

Caught in the “Language Forest”: Dorothy Smith Dushkin’s Diary (1919–1988) and *The Glassy Interval* Manuscript

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But when, in the diary, the sovereignty of the self withdrew and the raging against the way things happen fell silent, events showed themselves to be undecided. The ever more distant visibility of this self that relates nothing more to itself weaves the ever more imminent myth of things that storm on, endlessly attracted to the self, as a restless questioning, thirsting for definition.

Walter Benjamin, *The Metaphysics of Youth*, “The Diary,” 1913–1914, unpublished in his lifetime

I.

An important yet unrecognized figure in twentieth-century American creative and intellectual life, Dorothy Smith Dushkin was a composer and music educator who studied in Paris (1926–1928) with the famous composition teacher Nadia Boulanger. Along with other Boulanger protégés Aaron Copland and Virgil Thomson, she is one of the composers who, once they returned to America, together more broadly created a uniquely American musical signature, yet Dushkin remains unacknowledged as a member of this group.¹ Although she struggled to get her work more widely performed, published, and awarded, she produced ninety-one compositions, including large-scale works for orchestra and for chorus and orchestra as well as ensemble chamber music for a wide variety of instru-

ments.² In 1976, her “Quintet for Amanda,” for oboe and strings, gained national recognition when it was performed for the Bicentennial at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.³

Dushkin and her husband, David, started two music schools, both still in existence: what is now the Winnetka campus of the Music Institute of Chicago, one of only twelve community-based schools in the United States accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music; and Kinhaven in Weston, Vermont, a highly selective summer camp for gifted high school musicians. Former Kinhaven students include the guitarist Eliot Fisk and the conductor and pianist Ignat Solzhenitsyn. Together these two schools constitute a substantial pedagogical legacy.

**Dorothy Smith, 1918, J.D. Toloff, Evanston, IL, Dorothy Dushkin Papers,
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College**



However, Dushkin was also an aspiring writer. Born in 1903 in Glencoe, Illinois and raised there in a prosperous upper-middle-class family, Dushkin was a gifted musician who was sent to Bradford Academy outside Boston at sixteen to finish high school. She then continued on to Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, graduating in 1925 with honors in music. In the summer of 1919, as she was preparing to leave home for Bradford, Dushkin started a diary, a remarkable document that she maintained over

the next almost seventy years until four years before she died in 1992. This diary, along with Dushkin's composition scores, numerous recordings, and correspondence, is archived in Smith's Sophia Smith Collection. In scope, depth, and quality, this diary, inscribed with a worldly sophistication and a strong literary and intellectual aesthetic, reflects Dushkin's attempt to create in her life, in her music, and in her writing an American cosmopolitanism. As Dushkin converses in detail with the authors she has read, analyzes unflinchingly encounters with others, and studies her own composing process, the tension between how she viewed herself as a serious composer, writer, and intellectual and how others positioned her as a wife, mother, gardener, household manager ricochets throughout. In aggregate, the diary serves as a counterpoint to the twentieth century's large scale, sweeping events and its parade of monumental male figures, providing an intimate portrait of one American woman's reality decade by decade as these events—engineered, planned, executed, and managed by the century's great men—unfolded, like Laurel Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale*, an alternative history.

In the 1960s, some of Dushkin's creative ambition turned toward her diary, and she began to wonder if it might contain publishable material. A practice common to diary writers, according to Lejeune (2009), she periodically would review her diary and rip out pages that, on December 3, 1967, she considers to be "repetitious outpourings."⁴ Having just engaged in such a review and purging in this same diary entry Dushkin explains, "I started by examining entries for possible literary value. A slim chance, perhaps, but I may glean sufficient to copy out & when I line them up find whether they make any readable material. How I should hitch them together remains unpremeditated." She had been reading Aldous Huxley's *Text and Pretexts: An Anthology with Commentaries* (1933) and in this same entry makes note of a Thomas Beddoes poem cited by Huxley: "Let him lean / Against his life, that glassy interval/ 'Twixt us and nothing; and, upon the ground / Of his own slippery breath, draw hueless dreams, /And gaze upon frost-work hopes" (189). And with these lines she located the title for this imagined collection of writing: *The Glassy Interval*. Twenty years later, in a 1986 letter to acquaintance Lee Huntington, she refers to this manuscript as consisting of "short, concentrated expressions," "some commentaries of a poetic sort" and "abstract philosophizing."⁵ It contains thirty-nine individual pieces in two volumes, some of which are poems, each with its own title, such as "Harvard Commencement," "Boredom," "Old Tree By the Road," and "Theories."⁶

On a trip to the Smith Sophia Smith Collection to examine the Dushkin papers, I was eager to read this unpublished manuscript but came away

disappointed. As Dushkin studied her diary and decided what would and what wouldn't be included in the collection, she left out the diary material that I found and continue to find most compelling, the parts of her diary that reveal her point of view, her subjectivity, her voice, the variegated ways that the narrative "I" of her diary—her thinking and imagining, her hopes and fears, her struggles—make her writing unmistakably hers.

