surrounding "spirit" in the "Rectorship Address." Of Heidegger, Derrida states: "Six years later, 1933, and here we have the 'Rectorship Address': The curtain-raising is also the spectacle of academic solemnity, the splendor of the staging celebrating the quotation marks' disappearance" (463). Derrida's evaluation of Heidegger's linguistic move is highly complex, but his elucidation of "the law of quotation marks" aids in opening Kofman's marks around "that," for in the Derridian sense of the "law of quotation marks," the word—"that"—which, as I explained above, cannot be contextualized by virtue of its citational character, is now full of the entire text of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. The "that" becomes in this way a "stage" for the drama played out in the text, and an opening (if only "slight" as Derrida notes) to be filled by the remaining space of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*.

Especially exciting in this reading of Kofman's work follows Gregory Ulmer's elaboration of Derrida's claim in *Glas* (1947) that "[t]he organ of this new philosopheme," of citational marks in Derrida's thought "is the mouth, the mouth that bites, chews, tastes. . . . The first step of decomposition is the bite" (57). Derrida, who links individual parts of a text in terms of something akin to Roland Barthes's "lexias," in *S/Z* (1970)—which Barthes describes as "blocks of signification" and "units of reading" (*S/Z* 13) that can be understood as smaller, reduced fragments of a text—elaborates in *Glas* what Ulmer translates from Derrida's "morceau" in *Applied*

*Grammatology* as a “bit, piece, morsel, fragment; musical composition; snack, mouthful” (58). Derrida asserts that this “morceau” of a text is “is always detached, as its name indicates and so you do not forget it, with the teeth” (*Glas* 135); and these “teeth,” Ulmer explains, refer to “quotation marks, brackets, parentheses: when language is cited (put between quotation marks)” (58). The “effect” of the “teeth,” Ulmer continues, “is that of releasing the grasp or hold of a controlling context” (58). Kofman’s “that” is thus explained further with the aid of Derrida and Ulmer, who point to the unlimited contextual possibilities elicited by such marks. The use of “teeth” as an analogy for these marks is also relevant to Kofman’s numerous references to food, digestion, and purging found in *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat* and “Damned Food.”<sup>v</sup> More importantly for the present section of this thesis, however, is an application of Derrida’s and Ulmer’s notes on hypertextual marks to Kofman’s use of footnotes in *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat*.

### **Kofman’s Freudian Footnotes**

Penelope Deutscher makes the interesting remark in “Complicated Fidelity: Kofman’s Freud” that Kofman’s “fidelity” to Freud in most of her works makes her “seems to be a disturbingly faithful Freudian critic” (161). However, Deutscher asserts, Kofman’s faithfulness in Freud is only an apparent one, for it is complicated by “the way in which the textual references” (161) to thinkers besides Freud, such as Nietzsche, Rousseau, and Marx bounce off one another, or, as Deutscher puts it, “ricochet” (161). In a number of Kofman’s works discussed throughout this thesis, Kofman performs what Deutscher poetically defines as a “flickering across a stream of philosophers,” methodologically employed in order to “facilitate the connectivities between her male philosophers” (161). A close examination of the role of *Rue*

*Ordener, Rue Labat* in her practice of patch-working her intellectual forerunners reveals an important connection between Kofman's Freud and Kofman's Derrida, which surfaces only through an intertextual Derridian reading of the first of two footnotes in Kofman's chapter entitled, "In Flight." What becomes clear from this reading is that Kofman's use of quotation marks and footnotes facilitates a common thread from Kofman to Freud, *via* Derrida.

Before performing a Derridian-Freudian analysis of Kofman's footnote in the text, it is important to point out the importance of both Freud and Derrida for Kofman's philosophical agenda. As Deutscher notes, "[o]ne of the frequent dissolves at work for Kofman is that between Freud and Derrida. We might see broad references to Derrida in the midst of a discussion of Freud... or vice versa. A discussion of Freud's analytic discussions of literary texts might include comments on the distinction between what a text announces and what it actually does..." (162) and further,

[j]ust as Kofman fuses, or flickers between, a Freudian and a Nietzschean account of the economy of the veil, as she reconstructs these, she also flickers between her stylization of a Derridean distinction between the declared and described content of a text and her stylization of a Freudian account of textual symptoms that might occur at the level of described content. (162)

Soon after this passage, Deutscher moves away from this point in order to position Kofman's fidelity to "her philosophers" as strong and deliberate; rather than Kofman's "grafting" of one figure's theories (such as those of Freud) onto another's (such as those of Nietzsche's) or vice versa—a move which can often make her

methodology appear confusing—Deutscher argues that this “peculiarity” in Kofman’s method in fact “enables” the emergence of certain themes and theories in her work.

I return now to a reading of two of Kofman’s footnotes in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* in which, utilizing once again Derrida and Ulmer, serve not only as an annotation in the text, but also as an affirmation of that which Kofman shows cannot be contextualized, but, considering its highly academic language, finds greater security within this infinitely open text.

