

On getting it right

Article (Published Version)

Davies, Paul (2019) On getting it right. *European Judaism*, 52 (1). pp. 14-26. ISSN 0014-3006

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/88055/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

On Getting It Right

The Voice of Gabriel Josipovici

Paul Davies

.....

Abstract

This article focuses on some of the themes and questions at the heart of Gabriel Josipovici's fictional and critical writing, most notably the idea that reading is a matter of participation rather than understanding. It asks what is distinctive about Josipovici's relationship with other philosophically inclined critics and theorists. It offers a participatory reading of one of his critical writings demonstrating the care with which it is arranged. The article concludes with a brief consideration of how other writers and works are brought into Josipovici's fiction.

Keywords: continuity, experience, interruption, Gabriel Josipovici, reading, voice

.....

A literary work invites the reader to experience it. How simply this is said. Each of Gabriel Josipovici's fictional works issues such an invitation; each of his non-fictional works considers what is at stake in the invitation and the experience. Each of his works, he has said, whether fictional or non-fictional, is concerned with getting it right.¹ But what does 'getting it right' mean when it is a matter of literature, of the writing of fictions and the writing of literary criticism? There seem to be at least three figures involved here: the writer, the reader, and the critic or critical reader. What can 'getting it right' mean for each of them? The writer can never simply be the reader, even the critical reader. And what can the 'it' be for the writer when *it* does not even exist before the writer brings it into existence? For the reader as well, there is a sense of being involved in the coming into existence of the work. It does not properly exist until it is read and experienced. What does 'getting it right' entail here? It can be reduced neither to the reader being appropriately entertained nor to their capacity to recount the narrative or plot. For the critic or critical reader, it is not a matter of judging the work in terms of a set



of evaluative conventions, nor is it a matter of putting the work into the correct context, into a context in which the correct theory can be applied. The critical reader is also invited to experience the work. Criticism cannot protect itself from such an experience by presupposing its having already occurred. Each of these responses from each of the figures is unable to do justice to what is going on with the writing and reading of literature because each induces a scepticism about both the invitation and the experience. For such responses, it is as though we cannot begin to take literature seriously until we have broken with such simplifications. Josipovici asks us to recognize and to consider just how strange it is that such invitations and experiences are possible. What do such things tell us about language, about the world and ourselves, and about what we might ask of writers, readers and critical readers? These questions have consistently informed and driven Josipovici's work from the very beginning. And because he has always, also from the beginning, presented himself in the guise of each of the three figures (writer, reader and critic), his work has a distinctive feel, a threefold integrity.

A work invites the reader to experience it. Josipovici sometimes tries to give a sense of what is going on in such a formulation by invoking the notion of *voice*.² In the cases that most intrigue Josipovici and that he seeks to show should also intrigue us, the reader discerns a distinctive voice in the fictional work, a voice that the writer can never hear, but that the writer has succeeded in releasing into the work. The voice opens up and tells of worlds and events, and characters. Necessarily it escapes both the writer and this world. Its power comes from elsewhere. In his non-fictional writing, Josipovici asks his readers to envisage a critical reading that would take that voice and that elsewhere seriously and that would allow it to change the way we read and think about reading, and even the way we live in the world with our reading and our thinking about reading. But to begin to appreciate what the writer is attempting to do in releasing this voice or in enabling this voice to escape, the reader must trust the writer and the voice. The reader must feel a minimal companionship with the writer and the voice, however unsettling or contradictory or violent it might be. This emphasizing of trust and voice I think explains in part the works and the writers Josipovici values, the works and writers to which he always returns. (It also explains in part some of the works and the writers he will not read.)