An example of Dushkin's distinctive subjectivity—characterized by her quickened pulse beat, her lively linguistic aesthetic, her clear cut confidence and candor out on the page—is a diary excerpt from March 9, 1930. Like her teacher Nadia Boulanger, who sought to develop an individual and personal relationship with each of her students as a way to elicit their distinctive musical style,⁷ Dushkin approached her teaching by working from the familiar and the personal, from the matrix, out. This pedagogical stance warranted specific musical approaches; thus some of Dushkin's compositions were written as studies for students with this stance in mind. In the March 9 entry, she declares with conviction and spirit that "The word 'general' has become quite repulsive to me. Like a fat lady who doesn't know when to stop eating. I don't believe there is learning except through the particular" (DDSD). Her *Glassy Interval* manuscript, however, fails to capture this same liveliness. In one piece titled "Weightlessness," Dushkin philosophizes, "It appears I must be an individual. I'm treated as such by others; and my particular combination of looks and qualities are not matched anywhere. But only the packaging makes me unique. All the ingredients are likely to turn up anywhere" (GI). Contradicting the abhorrence of the general she so emphatically announces in her diary, this manuscript passage comes across deadpan, as flat and abstract, lacking linguistically the full expression and embodiment of weightlessness.

The Dushkin papers in the Sophia Smith Collection also include a folder of correspondence concerning *The Glassy Interval*. Most of these letters are from publishers, all of whom returned Dushkin's manuscript.⁸ This correspondence confirmed my impression: that *The Glassy Interval* had been a failed endeavor. In order to understand how so and why, in this essay I consider Dushkin's work on her manuscript as a type of translation project. Translation posits two structural reference points: the original work and the new work emerging from it. As Dushkin shuttled back and forth between her diary and manuscript, she had to navigate between genres, between chronological sequence and thematic considerations, between process and product writing, between private and public spheres of life. Moreover, these border crossings, considered as translation, accentuate that two different languages,

cultures, worlds must confront one another through the process. In what follows, I employ an essay by German literary critic Walter Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator” (1923), not only to illuminate my disappointment but also to explain why that, despite her determined attempts to get it published, Dushkin’s manuscript was rejected by publisher after publisher.

II.

Benjamin (1996b) advocates for a nonliteral approach to translation, an approach that backgrounds consideration of audience and focuses primarily on the essential substance of a work, its sense, “the unfathomable, the mysterious, the poetic” (253) found between the lines. He concludes that the “disjunction” inevitably occurring in translation between content and language prevents successful translation. Approaching translation narrowly and literally—like a signal code, attempting to line up the two texts, the original and the translation, word by word, stanza by stanza, or sentence by sentence—constitutes a fundamental pitfall. And focus on audience, what Benjamin conceptualizes as the “transmitting function” (253), constitutes another. The desire to communicate and to convey information, the “hallmark of bad translation” (253), interferes with the translator’s capacity to locate the substance of an original work: focus on the translated work’s reception dilutes and negates the project of studying the original’s meaning. Thus the only hope for translators is to establish their own region on the edge of the “language forest” (258), looking back to the original, searching in the new version for the echo from the original that will propel the new work forward, and “aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one” (258).

Locating this echo, however, was not Dushkin’s priority. Not unlike Benjamin, who “without being a poet . . . thought poetically” (Arendt 1968, 166), Dushkin possessed a poetic cast to her thinking, evident in the diary’s more lyrical and metaphoric passages. Yet Dushkin did not approach her manuscript project poetically, intuitively, nor fluidly, as she did composing music at the piano. She depicts “[t]he mysterious selection that goes on while composing. The insistent convictions in a turn of phrase—Stumbling upon a certain harmony opens a door. If I grope with mind in a haze—sooner or later emerges a stimulus which clings & is not shaken off. The rhythm pulls me equally—sometimes it precedes” (22 December 1968, DDSD). Unlike her composing process—although she was open to the form her manuscript would take—Dushkin approached the content quite analytically and literally, copying out the chosen passages by hand,

leaving them relatively intact, then using a typewriter to “line them up,” to formalize them, a cumbersome process by today’s technological standards. The diary passages excavated and *The Glassy Interval* pieces copied out thus mirrored one another, although not as precisely as they first appear.

Her exacting approach was just what Benjamin warns against. But audience also preoccupied Dushkin—the “niggling cankerworm of wishing for recognition” (9 August 1967, DDSD)—another of Benjamin’s admonitions. Given her literal approach and her concern with audience, Dushkin got in her own way, blocking out the essential substance and value of her original work. And as the following brief chronological portrait of her lived life and her diary life reveal, a lack of performance, publishing, commission, and award opportunities as well as the lack of recognition by her peers and family members for her music compositions frustrated Dushkin, motivating her turn away from composing and toward searching for an audience elsewhere.

III.

