

Interruptions: Disturbing the Essay

Lily Hoang

At the beginning, there is an interruption. An interruption marks this beginning. How much time must be logged before it is valid to call it an interruption? There is nothing inherently aggressive about the act of interruption.

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Interruption is a strategy to get to the disturbed essay, like the number of times in any day that someone uses their voice to speak over mine. I try to stop and to move out of the way. I really do avoid conflict. I am not interrupting: I am interrupted. I am being mispunctuated, every mark shrivels down to a period, proof that I am done speaking, please go on.

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I'm of that generation that likes to verb everything, so, like *Disturbing the Essay*, as opposed to the *Disturbed Essay*. And, indeed, I do disturb the essay. I bother it, perforating its beingness, holes spreading like oceanic hives. But that is not the same thing as the disturbed essay.

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Once, while I was reading at the University of Chicago, a student told me that my book of essays *A Bestiary* made her vomit. Reading my book incited such emotion in her that she had to vomit. I still wonder what it was about my essays that forced such an embodied reaction. The student hadn't explained. She thought the bigness of her response should be proof enough: but of what?

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Afterwards, editors would say that they were hoping I would write a book of long-form essays next. And so I kept on braiding.

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There is nothing inherently aggressive about an act of interruption except that it's aggressive. It's a display of power, and it betrays the interrupter's greedy bravado. But there are times when you must cut someone off, to sock and tape up a mouth.

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Almost every essay I've ever written has contained an element of fairy tale. I will drop entire fairy tales into the middle of an essay, diverting attention away with glitz and magic and the sublime, attention otherwise focused on something still too tender. I love fairy tales not for their whimsy but for their violence, rendered so flatly, so matter of factly, that it becomes a violence without pain. Whereas all the violence I have known is always accompanied by pain. Pains of different scales. Scalar ache.

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I will put a fairy tale in the middle of an essay and then I will insist that it is an essay.

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After reading my book, students will say that it's surprising to them how much I smile. They figured I'd be pouting in the corner, maybe, a sad girl off to the side, but in my everyday life, I am a happy person, fulfilled. I tell people I live half of my life is toil and half of my life in wonder, but that's an exaggeration.

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I've formed a bad habit with my partner. He is a thoughtful speaker; English is not his first language. His words are always surprisingly precise. Lately, though, in a pause he creates to allow

himself to search his word option bank, I will interrupt and try to guess with him. I don't know why I do it. I would hate it if he did the same. To insert myself into whatever story he was telling is rude. It's like I'm insulting him, assuming that I can read his mind and find the perfect word for him and then I can give it to him, to use in the very sentence he is in the middle of completing. In the most literal way, I am putting words into his mouth. I am impatient, maybe that's it. Or maybe I just like to interrupt.

Here I am, neuroticizing about my periodic interruption in conversation with my boyfriend, whereas others easily interrupt me and often. There's no need to apologize, either.

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I've been using that line about toil and wonder for at least ten years now. Although I always estimate the ratio is 50-50, ten years ago I was not a happy person. I was scared and abused. When I first said that sentence, I was living my life probably 90% in toil and only 10% in wonder. And I kept on repeating the sentence. It was aspirational, even though I spoke it as fact.

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I hope you say something—I am eager to interrupt.