
HIX
EROS
POETRY REVIEW

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Animal Crater

by Goat Far DT and Papa Boop Ndiop (Crater Press, 2013)

Reviewed by Anon

Poor Craythur

I was on my way to enjoy ſome fiſhing off the beautiful Weſt Coaſt of Cork, near Schvll, when I noticed an enormovſly large poſter ovtside a ſmall bar in a deſerted-looking town. The poſter was mainly text, which ſtrvck me an enormoufly perplexing, and ſo I keyed the coordinates into the ſatnav to incorporate a ſlight deviation from my deſignated route. I was immenſely pleaſed to find that the poſter was a kind of mellifluous poetry efpovfing the admirable qvalities of ſome poetry to be read in rap at that very bar that very night, in twenty minutes time in fact. I had been muſing on ſome rather depreſſing things during my long drive from Dublin, mainly *Cnidaria* and *algal blooms*. I thovght: what lvck! And in ſvch a deſerted place! I mvſt admit I thovght to myſelf that the poetry would probably be terrible, given the abſence of competition in the local area and moſt poets' love of large cities and the company of other poets, for however anti-capitaliſt I and nvmerous others are, ſvrely one mvſt concede that friendly competition does improve quality of poeſy. We need catfiſh in ovr ſhipping containers, amIrite? (Or is this all a falſe analogy?) Bvt curiovſity got the better of me, and ſo I went to fee this *Animal Crater* of Papa Boop Ndiop and Goat Far DT. "Theſe writers repreſent the fvtvre. They're fvtvre–Linnaeans and introduce us to all kinds of poſt–ſpace–age animals in theſe poems," the advert claimed, in part. I juſt hoped there was nothing on jellyfiſh.

Frankly, the poetry was great. Not jvſt becauſe there were no jellyfiſh in ſight or ſound or implication or allvfion. Bvt I became rather uncomfortable becavſe the two young men reading the poems, one line each alternatively, were making intimate love as they did ſo. I was ſvrpriſed, to ſay the leaſt. Although it was very beavtiful in ſome ways, I was vncomfortable, and ſweat began to rvn down my ſidebvrnians. Bvt the poetry being emitted amongſt groping fingers and tangled tongves was of an immenſely ſpecial kind. To wit:

HI HEARSE (For Jo & Sam Lindsay)

F*ck Moss.
Look at my wristwatch it's glittering.
Y'all'll be my victimins.
Yo yr shorty | said she wornts me.

The gorey, Moorish troll (Poesy's hihte)'s gloryhole's moreish,
Party time. Father-darts, the truth is
I haven't made *Potpourri* out of the Pope's skin.
Is it sin. One thousand paths were beaten
Together in a yellow wood, take this & eat.

Lend me yr hick jin's gap tooth.
  Did u know whose Jesu sick is sweet?
Whoa the stenographer put, tines close for karate chop.
I don't care if yr whole crew's beards grow chins.
< < Cleopatra was a faggot. »
I didn't say give me a bet, | I said [*garbled in transmission, phonetic symbols of some sort or upside down lettering or both, anon.*]
  Bid the huntsmen go blow corn out their arses,
they're so corny. Is this a dagger I see before me?
Dissembling cutlery! Go get this nigger a bigger dagger,
Not fronting. I hate yr soft triangles, Str8 bunting.
Puke on this 4k.
  The reality is, your fellatio tastes like ficcacio.
& More cheese than dick like bad book-to-market-ratio.
Goodwill's so fishy u got wood gills. Str8 PriceH2OhouseCooper,
So much unusual shit, u got to audit it with a pooper scooper,
Send all yr poop to the sewers with friends flushing in shifts
Till there's only smooth Ken doll flesh left b/w yr legs.
U can still give me pleasure w/ that, baby. Love u.
Spoon me. Did you know suet is jacking from yr teat.
  Prang Coda: http://animalpoems.tumblr.com

I thought of many thingums in one moment, but I will attempt to vnfold them:

§ Is it not the caſe that this poem is ſtrikingly original? And yet how; jvxtapoſition, ſtrange vibrations or vortices of energy? Like, I dunno, Wyndham Lewis born in Kentucky and fed throvgh a pencil ſharpener by the mad Simon Jarvis? If poems are a machine for thinking, is this queſtion juſt treating the pweum like a Rubix cube, producing reconfigurations which poſture as knowledge? Are theſe attempts at illvminating queſtions not jvſt ſvch banal reformulations of another's complex machine?

§ Did theſe poets intend to ſimply …, y'know?

§ [*Illegible in MS, ed.*]

§ How does the wit ſeem so qvick, when its cleverneſs reſides in a certain repetitiovs

ſlowneſs? Namely: "Bid the huntsmen go blow corn out their arses, | they're so corny." Does not the ſecond vſe of corn in *corn*-y work ſo well, ſo bathetically, is it not the perfect word, the *mot juſte*? And why am I laughing at fart and poop jokes ſo much, why does this acceſs svch belly-laughs? Namely: "So much unusual shit, u got to audit it with a pooper scooper, | Send all yr poop to the sewers with friends flushing in shifts."

§ How does ſvch wit, ſvch comedy, erm, well, how can one ever talk abovt it without feeling the need to mime out the joke, to repeat its geſtvres? That's a ſhite point thovgh right? I ſhovldn't've pvt that here.

§ Were the gvillemets there to allude to gvillemots? Will I ſee guillemots while fiſhing tomorrow? Was I to ſpot one animal per line (lion?)?? How did I ſee the gvillemots? Ah, I remember, the projection, it's actually in front of me right now. Ah the wonders of narrative condenſation and the lies one can tell.

§ Was this piece improviſed? Namely, did the "moreish gloryhole" allude to the gloryhole in the toilet of this ſtrange bar in Schvll? Were they recommending the gloryhole to us? In ſuch a ſmall town, ſvrely, the gloryhole's fvnction is ſtrangely vnneceſſary, or not as effective, I mean there are only three people in this bar … If an improviſation, was this a piece for a ſingle occaſion? Again, what is it to manipulate theſe empty phraſes of mine?

§ How cloſely does it relate to the later *CODA: solid tools*? At firſt I juſt pricked my ears to a ſecond and third mention of gloryholes, all ſeeming pathic, one quietly ſo. There is the fork, the tines, the puke, the path, the beams, the wick, the flame, the wedge, the pole, the thin end of variovs objects. How might theſe texts illuminate one another, how might they copulate to prodvce diſcernible, even *intelligible*, ſtatements that a critic could write withovt bluſhing?

§ And as they continued, reciting 'UPSET ORAL SEX BEE,' 'PLATELETS AND BONE MARROW CHEETAH,' etc., they diſcarded clothing, moved offstageum, played videos of poetry, Skyped family-members, in a manic whirlwind of energy. I had the following mental occvrrences:

§ Where did Papa Boop Ndiop and Goat Far DT get off? Even if chickens ſurvey the ſame view, can we not educate our Werner Herzogs?

§ How much did the ſoftware neceſsary to make the aweſome video coſt? Did they get it for free? Cool idea though, to leave the ſtage and play a video in one's place. Cool video. It reminded me of Radiohead's 'Fitter Better Happier,' or ſomething: "more productive | comfortable | not drinking too much | regular exercise at the gym (3 days a week) | getting on better with your aſsociate employee [...]" I.e. it was heartbreaking, two lovers, talking about not having kids in order not to get real jobs, etc. … I bet it is happening, has happened, oh auſterity, we ſacrifice our unborn to you. I have never encountered a lyric ſo moving, I was overwhelmed with, erm, well, two tears came out.

I don't like to talk about this. BTW I like Radiohead, but they're a bit SAFE, rite? On a date, someone ſays they like Radiohead. Tell me ſomething I don't know. Yeeſh. Anyway, read it, read the poem I'm talking about, or watch it, watch it here:

§ Cf. *http://animalpoems.tumblr.com/post/53443581123/platelets-and-bone-marrow-cheetah*

§ That one about eugenix, like I ſaid, heartbreaking. Partus as meta-meta-ethics? I.e. morality itſelf (and not only the priorities of individuals) is changed by the advent of a new human. But one ſpeaker of the poem claims to *be* eugenix, after recommending they don't manufacture a child, preſumably due to economic difficulties, or just refuſal – "then we won't have to get real jobs." Why are there *un*real jobs? I ſuppoſe Graeber anſwers that. This is aſpirational middle and lower-claſſes (is this not a vaſt generalization?) ſelf-neutering, removing themſelves from future generations as the rich continue to rut, accelerating the contradictions of capital, as it wades perſonified through placenta. Is there anything more tragic than this moment in theſe poems?

§ What of the nearby notated cheſs move exceeds what had been the rules of cheſs: there is a checkmate (++) but *the game continves nonetheleſs*. There is another ++ not far away: FeralElderCare, presvmably, on the model of the childcare the jvngle fvrniſhed Mowgli, aſſiſted living & hoſpices rvn by wolves? "++" very likely links to "++" inſofar as that vbiquitous pvnctuation mark of Twitter, the octothorpe *a.k.a.* the haſhtag, might be prodvced by blending & elongating theſe two croſſes. Plus a haſhtag in cheſs alſo means checkmate in cvrrent notation, *cf. cheſs.com*. The couple tries to live a better life and refvſes to reprodvce in the name of qvality of life, and this is where they end vp.

§ I want that video-making ſoftware, but it'd take me too long to maſter it. Does only one of this fearſome and erotic *duo* know how to do that, to make it? Can we all collaborate together, can I get in on this? Like, now I wanna make a video poem, but don't know how. How many of the avdience members felt alike, of the three? *Ergo*, are not poetry-readings ſimply ſelf-replicating viruſes on a cultural level? Namely, did theſe poems ſimply kindle a fire never to be qvenched in myſelf and the other three audience-members, i.e. a deſire to write a poem of ſimilar ſpecies, or comparable in ſome ſenſe? Oh folly, folly … And yet was it not right for the world to be popvlated by poets, was it not already popvlated ſolely by poets, even animal poets? Dolphins make art, I thought I read that ſomewhere, bvbble-art, they play and dance … can't we all do it, like a world of cheſs players, bvt ſome are better, y'know?

§ What is the difference between a poem and a ſpider web?

§ What is it that was ſtrange in its newneſs in this work? What was different abovt the gear-ſhifts, the tranſitions, and the ſvbject-matter? Svrely I had known of all the thingvms, the words, the letters, the punctuation, etc. it mentioned before? Was the poem, ergo, like ſome ſtrange zoo, ſome circvs freakſhow? Were the animals, if one runs at preciſely 60kmph with my metaphor previovs, being miſtreated? Did I care? Does

the ſtrangeneſs of zoos confiſt of ſeeing a pengvin near a zebra? Like, in RL, or without human intervention, that would not be poſſible, y'know?

§ [*Error 404, figuratively ſpeaking*.]

§ How often do they play videogames? Wiſh I could more often. Feel too old. Expenſive too. When they ſay preſs forward, I ſuppoſe I get it, but it's a bit like Steiner's modal difficulty. Like, what's it *like* to preſs forward? I liked real time ſtrategies more, I feel like they meant RPGs or ſhooters.

§ If the error innovates the lively reaſon, where are we left? Poetry picked me up from ſchool bvt, being a giant ſpacefiſh, didn't know where to take me. I kept ſaying where home was. I was very vpſet. Why am I not vpſet, therefore, with theſe poems?

Near the cloſe of their ſet, which I mvſt admit was ſhamefully ſhort, ſhorter indeed than the advertiſement. The three avdience members were, erm, *reacting* to the end of the ſet. One pvked into his pintvm, downed it, pvked into it again, and ſo on. Another clapped loudly. The only woman there was climaxing lovdly and theatrically. I believed I recognized Goat Far Dale Turbo to be, in fact, a certain yovng poet whom I admire mvch. Before I covld be certain, he raiſed an anti-ocular hood device, of lvminous aſpect. Papa Boop Ndiop was ſimilarly wearing a tie-die luminous hoody with the perplexing letters *OFWG-KTA* emblazoned thereon, and *GOLF* elſewhere. Nonethelevs I approached, and began:

"Excvſe me, are you Ju –"

Goat Far Dale Turbo cvt me off: "Nah."

He made to go, though Papa Boop Ndiop ſeemed to linger heſitantly.