In the first seven years of her diary, Dushkin established the practice of writing, mastering the rhythm and structure of the form. But gradually in the mid-1920s her writing began to shift from an emphasis on capturing and documenting events to more introspective considerations, in particular the fashioning and claiming of her artistic identity. Marking a critical turning point in her life, Dushkin’s two years in Paris (1926–1928) studying with Boulanger, occurred in parallel with this shift. Walter Benjamin also lived in Paris at this time, and I imagine Dushkin and Benjamin, unknown to one another, like the characters in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, walking past one another on the street, but never actually meeting. Although she recorded in detail her first meeting with Boulanger at Gargenville, outside of Paris (12 October 1926, DDSD), Dushkin wrote very little during this period. After returning home to Illinois, Dushkin conveys that it had been “[a] year and a half since I last wrote! Not until now have I felt any urge to write down my thoughts—not until now have I been lonely. Loneliness breeds such a desire. For a year and a half I had perfect companionship and a ready ear so I was too busy living to write” (22 August 1928, DDSD). That perfect companion and ready ear was David Dushkin, whom Dushkin met in Paris, also a student of Boulanger. The Dushkins were a large musical family with thirteen children; David’s parents were first-generation Russian Jewish immigrants; and his brother Sam became a virtuoso violinist who played and traveled with Stravinsky.

Later in this same August 22 diary entry, Dushkin claims herself as an

artist, wondering if this new identity will prosper or if her new emerging self will succumb to an upper-middle class, midwestern woman's stereotypical narrative: "I'm becoming more & more of an artist & musician. I'm not happy away from it & I care less & less for daily sociabilities. How will it end? Shall I continue or shall I suddenly turn into the usual type of American woman and plan my life to be easy, comfortable & kindly?" (DDSD). At this juncture in her life, with uncanny foresight, Dushkin articulated a conflict that would come to haunt her in the future.

The two Boulanger students married in the early 1930s and over the next almost twenty years focused on their four children as well as founding and developing in suburban North Shore Chicago, what started out as The School for Musical Arts and Crafts and through a series of transformations became what is now the Music Institute of Chicago.

**Dushkin Family, circa 1944–45, Dorothy Dushkin Papers,
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College**



In 1936 the Dushkins moved their school to a building at 555 Glendale in a Winnetka residential neighborhood. Adjacent to the Skokie School, from where students could walk over for their music lessons during the day, the building was designed for them by the Chicago architect Robert Paul Schweikher. Reflecting the Dushkins' music education philosophy, the design centered on an integrated studio/living space model.⁹ The fam-

ily living quarters were upstairs; the main floor contained a concert hall, and the basement floor, music studios, but also David's shop, where he designed and manufactured musical instruments, first in collaboration with the Wurlitzer Company (31 December 1934, DDSD), but then independently, particularly high-quality recorders. In the basement workshop, the Dushkins' students and their own children visited, studied, and learned how to make a variety of musical instruments: not only recorders, but dulcimers, marimbas, and xylophones as well (Polikoff 2006, 7). A spatial arrangement that easily allowed for a multidimensional approach to music study, this architectural design, converging aesthetic and practical elements, reflected the Bauhaus style. The New Bauhaus opened in Chicago in the fall of 1937. From an October 17 diary entry this same year, Dushkin describes this new school, "Patterned after the famous original Bauhaus founded by Walter Gropius in Dessau, Germany & closed by Hitler as being too progressive, I suppose, this school is headed by Gropius' assistant Moholy-Nagy, a Hungarian. As part of their first year's introductory course the students are to have an experience with music & its materials." And in fact, also discussed in this diary entry, Moholy-Nagy had just visited the Dushkins earlier in the week and invited David to become a member of the New Bauhaus faculty.

The diary over this same twenty-year period, however, acknowledges an undercurrent of privatized discontent. On March 27, 1949, Dushkin discloses,

So weary that this Sunday morning trying to take advantage of sleeping later, not being able to but just lying in bed & resting, I found the tears coursing down my face when David's practicing began. And I couldn't stop them. The constant sound of practicing is torture sometimes. I couldn't eat my breakfast but went down to do laundry—the sound of the machine drowned out the piano & gave me momentary relief. But then I have to face all sorts of questions about this & that, make a hundred decisions about domestic exigencies & try to keep the children in an attitude of helpfulness instead of shirking or quarreling. I'm very inadequate at that. It takes such inflexible persistence to follow them up. So I subside into dejected taciturnity. At least I don't talk about my discouragements & private worries. I've learned with somewhat of a shock recently that David really resents my interest in things outside the family & school—such as P.T.A., Co-op or anything my conscience & normal curiosity draws me into. (DDSD)

From the imagined auditory point of view of a composer, the juxtaposition in this diary passage between piano and washing machine, entangled by contrasts of background and foreground, male and female, creativity and domesticity, poignantly startles. And the tensions captured here formed a pattern that would persist and strengthen over the ensuing decades.