The first footnote in “Flight” reads as follows: “I later wrote a short book entitled *Camera obscura*” (Paris: Gallilée, 1973). It is perhaps helpful to look to Shari Benstock’s approach to Derrida’s assertions on footnotes in her article, “At the Margin of Discourse: Footnotes in the Fictional Text,” which, when supplemented by Derrida’s comments on footnotes, will clarify the use of Kofman’s academically-styled footnote in “Flight.” What is of special interest for Benstock is Derrida’s emphasis on “the physical existence of the footnote—the placement and form that make the footnote obviously what it is” (Benstock 220, note 2).<sup>vi</sup> She continues:

While notes are separated from the text on which they comment, keyed by superscript numerals and placed at the bottoms of pages or at the ends of chapters, they nonetheless negotiate an invisible and constantly changing line between this text and the texts that precede or will follow it, between this text and themselves. (120, n. 2)

Yet as Benstock elaborates, footnotes play different roles depending on the texts in which they appear. Her essay focuses on footnotes appearing in fictional works, which is certainly applicable—though not unproblematically, as has been made clear—to the present reading of Kofman’s footnotes in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, particularly as the text, according to William Cloonan and Jean-Philippe Postel, “cries

out for literary treatment” (“The Revues in Review: The Novel in 1994,” 920) due to a number of structural factors, some of which have been addressed above.<sup>vii</sup>

Nonetheless, Kofman’s footnote in “Flight” follows Benstock’s description of the notational mark as “skeletal” and “succinct,” its purpose being “to elaborate on the text without engulfing it” (204); it furthermore “adjusts the limits of the textual universe in which [it] participates” (204). Within a chapter whose title is “Flight,” moreover, the footnote as a textual “departure”—indeed, a “flight” as Derrida might acknowledge it—exposes Kofman’s utilization of the notational mark as a symptom of the chapter’s role in the larger text: to bring context to that which is inherently uncontextualizable by way of referencing an earlier theoretical work, *Camera Obscura: Of Ideology*.

The extratextual reference embedded in Kofman’s footnote has its referential root in the following line of the main body of the text, which is, not incidentally perhaps, within parentheses:

“(On the Rue Ordener, when she [my mother] couldn’t get us to stop shouting, crying, or quarreling, she would shut us up in a dark room [footnote 1 appears here] that served as a storage space, threatening us that ‘Maredwitchtale’ [footnote 2 appears here] would come for us...)” (73).

*Camera Obscura: Of Ideology* contains a short chapter entitled “Freud—The photographic apparatus,” which identifies Freud’s analogy of the “camera obscura” to the unconscious. Kofman’s unmasking of the analogy in unforeseen places in Freud’s work is useful for an understanding of Kofman’s first footnote in her “Flight” chapter, for it unveils in Freud’s texts—particularly *Project for an Scientific Psychology* (1895), *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939)—the

concept of “perversion” as “a development of neurosis,” for “it implies a passage from darkness to light, or from the unconscious to consciousness” (Kofman 21-22). Freud’s utilization of the photographic apparatus and the photographic negative is “intended to show that all psychic phenomena necessarily pass first through an unconscious phase, through darkness and the negative, before acceding to consciousness, before developing within the clarity of the positive” (22). Kofman’s most pertinent assertion in this chapter of *Camera Obscura* for the study of its reference in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* is that the “passage from darkness to light” (27), and its redefinition in *Moses and Monotheism* as the “passage from infancy to adulthood” (27) is not dictated by linearity, but rather, as an analogy of photographic development, has nothing to do with “development,” but rather with the allowance of “darkness to be made light” (27). To further explain, *Moses and Monotheism* makes evident “the psychic apparatus, the passage from negative to positive”—from darkness to light, from unconscious to conscious—“is neither necessary nor dialectical. It is possible that the development will never take place” (27). Repression—the “hiding” of that which awaits movement from darkness to light through psychoanalysis—is, according to Kofman, “originary, and there is always an irretrievable residue, something which will never have access to the unconscious” (27). Kofman’s extratextual footnote in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* can be read as an analogy for that “irretrievable residue,” for, in the Derridian sense explained above, the footnote refuses real contextualization; it can be understood as lingering in infinite “flight,” never grounded, always without “full meaning” (*Camera Obscura* 28). “To pass from darkness to light,” Kofman writes in *Camera Obscura*—to enforce meaning through extratextual reference, thus bringing what is hidden in the margins of *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*—is not “to rediscover a meaning already there” (28), but



is rather “to construct a meaning which has never existed as such” (28). And since Kofman argues that total meaning “has never been present” at any one point in the process of psychic development, her inclusion of such a footnote—and particularly one which references such a text as *Camera Obscura*, which points to the impossibility of finding originary meaning through psychoanalysis—reveals this footnote as a reinstatement of her “pre-text,” which admits to psychic “substitutive procedures” that “allow us to construct, after the fact... the meaning of experience” (28)—though always as a “hypothetical construction” (28). Kofman’s footnote is one such construction, for the fact of its inclusion in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*—specifically its position “in flight,”—and Kofman’s writing in of the specific reference to *Camera Obscura* gives the footnote a contradictory meaning, as it cannot be recognizably contextualized within any limits, and it cannot—like processes at work in the unconscious are unable to—find any true origin, no matter how deep its extratextual reference goes. Kofman’s footnote in is thus an example of this limitation of expression of meaning through writing, and a confirmation of meaning’s endless location “in flight.” The “dark room” to which Kofman refers in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*, is also the “dark room” of the unconscious, where even repeated contextualization will offer no assistance in finding full meaning of unconscious activity.