"Bvt I think I know yov, yov're…"

"Liſten, Kent," Goat Far DT began, confirming my ſuſpicions unwittingly, "for all your challenging of author-function you juſt had to aſk didn't you? Me and Papa here, we're the muthafucking poetry-game Ron Paul, you hear? And –"

Papa Boop Ndiop interjected: "The poetry-game Ron Hubbard *L*."

"The poetry-game two-girls-one-cvp."

"The poetry-game's toaſted ſandwich!"

"The poetry-game Ofcars AND Emmies."

"The poetry-game *GTA* ſeries, eſpecially *Vice City*."

"The poetry-game *Dawſon's Creek*."

"The poetry-game's cinnamon roll! Straight up."

I was confvſed. I meditated at length, or what could be at length if expanded from the condenſed point of time where the cognition occurred, on the nature of age and of poetry's advance.

"What we mean is," they ſaid together, "we're not in Schvll to chat to a fellow poet. Obv. We kinda came here to get away from familiar faces. To get ſtvff into wider circvlation. What are tovrs bvt extended potlatch, *esp*. a poetry-tovr?"

"I ſee," I ſaid, eyes widening, "how wonderfvl. But ſvrely to reject this enormovs coincidence, for vs both to end vp in ſuch a ſmall town in a foreign covntry… ſhall we not ſit down for one drink, even if I briefly apparently offended by attempting to diſcuſs the critical niceties of avthor-fvnction?"

"I ſvppoſe ſo," Papa Boop Ndiop mvſed. "Bvt then we really muſt get to the next town over, for our next ſet by 11."

And ſo we did, and chatted of many thingvms, adequately lvbricated by Gvinneſs of the fineſt quality, or ſo I'm told, and we diſcvſſed thingvms aſtral and earthly, and I, in fact, ſhamefully poſed my garbled qveſtions which I ſo vncovthly vnfolded, like ſome ſhit origami, before yov, dear reader, earlier. It turns out the ſoftware "is rilly rilly eaſy & alſo free." We ſpoke bout Steve Aylett a bit. I was too drvnk, thovgh, and can no longer remember their anſwers, bvt I remember feeling that I had vpſet them at one point in the converſation, and they me, briefly, bvt I am reſilient to ſvch thingvms at my fine age, I expect others to be robvſt and am robvſt myſelf. I always fovnd poets, even myſelf, difficvlt. It was late when we both made ovr way into the long night. In my dream that night a keſtrel tongved a perineum, I covld not tell whoſe it was.

False Flags

by Luke Roberts (Mountain Press, 2011)

Reviewed by Stephen Emmerson

I've been trying to write about Luke Roberts' collection for months. It is a book that contains seven poems, and then a long sequence called 'False Flags.' In the end I had to make a salt circle and place a typewriter and a small bowl of water (a spirit dish) in the middle to form a Daemon-Powered Chronohaven, or DPC for short. A DPC operates by creating a seal in time that excludes all external events and allows the human within the DPC to summon an extradimensional being. The extradimensional being, or Daemon, can then use the water to communicate with the person inside the circle. The Daemon I summoned was *baal*. *baal* creates a three-foot-high free-standing three-dimensional humanoid shape out of the water in the spirit dish. *baal* told me that a false flag operation is a covert manoeuvre designed to deceive. It is an act of sabotage that incriminates a person, group of persons, nation, or nations other than those who are responsible for the act.

Luke Roberts' collection takes this as it starting point, and according to the Mountain Press website, was initially "conceived as a satire or part-satire on conspiracy theories and New Age irrationalism starting at Ground Zero and stretching back to the space race and other territorial contests of the past fifty years or so. The resultant text is a sequence of

nine poems, including both short and extended lyrics, pseudo-narratives, and other mutating travesties. All the characters in the poem are real."

baal is in one of his moods today. Reckons I've been relying on him too much lately. So when I ask him what he thinks the book is about he gets all pseudo-gangster with me:

"Can't you have one fucking thought without asking for my opinion? Look man, I exist in an infinite amount of space within an infinite number of dimensions, I've experienced things you couldn't even begin to imagine, and the only thing you want to know is what I think of this book."

Before I can say anything he's off on one:

"Look, *False Flags* is like an investigation into all the wonderful, and inventive ways in which you humans are lied to by governments through the agency of media. It uses aspects of these control centres language-monads to expose the negative by inverting their syntax to break open holes in the human psyche. Trying to explain what it is, or how it works, is meaningless without television."

baal is pissed off so he collapses back into the Spirit Dish mumbling something about Ground Zero and 9/11.

There is much that could be turned into a film in *False Flags*. I can see Philip K. Dick's ghost in the margins taking notes towards a schizotopia:

> & this is a fantasy you live with, magnetic guns,
> robotic second guess a wristwatch
> your skin
> grows over & comes off with embarrassed
> glares, teenagers start dieting & the whole
> scuba club had an accident because the sea
> is also a joke
>
> *

And this from the beginning of the 'False Flags' sequence:

> Under fire GO and relay, spinning
> in the fantasy compound, well-fed
> colours touched in to soften, soften
> the first blow. Go pick ground up
> razors from feet, absent golden zero
> change the radio pumping infowars

and blowing out disaster, personal
currencies of collapsible space:

*

This is multidimensional writing. It is also political writing that succeeds – (for me anyway) – in ripping apart the current mediatic / political brainwash tactics in use by whichever goon is in power this week, without the reader having to trudge through a textbook the size of a brick to *get it*. Though I realise the term *get it* may be highly contentious.

I'm not saying it's an easy read. Far from it. But it is funny, and enjoyable.

There are many voices creeping in and out of this text – Sean Bonney, Barry MacSweeney, Ed Dorn, The Sun, The Daily Mail, Jeremy Kyle, MK Ultra, and The Taxonomic Review to name but a few.

But voices are what makes this thing tick. *False Flags* is brave enough to be out there on its own ripping things apart. It exists outside of the main bulk of what might be termed 'Political Poetry' in that it does not seem to represent any particular political ideology.

Hidden in a pseudo-ending in-between the Acknowledgements and a definition of the title, Luke Roberts states:

DECOY

No conspiracy theory is dialectical.

*

& as *baal* pops up in his watery form again screaming at his 'Ark of the Covenant Wristwatch,' I realise that *False Flags* must've been written inside a Daemon-Powered Chronohaven, dictated to Mr. Roberts at 100,000 miles an hour from an event horizon deep within the plane of limitless dimensions.

Kyotologic, I-Formation books 1 & 2

by Anne Gorrick (Shearsman 2008, 2010 & 2012)

Reviewed by William Garvin

Anne Gorrick writes poems that are at the same time expansive, elliptical & liminal, their connections subtle & startling: *Kyotologic*, the first book chronologically speaking, is based upon the *Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, a literary treasure from Heian Japan; the language of the 1967 Ivan Morris translation a starting point for a series of improvisations. Gorrick channels Shonagon's butterfly lightness & delicacy of expression, the older work's imagery blending effortlessly with the latter's oblique trajectories ("Blue horses in borrowed arcs [...]"; "his distances informed by a cherried elegance [...]").

Within each of its sections certain words & phrases reappear in ever-changing configurations, creating their own whirling patterns & arabesques, hinting at strategies of restricted language & in doing so drawing attention to the process of creation. It's creation, in both the artistic & edenic senses of the term, which lies at the heart of *I-Formation* books 1 & 2. An I-Formation, for those who don't know, is a strategy used in doubles tennis, its aim being to cause confusion & bewilderment amongst one's opponents. Readers may find themselves feeling similarly bewildered: caught between simultaneous events on the page: horizontal lines bordered by vertical lines, for example. It's for each person to create their own reading strategy...

The term 'I-Formation' could refer equally to one's idea of self: "The I spreads out and it writes [...]" though in doing so it becomes increasingly indistinguishable from its surroundings; a garden glimpsed through a calendar of ever changing possibility where language seizes the initiative, twisting & turning to reveal its latent music. *I-Formation 2* has less of '*Eden translated*' than *Book 1* but what *is* emphasised is Gorrick's ability to find freedom through anagrammatic limitation ("Monks ski in stony mists"; "The signori snort their iron elisions"). As she tells us, "a garden's borders are its thoughts," though in these volumes, a garden's thoughts may at times seem limitless...

09.09.13

Phrenologue

by Judah Raanan Rubin (Ugly Duckling Press, 2013)

Reviewed by Sarah Hayden

Phrenologue is a well-titled book. The occupation it evokes – that of an individual who attempts to divine the constitution and habitual operation of a brain via the examination (ocular and digital) of its subject's skull – is an apt set-up for the poem it contains. It's a book that, like the discourse against psychiatry (the 20th Century's replacement for phrenology) is invested in the failure of language. A book that dwells on the stoppering up of speech and the denial of expression. Its title and substance project its readership into the position not of phrenologists but of amateur or accidental *phrenologues*. Acting, *reading*, in this capacity as the anglicised counterparts, perhaps, to the French psychologue, the subject we are summoned to examine is a suggestively strange one. The bumps and hollows that might, on a skull, be presumed to indicate behavioural propensities, have been translated into a textual terrain that is stimulating, textured and pitted with sense-swallowing aporia. And, much as the contemporary phrenologue must acknowledge the tenuous foundations of his/her pseudoscience, so are we compelled to surrender to a(n arguably more) productive confusion. Rubbing seeking fingers over its filigreed surfaces, we can make only a partial diagnosis of what's at stake here. But the 'reading' experience and the cognition it provokes and rewards are, nonetheless, intensely, however perplexingly, pleasurable. This is a fine cranial surrogate to have between our hands; a fine cerebral poem to think around and through. The reading that follows claims no diagnostic authority for itself. Glad, only, of the opportunity to perform its examination, it offers its speculative analysis from a quack-dilettante's position of great, though inexpert, enthusiasm.

Released by Brooklyn's Ugly Duckling Press in July 2013, *Phrenologue* consists of 38 (32) pages, hand-bound into a beautifully letterpressed wrapping. If day-old (ox?) blood were poured into a stencil designed by Hans Arp, it would look like this. Sometimes the poem dribbles down the page in a staggered vertical unfold:

> to
> whet and polish
>
> slow to
>
>
> drink what

> underbit (p. 13)

Sometimes it streams in columnar freefall:

> to pluck its feathers
> halved of a covenant to
> what told of
> others – it itself
> the directional (p. 9)

Other lines, spatialized on an attenuated horizontal plane, betray the scanning eye – forcing it to double back, to check its footing:

> clothed distance
> clouded past pined
> for
> hustings
> down
> by the night (p. 23)

Performing itself upon such a fractured plain, the subjectivity, "Who, it is – these particulars | Become as such of myth" (p. 36). In a poem that is all empty space, 'I' is interchangeable with "absentia | perching beside the noose" (p. 11). The identities of any implied speakers are usually dissolved or at least diffuse, coalescing only towards the poem's end into a 'He' who:

> Had wanted to be
> He had wanted to
> Wander, to wonder
> Out into the water, to wade
> He had wanted, he had
> Wanted to wander – the shore (p. 36)

Appropriately then, the text is strewn about with bits of an explosively atomized body. In place of an integrated biological system, we find a scattered carnage of disarticulated components: of "lungs" (p. 9) somewhere, and "marrow" (p. 13) somewhere else. This ferocious subdivision extends even to a microscopically "gametic" (p. 12) "cellular" (p. 15) (p. 23) intimacy: "but how | its blood – how | its cells held to the | scored skin" (p. 9). These

dismembered parts of unidentifiable bodies are variously "fractured" (p. 23), "chopped" (p. 27), "broken" (p. 28), "snapped" (p. 32), and "starved" (p. 11). Gross acts of violence take place here but they have been dislocated from both subjects and objects – so that appalling things simply happen: "thickened blood | by the figure | digging his teeth from my skull" (p. 8) or happen only in the imagination:

> I would as soon leave
> to my son
> thrust the knife under
> —blank in the eye / cut/
> of
> —name (p. 12)

The memory of such violence is globally implicit – "How did it know what | the ground does | of a fist absorbing | sound –" (p. 9) – and awful.