Against the grain of this subtext, throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Dushkins' school thrived. On the cutting edge in terms of its philosophy, architecture, pedagogy, and curriculum, it became a force of its own, establishing a community, statewide, and national reputation and drawing many well-known composers, musicians, artists, and teachers to visit, including, among many others, Igor Stravinsky; the Kentucky folk singer John Niles; the Boston dancer, choreographer, and teacher Jan Veen, aka Hans Weiner; and even Nadia Boulanger herself. Given the success of their enterprise, the Dushkins sought to expand their school but became increasingly frustrated by ongoing confrontations with suburban neighbors and planning boards: Dushkin complains, "We grow more & more out of sympathy with the trends of North Shore life toward commercialized, pre-fabricated luxurious, material living & shallow busyness, restless flitting about & rubber stamp thinking. Our educational efforts are blocked along important avenues by the jealous animosity of local music supervisors" (16 October 1950, DDSD)

In the early 1950s, drained and discouraged but ready to develop their vision differently, the Dushkins left the Chicago area and moved permanently to Weston, Vermont, where they planned and developed their summer camp for gifted high school musicians: Kinhaven. As with the school at 555 Glendale in Winnetka, they also lived on the property, as did the music faculty during the summer. Following in the New England utopian art colony tradition, the rural Vermont landscape provided an expansive and idyllic backdrop for intensive, sustained music study, both instrument mastery and ensemble playing, removed from other concerns.

The decades that followed were a period of particularly strong compositional output for Dushkin, who produced some two dozen new and varied musical works in this period. She adapted her composing cycle to New England's seasonal progression and the business of running a summer music camp. She composed mostly in the winter when it was quiet and less busy, while the snow accumulated above the first-floor windows. In the spring, all her energies went to preparing for the onslaught of campers, managing the maintenance of the camp buildings, planning and planting the substantial vegetable garden, organizing the teaching faculty,

revamping the septic system. With camp in session in the summer, she benefited from critical feedback on her work since her compositions were periodically performed by the campers and the faculty. Hearing her music allowed her to revise accordingly.

The Dushkins' larger circle of acquaintances included Roger Payne, the whale scientist who discovered whale song patterns, the original New England back-to-the-landers Helen and Scott Nearing, and the jazz musician and composer Dave Brubeck. And Dushkin joined the Vermont Pen Women's Association. However, given Kinhaven's rural setting and the hyperactivity of the summer season contrasted by the extreme isolation of the winter, these contacts occurred infrequently.

Indeed, despite the creative output of these decades, Dushkin struggled with a lack of recognition for her compositional work and reinforcement for her artistic identity in her marriage, in her larger family circle, and in the Weston community more broadly. On September 20, 1971, she reveals that "[a]ll of my copying goes on without a word or question from David—He's habituated to seeing me with MS paper & pen in my chair at the window & it's just part of the house background. I could as well be playing solitaire or darning socks" (DDSD). And on May 29, 1967, Dushkin reports,

Cold & rain for two days—worked between showers to load our Steinway on the truck & up on to the Playhouse stage for the concert— . . . —but every seat was sold & the atmosphere of the place was warm & responsive. They played my Kinhaven Concerto best of anything & it sounded more effective—as the Beethoven was thin, needing more players. I was gratified & the audience response to it was very positive. Was amused by the startled expressions of friends who've known me here for 20 years & 'never realized' I was a composer. One person asked David what part I had had in presenting the piece, 'did I put it together or something.' (DDSD)

As well as family and community members' disregarding her talent and achievements as a composer, although there was the occasional success, music publishing houses for the most part rejected her submissions over this period, and there were few opportunities for her music to be performed outside of Kinhaven: "The nagging question of why I care so deeply about being slighted or ignored in musical achievement? . . . The comedown is the dead stop afterwards—the shelving with no publication" (9 August 1967, DDSD).

IV.

These tensions between husband and wife, the creative and the familial, the public and the domestic remained unresolved, and Dushkin, disillusioned, turned increasingly to *The Glassy Interval* writing project as an outlet for her ambition. Informed by the conventions of literary texts, not conversation, and reflected in places in her manuscript by word choices such as *propitiate*, *exhortation*, *fulsome* and *reiterations*, Dushkin adapted her diary passages into a sparse, abstract, impersonal presentation. Among the many texts that Dushkin read and reread and discussed at length often over decades in her diary were Krishnamurti's commentaries and Emerson's journals, and she may have decided what constituted appropriate translatable diary content from these texts as well as constructed her notion of the form of her project from them.

Dushkin not only possessed a poetical strand to her thinking but a philosophical and metaphysical one as well, reflected in her manuscript title choice and the Beddoes poem she drew it from: "Let him lean / Against his life, that glassy interval / 'Twixt us and nothing; and, upon the ground / Of his own slippery breath, draw hueless dreams, / And gaze upon frost-work hopes" (189). Once she decided on her title, it functioned as an organizing principle as she pulled material from her diary and shaped her manuscript. An interval is of course a musical term, but the glassy interval image also suggests a borderland, a void between life and death. More fully cited by Huxley, the Beddoes poem actually continues: "Uncourteous Death/ Knuckles the pane"—but Dushkin left out this line in her diary citation of the poem.