It is not primarily a matter of understanding the voice in the way we might plausibly speak of understanding a text, but rather of experiencing the reading (the discerning) as a participation. We are invited to notice the smallest details and repetitions and marks, and to comment on them, to question and wonder about them. And the invitation is there in even

the most daunting of books, *the* book itself. In Josipovici's book on the Bible – it remains my favourite of all his books – he sympathizes with Paul Ricoeur's worries about Bultmann and the endorsing of a tendency stretching back behind Luther to Augustine and Paul, a tendency to insist that the reading of the Bible must be bound by and to the intensities of a personal conversion.³ The authority of that reading and of the book itself are inseparable from the sincerity of this conviction. The danger is that the interpretation of the book is thereby subjectivized to such a degree that there seems no space for a reading that questions, a reading that challenges as well as a reading that acknowledges its being challenged. The converted subject or reader can hear nothing but the confident repetition of their own conversion. There is no room for the experience of reading. In *The Book of God*, we are reminded how even the greatest events (the creation of Heaven and Earth) are marked by a beginning that can be nothing but a mark, the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet, its very shape blocking us from any prior or relevant *before*. The reader is created and is a part of creation, but it is also given to the reader and only to the reader to read and to ask about that mark and that literary beginning. The books (*The Book of God* and the Bible) are full of such details. Each mention is worthy of being recalled and affirmed because it can be read. Thanks to Josipovici, I will never forget Phalti (read chapter 10, 'David and Tears')⁴ or, rather, thanks to Josipovici, I experience and hear how the Bible asks for Phalti to be remembered.

The task seemed fairly straightforward: to join in the celebration of Gabriel Josipovici's work by saying something about its relation to philosophy. Straightforward, because that work has always comfortably and knowledgeably referred to a philosophical modernism as well as to a literary and artistic one. Josipovici admits an admiration for Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, invariably linking their names to a lesson worth learning or to a point worth making. The critical writers on literature to whom Josipovici seems closest – Maurice Blanchot, say, or Walter Benjamin, or Roland Barthes – have either, on the one hand, explicitly let their thought develop in an engagement with the philosophical tradition and with the way that tradition has attempted to conceive of literature and its languages (fictive, mythic, poetic), or, on the other hand, produced essays and books that imply or propound a theory of literature, contributing to the philosophical treatment of issues such as literary meaning and interpretation, of authorship and the role of the reader. And as we have seen, Josipovici argues, with Ricoeur, against an extreme Bultmannianism.

Would it be so difficult to derive from all of this – and we could of course have added further examples – a Josipovician method or mode of argument, a Josipovician *theory*? Even if it is not one he would ever

present or want presented in such terms, surely it must be there somewhere, assumed or implied? Let us try to unpack it, to see what it must contain, and to show how it can help us begin to deal with the questions and issues with which we began (invitation, experience, voice, trust). Yet one only has to hint at such a project to know that it is bound to fail and that this failure would be neither interesting nor worthwhile. It would miss almost everything that matters in Josipovici's writing.

The discussion of Barthes and Blanchot in Josipovici's first book (*The World and the Book*, first edition 1971, second edition 1979) was doubtless for many of its readers their first introduction to these names. How could it not have served or now not be seen to have served as a precursor to the interest in literary theory that was to stretch across the next two decades?⁵ Not only Barthes, Blanchot and Benjamin, but Foucault, Lacan, Derrida? It is not that Josipovici has no interest in these other names, or that he is unwilling to cite them and their work favourably, and nor is it that he simply on ideological or aesthetic grounds resisted the institutional turn to 'theory'. It was more, I think, that the linking of a writer's proper name to a theory or to any specifiable and summarizable content almost inevitably withdraws that writer and their work from the only context that has ever really concerned Josipovici: the experience of reading and of coming to feel the force of certain questions, questions that at first seem so awkwardly out of place that they are accompanied by a second-order question that wonders why one would think like this or ask questions like this. And *this* experience is one that Josipovici sometimes finds in some of the writings of Blanchot and Barthes, rather than in Foucault, Lacan or Derrida,⁶ and it is one he tries to bring about in his own writings, even his writings on Blanchot and Barthes. Thus, instead of beginning with an account or a summary of Blanchot's or Barthes's views or positions, he isolates a single phrase (from Blanchot's reading of Beckett, from Barthes's reading of Camus), shares with us a sense for the novelty and the strangeness of the phrase, and shows how, in a never quite successful attempt to mitigate that strangeness, we are obliged to change our focus or to change the context within which we were inclined to situate Beckett or Camus. We seem to find ourselves at an unsettling distance from the work, a distance that is not that of the theorist or diagnostician, but one that nevertheless chimes with something in the work, in Beckett's or Camus's novel, we had never noticed before or had never been able to express before. Josipovici encourages us to welcome Blanchot and Barthes into a conversation that is trying to get something right about Beckett and Camus and about the reading of Beckett and Camus. In a sense, they are subordinated to that end, but Josipovici also shows in the delicacy of his introduction of their names that they too are