We encounter again and again what is identified as "the embodied clause," framed as a construct beneath and by which a body might live. Flesh asserts/inserts itself into everything so that even "the world's […] sphere of | knowing" is "lunged |" (p. 4). Inexplicably tortured and degraded, the body, in *Phrenologue*, tries to "sing and say the | non-song sense" (p. 6). "Blood cries out – for blood" (p. 5). If popularity hasn't left 'visceral' an entirely exsanguineate adjective, then this is a visceral poem. The word 'blood' appears (10???) times in 38 pages. The body is both source of and subject to unsavoury seepings and unseemly transfers. Surfaces are "fouled of offal" (p. 35) and something "stained my | hands | with fat" (p. 22). Like the references to weeds threaded through the text, inchoate impressions of bodily abjection abound:

> sugared, the tail
> purile as
> to a passing dog
> out of pity with the sex
> come limping (p. 3)

Other apparent miracles – surreal and inexplicable evolutions – are similarly distressing: "the bark grew | like tungsten out of | cheeks' hermaphroditic |" (p. 9), or as when "to clean the stain, wound from one's | hand – a part – to never have happened | again fused to a sudden | middle" (p. 5).

In the embodied text, speech materializes as a physical process: as the "spit in the end | of sound" (p. 6) and the tingle of "The, fricative" (p. 13) between "hoarseness" and

coughing (p. 18) (p. 37). We are incited, indirectly, "to place a tongue || in the muscle, the fat" (p. 9). This focus is flagged from the first page in the image of "a mouth – extrement – strewn | across the | melos" (p. 3). With its neologism a blend of the French intensifier (*extrêmement*) with its scatological eye-rhyme, this line that holds both shit extreme and song is metonymic of the poem-entire. In this poem of brutalized "meat and | marrow" (p. 12) speech can be shot like "dithyrambic buckshot" (p. 16). The sounds of birds – that other noisy species – manifests similarly as matter so that the song of a bird cast into the wind is, memorably, "its sibilant jism" (p. 11), and birds are similarly vulnerable to attack, to "die | one wing torn back" (p. 11).

As the site for the transmission of thought into sound, the figure of the mouth irrupts frequently into the text. A sub-optimal specimen, it is repeatedly described as "thin lipped" (p. 18), "underbit" (p. 13) and again, "too thin" (p. 12). What does it mean for a mouth to be so impoverished? We are compelled to consider what it means to "have a voice," but for the organs of articulation to be so weak. That mouth with its "thin lips" (p. 30) is always at risk of being sealed, whether by "[…] a feather in | The throat of" (p. 6) or, more violently, when "a foot on its throat" (p. 9) renders an 'I' that was speaking "stoppered" (p. 9).

A speech exalted as the "gurgling pus of being" is aggressively arrested when – "nail shut | the shoe so throat stopped" (p. 10). These material obstacles to speech accrete until:

> I am closed
> up for
> days I,
> am, how closed
> I am / how closed up for the day (p. 14)

When the primary channel of this "thistled | valve" (p. 6) is found to be blocked, then here, as in the case of choking, an alternative airway must be opened. Sustaining the analogy, this operation cannot not achieved without causing more pain:

> I find and
> piece and pierce and
> know the body's
> metallic
> shape – how the moon does
> die for embrace

for the throat
found needle whereby to breathe (p. 10)

Notwithstanding the ever-threatening incursion of these challenges to expression, the poem is yet replete with invocations of an aural landscape rich with a conspicuously wordless "Clucking" (p. 23), singing (p. 6) and every other "tonal | cicadic […] harmony" (p. 27). Thwarted, muted and drowned out, the poem strains to speak into the context of "the world's | dimensional noise" (p. 8). When the voice(s) succeeds, it must articulate this success too, reiterating: "I am speaking am speaking" (p. 10) even if it is only "speaking with myself" (p. 8). At intervals, speech falls into an obsessive glitching loop:

A forgery, kept to posit its growth
has failed in me
what has failed in me
what has failed in me – it has failed
in me – all the same – (p. 8)

Our own saying becomes a sort of singing that revolves around the repeated word or the repeated sound as refrain. These repetitive passages take the forms of both the fully logical and twisting aural replays of an actualized subject and the hollow partial echoes of an inanimate bounceback:

The, fricative
played
against –
itself
of faltered
red and
red and
red and red (p. 13)

Though the poem is shot through with interrogatives, it is yet devoid of the punctuation that case should bring with it. If questions are being asked, it is by a weary speaker who no longer anticipates or demands enlightenment. (Or perhaps, more troublingly, the rubric of interrogation has been forgotten or no longer exists). The scope of extant punctuation is confined to a cumulative collection of hyphens, m- and n-dashes, commas, and pairless parentheses. There are no full stops; no ordained rest-stops. Some lines might appear to be parsed/parceled out for us, but our eyes snag and stall on unorthodox punctuation, set trap-like, for us to trip over: "and on, occasion, I." (p. 25) for one, do. This poem actively resists

smooth, passive reading. Language itself becomes treacherous, the rules we unthinkingly 'know,' the presumption that 'nor' will follow 'neither' proves false: "an uneasy dream – an endlessness | neither projective but | the rupture of suggestion, narrowed" (p. 8).

The system that is language is demonstrated to be just as corruptible and worthy of careful surveillance as any of society's other internalized and unexamined structures of givens. Slow reading asserts itself as the only fit strategy. The poem seeks to move us from automatism into critical thinking. Beyond pagination and page-breaks, no further subdivision of the poem's parts is applied. We apprehend the whole as a sequence of single pages – each of which is obedient to a discrete formal logic. The lyric line holds its tension but the sentence is frequently fractured beyond sense:

turned – is east –
and on, occasion, I
to prove is
no regard but that
all future capitulated in the
ultmagnesic sensed (p. 25)

When lines keep breaking before they have become syntactically sound sentences, the spaces on the page stop looking like gaps and start to resemble externally directed redactions. The page begins to look like a whited-out victim of censorship.

Notwithstanding its own commitment to being always unfinishing and fugitive, the text is rife with a lexicon of delimitation – "collapse the | margins where was," (p. 5) "we | can but | speak of | its limit to | limit" (p. 32).

This drive towards containment reaches its apotheosis in the image of a hand gloved by a rapidly hardening seal of lead; its contours forever set and preserved into a secretly withering eternity:

speak of the page to which
we adhere, plunge the
hand into
lead, how it
dries over the thing (p. 11)

The text-body is petrified by external forces, just as it is constricted from within. Liquid effulgences – "the sky bulging at its belted | seams | sea rising against | effluvia" (p. 18) – bear down on the elusive subject "(this – I, *this* – I" (p. 28) even as it attempts to articu-

late itself. The poem is haunted by the process:

whereby the ocean moves
toward and covers us (p. 18)

Drownings proliferate. One grim stanza sketches with admirable economy a nightmare of recurrent stillborn suffocation:

A vacuum of birds A filet of fish The waves' grey wife

What dies young, close to the
beach
Its head lifted
to drown again
among the tines (p. 24)

Notwithstanding the fact that apparent threat, this sea is the natural habitat of some fish-out-of-water voice in the poem who speaks of:

my
sea people
hidden among the
rush
how command
the horse or push a wheel

dropped
in aspic (p. 33)

Nevertheless, those aquatic origins have been forsaken for a land for which they appear ill-equipped. Now, some apocalyptic wet threat hovers over the poem.

On page 26, an explanation for the poem's reader-resistant prosody is proffered:

With hazard
content,
form declared
in
all I
can do

is listen
I won't recommend (p. 26)

This is the manifesto of a voice actively undermining the authority of its own inherited fluency. The statement of intent of a voice that shuts its own well-furnished mouth before it has spat its full eloquent streel – in solidarity, perhaps, with the masses mute *ab initio*. When, some pages later, we read the clogged injunction to "[…] do not | do this in prose, think in" (p. 30), it seems automatic to supply 'poetry' to the gap at the end of that line. This, then, is Rubin's profession of faith and his demonstration of poetry's specific capacity for holding us tight – alert to the page, to the words, and to the spaces between them. For epigraphs, he gives us lines from Prynne's 'Crown' and Frederick Jackson Turner's 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History.' By stacking these political textracts in transatlantic communion, he pulls their politics together and into a shared register that is specifically contemporary, American and revolutionary. The suggestion is implied that notwithstanding Turner's claim in 1893 that "[h]aving completed the conquest of the wilderness, and having consolidated our interests, we are beginning to consider the relations of democracy and empire," the debate he envisioned has yet to be staged. Capitalism endures, and with it, the global power structures of a bygone era. The machinery of these archaic systems is brutal and anonymous: "[…] the | external world touches all, | spits blood." When, on page 29, we read the unusually whole declaration: "The real war will never get in the books | Barking and bagged" the memory of Abu Ghraib arrives directly and with force. The effect is powerful. The stuttering stanza that follows plays out the difficulty of beginning this choked up conversation, and the threat of violence that such action necessarily connotes:

What o posits
Reduction plied prayer in
Listened to the thousandth
Leg to place its head above the knife –
All known
Sewage
A dictionaired invective (p. 29)

When, on page 18, that stuttered repetition gets stuck on the word 'America' we are compelled to read the error as eloquent of some self-conscious imprint of unconscious taboo. When America doesn't have the words for the democracy the poem wants to talk about, the lexicon of ancient Greece interpolates itself into the poem. It reaches across time with the insistence of one eager to prove its continued currency for the problem at hand.

waxed from a lip of shoes flattened
Into recession. Amer this is – no, Americ
back, is America when – this poem –
Do polis, "you" – the pointed
mayority – is to change
the words another missive (p. 18)

On its penultimate page, the poem commentates on a productive eructation. After a repeated call to:

Let fly the rock, let
Fly the round rock
From about the wrist
Let fly (p. 37)
– the blocked throat finally is cleared:

What marked
coughed up life
and sputtered
and coughed
and coughed
up
its

What it is that is coughed up remains unsaid – but on the following page, paper is classed with "concrete, tar, asphalt and railroad" (p. 38). This phrenologue is tempted to read this pile of industrial materials left at the end of poem as the ingredients for the construction of some new frontier town – home to a body public that is cognizant of the violence that has been done to it, and free of the myriad, specifically material obstructions which have, heretofore, hampered its speech. In its final address, the poem calls its public to "escape the burden | of such peace as burnt" (p. 38). Dumb pacifism finally forsaken, a new-galvanized polyphony must follow.

Silent Diagrams

by Alison Gibb (Knives Forks and Spoons Press, 2013)

Reviewed by Colin Herd

"*This almost turbulent silence was dizzying*" – Toru Takemitsu

Whatever they are, Alison Gibb's suite of 19 poems overlaid by 19 diagrammatic pencil drawings seem anything but silent. Even of the dizzying, quivering sort described by the composer Toru Takemitsu. That's if silence is conceived of as nothingness, which probably it isn't. There are countless kinds of silence. And none of them really silent. No, much more cagey than that.

But first to describe what it is that makes these 19 poems unusual. The first thing is that they are the same poem repeated 19 times. That might seem to create a sort of silence. If something is repeated often enough it can fade into a kind of silence, a background noise that isn't paid attention to. But is 19 times enough for that? Probably not and anyway, when I say they are the same poem 19 times I'm not giving the full picture. While the text is the same in each instance, on each page it is overlaid with a pencil drawing (composed of a circle and lines within and intersecting it), meaning that visually there are 19 distinct poems. But not that distinct. The variety in the diagrams is fairly minimal and limited.

A preface to the text notes that these drawings "originated during the development process of *Thus in the crossing*, a poetic dance performance in collaboration with the choreographer Elaine Thomas." Movement does seem fundamental to the poems: the subtle differentiations of the positioning of the diagram in relation to the text is the most readily locatable source or trigger for a response to the poems, and for a meaningful reading. It's about as minimal as a flick-book could get, a line shifting about here and there, the sudden appearance of a grid.

Minimal though they are, these structures seem to positively chatter with gossipy, even operatic meaning. The quieter the background the louder you hear a whisper. Without wanting to become hysterical, it becomes emotional when one of the parallel lines that dissect the poem suddenly breeches the circle on page 9. It's sort of an outrage. This beautiful perfect circle and there's suddenly a line poking through it. There's a powerful tendency to see it as a mistake. To get your Tipp-Ex out! It takes a couple of pages to slide back down and be contained again within the diameter of the circle. In the process it forms a miniature parody of the parallel tram lines in the centre of the circle with the "t" of "toy.e."

There's noise too (or at least movement – and only assassins move silently) in the way that words get obscured by the drawings at various times in the piece. On page 15,

the line "you dilly and are little and idle and want to romp" is almost entirely obscured. So much so that you have to take it on trust that it is in fact the same. Indeed, it isn't, because in the act of attempting to decipher it behind the veil you become sure it says "you are dilly and little and i die."