Transcendence over the human clearly preoccupied Dushkin; like Emerson, she focused on individual experience rather than on religious doctrine. But unlike Emerson, as she understood him, because other people upset her, as a countermeasure, Dushkin sought to get control over her inner life and to neutralize her concerns about what they thought, her reactions to others, her irritation—their disregard, their ambivalence, their inattentiveness: "And for me the only safe direction is turning inward. Great mistake to expect people to understand one's feelings & urges & thoughts. Even those closest" (17 January 1966, DDSD). Along with the French surgeon and violinist Hubert Benoit (1904–1992), whose book *Let Go!* (1962) was germane to her thinking and with whom she attempted a correspondence, and Jane Roberts's (1970) *Seth Material*, she considered Emerson and Krishnamurti as guides on this quest. On June 22, 1986, Dushkin copies out this passage from Emerson, underlining the

final phrase: “happy is he who looks only into his work to know if it will succeed, never into the times or public opinion—who writes always *to an unknown friend*.” In a diary entry on April 3, 1969, she determines that the conversation with the old *sannyasi* toward the end of Krishnamurti’s (1960) third volume of *Commentaries on Living* (278–312) about how to best live not only sums up Krishnamurti’s work but that “it is the final, all-encompassing word for me also.” Krishnamurti organized his book into a series of separately titled, generally short pieces that flow into one another, not unlike Dushkin attempted in her collection of writing. In this same diary entry, Dushkin notes Krishnamurti’s “austerity of expression”; “short, concentrated expressions”¹⁰ is one way she conceives of her *Glassy Interval* collection. In other diary entries, echoing Krishnamurti’s title, as well as Huxley’s, Dushkin refers to her manuscript as “commentaries.”¹¹ Indeed, given her extensive familiarity with his work, Krishnamurti influenced Dushkin considerably, but neither he nor Emerson may have been the best models for her project.

At first glance, it appears that Dushkin left relatively intact the passages she extracted from her diary for use in *The Glassy Interval* manuscript. In fact, given the massiveness of the diary, these passages are relatively easy to identify. Occasionally, however, she made changes. Below are juxtaposed a diary excerpt and Dushkin’s “translation” that reveal changes in wording and phrasing as she moved from diary to manuscript:

From the November 9, 1966 diary entry:

The great composer however is saddled with himself in the end—Achievement is not a mysterious opening into demonstrably accurate enlightenment for all to realize, but a personal venture, very often desperately isolated, calling down upon him a swarm of contradictory responses and no impartial judgment of value.
(DDSD)

The following is from a piece titled “Scientist and Artist” in *The Glassy Interval*:

For the composer, however, achievement is not a sudden opening into a demonstrably accurate enlightenment for all to realize, but a personal venture, often painfully isolated, or subject to ensuing contradictory opinions. (GI)

9 November 1966, Diaries of Dorothy Smith Dushkin,
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College

The great composer however is saddled with himself in the end - achievement is not a mysterious opening into demonstrably accurate enlightenment for all to realize, but a personal venture, very often desperately isolated, calling down upon him a swarm of contradictory responses and no impartial judgment of value.

“Scientist and Artist,” volume 2, piece 22, *The Glassy Interval*,
Dorothy Smith Dushkin Papers, Sophia Collection, Smith College

For the composer however, achievement is not a sudden opening into demonstrably accurate enlightenment for all to realize, but a personal venture, often painfully isolated, or subject to ensuing contradictory opinions.

In this translation, Dushkin made many micro-decisions to scale down phrases and make them less forceful. These include the move from “great composer” to “composer,” from “very often desperately isolated” to “often painfully isolated,” and from “calling down upon him a swarm of contradictory responses” to “subject to ensuing contradictory opinions.” She also conflates the diary excerpt’s two main clauses, shifting away from the subject of the first clause, “the composer,” to leave standing the subject of the second: “achievement.”¹² These changes have a cumulative flattening effect. Suggested in words such as “desperately,” and its evocative metaphors like “saddled” and “swarm,” Dushkin’s translation eliminates the diary’s emotional reverberations. In doing so, she left behind the proprioception operative in the diary—the voice, the sound, the feel and texture, and the ownership of the language, all that which makes the diary writing distinctly Dushkin’s and no one else’s.

Notable also is Dushkin’s use of generic masculine pronouns in her diary. Of all textual forms, the diary is among the most subjective: a diary is first and foremost one’s own. But in her diary, Dushkin was prone to such periodic slippages into a more expository philosophical style, and in these passages, her pronouns also slip into the generic masculine. It may have been that these objective passages were easier for her to translate than the more subjective diary entries. Certainly, as she interacted with male texts, like Emerson’s, and copied out various passages to consider and incorpo-

rate into her own thinking, in order to quote these accurately, she left both her and their unexamined use of masculine pronouns intact. Benjamin (2006b) explains that the relationship between content and language in an original work is like that of a fruit and its skin, but these disjoin in translation (258). As Dushkin thought and wrote in her diary, she was involved in a more primary translation project: the diary itself can be thought of as a translation and the life lived, the original. The disjunction in this more primary translation project occurs between female content/experience and male language. And in this scenario, *The Glassy Interval* emerges as a translation of a translation, reflecting a double disjunction: from experience to diary and from diary to adaptation and compilation.

This double disjunction opens up a quagmire, configured in the question of whether or not, as an accomplished composer, Dushkin includes herself in her diary analysis of the difficulties facing composers. Her use of the generic masculine as the given textual norm prevents her from directly claiming these difficulties as her own: she is not a he, a Wittgensteinian obviousness that can't be overlooked. Adrienne Rich suggests that when someone with authority "describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing" (quoted in Rosaldo 1989, ix). Caught in the "language forest" somewhere between Benjamin's disjunction and Rich's disequilibrium, the problems with Dushkin's manuscript may stem from the diary itself, where content drawn from female experience and the male language deployed to represent that experience are already, at times, divided from one another.