### **“Damned Food” and *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*: Kofman’s History With Food**

Food—as threat, sustenance, and defecation—is an undeniable subject in Kofman’s work. When read from the standpoint of Linda Anderson’s concept of “food autobiography,” the applicability of the term “gastrographer” seems relevant to an autobiographical characterization of Kofman. Kofman’s autobiographical text,

“Damned Food,” writes Frances Bartowski, is “a discourse of/about scarcity and impoverishment—in its materiality and fearsomeness” (“Autobiographical Writings” 6). Bartowski links “Damned Food” to Kofman’s autobiographical prose pieces “Nightmare” and “Tomb for a Proper Name,” stating that, in all three texts, “the loss of food... and shelter... coalesce in the loss of the name... through a terrible version of self-sufficiency that leads only to self-destruction—feeding one oneself... To link [the three pieces] is to move from food to the body to language” (6-7). With the exception of Bartowski’s analysis—which is itself only partial—the issue of food in Kofman’s autobiographical works has rarely been assessed in relation to her larger body of work, particularly between “Damned Food” and, via a clear-cut analogy, in *Smothered Words*. Kathryn Robson, for instance, in “Bodily Detours: Sarah Kofman’s Narratives of Childhood Trauma,” asserts that “Damned Food” expresses Kofman’s childhood loss of her father:

[A]lthough the father seems forgotten [in “Damned Food”], we can trace the child’s (in)ability to mourn and to give voice to her father’s death through what she eats and what she does not—or cannot eat. Having already lost her father, the child carries out hunger strikes... equating eating with accepting separation and loss, she resists separation through self-imposed starvation. (Robson 614)

In the above argument, Robson has altogether neglected to note Kofman’s references to vomiting up what is fed to her, which is central to “Damned Food,” particularly as it is expressed in the final line, immediately following “I could no longer swallow” (9). Robson argues that Kofman’s accounts of eating and vomiting in the text can be compared to such behaviors found in people with eating disorders. Although she admits that “Kofman’s autobiographical accounts... are very far from stories of

contemporary eating disorders” (611), she utilizes current theories about eating disorders in order to define Kofman in the following way:

... Psychoanalytic accounts of eating disorders suggest that sufferers replace food with words or, more accurately, act out what they cannot say through what they can or cannot eat. Unable to speak, they attempt instead to control their food intake in order to ‘speak’ through their bodies, or, more accurately, to articulate their inability to describe their feelings verbally. Kofman’s autobiographical writings describe a similar struggle to speak through the body, as the young Kofman stages a refusal or acceptance of her own situation not through words, but through what she will not, or cannot, eat... (611)

Robson’s overall argument is that Kofman’s autobiographical writings attempt “write out” her childhood struggle with the loss of her father and traumatic experiences, and thus emerge as indicators of what Kofman can and cannot speak. Robson takes her claim further by asserting that Kofman’s texts, when read in light of psychoanalytic theories about eating disorders, do not find their satisfaction or “recovery,” for “the vomiting, self-consuming body that recurs throughout Kofman’s writing cannot correspond to any ‘real’ body; it is always discursive, a figure that resists assimilation” (621). “The body” in Kofman’s works, Robson claims, is repeatedly inscribed as a figure of the limits and possibilities of narratives of traumatic experience” (609). Robson carries out her argument without engaging with Kofman’s scholarship, most notably *Smothered Words*, wherein Kofman addresses the “double bind,” *not* of articulation of traumatic events, which cannot by their traumatic effect be uttered, but rather the double-bind of one’s “duty” to speak—of the body’s “choking” on words before they find ample expression.

Finally, amongst other Kofman scholars that emphasize her texts directly related to feeding, food, digestion, and purging, Michael Stanislawski claims that Kofman's "food issues" are comprehensible by way of Freud's description of the child in an afterglow of satisfaction following a breast-fed meal, which later appears in the adult psyche as "a prototype of the expression of sexual satisfaction in later life" (159). Stanislawski equates Kofman's "hysterical vomiting" with a "'defensive regression' against positive Oedipal wishes" (159)—wishes which are embodied through Kofman's "homosexual attraction to her surrounding surrogate Christian mothers" (159).<sup>viii</sup> This somewhat reductive reading, in an about-facing way to Robson's analysis—focuses on vomiting, rather than on both rejection of food and subsequent vomiting. I propose an analysis that emphasizes the connection between feeding, ingestion, digestion, and vomiting, which I argue frames not only Kofman's texts that explicitly discuss these elements, but through a multi-faceted reading that incorporates Kofman's repetitive language and analogical framework.

I focus here primarily on "Damned Food" and *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat* as the two texts resembling on another most obviously in their approaches to self-diminishment by way of refusing nourishment—even in the most urgent moments—and subsequent purging. The issue of food for Kofman in both writings is also significant in that its source is always that of a mother or mother-figure, even as Kofman's father is heavily involved in the killing and blessing of meat for the family and their Jewish neighbors in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. In the case of "Damned Food," the fixed source of food is Kofman's mother, where her father is depicted as the gentler, less forceful provider of sustenance. Kofman writes:

“You must eat,” said my mother. And she stuffed and stuffed and stuffed us. Not a chance of being deprived of dessert with her.