Masking or veiling text as a device in poetry has one set of visible roots in Charles Bernstein's early sequence 'Veils,' where text is overlayed on other text so thickly as to make it almost impossible to interpret which text is which and what any of them say. Almost impossible though not entirely, because with due diligence you can pretty much figure out a poem from the veils (though it's a poem of baroque folds and overlays). Gibb's gesture is much lighter. There is absolutely nothing to figure out, really. So one line is partially obscured on one page. If you've forgotten what that line is, just flip back or forward and you can read it there. Except, in its very minimalism, Gibb's work even more loudly states the essential difference of every iteration of any string of words.

Paradoxically, what might be considered to become silent is in fact the text rather than the diagram (so far as you could pull them apart, which you can't). The diagram becomes the most active source of meaning in the poem and the poem itself seems almost absent compared to the drama of the drawing and its subtle changes on the page. Which isn't to say there aren't nuances within its structure, semantics and sound of the sort that normally provide energy and fuel fascination when reading poetry. "I extend my knee and take you for a ride through the forest of our past. *It is green | and silvered with crisp dew*" is either a playful moment with a child or a line that operates at its own squeam-inducing logic, reversing and repossessing a grandfatherly or avuncular game. The second sense might be traced to the word "silvered" suggesting age (and contrasted with the innocence of "green") or a possible sexualized interpretation of the word "dew." But this reading of it seems over-wrought, and only relevant for certain of the pages in the book. Page 10 for example, where the sentence is underscored by a thick black line. Or page 11, where a right angle is drawn from the end of the word "knee" to the base of the circle and the side of the circle, in which a repeated fan of acute angles seem to form frets or jalousies.

The suggestion I'm trying to make though is that such interpretative manoeuvres become silenced in favour of attention to the choreographic interactions of words, phrases, lines and the pencil lines of the drawing atop of them. The jalousie fan of lines is one of the most striking aspects of these diagrams and is used repeatedly throughout the sequence. On page 17, two of these networks of lines are used, forming a kind of bow or sand-timer shape across the poem. These forms relate to the line "I watch as my emotions falter, wound with string that is spun down from and." However, above all they become a metaphor for the ever partial interpretation of things, perceived aslant through varying thicknesses of slats.

What Derrida in 'Memoirs of the Blind' calls "this twinkling of an eye [...] a blinking of the difference that begets it [...] a jalousie (a blind) of traits cutting up the horizon." The excursion across and through various cuts in the horizon is the energizing force in much of 'Silent Diagrams,' as is the blinking nature of repetition and subtle transformation that structures the book. In Gibb's poem sequence the same poem is iterated 19 times and each time is an expression of its difference, of its partiality. The tools we usually go to when analysing (and 'explaining') poems are things like semantics, sound patterning, rhetorical devices, etc. And all too often they seem inadequate tools which may form a map but don't reveal the territory, a relief since it means that poems remain unexplainable. Gibb introduces a whole new form of mapping which doesn't seem attentive to a sonic sound pattern, a logic, grammar or semantic analysis. In putting off (or, o.k. silencing) these ways of analyzing poems, her curious maps seem to posit other undiscoverable links between aspects of a poem that can't be figured out. It's a pleasant sensation to be on the receiving end of it, waiting to hear something.

Songs for One Occasion

by Justin Katko (Critical Documents, 2012)

Reviewed by Chris Kerr

Justin Katko's *Songs for One Occasion* was written on several occasions. I know this because Katko lists the month and year that each poem was written alongside their previous publication history on the final page of the book. For example, we're told with lopsided precision that 'On Being Ammunition' was "written September to 14 November 2012." It's difficult not to think of the great, rasping, tectonic energy it must have taken to sustain the songs across time and to bind them into a book. Impressions like this are all the more insistent because Katko published *Songs* with his own press, Critical Documents.

Songs is surprising at the level of the individual word, like much innovative poetry, but not quite in the same way. A jazzy disrupted control pervades the whole. The twelve songs contain moments of catalytic illumination, and I sense these points will be different for every reader. Certain lines pop out against a background that's murky but not quite obscure. The bright neon gas flashes, and escapes the tube. The reader can only attend to so much.

In 'Mantras in Defence of Non-violence Against Everyone,' there are "horses slide-tackling while we still sense their presence." The language often seems to vanish like this, and as weirdly. In this poem typographical daggers (†) cleave what would otherwise be prose into something like lines of poetry, perhaps "To the ambience of pube-splitting angelic drool" in another poem ('Camophage Airbursh'). The titles of three poems, 'In-Burst:

Sand-Blind,' 'Inter-Burst: Cyclone Furoshiki' and 'Out-Burst: Pedant' have been separated as if by centrifuge, split down the middle at the colon, with the first element left-aligned on one page and the second element right-aligned on the facing page.

It is difficult to read individual lines in this hyper-bibliophile work and not fancy that they might be commenting on how the whole book is constructed, but such insights are fleeting and most probably treacherous. One point like this comes in 'Inter-Burst,' where a lover elides with the "author" (the word *muse* is absent from the body of the book but is an insistent intermediary term in this collection of songs):

> Its author I shall never name; its form has curved my own; whose
> rhythm like volcanic stone skips isle into isle.

This rhythm feels like that of the whole book: the volcanic islands are the occasional poems, which look isolated above water. Under the water they reveal themselves to be one structure. The rhythm "skips," randomly like a geological record, but also like stones. It's as if there's some gigantic agency mastering the series, across time, a great big vomiting Hercules. In these words the work is poised between a phenomenon that 'just happens,' under the water, and poems more consciously thrown.

The poems have a fragile poise. The lines of the first 'Song' shuffle and twist on the page like the "sister" that inhabits them and like a precarious pile of books in a library. She

> Is to my pulsing visionary field
> Revealed,
> By turning out the light.
> The beautiful sister is exalted,
> Whose name is *of* light[.]

Katko co-edited Edward Dorn's *Collected Poems*, published last year, and contours of Dorn's voice can be heard in these lines as elsewhere in the book. The poems, with their deliberate, accidental shapes have the quality and soft, rigid form of after-images behind eyelids.

The poems could be said to be under water. The cover of the book is a porous, fibrous royal blue. On the inside front cover, the title of the collection and Katko's name form a shining, silver, raised archipelago on the page. I've remembered that the final words of the first poem, 'Night Song' are "Blue and silver | Ocean grave." The text really does seem to call for this level of attention to the book as an object.

The cover was a surprise when the book arrived. I'd ordered it on Justin Katko's website, where the accompanying cover picture is an image of Charlize Theron that was used in a billboard and magazine advertising campaign by Dior ("*j'adore Dior*"). I saw the

billboard in Croydon in the summer of 2012. Theron is wearing a gold dress, and Katko has cropped her at the neck. Clicking on this image takes the user to an enlarged version of the same picture, but laterally reversed: plantarchy.us/images/songs-big.jpg.

The image has been deformed. It has been torn to reveal several layers of paper, probably other pages in the same magazine. The flipping of the image makes it a convincing alternative cover, complete with front and back. The lesion promises a healthy clutch of leafs inside, but it too is mirrored on both sides. The imaginary dividing membrane between the front and the back of the book is a single flimsy sheet.

The actual blue cover cedes nothing. It is no more layered than the sea. It could be called deep. Both physical and virtual covers are all surface. A quotation from Henry Peachum (junior), again in silver, is set on the inside of the back cover of *Songs*. The quoted passage begins "BID now my Muse" and contains the line "Let muddy Lake, delight the sensuall thought." The language in this collection rises against this screen or background. It's like blotting paper, or an ostrich's dream.

The speaker boasts of his or her "impressive reference library" in 'In-Burst'. The poetry is experienced through points of access, where they come. Much of the pleasure of the poem seeps in when such channels are closed, but the lines that peep above the flow grant the most enduring satisfaction. One such moment persists for me in the final poem, 'Camophage Airbrush':

> You must understand, our company, by a series of acquisitions,
> Was compiled over centuries, posing up along the stairs,
> Exuding casual seduction, painful aspect all coelestiall being
> Not unterrific, hypervalent in a mute fall permanently backwards [...]

Mergers and acquisitions and the compilation of computer code are arresting metaphors for the collection of these songs. Quoting these lines here muffles their valence a little, but it does not detract from their pose. Their after-image has stained me, like a lesion in language. Other readers will pick up other lines. This book deserves to be read cover to cover on one occasion and then again across several more.

SNOW #1

edited by Anthony Barnett and Ian Brinton (Spring 2013)

Reviewed by Lila Matsumoto

SNOW, a literary review edited by Anthony Barnett and Ian Brinton, arrives through my mailbox. It is a beautiful object, with a classic aspect announced by the minimalist cover and confirmed by its uncluttered layout. It's a publication which takes advantage of its black and white aesthetic, and not just by its physical presentation. Just as a successful monochromic photograph allows us to appreciate depth and texture, *SNOW* at its best facilitates an exploration of works within a framework of articulated interests. This places the publication in contrast to those literary magazines that showcase a hyperactive hodge-podge of works without providing entry points for any deep engagement with them.

The strong editorial presence in *SNOW* has its advantages as well as disadvantages. I will touch on the drawbacks first. There is a sense at times that the reader is being inculcated into the editors' private playground, or a cabinet of curiosities: we are invited to partake in a playful reading, but not always on our own terms. Take, for example, the blizzard (apologies) of snow puns on the back cover. The magazine is printed, we are told, on 'Arctic' paper with 'Ice White' covers. The editorial board is the Snowb(o)ard, the logo (by Fiona Allardyce) is referred to as a Snogo, and the book identifier numbers, Icesnow and Issnow. Content-wise, some of the pieces explicitly reference snow, from Sung Hee Jin's two photographs entitled 'Snow' and James Wilson's prose poem 'Something Like You' set in a snowscape. But this kind of theme-keeping feels gratuitous rather than generous. The inclusions of a recipe for pan-fried sea bass by chef Alex von Riebech, an ink drawing of Hélène Cixous at the 1979 Cambridge Poetry Festival by Barnett, and an etching by Gisele Célan-Lestrange (the contributors' page summarizes her as graphic designer and Paul Célan's wife) smack a little of show-and-tell, or a snooty game of cosmopolitan connect-the-dots. The presentation of three sets of music scores for stringed instruments (by Dave Solder, Leroy Jenkins, and India Cooke) recall the modernist belief that all arts may hang (out) together, but I wonder what these scores *do* for those who don't read music, apart from giving some visual interest (perhaps the magazine ought to come with a musical supplement?).

From a positive point of view, *SNOW*'s unifying tendency presents us with a reading structure which allows for a consideration of the magazine as a work of art in its own right, rather than as mere vehicle for miscellaneous works. This was certainly the case with Ian Hamilton Finlay's extraordinary little magazine *Poor.Old.Tired.Horse*. (1962-1967): later issues in particular, where all the poems in an issue are rendered by an artist, produce the effect of a purposefully arranged and curated collection rather than what David Bennett calls a 'montage of fragments.' Snow the white stuff is in this perspective an effective metaphor for *SNOW*: the unique pieces falling into place, subsumed into a larger work striated with compelling connections. But more interesting than the overt theme of snow are the thought-strands which the reader may generate and weave through the publication on their own accord. And the quality of much of the pieces published here (I was excited to see the work of younger contemporary poets whose work I admire such as Rosa van Hensbergen and Juha Virtanen) certainly invites these leitmotifs to emerge and flower.

One thematic strand I enjoyed following was 'craft and intention.' The last piece in *SNOW* is a letter (excerpted) from J. H. Prynne to Barnett; at one point Prynne compares certain desirable poetics to "applied pattern-forms, like those met in oriental or middle-eastern textiles: these often show forces strongly gathered but not at a centre or behind the image-plane" but at the "calm brilliance of a margin (a *useful* hem)." I like the idea of the physical boundary of a work not limiting the project, but calming or composing it. The visibility of a work's crafting – and/or the conditions of its crafting – affords a pause where we may think about intentions, both in terms of the crafter (given the specifications, what could have been done differently?) and the perceiver (what do I want to get out of this piece?).