In 1986, seeking feedback and publishing guidance about *The Glassy Interval* through her connections in the Vermont Pen Women's Association, Dushkin sent her manuscript to the poet Ann Goldsmith, who commented back in a letter on 30 September of that year that Dushkin's work needed "more tie-ins with the actual life being lived" and that "[i]t is easier to connect with such an active mind when we can see it incarnate in a life" (DSDP). It is exactly these kinds of connections, these kinds of particulars in her diary material that Dushkin excluded from the manuscript. In the same letter, Goldsmith recommends that Dushkin study Thoreau and May Sarton as exemplars of how to go about forging these connections and grounding her *Glassy Interval* pieces in a specific place and time. There is no evidence in Dushkin's diary that she read or considered Sarton's work, but there are four entries in the summer of 1987 that discuss Thoreau. Having reread Thoreau's journals, Dushkin finds him

happily dwelling on insignificant parts of insignificant weeds. His emotional transports on apparently any subject never cease to surprise me. He elevates inner comments to a mythical stature with the whole world for location. Not at all embarrassed by exaggeration. What I admire most is his indifference to what others think of him. What he does with his time is strictly his own affair. Save for the transactions he makes for surveying or making pencils. (12 August 1987, DSDD)

Thoreau and Dushkin shared both class and regional affiliations. Although Dushkin was born in the Midwest, her father's family—the Smiths and the Fosses—were from New England, many of them buried in Thornton, New Hampshire, dating back to the 1790s (15 June 1969, DDSD); she was a New Englander via familial history and by choice if not by birth. But Dushkin's and Thoreau's day-to-day lived experiences, their personalities, their contexts, and their work also present critical differences. She clearly admired Thoreau's capacity for interplay, so evident in his writing: the unquestioned confidence and unfettered freedom, from her vantage point, with which he seemed able to connect his subjective reality, observations, opinions, decisions and the world at large—an inner confidence and outward freedom she did not share. She could not develop nor project nor sustain what she perceived to be Thoreau's sureness in himself, his seamless possession of the world, his apparently god-given right to pursue his interests unimpeded, whatever they may be, even “the insignificant parts of insignificant weeds.”

Benjamin focuses on the specific task of translating an original work, but in order to comprehend more fully the failure of Dushkin's project warrants analysis outside of that specific task, outside of a close reading of her attempted translation, and into the gendered context in which she lived, composed, wrote. As Huff (2000) informs us, “diaries are symbiotically linked to their cultural context and cannot be read in isolation from that context” (508). That Dushkin was a woman creating in a particular place and time matters. Positioned within the institution of marriage and motherhood and the division of labor defining these in mid-twentieth-century America, unlike Krishnamurti, Emerson, and Thoreau, she had to negotiate her way through conflicting positions as composer and writer, on one hand, and wife and mother on the other, all the while running a summer music camp.

From as early as the 1920s Dushkin expressed awareness of the conflicts embedded in women's lives. On New Year's Eve, 1926, for example, she

observes that “women are both degraded & worshipped in this world. A man can treat one woman as a plaything & treat another as a goddess” (DDSD). Later, as the second feminist wave unfolded in the 1960s and 1970s, she incorporated feminist insight into her thinking, as evidenced by this critique:

I’m supposed to get all of my satisfaction from camp, from pleasantly feeding people & arranging domestic efficiencies. Praise for my vegetables & bread gets to be almost offensive after constant avoidance of my essential work. Will there never be any one I can share with –who sees me as I am? Being a woman is still a disadvantage – Domesticity is still uppermost in general attitude. (sometime between 6 May and 7 June 1971, DDSD)

A year later, advancing this critique, Dushkin comments, theorizes, then imagines that

the movement of women’s Lib with all its high-lighted fringe of radical elements is a long delayed adjustment to social facts. If the great lethargic mass of women were stimulated to think for themselves and pull away from the stultifying clichés of tradition, & seriously investigate & participate in this man’s world, it might be the saving of society. There should be an invasion of women into politics & business & international relations. (20 April, DSDD)

In these diary passages Dushkin aligns herself with the discourse of liberal/cultural feminism, a discourse that positions the autonomous individual as the primary site for analysis and action to transform restrictive conditions, traditions, behaviors, norms, values—not social structures, not patriarchy (Echols 1989). Hampering the ability to develop what Weedon (1987) terms “a feminist critical practice” (136–75) and eclipsing the realities of transgressive subject positions such as woman-as-artist and the entanglements these inevitably produce, always proportional to the power they potentially offer, this discourse constricts possibilities. In her analysis of what went wrong with the public’s reception of Gwendolyn Brooks’s first novel *Maud Martha* (1958), Washington points out, in a reference to Joyce Carol Oates,¹³ “that by aspiring to art, women violate the deeply conservative and stereotypical images of men. The autonomy of the artist is considered unnatural for women, unfeminine and threatening” (393). In conceiving of what went wrong with

public reception of her own work, Dushkin, however, privatized her battle, generally resisting any linkage of her struggle as an artist and her gender. Although she never joined a consciousness-raising group, Dushkin did attempt to connect the political and the personal, making this determination: “If I had been born male instead of female I’m sure the anxiety about being approved, liked, would not have been nearly so keen—the inculcation to please was much more insisted upon with girls” (17 May 1972, DDSD), but how this “inculcation” might have been produced and what she would then do to ameliorate her situation were questions she did not engage.