“You must not eat everything,” said my father. Not mix milk and meat, not eat just any meat; not eat off just any dish; not mix plates and silverware, *milchig* and *fleischig*; purify them once a year at Passover, in case of a mistake made misguidedly. (8)

Kofman writes that her mother “officiated in the kitchen, where it was not uncommon to see a cut of salted beef dripping blood for hours, or a carp wriggling in a deep pan,” and that her father, “a ritual slaughterer, killed chickens in the toilet according to the law” (8). Her use of the words “slaughter” and “killed” imply that her father was the more aggressive of her two parents, but as she writes that he performed such an act as “law,” she is also indicating that it was his responsibility to do so, while her mother, she incites, used food, not according to the same “law” followed by her father, but rather as a double condescension: nourishment and abuse. Kofman’s refusal to eat was not a breach of her father’s law but rather that of her mother. She suggests that her refusal to ingest her mother’s prepared food stems from two possible sources: “Was it fear of transgressing some taboo, or the consequence of being stuffed, the fact that I had hardly any appetite and resisted with all my might the maternal categorical imperative” (8). The “maternal categorical imperative” is an important phrase in the context of Kofman’s statements about obedience to her mother’s demands. In the opening to Kofman’s *Smothered Words*, published one year following “Damned Food,” she suggests that the “categorical imperative” constructed by Adorno “in the style of Kant, though ridding it of its abstract and ideal generality,” Freud (loosely citing Kant) in *The Ego and the Id* asserts that a child’s initial “compulsion to obey his parents,” at a defining point in his psychic development transforms into a tendency towards rebelliousness: “so the ego submits to the categorical imperative of

its super-ego" (48). What is universally obeyed by the child from this turning point onwards, according to Freud's construction of id, ego, and super-ego—is essentially ruled by the fantasies elicited by the super-ego. Kofman thus indicates that by denying the sustenance forced upon her by her mother, she is resisting her childhood desire to gain satisfaction brought by maternal love. Kofman also contemplates, however, the possibility that she rejected food out of fear that she might be “transgressing some taboo,” that is, that by eating she risks breaking the paternal laws set forth by her father via Jewish laws. She also considers that her denial of food is perfectly logical: she was pathologically “stuffed” and so she could not eat any further.

Kofman's analogy of *not* eating as a crime—a breaking of a “law”—further complicates the description of her mother in “Damned Food”: “To accomplish her ends,” she writes, “my mother would follow me to school with her bowl of *café au lait*, taking the teacher as witness of my crime: ‘She didn’t eat this morning!’” (8). It is not only that her mother “stuffed and stuffed and stuffed us” (8), but that she “stuffed” and also punished her child for not *being* “stuffed.” Even if hungry, she hopes to punish her mother in return by refusing food. And, moreover, as Kofman continues in “Damned Food,” at a time of chaos, “during the war” when “things became complicated” and Kofman wonders “How to find anything to eat?” and “How to continue eating kosher?” she also describes how her mother, once “stuffing” her children, now restricted the eating of non-kosher food—specifically the ham and butter sandwiches handed out by the Red Cross to evicted Jewish families in Paris. “The ham and butter, once decreed impure,” she confesses, “I found delicious, now purified by circumstances and paternal authority” (8). When she writes immediately following these lines: “A few years later my father was deported. / We could no

longer find anything to eat,” an even sharper turn against the “maternal categorical imperative” occurs. She writes:

After countless turns of fortune, I was ‘saved’ just in time by a woman who kept me in her home in the middle of Paris until the end of the war.

At the same time that she taught me what it was ‘to have a Jewish nose,’ she put me on a totally different diet: the food of my childhood was decreed bad for my health, held responsible for my ‘lymphatic state’...

Put in a real double bind, I could no longer swallow anything and vomited after each meal. (9)

Kofman’s concept of the “double bind” is now appears for the second time in her larger body of works, embedded in the text as describing a state in which Kofman cannot digest nourishment, but vomits nonetheless. I propose that this “double bind” can be newly paralleled with the “double bind” described in *Smothered Words*, which in the latter text accounts for the “unimaginable” experience of witnessing the Holocaust. Kofman points to Antelme’s explanation: “When you walk around with this word [unimaginable] as your shield, this word for emptiness, your step becomes better assured, more resolute, your conscience pulls itself together” (Kofman citing Antelme 38). What is “unimaginable,” says Kofman, cannot be expressed “without delusion,” for it is “[t]hat for which there are no words—or too many...” (*Smothered Words* 38). The “double bind” in this context is made up of “an infinite claim to speak, a duty to speak infinitely, imposing itself with irrepressible force, and at the same time, an almost physical impossibility to speak, a *choking* feeling” (39).

The connection between the double-bind of Kofman’s “Damned Food” and that of *Smothered Words* becomes even clearer when food is equated with words, and

when that which is ingested—that is, experienced—cannot be *digested*—that is, expressed through the body—and so must be vomited; for Kofman, then, the experience of eating is the experience of accepting that which has the potential to poison if digested fully.