Peter Riley's poem 'Screensaver,' for example, considers that not often spoken-about blank time with which we are nevertheless intimate: the gradual disappearance of objects off the computer screen after you've told it to shut down. He writes:

> for three or four seconds the landscape is whatever it is, something
> you put there because you believed in it, is there in its entirety, with
> no labels stuck on it, no doors in it, no tableaux waiting to be thrust
> in front of it […]

The business of the day abated, we are left with the starkness of our decisions, embodied in our choice of screensaver. "[B]ecause you believed in it," the speaker says, but decontextualized like this, floating in its ghastly wholeness, the screensaver becomes a tragi-comedic emblem of a life only considered piecemeal.

Alexis Nishihata's 'Cross Stitch' (here presented as photographs of two cross stitched works) is a ludic rendition of the homely cross stitch. But there are no homes, flowers, or cozy expressions here. The images are abstract: geometric shapes and diagonals reminiscent of pixel art, or of the op-art carpet designs of 1990s American bowling alleys. The disjunction suggested by these two pieces (folk art or pop-art?) permits all sorts of visual associations to be made. The monochromic presentation works wonderfully here to evoke the bumpiness and hairiness of the strings tied to the warp and weft. Like the uncanny thrill you get from witnessing the image of a finger accidentally photo-copied on

the margin of a page, the wiry strands of wool, silk, and lurex are tantalizingly surreal. Also appealing is the visibility of the gridded net (onto which the threads are secured), allowing us to perceive, or at least imagine, the artistic choices made and not made by Nishihata.

Denise Riley's work in the issue can also be read fruitfully within the theme of visible crafting. In 'Nine Blindfolded Songs' she writes:

> We think as our lives have led us to think
> Or on the whole, though dusk settles in
> Like ... a metaphor. Though *though*

Here, our language-use is considered as something worn (like clothing, or perhaps in the sense of wearing away) by our unique lived experiences. But in acknowledging the materials of our thinking – i.e. language, especially lyrical language: "dusk settles in" – the speaker asks whether it's not the other way around, that language has already shaped us before we even began to live. Can experience be meaningfully rendered through tried and now tired linguistic materials? "Though *though*," however, interrupts the lyrical pause, and seems to mocks the pathos inherent in the circular misery of representing representation ("Like ... a metaphor").

There are many other reading strategies afforded by *SNOW*, and its simple and clear format enables, in the words of Peter Middleton speaking about successful literary magazines, "poems to generate a conversation among themselves and with other poetries." I am looking forward to reading the next issue.

Definite Articles: Selected Prose 1973 – 2012

by Tom Leonard (etruscan books / Word Power Books, 2013)

Reviewed by Robin Purves

As in the work of William Carlos Williams and Charles Reznikoff, two poets Tom Leonard has paid tribute to in his prose, a major thread running through Leonard's own poetry involves the tactful representation of human subjects harmed by contact with the social world – in their alienation from domestic labour, their alienation from 'approved' uses and abuses of language in the form of state-sanctioned lies and euphemisms, and in similar conditions of stress. The poets' means of representation are all, in their different ways, designed meticulously to be discreet, considerate and accurate, and when these are working at their highest pitch they contrive a mode of poetic expression which can send and guide the reader through an experience of intuitive apprehension, a sense of recognition which

happens in advance of any processed intellection. The relevant schedule is described beautifully in one of Leonard's most important early essays, 'The Locust Tree in Flower; and why it had difficulty flowering in Britain,' which first appeared in 1976 and is collected in the volume under review.

Definite Articles is an indispensable complement to *outside the narrative* (Etruscan books / Word Power Books, 2009), a volume which collected most of the poems Leonard has had published since 1965, though there is one curious overlap between the volumes (the prose work, 'A night at the pictures' appears in both) and it seems odd that the 'The Present Tense' is in *outside the narrative* but not in *Definite Articles*, as it is the most formally inventive work in prose that the author has written so far and the most informative with regard to his own poems. I would also like to have seen room here for the short essay, 'Journeys,' from issue 75 of the *Edinburgh Review*, which recounts the difficulties Leonard had in trying to write about the work of W.S. Graham and contains an insightful set of comparisons and contrasts between Graham and Beckett. Still, there is plenty here to be going on with: I've mentioned 'The Locust Tree in Flower,' but 'On the mass bombing of Iraq and Kuwait,' 'The Common Breath,' and 'On Reclaiming The Local and The Theory of the Magic Thing' are essays which are all absolutely indispensable to an understanding of Leonard's poetry and the extent of his achievement as an artist.

In *nora's place*, which is probably his most celebrated work, the relationship between the poem and its focus, "nora," is settled in the quietly declarative sentence, punctuated by gently hesitant linebreaks, and enunciated in rhythms appropriate to the idiolect of the poet and his subject and, more often, to the mood and activity and thought-pattern designated "nora," as she does what we are told she does.

A related format can be seen at work in William Carlos Williams' most famous poem, known as 'The Red Wheelbarrow.' The occupied, self-sufficient insistence of this brief poem invites us to speculate about what kind of 'being' its objects might possess, beyond what Heidegger would call their 'equipmentality.' The wheelbarrow *of the poem* is a thing which is not, as we read, in the type of use that would specify and diminish it. At this precise moment, it carries nothing, though it can accommodate a freight of indeterminate but weighty signifying potential, a fact mysteriously confirmed by the position it is later accorded, to the side of the white chickens who appear at the end of the poem. The chickens' existence, behind their function as egg producers or curry-in-waiting, seems to be accessible momentarily through displacement of the wheelbarrow's own out-of-service status. Likewise, "nora" thinks/speaks when she has nothing else to do or, more accurately, when she is provoked into considering the conditions of her life by a break in her habituated performance of entirely mundane tasks. It is in this way, on the whole, that Williams and Leonard fashion a poetry capable of discovering and embodying a specific, ethical relation to the existence of the things of the world, through the poem's requirement to

acknowledge and communicate the trace of the substantial presence of those things in the formal characteristics of the verse. But the prosodic resemblance between Williams' poem and parts of *nora's place* is especially interesting, since "nora" spends time and mental effort attempting to differentiate herself from inanimate or non-human objects of the kind that litter the Williams poem. *nora's place* depicts a mind moving inside a limiting set of locations which are characterized by their ordinariness. The central figure is almost wholly defined by her obligations as a wife and a mother whose routine proceeds in a depopulated realm occasionally visited by other members of the family who, not spending all of their time there, are free to experience it as a refuge from the public world of meaningful social interaction.

Keston Sutherland has written an admiring and illuminating commentary[1] on the last 'aspect' of *nora's place*:

> only this particular
> street to walk the length
>
> of, this
> is not a metaphor, only
>
> being suddenly
> walking down a street
>
> in this place, having
> this particular sense
> not of anxiety, but
>
> "the fact of the presence of existence"
>
> * *
>
> each time it happens
> it seems
>
> that all the intervening times
> have disappeared
>
> and this
> is all that nora really is

1. Keston Sutherland, "'this/is not a metaphor": The Possibility of Social Realism in British Poetry,' in *British Social Realism in the Arts since 1940*, David Tucker (Ed.). Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire and New York, 2011: 103-129.

The essay is an excellent historiography of theories of realism and conservative reactions to them, and the commentary on *nora's place* declares it to be "the best – most moving, critical and technically accomplished social realist poetry written in English in the last 60 years." Focussing on Leonard's repeated use of the deictic "this," Sutherland calls it an "emphatically simple word" but defines its simplicity as complex here due to its being "difficult to accept." He also invokes Leonard's hostility towards academics and the academic appropriation of literature to identify "the fact of the presence of existence" as the kind of thing a critic might say but that the poem would not. The diagnosis ends with the judgment that the last two lines of the poem, "and this | is all that nora really is," count as a confession that the poem, in its realist mode, must necessarily be "simplistic" since the reality it attempts to specify "coerces us into simplifying it." It's an extremely persuasive reading in many respects since the formal restrictions inherited from poets such as Reznikoff, in the self-contained vignettes of religious prejudice and industrial injury that constitute his grievously beautiful *Testimony*, obviously dictate the nature of nora's being-in-the-world. It would be difficult to imagine a poem in the WCW/Objectivist tradition that could represent with sufficient force the plight of the contemporary victim of state-sanctioned torture, as he or she would perhaps just be too helplessly available and 'equipmental,' too readily at the disposal of Military Intelligence and the CIA to be sent forth standing beyond the horizon of utility, in the free void or ground of an Objectivist poetic space. The concept of resistance, embodied in the prosody and obdurate presence of Williams' wheelbarrow and defined by J. H. Prynne in an early essay as a principle which makes the fact of an object's or person's existence accessible without impairing their status as an entity, would be untenable when extended to the victim of torture whose status as an entity is being deliberately and systematically impaired. But as a supplementary note to Sutherland's reading, the word "this" has had an operative function for Leonard since his early poem 'The Rainbow Of' and makes reference to Duns Scotus' principle of *haecceitas*, usually translated as 'thisness.' *Haecceitas* or thisness is the quality held to constitute things as individuals, not in discriminating the *kind* of being that they are, nor in the way that they differ from each other, but as a principle that *unites* things in the shared realm of their actual and sheer existence. I would also propose, then, that "the fact of the presence of existence" is, in addition to Sutherland's identification, the sort of thing that anyone might say or, at least, I wouldn't in advance want to rule anyone out as the kind of person *unlikely* to say (or think) it, and the inverted commas operate here partly to shelter and maintain the terms of this quotation in their isolation, anomalousness and fragility. I take this long detour through *nora's place* because the best of Leonard's prose extends the reach of his writing in directions that his

poetry by necessity won't go and it's the access provided by *Definite Articles* which makes my qualifications to Sutherland's commentary possible: 'The Common Breath' insists that:

> The politics of space on the page is a politics of democracy, of transference from world of text as "the" to that of reader-subject as "this." It is the universalization of the author-reader experience [...] towards the structuring of a system of common breath, integer of the universal human.

Reading a claim such as this, of course, you might wonder if this should be the only permissible way to write: that other modes should be forsaken as inherently anti-democratic, divisive, elitist or inauthentic. There's a sense of strain in a text like his review of Tom Raworth's *Windmills in Flames* where the underlying message seems to be: This may look and sound and confuse like some typical 'experimental' linguistic jetsam but don't worry, reader, I guarantee that Tom Raworth is in there somewhere. Praising someone who works a good distance outside the remit of Leonard's own poetics is relatively easy for the poet, though it's sometimes difficult to guess why some writers are permitted to exist there and others are discovered to be unhealthy influences whose minds are not in their language and who are therefore not entitled to a point of view. The principles that animate Leonard's incorruptible and increasingly dissident poetry and prose still await their due description and understanding but *Definite Articles* is a major step towards the day such an event will happen.

Ballads

by Richard Owens (Habenicht Press, 2012)

Reviewed by Orlando Reade

Regret has two faces, red and white, but you don't get to choose which becomes your own. In the courts, prisoners receiving sentences of immediate custody are led through an interior door in the glass-fronted dock directly to the cells, and though there is no opportunity to say farewell to anyone who has come to watch, there is sufficient time for a backward glance, to present a face which cannot speak but will be read by those who remain behind. Faces concern us here. In the history of philosophy, some gladly see faces as texts to be read but a dark crowd disbelieves 'faciality' as much as stars, palms, tea and coffee grains, the intestines of chickens.

Justice takes a rational-theological view of faces, their expression of truth as affect;

in court, contrition is currency and those who resist the demand for affective submission are punished especially severely, at least until the Hollywood biopic, where radical refusal is transformed into a dramatic pose: *la historia me absolverà*. In this respect juridical process has been the avant-garde of the domination of life by economics. In the last half century this has been recognised and theorised: affect is captured (and reproduced) by the domain of labour, for those whose life is submitted and those who are excluded by it, i.e. everyone.

Interpretation often sees a text as a face, assuming that somewhere lies a stable and present persona. This assumption is necessary for interpretation to have a proper subject for its diagnosis: for a text to exhibit signs of pathology, the symptoms must belong to *someone's* body. Some readers see the object of reading (and then of writing too) as the description of symptoms which identify a general body. Is the number of times I listened to Justin Bieber's 'U smile' in 2010 a reliable metric of my own personal unhappiness, or the number of hits the song has on Youtube an index of my share in a general unhappiness? It would surely be a mistake to suggest that every Belieber is an identical symptom, but this, no less than every mania since Liszt's 1841 European tour, is pronounced a form of pathology of society.