As evidenced in these diary entries, Dushkin clearly had access to feminist politics and principles, and she was able to address feminism in her thinking, albeit liberal feminist discourse, but, because her patterns of life were formed much earlier in the century, despite feminist insight, she was neither able to apply nor implement feminism directly into her own life. Like Woolf’s metaphoric Shakespeare’s sister, she possessed an income, a room of her own, and even a writing practice, but unlike Thoreau, she had no Emerson—and her lifelong quest for such a friendship would always remain unfulfilled:

Reading of the deeply satisfying friendships between certain people of accomplishment I envy the natural ease of sharing thoughts & mutual admiration—the articulate exchange, lack of embarrassment & fear of intrusion—How often I’ve longed for another mind willing to support such a friendship with me. I’m assailed by the familiar misgivings about my own worthiness to attract or sustain such a relationship—Communication for me has become labored for lack of use. My thoughts, the ones that concern me have been confined to writing in this journal. (12 February 1975, DDSD)

Even though her diary functioned as an alternative social space, it could not fully substitute for the type of friendship Dushkin sought. Isolation characterized her experience; she was never able to develop a sustained social context based in the company of like-minded others, colleagues, friends, critics. As a result, sometimes retreating into a “dejected taciturnity” was her only escape.

V.

How do diaries end?—Lejeune (2009, 187) asks. With the end of Dushkin’s diary comes the end of Dushkin’s life, and after reading her diary for a year and a half, I cried as these two events began to collapse into one another.

Around 1980 David became increasingly unwell, had a heart attack, followed by surgery and increased mental confusion, and Dushkin became his only sustained caregiver, while starting to struggle with her own health

**Dorothy Smith Dushkin, undated, Dorothy Dushkin Papers,
Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College**



problems: vertigo, diabetes, periodic blindness, and extreme unsteadiness on her feet. Then in 1986, David died. Within a month, with desperation and determination, Dushkin sent off her *Glassy Interval* manuscript to one publisher after another, each correspondence followed by a rejection letter. Later in the summer of this same year, following her correspondence with Goldsmith, she did begin to envision and to craft another collection of writing, inspired by her Thoreau study, “minute observations” that could be organized into a “second sheaf of commentaries” (20 July 1987, DDSD), but she ran out of time. As her own health problems became more acute, the resulting shifts in her life circumstances by necessity increasingly occupied her attention. Nonetheless, mention of *The Glassy Interval* manuscript appears sporadically in the diary’s last full year: 1988. Kinhaven

had become a nonprofit corporation in 1962, but the Dushkins still operated much of the enterprise into the 1980s. The actual transfer of the management to an independent board of trustees began in earnest after David's death, and Dushkin had to gradually relinquish her responsibilities at the school. Then in 1987 she moved to a residential care facility in Manchester, Vermont, to recuperate from a serious fall and to have her diabetes monitored.

Dushkin intermittently discusses all of these events in the last years and months of her diary. Her handwriting becomes unsteady and difficult to decipher as she grapples with David's death, a broken wrist, the changes at Kinhaven, a cataract operation, sleepwalking, mixed messages from doctors, her life as a nursing home patient, inexplicably dramatic shifts in her insulin levels, and her son's erratic behavior and his not visiting her for some four months. A diary entry in the final year illustrates her frame of mind once she moved to Manchester: "What can I possibly find new? What creative? It seems as if I had chosen to end my life with utter mediocrity. Any accomplishment worn down to a lack-luster everydayness. The residential home is devoid of any interest—of people, attempts to entertain, anything imaginative. No evidence of any but the most commonplace conversation" (18 September 1988, DDSD). However, experience proves to be more jagged than smooth. Benjamin suggests in the epigraph that "when, in the diary, the sovereignty of the self withdrew and the raging against the way things happen fell silent, events showed themselves to be undecided" (*Metaphysics* 13). And on June 14, 1988, almost seventy years after she first began her diary, Dushkin exclaims that

[a] surprising turn of events has happened regarding the preservation of my manuscripts. . . . got eager & enthusiastic letter from the head of the college archives as well as The Sophia Smith Collection. To my utter surprise they are interested in preserving all my . . . music manuscript[s]! [First word unreadable] the problem of what will become of my long list of creative works [is] solved & I was wondering what was going to become of any of them. The warmest & most satisfying part of the whole proposition was the way Le & Na¹⁴ welcomed the idea. They seemed to agree to save whatever I have produced as perfectly natural to do. They don't want me to throw away anything! Surely it needs some sorting out. I will need advice how it should be done. But what a boon it is to my Ego to have my good work taken care of. (14 June 1988, DDSD)