concerned with such things. They too want to get something right about these works. Nothing in Josipovici's reading of Barthes on Camus (or elsewhere on Balzac) leads him to endorse Barthes's famous theory of the death of the author, and Josipovici has no desire to write such a text himself. Likewise, nothing in his reading of Blanchot leads him to develop or even to consider the complex interweaving of literary and philosophical language that characterizes Blanchot's later fragmentary writing and the reading relations with Hegel, Heidegger and Levinas that have been a major part of Blanchot's work since the late 1940s. But should they?

Consider another perhaps simpler instance, one where Josipovici draws on Benjamin's late text 'Theses on the End of History' to affirm a preference for dialectics over historicism. The latter is restricted to a form of thinking that presupposes the flow of thought, a thinking that is secured by the thought that history continues and that it must continue. The former accepts that thought is also engaged by the arrest or stopping of thought, the jolt or shock that gives to thought a configuration. Having made the reference to the 'Theses', Josipovici notes that although Benjamin found the artistic expression and re-enactment of this shock in the epic theatre of Brecht, he is disinclined to follow him. 'Brecht in his theoretical writings ... makes it seem too easy.'⁷ Here, surely, we might be moved to protest. Is this not a sort of voluntaristic criticism that takes what it wants from the sources it finds most suggestive or useful? Benjamin himself makes no such allusion in the 'Theses'. A couple of lines from *The Threepenny Opera* serve as an epigraph to the seventh of the numbered sections. But they are not there as an aid to illustrate the point about dialectics and configuration, an aid that we can decide to do without. The passage on Brecht and the gestural theatre quoted by Josipovici is not from the 'Theses'. How has anything like justice or sensitivity been shown to Benjamin (or Brecht) here? And we might be tempted to think that the clear-cut voluntarism in this case should encourage us to have another look at the use of Barthes and Blanchot. I suspect some readers do respond to Josipovici in this way, but I think they are mistaken in doing so, or at least they are missing out on what is most distinctive in his work, and by his work here I mean both his critical and his fictional writings.

Let us take a closer look at the essay from which the Benjamin reference is taken.

The essay is titled 'Interruption and the Last Part'. It comprises six numbered sections with a single footnote. It is written 'In memory of John Mephram', a colleague from Sussex who is described in another essay as a 'philosopher friend'.⁸ It is of a similar length to the 'Theses on the End of History' but its style and tone and its voices are very different. It begins

with a question and a single word answer ('What is interrupted by an interruption? Continuity') and a critical assertion ('The classic novel presents us with narratives that are continuous and with narratives of continuity. Let Smollett's *Roderick Random* stand for the genre').⁹ Josipovici quotes the opening paragraph of the first chapter. But before following him, what about that question and answer: 'What is interrupted by an interruption? Continuity'. There is a certain pleasure to be had from the brevity and confidence of that 'continuity', especially when the question it supposedly answers repeats and stumbles over the word it is seeking to clarify: interrupted, interruption. 'What is interrupted by an interruption?' When there is an interruption, what exactly is or has been interrupted by it? It is not quite a philosophical question. It is not asking 'What is interruption?' or 'What has to be in place for interruption to occur?' It is not enquiring into the conditions of possibility of interruption. It is hard to think of situations where this question could be asked. And why would one ask it in this fashion? The interruptive repetition almost gives the question the form and feel of a riddle. Oh well, leave it, let's get on with the Smollett. But there is nothing more to the Smollett. We read: 'Roderick Random appeared in 1748. Eleven years later a very different kind of novel was launched on the English public'.¹⁰ And now we are presented with the opening of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Note already a crucial distinction, or rather a crucial feature of the distinction being made between Smollett and Sterne. The former is to 'stand for the genre' of the continuous narrative of the classic novel, the implication being that any number of other texts might have served Josipovici's purpose. The latter is presented in its particularity, a beginning that tells of an interrupted beginning, the interrupted beginning of the life of Tristram Shandy. The first section concludes with the restating of the relevant contrast, Smollett's continuity, Sterne's interruption. That opening question can now be heard with a Shandyean inflection (What is interrupted by an interruption?) and that short sharp 'continuity' can only serve as an answer if we rescue it from the 'genre' of the classic novel.