The lyrics of certain songs currently dominating the market exhibit the structure of addiction: e.g. the unfulfillable promise which opens onto a spectrum of potential harm. Justin Bieber sings "U smile; I smile," what is really meant? The grammatical symmetry offers an image of narcissistic similarity, "translating" the love between the singer and his love-object to a market-place of individual listeners. Bieber's songs 'Never Let You Go,' 'As Long As You Love Me' and 'Boyfriend' formulate their promises as offers of perfect containment ("If I was your boyfriend, never let you go"), carefully maintained within the subjunctive tense and outside of culpable reality, allowing the listener to sustain the phantasy that he or she is the singer's real and singular love object.

The formal reliability of these songs – their pasteurised rhythms, managed tonal variation, exacting rhyme sequences and consistent persona – manage the extremism of this phantasy with a neo-classical contrapposto, as cold as statuary and dramatic as the lines running through the illiac crest of a discus-thrower. "As long as you love me, we could be homeless, we could be starving, we could be broke." The absolute heartlessness of this romantic posturing is inherited from the courtly tradition of love sickness: the man becomes weak in body and mind at the first sight of a woman who becomes his beloved, pain becomes love's best credential in the ensuing seduction. The same sickness is formulated in JLS, 'Beat Again,' as a wishful thinking: "If I died, would you come to my funeral, would you cry?"

Behind the conventional sickness lies a real tendency to pervert the representation of love; see, for example, the perfect hypocrisy of the formulas ventriloquised by One Direction, breast-milk for fragile egos: "You don't know you're beautiful, that's what makes

you beautiful." The managed impersonality allows the listener to consume the song, its affective signals communicated effectively across the social synapse, as if it were a personal message written only for him or her: "I know they love me, even though they don't know me." The tendrils connecting love and knowledge have been broken; "you" could be anyone, the addressee identified by the desire to be addressed.

Bieber – or his puppet-masters, managing our heartstrings – is an exponent of a popular transcendentalism which makes the ideality of an object triumph over its material origin and destination. Insofar as these songs imagine relations which proceed from ideality, they teach us to desire objects which may never enter reality, God's image (in the words of Nicholas de Cusa, "the face of faces") made entirely from *AdobePhotoshop*. The object relations constructed are as indifferent to the actual lives of its listeners as the conditions of production which market these bodies as the temporary embodiments of beauty and wealth are violent, i.e. One Direction's 'Little Things': "You still have to squeeze into your jeans but you're perfect to me." Between the perfection of the singer's image and my own disappointing materiality a gross inequality is overcome by the promise of unqualified love, which he teaches me I do not deserve but nevertheless want all the more keenly.

Texts need not present a legible face but always somehow involve bodies. For some readers these become symptoms of a body which is the exemplary bearer of harm *for* society in general, the poet's body pecked by the vultures of the world. The work of writing may be a form of care, demonstrated exemplarily (or badly) towards objects already really existing in the world. Songs may recognise the promises they make, and urge us to refuse their promises. Listen to Nina Simone sing 'Feelings' at the Montreux Jazz Festival in 1976: she takes the song apart piece by piece, allowing her disgust at the song's mechanical production of affect to surface ("I do not believe the conditions that produced a situation that demanded a song like that..."). Then she puts it back together, finishing it as it was and was not intended, with a performance of such sentimental and satiric intensity that the listener simultaneously can neither accept the song's affective demands nor resist them. This performance illuminates the peculiar capacity of songs to create and intensify needs. Need is not an immanent property of a song's structure but a relation they promise to their consumer; he who damages you is not addictive, only your love for him. It is possible to force this attraction to the point of crisis, until its dangerous power is most intensely felt and its contradictions are made critically manifest. When the singer promises love, what he maybe means is *I bequeath you my diseases*.

*

The occasion for these thoughts is a new book of poems by Richard Owens, published last year in Buffalo, New York, printed by David Hawdabnik for Habenicht Press. *Ballads* presents one hundred and three ballads, enclosed in an elegant black letter-pressed cover. The text appears to have been composed using fragmentary phrases and archaic words collected from a variety of sources and written out in jagged lines. A taxonomy of these ballads, whose titles are inherited from English and American folk songs, escapes the capacity of this review. Here a single ballad is discussed, chosen for that quality which makes me want to read it repeatedly.

The titles in *Ballads* appear at a generic distance from the texts they name, announcing the writing's relation to a history of folk culture and its appropriation as pop music. 'Cocaine Blues' names a genealogy of cautionary tales: the regrets of fictional and long-dead men and women, the affective, community-building work of the blues explained away by the substance of addiction. Unlike an antiquarian, who conserves the idea of the past in order to maintain or improve the exchange value of its objects, the poet works with tradition in the present. In 'Working Notes on Ballad Practice,' the prose piece which concludes *Ballads*, the review is an act which has a body in the present: respect is called for, "in the interest of fresh light – of reviewing what the eyes have already seen." In 'Cocaine Blues,' regret appears as a form of respect, the constant work of knowing the past.

Johnny Cash's 'Cocaine Blues' appears on the recordings from his 1968 performance at the State Prison in Folsom, California. In that document the jaunty syncopated rhythms and tightly rhymed lines seem to rouse the inmates into howling and applause which several times interrupts the song. The song tells of a man who, under the influence of cocaine, murders his lover, is hunted down and executed for his crime. In the prison recordings, howls of exceptional magnitude follow the line: "I can't forget the day I shot that bad bitch down." Similar howls greet the last line: "Lay off that whiskey and let that cocaine be." The song appears to produce pleasure both at the thought of violence against a woman and pleasure at the economy with which the moral is delivered. Listeners to the recorded version may take satisfaction at the noise of that authentic captive audience, who may be silenced or paused on your hi-fi like that old-fashioned paradise (described by D.P. Walker) where "the happiness of the blessèd consists in contemplating the torments of the damned."

Woody Guthrie's 'Cocaine Blues' adopts a softer tone, it doesn't present the rhetorical face of contrition (as demanded by, say, a judge or an angry lover) but sings plain regret which is not necessarily *for* anyone else. Regret describes a particular relation to the past, an arena within which the power to correct or unmake bad decisions, is irrevocably past. In the 'Cocaine Blues' of Townes Van Zandt this relation is expressed as a form of geographic alienation: the past is distant as another country. The social figure of regret is the prisoner, who cannot return home while the consequences of a bad decision constrain him or her to a constant relation to the irrevocable past. This relation is elongated into nostalgia in the

soft rock adaptations of Eric Clapton and J. J. Cale, whose easeful laments make dangers appear to vanish, an illusion for privileged men.

The antidote to these songs, which present the seduction of such easy pleasures without the accompanying damage, is found in a poem by John Wieners, 'Cocaine.' In the easy cadences of that poem, which seem to flow across the breaks in its syntax, the relation between pleasure and harm which described the tradition of Cocaine Blues finds its most perfect expression. "For I have seen love | and his face is choice Heart of Hearts," it begins. There is, as one early reader noticed in Shakespeare's poetry, "much ado with red and white"; here what is red is the remembered moment of desire, the present is blank as a page. In my heart of hearts, proverbially my most intimate place, I have chosen once and choice is now exhausted. Love in its first flush had all the appearance of choice; later, with regret, I regard it as the apparition of what is no longer available to me. The house always wins.

The second verse speaks of "despair that the Face has ceased to stare | at me with the Rose of the world | but lies furled." Red and white appear again, furled like the colours of a flag, and perhaps also a penis which is no longer erect, the *deus absconditus* of departed desire. Shakespeare knew that each of his sugared sonnets once published would present a face to the world, that each face, "damask'd, red and white," views a private sorrow; each window presented like the variegated leaves of cut flowers to any paying reader. "You" could be anyone in the market-place. These poems are diagrams for confusion of love and addiction, reading them a critical distinction between care and dependency may begin to emerge.

We have been led to believe that the same market-place has experienced unprecedented growth in the last few decades, that the numbers of poems written and published has outrageously exploded like the head of a tulip. It is possible that our poems have a pathological element where they reflect the processes and proportions of commodity production and consumption; what we love harms us, and others. For the American conceptual writer Vanessa Place, the conventional first-person subject of the lyric poem is the subject *par excellence* of a pernicious form of contemporary capitalism. Place and other conceptualists believe it is now impossible to write a poem using the 'I' which does not reinforce contemporary capitalism's foundations (the most exhilarating advice they can imagine is *don't write at all*).

Recent debates around the concept and practice of writing have focused their taxonomies around the absence of qualities such as charm, interest, affect and resistance in Conceptual Poetry; Owens' research in and feeling for the poetic tradition and its attendant ideas of craft, exposes the well-publicised practices of Conceptualism as poor in care. One of Place's performances addresses individuals in her audience with a single repeated word – "you" – a crude parody of the belief that a text cares for its audience (as if every time Justin Bieber sings "you" we don't already know that care is no certain property of lyrical address).

In this light the *Ballads*, collected from a life of reading and work, call to be read closely and repay this expense of attention with the significance they offer lived experience. These poems are not mere mirrors to the faces we are forced to be for the world, the self that sells itself, offering a brief narcissistic thrill of recognition, they are carefully made objects which trouble the borders of our selves; this writing is not a form of affective labour which oils the machines of profit, it is the work of social necessity, which aims to sustain life rather than gobbling it up.

*

COCAINE BLUES

down just about midnight
all the angels
rapt—what—to fetch out

thrilled in skinned brass
calling him home
built on edge—still at ease

up with his old sweetheart
& I ran laughing
home before the landlord

she knew—how to move
ain't never seen her
hustle that same run twice

The subject positions in 'Cocaine Blues' shift like masked faces at a march. The first two verses speak to what appears to be a present moment ("just about midnight") or, at least, to events which are not yet past; the whole scene moves towards the brink of pastness. The angels visit, are "rapt," and "thrilled in skinned brass"; these phrases linger between the status of adjective and verb, subject and predicate. Those "calling him home" teeter, in the progressive tense, between present and past – we cannot be sure where or when we are. The phrase "still at ease" illuminates this uncertainty, as a moment where the stillness of the present slips into the past of the irrevocable decision.

The last two verses move definitively into a past which is populated, not by regret, but memories of tricks played on a landlord and laughter, memories of a woman: "she knew—how to move." The em-dash which elides the space between these two phrases, connects the rhyme words "knew" and "move," is unique in this poem, whose every other move has been a break in the semantic flow. Here the break does not abolish but fulfils the grammatical promise of the first two words. This moment of intense ease appears as the lines arterially converge on the reconciliation we expect at the end of the poem. The next two lines are further commentary on the woman, never known to "hustle the same run twice." This after-thought comes emptied of affect (unlike the bitter force in Johnny Cash's song against the "bad bitch" who dared to slow *him* down). Here thought is reduced to a motion between images, as if reviewing life for the last time. This ease becomes a freedom from affect and the constraints of real life, the freedom enjoyed by a captive whose angels are "calling him home."

The craft of these lines militates against an antiquarianism in poetry for which tradition is not a body but a wax-work dummy. We inherit these forms, but it would be impossible to write a ballad today which presents a consistent and stable persona; this is to say, where those ballads are written, the breaks have been suppressed. The writing of these ballads involves a peculiar kind of regretfulness, which constructs the past not as a mental prison from which to lament irrevocable decisions but a practice in which that which is broken may be taken up and thought through. We live our constraints and intensify their damage when we are unable to recognise them or when we wish to suspend this recognition. Such a suspension is always temporary, pleasurable as long as harm is delayed – a moment of inattention is bliss. If I have enjoyed this same ease, failing to recognise the breaks, this is visible to me in the daylight of review. In these breaks a language emerges with which to find in constraint the possibility of better care.

alphabetise

by Carol Watts (Intercapillary Editions, 2010)

Reviewed by David Spittle

Carol Watts has several chapbooks to her name (*brass*, *running, when blue light falls* and *this is red*), two collections with Reality Street (*Occasionals* and *Wrack*), has been anthologised in *The Reality Street Book of Sonnets* and *Infinite Difference: Other Poetries by UK Women Poets*, in addition to being co-director of Birkbeck Contemporary Poetics Research Centre. Her book, *alphabetise*, was first exhibited as part of the Bury Text Festival ('Different Alphabets') in 2005. Described by Intercapillary Editions on their website as a "prose poem chronicle," this hardback version of Carol Watts' project was published in 2010.