Moving her “good work” from the uncertainty of private hands, perhaps forgotten, lost or destroyed, to the public domain, preserved in the archives, accessible to scholars and to posterity, increasing the possibility of recognition and value after her death, clearly pleased Dushkin, as did, above all else, her daughters’ enthusiastic participation in the endeavor. This restitution for the difficulties she endured seemed to affect her deeply, perhaps even setting her mind at rest. In July of this same year, she worked with Sophia Smith Collection archivist Maida Goodwin, who picked her up in Manchester and drove her to Kinhaven, to review, organize, and turn over her materials to the collection (12 July 1988, DDSD). Over the following months, the archived diary peters out, her eyes degenerating, her handwriting increasingly shaky and illegible. If she continued to write, there is no public record. When her health further deteriorated, Dushkin moved to Amherst, Massachusetts to be near one of her daughters, where she died on March 9, 1992.

As Thoreau famously noted, people live lives of quiet desperation, but we don’t fully understand the myriad forms that desperation produces within day-to-day lived reality. Scholars have demonstrated the role of writing, specifically the diary form, in voicing, documenting, alleviating, mediating, inscribing a path to fuller articulation of that desperation across diverse cultural sites, particularly historically for women. Mass Observation Project historian Robert Malcolmson (2008) proposes that diary writing and isolation have often accompanied one another, a symbiotic relationship particularly pronounced in early- and mid-twentieth-century women, such as Dorothy Smith Dushkin, who had been educated and had a passion for writing but weren’t published authors. Despite isolation, despite struggle, despite gender, the desire to create, the “thirsting for definition,” Benjamin implies, can’t be quelled (2006a, 13). Dushkin did not achieve publication of *The Glassy Interval* manuscript, but she did achieve the preservation of her writing into the future despite this failure, ensuring its “afterlife” (Benjamin 2006b, 254). Writing defies the gods of time! It holds our thinking still, transcending time and place, standing in for us in our absence. Having accompanied her across all those years, ultimately her diary, documenting her struggle as an artist over seven decades, may prove to be her most meaningful, enduring work.

NOTES

1. See , for example, Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: Grove/Atlantica, 2001).

2. A complete list of Dushkin's compositional works was printed in the program for "A Concert Celebrating the 100th Birthday Anniversary of Dorothy Smith Dushkin (1903–2003)," given on Sunday, November 2, 2003, at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington, D.C. Thank you to the concert organizer, musicologist Thomas MacCracken, for sending me a copy of this program along with the accompanying CD.

3. Dushkin wrote it for her third child, who died 7 January 1962. See National Music Council and National Federation of Music Clubs, *The Bicentennial Parade of American Music*, May 7, 1975–December 31, 1976, The Council, [New York], 1977, VERMONT, no page numbers.

4. All diary entries in what follows are excerpted from the Diaries of Dorothy Smith Dushkin, 1919–1988, Box 3, Folders 1–8, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA. Hereafter cited in these Notes as "SSC" and the Diaries of Dorothy Smith Dushkin parenthetically in the text as "DDSD."

5. Dorothy Dushkin to Lee Huntington, April 18, 1986, Dorothy Smith Dushkin Papers, 1906–1988, Series III, Box 3a, Folder 4, SSC. Hereafter cited in these Notes and parenthetically in the text as "DSDP."

6. Unpublished manuscript, "The Glassy Interval," in DSDP, Series III, Box 3a, Folder 3, SSC. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as "GI."

7. For more in depth scholarship on Nadia Boulanger and what made her such an extraordinary teacher, I recommend the following starting list: Jérôme Spycket, *Nadia Boulanger*, trans. M. M. Shriver (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992); Bruno Monsiegeon, *Mademoiselle Conversations with Nadia Boulanger*, trans. Robyn Marsack (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988); Don G. Campbell, *Master Teacher Nadia Boulanger* (Washington, DC: Pastoral Press, 1984); Léonie Rosentiel, *Nadia Boulanger: A Life in Music* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1982); and Alan Kendall, *A Tender Tyrant, Nadia Boulanger, a Life Devoted to Music* (Wilton, CT: Lyceum Books, 1976).

8. Including floor plans for all three levels, six original blueprints for the Dushkin house and music school, built at 555 Glendale and designed by Schweikher are archived at The Winnetka Historical Society in Winnetka, Illinois.

9. These publishers include, among others, *The Countryman Press*, *Phoenix Publishing*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Kenyon Periodical*, *The New England Press*, *The Atlantic*, and *The Green Mountains Review*, Series III, Box 3a, Folder 4, DSDP.

10. Dorothy Dushkin to Lee Huntington, April 18, 1986, DSDP.

11. Dushkin uses the term *commentaries* (10 November 1985, DDSD), as well as in her letter to Lee Huntington, *ibid.*

12. This insight came from colleague and friend Jura Avizienis.

13. The Joyce Carol Oates essay Washington refers to is "At Least I Have Made a Woman of Her': Images of Women in Twentieth-Century Literature." *Georgia Review* 38 (Spring 1983): 7–30.

14. "Le & Na" refers to Dushkin's two daughters, Lelah and Nadia.

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