### **Cuts and Glosses: Kofman, Freud, Hitchcock**

In her chapter “Summarize, Interpret (*Gradiva*)” in *Freud and Fiction*, Kofman examines Freud’s method of summary in his *Delusions and Dreams in Jensen’s Gradiva* (1907). Freud’s essay is fascinating for a number of reasons, not the least of which relates to Freud’s own autobiographical involvement with the text. Kofman at first focuses on Freud’s particular act of summarizing Jensen as a precondition to his interpretation of *Gradiva* in *Dreams and Delusions*: “It is once the summary is completed that the work of interpretation is to begin: the moment of the summary is that of a ‘naïve’ reading of the text when the reader, swept along by the same feelings and hopes as the hero, is in too great a state of suspense to be able to understand it” (85). Kofman then considers the possible mishaps of Freud’s style of summarization—artistic license suffers the risk of being discredited, and a drastic and a possibly irreparable divergence of the text’s form and content (its content now being torn from its original position). Pointing to Freud’s own perspective on the consequences of summary, Kofman states that Freud “presents his summary as an imperfect substitute for the text itself: to summarize is necessarily to strip the text of its charms by changing the form of the narrative: it is to deprive the reader of any pleasure incentive” (85). This deficit in “pleasure incentive,” Kofman verifies, however, may not be without specific purpose in the larger Freudian project of psycho-literary interpretation. Kofman argues that Freud’s method of analysis,



beginning with his summary of *Gradiva* “seems necessarily to exclude any summary, any transformations of the text. Interpreting the text correctly should mean looking at the whole text, and, indeed, Freud does refer to the reader first of all to the text. Nevertheless, he summarizes it; he even summarizes the dreams [in *Gradiva*] which are of particular interest to him” (87). Freud’s method may in fact require such a summary; it may have a “precise function within the Freudian method” (88). Kofman reiterates this function by showing increasing enthusiasm about the necessity of Freud’s summary for Freudian interpretation of Jensen’s work, specifically an interpretation of the central dream depicted in the text in which Norbert Hanold fleetingly catches sight of Gradiva, a stone statue which has come to life in his dream and which leaves Norbert with the belief that Gradiva is a living woman who can be found in the streets of Pompeii. Kofman writes:

A summary of the work is necessary to provide the dream’s context: its context is decisive in determining its code. The selection operated by the summary is a function of its finality. Henceforth the summary no longer appears to be a useless supplement but a complement to the method of interpretation. It is designed to prepare the way for interpretation since, as a whole, Jensen’s text, by excess of meaning it conveys, conceals the fact that of itself it is not fully transparent. The summary is not a supplement added to the text, a surplus: it comes to reveal the gaps hidden in the text’s continuity and plentitude. The dismemberment of the text introduces ruptures, discontinuities and cuts into its seamless fabric. In order to construct, the analytic work always begins by *deconstructing*. It is the summary that performs this deconstructive process. (89)

For purposes of getting closer to Kofman’s text, it seems fitting to present fragments of Freud’s summary of *Gradiva* in his *Dreams and Delusions*, including his introductory and concluding lines of the summary:

And now I ought properly to ask all my readers to put aside this little essay and instead spend some time in acquainting themselves with *Gradiva* (which first appeared in bookshops in 1903), so that what I refer to in the following pages may be familiar to them. But for the benefit of those who have already read *Gradiva* I will recall the substance of the story in a brief summary; and I shall count upon their memory to restore to it all the charm of which this treatment will deprive it.

A young archeologist, Norbert Hanold, had discovered in a museum of antiquities in Rome a relief which had so immensely attracted him that he was greatly pleased at obtaining an excellent plaster cast of it which he could hang in his study in a German university town and gaze at with interest. The sculpture represented a fully-grown girl stepping along, with her flowing dress a little pulled up so as to reveal her sandalled feet...

Soon afterwards he had a terrifying dream, in which he found himself in ancient Pompeii on the day of the eruption of Vesuvius and witnessed the city's destruction... Fear of the fate that lay before her provoked him to utter a warning cry, whereupon the figure, as she calmly stepped along, turned her face towards him... When he hurried after her, he found her stretched out on the broad step with a peaceful expression, like someone asleep, till the rain of ashes buried her form...

But even after his returning reflection recognized the sounds as the awakening signs of noisy life in a great city, he retained his belief for a long time in the reality of what he had dreamt. When at length he had freed himself of the notion that he himself had been present at the destruction of Pompeii almost two thousand years earlier, he was nevertheless left with what seemed a true conviction that *Gradiva* had lived in Pompeii and had been buried there with the others in the year 79 A.D. The dream had as its result that now for the first time in his phantasies about *Gradiva* he mourned for her as someone who was lost. (Freud 12-13)

Kofman does not provide Freud's summary in her text, a move that prompts her to take part in the act of summarizing. Perhaps an imitation of Freud's technique of dealing with a primary text, Kofman effectively halts the cycle of analysis which, when returning to its biological state, will turn endlessly unto itself. Her decision to stay outside of her text in this manner is, I argue, only temporary, for she participates in a Freudian act of summarizing which, I propose, is also a reenactment of her scholarly interpretations of Freud's work on *Gradiva*.<sup>ix</sup>

Kofman's summary of Alfred Hitchcock's 1938 film, *The Lady Vanishes* includes the following description:

Hitchcock's film *The Lady Vanishes* is one of my favorites. I have seen it several times and each time I am seized with the same visceral anguish when the nice little old lady, Miss Froy, seated in the train opposite the sleeping heroine (a young Englishwoman named Iris), vanishes. It is even worse when she is replaced by another woman who passes herself off as the first. And my agony is excruciating when Iris, having left her seat to look throughout the train for the lady who has vanished, returns to her compartment half-convinced by the Pseudodoctor from Prague that the blow to the head she received before getting on the train has caused her to have hallucinations (according to the doctor, Miss Froy—the good little old lady—has never been on the train at all, and seated opposite Iris has always been this other woman who, in fact, has been put there in Miss Froy's place by the conspirators). The part that is always unbearable for me is to perceive, all of a sudden, instead of the good maternal face of the old lady (and everything in the film suggests that she represents the good mother: she calls the mountains at the little ski resort baby's bonnets; she always has extra food with her... she poses as a governess, a children's music teacher) the face of her replacement (who is wearing the clothes of the good lady, who is really a secret agent for the Intelligence Service and who is at this point in another compartment, bound and gagged by spies). It is a horribly hard, shifty face, and

just as one is expecting to see the good lady's sweet, smiling one, there it is instead—menacing and false. (*Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* 65-66)

Following Freud, Kofman's summary of *The Lady Vanishes* reveals a number of important shortcomings in Kofman's summary. First and foremost is the contradiction inherent in her summary of the film, where she slides between the private and the objective without hesitation. So personal is her summary that the passages "my agony is excruciating when Iris, having left her seat to look throughout the train for the lady who has vanished..." and "[t]he part that is always unbearable for me is to perceive, all of a sudden, instead of the good maternal face of the old lady... the face of her replacement..." (66).

Kofman writes of Freud's method of summarization that it serves as a "complement to the method of interpretation" and "is designed to prepare the way for interpretation since, as a whole, Jensen's text, by the excess of meaning it conveys, conceals the fact that of itself it is not fully transparent" (*Freud and Fiction* 88-89). The "effect" produced by Freud's method of summary is, Kofman argues, "to deprive the work of its charm" (91). Kofman's argument, while understood in the context of a criticism of Freud's methodological tactics, is turned over by her summary of *The Lady Vanishes*, for she does not abide by the rule of deconstructing a work as the first step in revealing its meaning. Kofman's summary of Hitchcock's film, from the very first line of the chapter, is interrupted by Kofman's recognition of herself as a participant in the film's summary. An interpretation of the film is thus not relevant here, as Kofman's statements such as: "The part that is always unbearable for me" and "It is a horribly hard, shifty face" implicate her in her own summary, thus preventing any "charm" of the work to be perceived in the first place. Where Freud may "prepare" his interpretation through his very directed summary, Kofman's

interpretation is already found within it. As if to prevent the film from having a place outside of her interpretation, Kofman forbids any “mis”-understanding by “eras[ing]...” “what is truly puzzling” (96). Like Freud’s method of summary proposed by Kofman, her summary of *The Lady Vanishes* “not only fragments, and selects from, the text, it also puts into operation a whole series of semantic substitutions. It is the translation from one language to another. These transformations move in the direction of a certain interpretation of the characters’ behavior. They turn a singular and concrete adventure into a more general and abstract tale” (96). Once again, Kofman’s critical words are turned over by her act of summarizing in *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat*. In Kofman’s summary, Miss Froy of *The Lady Vanishes* is not only the little woman who is supposed to have “the sweet, smiling” face, but, embedded in *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* between Kofman’s statements about her “real” mother and mother-substitutes, the summary does not meet up with Kofman’s conception of summary in her work related to Freud. And yet, the chapter on *The Lady Vanishes* is situated between the only other chapter in the text that describes her relation to Freud in her scholarship (which is entitled, “The Two Mothers of Leonardo da Vinci”) and the second, the only chapter in which she makes direct reference to her scholarly work on Blanchot (entitled “The Idyll”). These three chapters—“The Two Mothers of Leonardo da Vinci,” “The Lady Vanishes,” and “The Idyll”—together serve as a detour in the text, the last of which includes two of only three footnotes in *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat*, in which Kofman refers to her previously published *Camera Obscura*. Looking at Kofman’s style of summary in *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat*, then, is a necessary undertaking when following Kofman’s assertions about the role and setbacks of summaries in psycholiterary analyses.

## Uncanny Objects – Freud, Hoffmann, and Kofman’s Dolls

Kofman’s final chapter in *Freud and Fiction*, entitled “The Double is/and the Devil: The Uncanniness of *The Sandman (Der Sandmann)*” has been widely discussed by critics of Kofman’s work, perhaps due to its subject matter—primarily, Freud’s utilization of the “uncanny”—and this topic’s relevance to other fields such as literary criticism, feminist studies, and post-structuralism.

Like Freud in his article on the uncanny, Kofman opens her chapter with an attempt to redefine—as both an act of understanding Freud’s methodology, but also, I argue, an act of repetition—the word on her own terms, following Freud. Freud’s article opens with the following lines (which Kofman herself cites in a separate text, *The Childhood of Art*, under the subheading “The Symptomal Reading”):

It is only rarely that a psycho-analyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics, even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling. He works in other strata of mental life and has little to do with the subdued emotional impulses which, inhibited in their aims and dependent on a host of concurrent factors, usually furnish the material for the study of aesthetics. But it does occasionally happen that he has to interest himself in some particular province of that subject; and this province usually proves to be a rather remote one, and which has been neglected in the specialist literature of aesthetics. (“The Uncanny” 219)

Freud’s opening statement is comparable in both form and content to Kofman’s initial inquiry presented in *Freud and Fiction*. Here she proposes similarly that the term “uncanny” requires a definition before it can be appropriately applied to a work of literature. Kofman begins: “*The Uncanny* – a text dominated by an investigation which is not, at any moment, complete without being immediately invalidated...