The hardcover edition (21.6cm wide × 27.9cm tall) reproduces the original handwritten notebook, placing a photograph of the open book on each large glossy page. The photographed open notebook (complete with dates, 2004-5) has its original handwritten entry on one side and on the other a pasted box of typed text, in most cases reproducing the handwriting word for word. In addition to simply being a typographical accompaniment, each box of printed text is also introduced by a word and its dictionary definition. The words appear in alphabetical order, from "astray" to "zygomorphic." The resultant book resembles a sometimes cryptic, sometimes humorous and personal, diary. It is a diary that is prompted by, and in sideways dialogue with, Watts' own esoteric word hunt and its acrostic organization.

The first thing to note – and perhaps get out the way – is the disappointing nature of its presentation. While the tension between the original notebook, as an organic and fondly scuffed artefact, and the glossy whiteness of the Intercapillary Edition invites an interesting juxtaposition, it has the unfortunate result of making the book seem depressingly amateurish. The front cover crops a photo of the original notebook's front cover, a cross-hatched fabric of characterful texture that only serves to enhance the painfully anonymous blank white that surrounds it. While the dynamic between personal creativity and its eventual published avatar could induce interesting interpretations, it falls short of capitalizing on that split aesthetic and instead feels uncomfortably clumsy. The combination of the book's hardcover and its size evokes an object somewhere between a cheap children's book and a corporate car manual, neither of which elaborate favourably on the text's potential. As the original notebook, its personal scrawling of dates and Watts' handwriting all seem integral to the nature of this piece, it makes sense to include reproductions, however, the glossy and crude framing of these reproductions detracts from the reading experience and ultimately does a disservice to *alphabetise*.

To explore the discursive area between poetry, the text in its content and form, and its physical platform (be it book, gallery, online etc.) raises a dichotomy between ownership and production in service to unthinking, aesthetic pleasure – and the politicized implications of the book as commodity. Is a book's appearance, considered as a commodified artifice of texture, shape, colour and size, unfairly misrepresented when we consider that small presses are 'labours of love' – or should this be as closely scrutinized as the text itself, and if so, in what way? Many collections can be genuinely beautiful objects (I'm sure there are many out there, like me, who have idly ordered something on Amazon only to be disproportionately excited by how *big* or *shiny* said book turns out to be … wriggling in the guilty grime of my own Magpie materialism). To what extent should a *consumer* of poetry be on guard when facing naturalized 'beauty' (the thickness of page, the print etc.)

as an apolitical result of literary production? A large part of me feels it would be a pedantic masochism to deny the pleasurable kinship with aesthetics, as unlike a car production line (thinking here of Oppen's poem, referenced by William Rowe in his recent essay in *Zone*: 'Nothing can equal in polish and obscured | Origin that dark instrument | A car') poetry – surely even in production – strives for an artistic presentation to support the art of the text inside. I feel there are certainly many large presses whose brand and formatting could all be subjected to critique (and I'm sure have been) however on the level of most 'experimental' poetry in Britain, it's enough to strive towards circulation – let alone impractically and perpetually dissect implications of presentation or production and our reception of such features. And yet I found myself doing just that with *alphabetise*. Internally scolding my knee-jerk visual judgment of its 'glossy children's annual meets corporate car manual,' I felt sure my response was painfully indicative of a certain expectation from publications – a desire for (nay a fetish) for the superficial casing. That said, the layout, which obviously aims to prioritize a dialogue between the original notebook and this publication does feel problematic. Mainly because the consideration of book production and consumption does, for the most part, feel tangential from the purpose and drive of this particular prose poem. It therefore seems as if the book's presentation sadly intrudes upon and distracts from the merits and intrigue of Watts' poetry.

The first entry, dated '27 November' and with the word '***astray***' is representative of the more interesting elements that arise in *alphabetise*:

> It begins. C tells me that on concluding lunch with her colleague at a reputable restaurant on the Strand she had walked purposefully towards the entrance only to hear his footsteps rushing up behind her and feel his hands pulling her back by her shoulders, as if saving her from an accident. She had been striding into a mirror. And the curious detail: she had not seen herself advancing. I wander if roaming always demands such fatal excision.
>
> She smiles at her daughter's readiness to journey.

The writing breezes between moments of portent and abstract reference amidst personal and humdrum recollection. The opening of "It begins" feels receptive to both an interpretation of ominous and inescapable propulsion – the alphabet has started, we are already "astray" – and yet, to be then followed by "C tells me" creates a bathos which characterizes the opening as mock dramatic. The tone is casual and mundane ("concluding lunch with

her") and yet faintly edged with a formality that jars the confessional diary format. Somehow the adjectives "reputable" and "purposefully" feel oddly and consciously formal, as if in mirrored seriousness to the authoritative rhetoric of the dictionary:

> ***astray*** adj. (postpositive), adv. 1. Out of the correct path or direction 2. Out of the right, good, or expected way; into error. [C13: from Old French *estraie* roaming, from *estraier* to STRAY]

As the paragraph follows her "purposeful" steps we are told she was about to collide into a mirror, into which "she had not seen herself advancing." Not only does this effortlessly shift the introductory tone from a (although slightly unsettled) tone of realism into an existential image, but also, in the context of linguistic definition, feels evocative of a funhouse, *en abyme* effect. A wandering in and out of words that point to other words, back and forth, both reflecting and assuming transparency. This unreliable play of image is revisited later: "He asks her why the ceiling is not a true reflection of the floor." The family detail that arrives at the end ("daughter's readiness") is demonstrative of Watts' frequent tendency to end on an unresolved twist, as if like a dictionary definition, one word (or piece of the poem) leans on, or leads to, another; never wholly present or finished.

We encounter visits to museums, "the biggest ball of string in the world," "Elfriede Jelenek and her Nobel prize," a shark killed by a penknife, birthday celebrations, displays of second-hand books and avian statistics … amongst other cobbled observations, cryptic events and visionary glimpses. The entries range from gentle contemplation and prosaic plainness to flashes of poetic urgency:

> Suddenly there is danger in randomness. And delight, delivery, guilt. People carry on. What is it that ties you to the flinch of a city? Bones and sinews, as if scar tissue has built you a forest. Finding yourself damaged or saved. Sheared. Loved in number.
> H says: *but I am only nine. It is too short.*

As this extract – from Y, "***yaw***: *vb.* 1. (of an aircraft, missile, etc.) to turn about its vertical axis" – suggests, often the definitions tip into an anxiety or a feeling of risk. Moments that burst through or derail the anecdotal and banal with confusion or emptiness that threatens to puncture certainty. To temper that concern, elsewhere the peripatetic determination for definition, to keep going, to find out, is beautifully and plainly suggested: "She walked until

her words could be understood." This collection rewards multiple re-readings and manages to beguile and entertain while also intimating unnerving absences. I do feel it deserves a different presentation than this hardcover edition, one that can fully convey the poem's strangely accessible alphabetic puzzle without a cumbersome distraction of formatting. It is also, reductively, an entertainingly obscure way to discover entertainingly obscure words, my particular favourite being:

> **ullage:** *n.* 1. The volume by which a liquid container
> falls short of being full.

Reckitt's Blue

by John Wilkinson (Seagull Books, 2012)

Reviewed by Josh Stanley

"Every single single singled out,
one on one."

This is an ecstatic book of not only *unfree* verse, as Simon Jarvis called the verse of Wilkinson's 'The Speaking Twins,' but of an accumulated verse and a torn up and reconstituted verse, producing a poetry that in its very made-ness works at the face of the privilege and acts of appropriation that are the tarmac on which our capitalist world is forever parked.

When I read the title sequence of *Reckitt's Blue* (pp. 61-92), I was drawn to care about sets of threefold repetition within single lines in the first few pages:

> We are open, open, we are open. (p. 63)
>
> Let cancel cancel cancel passage, (p. 65)
>
> Soul gathers, more more more abruptness (p. 68)
>
> I am caught, I am snatched, I am snapped, spoken. (p. 68)
>
> I swipe I swipe I swipe. (p. 69)

Wilkinson's heavily wrought and distorted syntax demands slow reading; his attention to echoes and harmonies, to the rise and fall of stress within and across his lines of verse

demands from the reader an attempt to find a melody (a melody from my memories, from somewhere in the back of my head) that does justice to his attention. When I read the first threefold repetition, "We are open, open, we are open," I found myself performing a rising cadence, with the highest pitch and volume sounding out on the "ope" of "open," then falling off on "en," then a pause, then the highpoint "ope" repeated or remembered, then falling off on "en," then the whole repeated or remembered, rising from the pronoun and verb of being to the quality of being, "ope" then falling off again. When I read the next, "cancel cancel cancel," the unvoiced plosive "c" and nasal "an" sounded out three times as a block on the music "Let" was about to start, still heard through these blocks in the fall to "cel," a whispering back of the "l" of "Let," before "passage," through the "a" assonance, finished off what "can" had begun. That is to say, my performance of "cancel" felt like a failed mimic of the act of cancelling: the performance of cancelling a poetic line or sound-set kept on failing and had to be repeated until the match of performance with word-meaning was given up on. Repeating the long, stressed, monosyllabic "more" felt like a simpler experience of performative mimicry: each time I said the word I was taking up more time, more thought, more into the sound, accumulating. I felt no such thing in any of these as the pathos of repetition. I felt no irony. Performance time passes in each repetition, but not grammatical time.

Things change in "I am caught, I am snatched, I am snapped, spoken" as the varied verbs and the variation of syntax in the phrase "spoken" (with the subject and verb of being "I am" carried over from one of the other three phrases or assumed as comprehensible without repetition) produce a grammatical progression. Sympathy is summoned for this "I" but the doubleness of "spoken" troubles this. What if "spoken" is the only thing that has happened to the "I," presented as experiences of being "caught," "snatched" and "snapped"? What if the pathos of private experience is stolen from elsewhere – so that it bears the weight of being "caught," "snatched" and "snapped" because these things happened to other bodies and other people? This "I" seems to be constituted out of the experiences of a natural "she" in the sequence, a figure for what the tourist imagines as a tradition of interacting with nature/natural life, now disrupted:

> Before this 'I' took she floated lazily,
> Land lay ridged in waxberries and heather. Striped
> Bass was good, sea sucking shingle, all good,
> Acting as she used to. She unpacked.
> Huffed and puffed but then caught the breeze.

(p. 77)

Even this "she" seems to have been turned into a tourist, infected and now unpacking, as the sequence deals with a tour of Papua New Guinea, the consumption of 'primitive' culture and the accumulation of artefacts such as canoes and a headdress made from cassowary feathers. If the "I" is merely a means of soliciting sympathy through the performance of the suffering of others, the half-rhyme of "snapped" and "snatched" suggests a rhyme for "spoken" in "broken": not what "I" went through, but what has happened to its performance. This "I" preys on the passivity of experience and sticks them in its mouth: "I gurgled me. Beset thus by the senses apt to take" (p. 79).

The performance of private experience is premised on theft from a kind of common experience, a world in which subjectivity and private property have not been fully constituted: "I swipe I swipe I swipe" merely describes an action three times that this "I" carries out again and again. Again, there is grammatical progression, as each "swipe" is a distinctly described act: these three stand for many more. Each is distinct, added on top of the other, with no new content. The increase in sense, the sheer repetition of words, runs on credit as a credit card is swiped: credit that a new meaning could have been added, credit that a whole new set of values and referents could have been created elsewhere, off-page. The bank of private experience grows.

I have described these five instances of threefold repetition within a single line so slowly because after five instances in the first seven poems of the sequence, this technique disappears from "Reckitt's Blue" only to occur once more, near the end of the sequence. When this technique does reoccur, it is in the form of a *correction* of the first instance, "We are open, open, we are open." The gap before the second "open" is taken out and so are the commas. To get the full effect, I want to quote both of these in a fuller context:

> Tense nets gather These were the drafts,
> Turmoiling, these block
>
> In the compelled unities
> Reproduced in those of that fog,
>
> We are open, open, we are open. Rostrum
> Greedily furrows oar drags,
>
> (p. 63)

> Whatever is released , it goes viral
> In the most flail,
>
> We are open we are open we are open, stars squawk,
> We are the truth, the light.
>
> Without forgetfulness these crowd the present cohort,
> Ocean stops in salt starry ridges.
>
> (p. 84)

We can read the first version as one of "the drafts," not yet finished, with the gap before "open" not yet filled in. It is an instance of a modernist fragment, to which all the gaps refer, and which an authorial voice is trying (but failing) to make cohere: "In the compelled unities." But the fragment is that which is prior, earlier: it comes before the finished work and thus bears the trace of the archaic, the imperfect and unbeautified. But the poem really offers multiple representations of some absent *real version*, to which the damages of gaps and repeated or distorted phrases have not yet been done, increasing the value of the representations on the basis that they are proxies for some heap of poetic intentions that is somehow able to be glimpsed through the damage. There is a promise of a not-yet-available but definitely immense return that raises the price of the stock.