The second section show us how to do this. It is not just that interruption is the problem, the thing to be explained, the bad to continuity's good. Rather, if anything, the problem is continuity. It is the continuity of the life, of Tristram's life, that makes the project of telling his life an impossibility. The time spent writing the events preceding his birth is itself a part of his life (more time) to be added to the life he is endeavouring to write. This cannot end well. The end of a life, as Kierkegaard realized, cannot stand as a conclusion to a life, as though it had been properly and rationally prepared for. Such a conclusion is always necessarily lacking and this is the only necessity we can know or expect. For Sterne and

for *Tristram* this is a truth that can only be expressed as an interruption. Hence the non-end to the novel and to *Tristram's* reminiscences.

The third section of the essay turns to Benjamin, Brecht and the Brechtian celebration of interruption. The fourth, the longest of the essay, returns us to the focus on the power of continuity and the unavoidability of the thought that life continues. It is in this section that Josipovici brings in the second literary work he wants to consider, Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*. As with *Tristram Shandy*, this novel is not introduced as an example but as a work whose voice we need to discern and to think about in order to get further with that opening question. I will not give the details of Josipovici's interpretation, but he focuses on the way Woolf's account of Lilly Briscoe contemplating the now deceased Mrs Ramsey as she watches Mr Ramsey and the children being rowed across the bay is interrupted by an account of the boy (Macalister's boy) who is doing the rowing. Why this violent shift? Why this interruption? What continuity is being interrupted here with this interruption? Again, Josipovici recalls Kierkegaard. The absence of a conclusion requires that the author find another perspective, another way to move towards an ending. Lilly's anguish, however well written, however tragic its intensity and description, cannot count as an end or an achievement. To suddenly see that anguish interrupted by another violent act, a body, the body of a fish consigned to the sea as bait and by the description of that act, is to be forced to think the anguish otherwise. There is necessarily something more to a life, namely its relentless continuity. But that continuity can never be satisfactorily heard in the simple continuity of Smollett and the classical novel, or, for Josipovici, in the Brechtian contrived discontinuities that would interrupt and configure it. Without the desire for continuity and for a meaningful end continuous with it that drives *Tristram* and Lilly, Sterne and Woolf, the novels could not enable us to experience all the different ways in which interruption does its work or its un-work.

The fifth section, a single paragraph, opens with a polemical and theoretical assertion. 'Post-Modernism has made a fetish of interruption – but by that token is in danger of robbing it of its meaning and power. Sterne, Kierkegaard, Benjamin, and Virginia Woolf are wiser ...'.¹¹ The sixth and final section gives us a single sentence: 'Yet even to talk about interruption is to turn it into something else and so rob it of its force'.¹²

Now one could imagine an author, not Gabriel Josipovici, deciding to begin an essay on 'Interruption and the end part' with this final sentence. It would sound well, would give off an air of paradox and profundity. But such a beginning could only continue by stepping back and away from its first sentence. It would have to begin again, and the now free-standing paradoxical opening sentence would be little more than an indication

of the author's modesty (the admitted failure of what we are about to do). But so placed, it could not engage the reader in the questioning of interruption. It would neither intrigue nor implicate, but rather impress. It would, I think, for Josipovici, count as an instance of fetishization, a discontinuous discontinuity that can only be dealt with by being forgotten. Even at the end of such an essay, the reader might not remember it. Yet we do remember that other opening question: 'What is interrupted by an interruption?'