Freud's stated desire is to arrive at the core of meaning proper to a concept, that of the *Unheimlich*, which would justify the use of a specific word" (Kofman 121). Kofman continues her summary of Freud's text by asserting that his aim in "The Uncanny" is, following his offering of a number of definitions, to "find cases which have uncanny effects on everyone, and at the same time to take into account individual variations in sensitivity" (122). She then goes on to break down Freud's article, honing in on a number of points at which Freud utilizes his own conception of "the uncanny" to put forth his arguments.

For Freud, the figure of the "doll"—the automaton, and, in the case of *The Sandman*, the silent but humanlike Olympia—is one example of the uncanny. The actuality of its non-living characteristic is masked by a façade of qualities that make it appear to be a living, breathing person. The confusion brought on by one's gazing into the empty eyes of a lifeless doll brings about the feeling of uncanniness, where the holder of the doll is taken by its likeness to a living being, but is simultaneously aware of the doll's artificiality.

Kofman writes of dolls three times in *Rue Ordener, Rue Labat*. The first is in her description of the doll given to her by Madame Fagnard as a gift, giving the impression that on the whole, dolls provoke fear in young Kofman: "I remember getting a little doll from her (the only one I wasn't afraid of), housed with its clothes in a small brown artificial snakeskin trunk. To my utter despair, I was never able to get it back after our apartment was sealed off by the police" (19). The second scene in which a doll appears is in "Metamorphosis." In this chapter, Kofman describes the changes she's undergoing in the hands of Mémé, who has by this time, to the dismay of Kofman's mother, put the nine year-old girl on a non-Jewish diet and "bit by bit... brought about a real transformation" in her. She explains in a memory fragment in the

same chapter that her mother, who had Kofman's hair "cut quite short, like a boy's" because she had contracted lice at school, had to wash her scalp with kerosene and combed it, "all the while trying to distract me with a windup puppet that frightened me as much as dolls' eyes and masks did" (41). Kofman's final mention of dolls is the most revealing. It occurs in the fourth-to-last chapter, entitled "Idyll," and provides an account of Kofman's childhood which not only explains the uncanny source of Kofman's fear of dolls, but which also puts uncanniness within the same framework as food. Mémé picked Kofman up from school one day and the two walked to the Rue Labat together, passing store windows and talking "on every subject" (68). During their walk, Mémé bought Kofman paints, a dictionary, and a collection of Charles Dickens stories. Kofman writes of this time: "With her encouragement I longed for a doll or, rather, for a rubber 'bather' (I was still terrified of the eyes of other dolls, which my mother used as a threat when we would refuse to eat), and I hesitated for a long time over the choice of this one or that, without ever really managing to make up my mind" (68). When all three passages are read together, two important factors stand out: the first is that, for Kofman, it seems that dolls could be used to clarify motherly affection; and, secondly, dolls (specifically dolls' eyes) were used against Kofman by her mother when she refused food. Food is thus tied again to the mother, but this time through the figure of the doll, whose uncanny characteristics grow or fade, depending on the role of the one giving little Kofman the doll, and perhaps the likeness or difference which the doll has to food. Although not referenced explicitly, Kofman's fear of "the eyes of other dolls," used by her mother as a "threat" seems to mark a reference here to Hoffmann's work, wherein the Sandman pulled out the eyes of small children. The uncanny is thus situated within the context of Kofman's multiple mothers, and further encourages a reading in which the "double mother" is



complicated by the addition of two mothers: Madame Fagnard and Mémé, the first who successfully granted Kofman a doll, and the second who tried and was met with complacency.

### **The Fountain Pen, the Postcard, and What Remains**

Often cited from *Rue Orderner*, *Rue Labat* are its opening lines, which appear to set up the text as a necessity for Kofman:

Of him all I have left is the fountain pen. I took it one day from my mother's purse, where she kept it along with some other souvenirs of my father. It is a kind of pen no longer made, the kind you have to fill with ink. I used it all through school. It 'failed' me before I could bring myself to give it up. I still have it, patched up with Scotch tape; it is right in front of me on my desk and makes me write, write.

Maybe all my books have been detours required to bring me to write about 'that.'

(3)

These lines are described by Tina Chanter as Kofman's call to write in place of her father, "in his stead" ("Playing With Fire" 99) and it is "[d]ue to her father's death, she must write. Perhaps she was compensating, with her writing, for her father's death? Displacing her mourning" (99). Chanter makes an interesting point with this statement, but she misses a distinct contradiction on Kofman's part: Despite various references to Kofman's opening words, and her passage on her father's postcard, little effort has been made towards identifying a contradiction between the two artifacts. The postcard, "sent from Drancy, written in purple ink, with a stamp on it bearing Marshal Petain's picture" (9) was written not by Berek Kofman—he was apparently forbidden to write in Yiddish or Polish—but by another inmate, in French. "When my