And one could imagine another author beginning with an angry dismissal of just this sort of non-productive and easy paradoxicality, perhaps as follows: 'Post-Modernism has made a fetish of interruption – but by that token is in danger of robbing it of its meaning and power. Sterne, Kierkegaard, Benjamin, and Virginia Woolf are wiser ...'. This would be a fine way to start proceedings, provocative, critical, introducing the writers whose wisdom you want to demonstrate. A tutor might advise a student to proceed along these lines. Sterne and Woolf contra the classic novel, with help from Kierkegaard and Benjamin. But now the essay, although it would have much of the content of the one Josipovici wrote, would keep the reader at a distance, never feeling the force of the question of interruption. Worse, it would encourage the reader to treat *Tristram Shandy* and *To the Lighthouse* as though they could also stand for a genre, for a type of literary writing that accepted the interruption of continuity. Had the essay been written like this, it would have been a matter of understanding what it said about interruption and continuity rather than participating in the thinking itself.

Both of these rearrangements would preface the essay, either with a programmatic and polemic assertion or with an aestheticized paradoxical truth. Each would give the impression that before we begin something needs to be admitted or confessed. Josipovici has always been suspicious of a writing – philosophical, critical or fictional – that allows itself the comforts of a 'before we begin', for that is also always a beginning, but one that abrogates the reader's right to treat and read it as so. It effectively says that before participating in the experience of the reading certain things need to be *understood*, taken as read before the participatory reading can really get underway. The oddness of that riddling 'What is interrupted by an interruption?' may discourage some readers in ways that the polemical or aestheticized opening would not. But the experience of those who linger with that question and all that follows is much more engaging and thought-provoking.

The last part of a life or a novel (at least the novels that concern Josipovici) can never have the meaningful necessity we might wish. It could always have finished otherwise, ended sooner, or gone on

indefinitely. The last part of 'Interruption and the Last Part' might be read as that single sentence verging on paradox or performative contradiction, but now somehow worked for, certainly arrived at by way of a discussion and an engagement with a variety of works and writers. But however subtle Josipovici's expositions, that sentence (that last part) will never simply be read as following on from them. It can never be entailed. Were it to follow logically, it could not say what it says. There would be no need for it. The last part interrupts and stands apart from what preceded it, but memorably and meaningfully so, just as in its own way did that opening question. We are asked to participate in the reading and experiencing of an apartness and a necessity that resists argument or summary.

There is perhaps just one more thing to add, for there is one more last part, an endnote. I hope you will forgive me if I cite it. 'My comments on *To the Lighthouse* owe much to John Mepham's wonderful essay "Figures of Desire: Narration and Fiction in *To the Lighthouse*", in Gabriel Josipovici (ed.), *The Modern English Novel*, Open Books, 1976'.¹³ The reader might recall that the essay they have just read was written in memory of John Mepham, this 'philosopher friend'. The last part of the essay, standing apart from it, neither continuous with it nor interrupting it, returns us to that italicized dedication, also read just before the opening question. But it also invites us to read another work, one by the remembered friend, and one whose citation names an earlier shared project. Everything in Gabriel Josipovici's writing invites us to take these moments and decisions, these reading experiences, seriously.

To close, I think I want to risk saying that the writers and works Gabriel Josipovici introduces into his critical writings often play a similar role to the writers and works he introduces into his fictional writings, and I can think of no one else of whom this could be said. Very few novelists can incorporate other works and voices as convincingly as he does. Perhaps Muriel Spark, as Josipovici has often demonstrated. It is hard to get this right, but Josipovici almost always does. His most recent novel, *The Cemetery in Barnes*,¹⁴ excels in this respect. A novel of repetitions, interruptions and continuities, and of course repetitions are always also interruptions. The novel turns on the topic of translation and the character of a translator. Translation is a matter of continuity and interruption, of an interruption that functions to protect and preserve continuity and an interruption that consigns continuity to repetition. In *The Cemetery in Barnes*, translation enables the central character and the reader to continue. Sometimes the continuous flow of the untranslated language carries its own disruptions even for the capable translator. The extraordinary shifts between Josipovici's text and the translated and untranslated poems of du Bellay mean that those poems both do and do not belong to

the novel. Du Bellay's voice, the voice of his translator, and the voice that tells of the life and marriages and wanderings of the translator mingle, and in mingling return us to a world in which we can read du Bellay just as we can walk along the river from Putney Bridge to Hammersmith. The novel is permeated by the libretto to Monteverdi's *Orfeo* and by a recording of the opera. They too, untranslated by the translator although not untranslated for the reader, comment on and accompany the events and recollections in the novel. Indeed, they do so *almost* perfectly and in a manner that matches the almost perfect success of the opera itself. What fails and falters is Monteverdi's finale where everything is brought to an end as though a conclusion, *this* conclusion, were possible. Josipovici's novel ends elsewhere and else when, in a place and a time we have already been, even if we now count ourselves a little more knowledgeable.¹⁵ How seamlessly one moves from the events of the novel, which include the listening to the opera to the opera itself, to a sense for its achievements and failures that is both the character's sense and the writer's or the work's sense, something with which the reader can engage just as we might with a moment in one of Josipovici's critical writings.

But for me the finest ending remains that of *The Air We Breathe*. The novel closes with a woman asking a barman for a glass of water. 'The Glass of Water' is also the title of a poem by Wallace Stevens, a poem whose words, rehearsed and repeated, bring us to the end. The final four paragraphs read:

As she crossed the room again the evening sun touched her face for a moment as it came through one of the high windows.

She sat down. The sun formed a pool of light on half the little round table in front of her.

Two men came in, talking loudly. She looked up for a moment, then it was as if they had never existed. Her voice rose in her throat, it filled her ears. Then it was gone.

The light fell on the glass of water in front of her. Light is the lion. She heard the words, clear, quiet, inside her head. Light is the lion that comes down to drink. Yes, she thought. Light is the lion. Light is the lion that comes down to drink.¹⁶

It must have been sometime in the early 1980s when I and a mutual friend of mine and Gabriel's, Francis Landy, had a long conversation about why this ending worked so well. For this is an ending, the quietest of endings, and it might almost be said to succeed as a conclusion. It does not loop back into the novel. There is repetition but it is the repetition of the words of another. Stevens' words are removed from their position in the opening lines of the second stanza:

Here in the centre stands the glass. Light
Is the lion that comes down to drink. There
And in that state, the glass is a pool.¹⁷

Has Stevens' poetry become Josipovici's prose? The woman asked for a glass of water, not 'The Glass of Water'. Receiving the one, she also received something of and from the other, and pondering its words was able, finally, to assent to them, and, in the context of the novel's conclusion, perhaps to much more. The reader of the novel is invited to share that experience and that 'yes'. Maurice Blanchot once called it 'the light innocent *yes* of reading'.¹⁸

Paul Davies is Reader in Philosophy at the University of Sussex. He has published widely on philosophy and literature and on the philosophy of Kant, Heidegger, Levinas and Wittgenstein. Recent publications include: 'Uneasiness: The Line between Sterne's Novel and Locke's *Essay*', in 'Laurence Sterne: A Symposium', special issue of *Textual Practice* 31, no. 2 (2017), ed. Paul Davies and Andrew Hadfield; 'Investment without Return: On Futures That Will Never Be Ours', in *Climate Change and the Humanities*, ed. Alexander Elliott, James Cullis and Vinita Damodaran (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017); and 'A Remarkable Fact: Wittgenstein Reading Tolstoy', in *Wittgenstein Reading*, ed. Sascha Bru, Wolfgang Huemer and Daniel Steuer (De Gruyter, 2014).