mother died,” writes Kofman, “it wasn’t possible to find that card, which I had reread so often and wanted to save. It was as if I had lost my father a second time” (9); reminiscent of Ruth Kluger’s *Still Alive* passage in which she explains that learning of the way in which her father died at Auschwitz meant experiencing his loss a second time, Kofman depicts her mourning. It is perhaps in this state that Kofman forgets (or, as Freud would have it in the case of hysterics, “[t]he unconscious feelings strive to avoid recognition which the cure demands” (“The Dynamics of Transference” 113-114), that is, the impression one gets is of forgetting, while the unconscious reveals this “forgetting” to be rather a refusal to remember, manifesting itself through repetition. Kofman certainly repeats the sentiments used to describe the fountain pen and, later, the postcard. Of the fountain pen, she writes: “Of him all I have left is the fountain pen” (3); describing the loss of the postcard she writes: “From then on nothing was left, not even that lone card that he hadn’t even written” (9). A faulty pen and a lost ghostwritten postcard (and moreover a doubled ghost—the real writer of the card and the card that merely bears Berek Kofman’s signature), all objects which Kofman seems to avoid coinciding.

### **Concluding Remarks: Kofman’s Autobiographical-Scholarly Works**

Of *Rue Ordener*, *Rue Labat*, I agree with Christie McDonald that the text affirms its authorship by a philosopher, for it “is not an end commanded by a *telos*, but rather the story of forces that constituted the person, Sarah, and her works as a philosopher” (195). As Jean-Luc Nancy eloquently states in his preface to *Enigmas: Essays on Sarah Kofman*: “With Sarah, the analysis of analysis—interpretation and dissolution—comes with its identification: it is the name of Nietzsche, in other words the one whom, along with Freud, Sarah analyzed and commented upon the most.

Their two names run from one end to the other of her books...” (xv). Indeed, *The Childhood of Art*, for instance, Deutscher and Oliver write, “is a little-known, intensely scholarly, and broad-ranging interpretation of Freud on art, literature, and aesthetics...” (3), wherein “Kofman realizes a scrupulous reading that entirely rethinks Freud” (3). It is argued that Kofman is very much *like* Freud, perhaps one can thus say that Kofman was not only influenced by, but partook in Freud’s analyses, becoming a figure of study like Freud’s Leonardo or Hoffmann. “Like Freud,” writes Tina Chanter, “Kofman put off letting go of a text that was most revelatory of her private being. Like Freud, the text [*Rue Orderner, rue Labat*] concerns issues surrounding the death of a father, and the desire for a mother” (“Playing with Fire,” *Sarah Kofman’s Corpus* 113).

The works and concepts I have examined here are but a few of a myriad of Kofman’s publications, both autobiographical and critical. My overriding goal has been to open up the possibilities of reading Kofman as a scholar-autobiographer whose works cannot be read using common methods of analysis purported by many scholars of Kofman specifically, and autobiography more generally.

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<sup>i</sup> See, for instance, Cathy Caruth, “Holocaust Testimonies: Attending to the Victim’s Voice” in *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*; Alvin H. Rosenfeld, “The Assault on Holocaust Memory”; Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Memory and History: Liturgical Time and Historical Time”; and James Young, “Between History and Memory: The Uncanny Voices of Historian and Survivor” and “Toward a Received History of the Holocaust”). See Bibliography for full bibliographical details.

<sup>ii</sup> For further clarification of the term “citational grafts,” see Derrida’s “Signature Event Context” (12).

<sup>iii</sup> “Of Spirit” is an article originally published within Derrida’s longer evaluation of Heidegger’s work, the whole of which is entitled *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (1989).

<sup>iv</sup> By “Rectorship Address” Derrida is referring to “The Self-Assertion of the German University” (1933).

<sup>v</sup> The multiple readings of Kofman’s writings about food based on Derrida’s introduction and Ulmer’s elaboration of the “teeth” and “eating” analogies will not be elaborated in my section which focuses on Kofman’s writings on her relation to food and eating below (which is entitled

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“Eating Autobiographically”) but the possibilities derived from such a reading certainly deserve further exploration.

<sup>vi</sup> Benstock looks at a number of Derrida’s texts which discuss footnotes, but her primary references—only in certain cases the same as those used in this chapter—are “Living On,” which includes Derrida’s examination of Blanchot’s *La Folie du jour* (“The Madness of the Day”), and which, interestingly for any study of footnotes, presents a single running footnote through the whole of the text.

<sup>vii</sup> See my above section entitled “*Rue Orderner, Rue Labat: Breaking Points*,” wherein I address some of the literary elements of *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* that make it examinable as a work of literary fiction.

<sup>viii</sup> Stanislawski’s use of the term “hysterical vomiting” is not backed by sufficient proof in Kofman’s text. This highly pathological phrase—and equally problematic due to the implications of the term “hysterical” in Freud’s work—does not seem to apply to Kofman’s accounts of vomiting in her early childhood. Furthermore, his simplistic application of Freud’s Oedipal model and his assumption of Kofman’s homosexuality—likely influenced by the work of such scholars as Tina Chanter, who also argue that Kofman’s work is directly related to her purported homosexuality (for Chanter, based on her personal correspondences with Kofman), is not deducible through Stanislawski’s Freudian reading of *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat*.

<sup>ix</sup> Kofman provides summaries of a number of literary works throughout her corpus, though none as detailed as her summaries of Hitchcock’s *The Lady Vanishes* in *Rue Orderner, Rue Labat* and Robert Antelme’s *The Human Race* in *Smothered Words*.

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