Notes

1. See, for example, 'Why Write Fiction?' in Gabriel Josipovici, *The Teller and the Tale* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2016), 213; or 'Reading Kafka Today', in *The Teller and the Tale*, 88.
2. Gabriel Josipovici, *Text and Voice* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), 114–137.
3. Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 13–14.
4. *Ibid.*, 191–193.
5. Gabriel Josipovici, *The World and the Book*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1979), 267 (Blanchot), 275–279 (Barthes). See also the essay on Blanchot in *Text and Voice*, 62–78, and the essay on Barthes in the same volume, 114–137.
6. Josipovici's relation to Derrida is a complicated one, not least because, on the face of it, he shows no real desire to get to grips with Derrida's writing, and this despite the fact that there are so many shared elements and concerns, biographical and critical: the moves to and from North Africa, their overdetermined introductions or reintroductions to Europe and to French and English

universities; their changing reflections on being Jewish; the shared fascinations with Kierkegaard, Kafka and Blanchot; and much more. The reader might want to hear in Josipovici's appeal to the voice a deliberate retrieval of the term from Derrida's attack on phonocentrism, the fantasy of the voice as the uniting of thought and meaning in the experience of hearing oneself speak, that Derrida had begun to deconstruct in his book on Husserl, *La voix et le phénomène* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967). But Josipovici beats us to it. He cites that very book and that very argument, suggesting that we should understand his notion of 'voice' to mean something that resists the metaphysics of presence and unity (*Text and Voice*, 130–131). The implication is not only that Josipovici accepts Derrida's argument but also that he presumes Derrida would accept his. I have already hinted at what might lie behind Josipovici's refusal to go any further with Derrida, a lack of trust. Josipovici finds no reason to trust Derrida's work. But there is something else. Josipovici often remarks on the fact that Blanchot, in addition to his critical work, was also a novelist, a writer of fictions, and Barthes always wished to write or to have written a novel. Josipovici has commented on those aspects of Barthes's theoretical work that would have made it hard for him to risk writing the novel. Derrida, for Josipovici, never wanted to take such a risk, and when he did write a text (*La Carte Postale* [Paris: Flammarion, 1980], *The Post Card* [trans. Alan Bass, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987]), the first half of which consisted of a series of postcards sent to a lover, he refused to admit to their reality or fictionality. Josipovici, I suspect, will always distrust a writing that feels itself capable of sustaining that distance and of refusing that absorption into the world or into the book (the fiction).

7. Josipovici, *The Teller and the Tale*, 277.
8. *Ibid.*, 283.
9. *Ibid.*, 274.
10. *Ibid.*, 274.
11. *Ibid.*, 280.
12. *Ibid.*, 280.
13. *Ibid.*, 280.
14. Gabriel Josipovici, *The Cemetery in Barnes* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2018)
15. I cannot resist drawing attention to one of the many tiny ways in which *The Cemetery in Barnes* invites the reader to attend to the smallest of marks and repetitions. Throughout the novel, almost every reference to the translator's wife is followed by the simplest of qualifications, 'his wife – his second wife –'. So, for example, 'His stomach was his Achilles heel, his wife – his second wife – would interrupt' (102). It enables the novel to perform the interruptions and repetitions (the repetitive interruptions) that were a key feature of their relationship. They also remind the reader of other references and repetitions. The absurdity and humour of the translator's stomach being his Achilles heel might trigger a memory of an earlier reference to Achilles in one of du Bellay's poems. 'His wife – his second wife – ...' also makes the reader think of 'his first wife'. (I believe there are only one or two occasions

when we come across ‘his wife – his first wife – ...’, although we are told a lot about his first wife.) In reading the novel, this particular repetition takes on many different moods. It can come across as endearing, funny, irritating and sinister. Even the hyphens or dashes themselves, holding the repeated phrase apart from the rest of the sentence, can take on a visual meaning, as though before ‘the second wife’ were this line, this body, this grave; and after it another line, another body.

16. Gabriel Josipovici, *The Air We Breathe*, reprinted in *Steps: Selected Fiction and Drama* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), 357.
17. Wallace Stevens, ‘A Glass of Water’, in *The Collected Poems: The Corrected Edition* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2015), 209.
18. Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1982), 196.