The fragments are on the one hand scooped up like fish by the "net," as the act of verse construction is compared to a piece of basic hunting technology; on the other hand, the poet is a bird whose beak (rostrum) greedily furrows in the water. Birds are a central figure in the book for art makers and culture workers, pushing a little beyond the figuring of birds as lyric poets: here, lyric or aesthetic flight is not only connected with animal violence but also with servitude. In 'The Beacons' the birds are not wild, but tamed "emissaries" for the "tribunes" of wealth and power (p. 16). Then the net comes into focus and the representation of modernist practice is paralleled with the artefacts and practices of the indigenous cultures of Papua New Guinea: the "oar" that "drags" in the water, creating ripples like the "rostrum" does when it "greedily furrows," is one of the artefacts "sold openly" with a "canoe" later in the sequence (p. 86). That which is accumulated is represented as a model for the act of accumulation. Accumulation infects the accumulated.

In the reprise, completed and with the gap filled in (though with other gaps lurking nearby), we hear the self-celebration of the "stars," bird-like in their "squawks" and messianic in their claim that they are "the truth, the light," the second and third parts of Jesus' threefold identity: "I am the way, the truth and the light." They do not say they are "the

way," but perhaps "we are open we are open we are open" is a claim to being an open way for travelling to the good life, as well as a claim to ready availability for customers, lack of strict values and clarity. The successful market is that which positions itself as undemanding, easy to use, simple and understandable: it is "the truth" and it is "light." The birdy "stars" are celebrity art makers or culture workers represented as the natural burning centers amidst the vast abyss of human inadequacy and alienation: they don't look like accumulators, like the amoral modernist fragmenter, but release their works freely. When their works accumulate fame and go "viral," there is no moral judgment on the behaviour of the "stars." The public made it viral, consumed it, helped it sell: the "stars" were merely "open," and the other birds weren't. "Whatever is released," inevitably "it goes viral," succeeds. Now this gap is potentially not fragmentation, incompletion, but a pause or hesitation. The threefold repetition is not the interruption or manipulation of the poet, but the quoted voice of the "stars," excitedly repeating their claim to openness and trying to be heard by as many of the people in the street or on the internet as possible.

Wilkinson has these dissolved in contradiction: the fragment maker who accumulates the objects and experiences of all others, understands all others as himself or herself; and the Christ-like birdy stars who do no wrong and believe they make the only real and honest works, open to the world, which others will naturally understand themselves through. Is there a way out for the art maker, the "trumpet-blower" and "own trumpet-blower," situated at "the roundabout" (p. 93)? Perhaps that isn't an interesting question. But this roundabout is an intense feeling, it haunts like a passion, of emptiness and fullness, breaks down. The contradiction throws out a subjectivity on a luxury cruise tour that speaks out over four pages in unfragmented lines arranged in seven-line stanzas. The first of these looks like this:

> It is the closed thing I want that it stay closed,
> That flightless feathers fail they stay furled.
> Nor want fitfully drive magnetic skirl
> On polished surfaces home like a beacon.
> Snap then the embrace and fling the dust
> Of affection that it convolute in lesions
> Kaleidoscopically opening, now would I drop.
>
> (p. 88)

The subject that drops in is characterized by refusing a feared change, willing to negate itself and "drop." This subject wants the indigenous culture he or she can buy to remain "closed," not "open," to be left uncorrupted by a modernity that seems to produce almost

irreversible effects. This subject will make this "want" permanent, not fitful, writing home in protest against the kaleidoscopic opening up of new markets that capitalism demands.

There is a tempting show of the musical logic of fixity in the second line. A falling rhythm with the first three stressed syllables starting with "f" is interrupted by two other potential stresses, chained together as unfree rhymes, unfree to enter into tension because there is no space, time or words between them, and what they express is fixity: "they stay." "Stay" is even a non-rhyme with itself, also in penultimate syllable position in the line above. Then back to the "f" words and the wish for what will remain the state of these feathers: "furled." But there is real stupidity here, as this wish returns and returns. The birds being described are not figures for indigenous culture workers: they are real flightless birds, cassowaries, whose feathers are used in ritual practice. Whether they remain flightless has little to do with human wishes, tourism or the expansion of markets. They evolved and may evolve. The real nature, on which the bird/flight metaphor for culture is based, slaps the subject in the face.

What I admire in this poetry is not the lessons it teaches, but the way it can register in sound and song the seductions of late capitalism, currently called neoliberalism, including the oppositions to late capitalism that we are seduced into as part of its full structure. The 2008 financial crash reverberates through the book's "cash cows," bled dry in the recession. Memories, snatches of song from my youth and from much of the poetry I've read in my life and even from earlier in the book, are accumulated and ramped (I came across this word in Wilkinson's phrase "ramp them" (p. 16). To ramp means to drive up the price of stock in order to gain a financial advantage). Privacy and subjective experience are themselves accumulated in poems like 'At a Loss.' Every accumulation promises a way out, but none is forthcoming. We are but returned to the accumulative drive. "Near close enough."

A brief word on influence: I cannot help thinking that the stunning title sequence draws some of its energy from J. H. Prynne's *Field Notes: 'The Solitary Reaper' and Others* (Cambridge: no publisher, 2007), about Wordsworth's encounter with a singing highland girl who is "reaping and singing" in 'The Solitary Reaper,' and also from Prynne's own versions of Wordsworthian encounters with indigenous cultures. For instance, Prynne wrote in 'As It Were, An Attendant,' published in *The White Stones*:

> I see at once the faces who have
> unsuccessfully dogged my path—the procession
> headed by the old woman who walks & does other
> things
> maybe she
> sings, this is
> her song:

Blackie, she
calls (her cat free
of sparks), she
treads with her
face, the grave
carried away
she has stringy hair
water flows at her feet
it is often dark there
nor quick nor neat nor

This is the Wordsworthian encounter reduced to the banality of Eliotic domestic irony – then turned inside out. Wilkinson's encounter looks like this:

That designing devil, she who
Shouldering her load, pounds sago
Day in day out, sings a closed
But too restive song , white
Shod above breakers, nonetheless a
Tutelary spirit filling bark beaten for a sail.

She sings not while reaping, like the highland girl, but while pounding "sago," a staple starch food in Papua New Guinea, extracted from palm stems.

In *Field Notes*, Prynne argues that, by comparison with the highland young woman's solitude, poverty and likely lack of knowledge of the English language, Wordsworth feelingly knows his own privilege as part of (or close to) the social order of literate and wealthy English speakers, who control "agrarian improvement" and are responsible for the de-skilling of work and the depression of older labor communities that are the direct causes of this woman's solitude. Wordsworth's knowledge of his own relative privilege and the disadvantages of this woman must, Prynne says, be suspended "if an uninflected human truth is to be discovered and acknowledged; virtually all the evidence of circumstance must be sacrificed, just as the consequent over-determination of subject-consciousness, which would seem inevitable, must also be defeated"(*Field Notes*, p. 43). For Prynne, the determinations of subject-consciousness itself must be defeated in an experience of mortification and kept hidden (sustaining which deceit mortifies further), not to reveal the equality of all individual subjects, but to reveal a truth of human community not yet realized, that opens to the individual "a path of return to the human and everyday social world which is lit up with trust and love and non-trivial gratitude" (p. 70). Knowledge of social conditions must

be suspended or hidden to produce a hard to have knowledge of community (knowledge of a usually unavailable experience): the difficult task of the Romantic imagination is to also preserve this knowledge of social conditions, as the social conditions that harm, disadvantage, alienate humans are what make human community unavailable. In the final poems of *The White Stones* and the book that followed, *Brass*, Prynne was trying to satirize the thin ironies and domestic concerns that blocked off the knowledge of global damage, especially that wrought by imperialism – attacking the thin universalism that ignorance or hiding of actual irreversible damage makes possible. Wilkinson's workspace is similar to that of the Romantic imagination, but it is one constructed by the specific economic condition post-2008 and requiring highly developed tools of accumulation and value raising.

Enough. This is, I believe, the most yearning and urgent book of new poems that Wilkinson has published for a decade: the yearning and the urgency reside in the stockpiles of passion and ethical confusion.

20.07.13

Inebriate Debris

by Rosa Van Hensbergen (Punch Press, 2011)

Reviewed by Samantha Walton

Inebriate Debris is the dust of explosions, perhaps, or a business site smiling through an endless redevelopment, or domestic nooks and corners uncared for and unswept. Pardon Our Dust! – this chapbook does *not* say. The inebriation of Van Hensbergen's debris comes across in the titles of the first two fragment poems, which are dryly and dutifully numbered, sifted and then fired out in pellets ('Thirteen Sifted' / 'Twenty Pellets' they're called). Violence lurks in these titles (pellets / bullets), composed of words that more obviously pertain to trophic processes by which nature becomes nutrition: the balls of mouse bone and hair coughed up by owls; the aeration of flour prior to baking.

Van Hensbergen's debris, however, will not be made to function. Drunk and wanton, the debris revels in its resistance to being turned to profit or purposeful activity. From raw food stuff to disgorged pellet, the poems disguise or negate the moment when they are activated as useful nutrition. There is no 'Sixteen Consumed' lurking between the two. Poised between potential and cessation, the first poem, 'Thirteen Sifted' is composed of fragments which describe pasts and presents of shifting and potential solidarities. The tetchy imperative of the opening line ("Hear this for bristles: des bruits d'explosions ont été entendus à plusieurs reprises") asks – perhaps – that instead of clearing things up we, the

addressed, might attend to the sounds, repeated and shocking, of bombs. Stuff intervenes. This section is written in French, I need to wait for Google to translate it. Now I'm on the internet and distracted. I fail to listen. The next fragment offers the kind of metaphor a Creative Writing instructor would delight in – "We blanched like asparagus." Flimsy and unexpectedly obvious, the "We" we become is a joke: frightened, white and usually out of season. There's a potential to be confused by the wordplay here, I wonder how much I understand with my cafe French? There are lines that simply cannot be about broccoli. Still, these lines are poised, as Google Translate tells me, on the brink of war, but in various ways the message fails to get through. Communication is 'gurgled'; the message telling us to *attend to* the message is followed by up fragments of recrimination and silence. "We mute desires to mime distractions," Van Hensbergen states, and in doing so 'we' participate in the mimicry of the distractions that keep us unactivated and unfulfilled. We're not even convinced by our own evasions.

Unlike 'Thirteen Sifted,' with its "telepathy" and its metaphysical mind that has "bypassed" Cartesianism, 'Twenty Pellets' is more firmly located in a body / bodies. Everything begins with a pause, as the speaker holds the "Phlegmatic anima" in its "eye's reach." Humoural terminology firmly locates the poem in an antiquated scientific and cultural context. The body undergoes violence, dissection perhaps, under the watchful eye of a detached medical gaze. The power of the doctor slips effortlessly into that of the police as the eye of the speaker/victim is metaphorically and/or literally incapacitated ("It's a vitreous slope | Sliced over again, | Only this time | Scalpels tumble | To truncheons – tin, silver, | Beaten in"). The violence of a medical authority which would destroy its patients' sight simply to stop them returning the gaze segues effortlessly into the violence of the state and pre-/proto-capitalist mercantilism. In such a state, the speaker imagines a past where a loved one's name was not indistinguishable from a commodity (there's word play about 'silver' and the lover's name, 'Silva,' and in a collection so concerned with hearing and mishearing this is extra relevant). In order to imagine a state in which Silva means just Silva, where love is still possible ("I love you | Or rather would, | If time rolled backwards"), and where souls aren't separated by philosophy and scalpels, the poem must move backwards into a kind of semiotic prehistory. Raindrops peal off pavements and collect themselves "[t]o a low-slung mist" populated by infantalised infants reverse-ageing back to the "their pores of origin." The speaker is not forced to roam and jump baffled through time and space, but takes control of textual time to move the poem backwards – through a primordial slush to an originary big bang. Together at last, beyond binaries of self and other and the social order – beyond, even, the organisation of matter into a recognisable universe – are the lovers. But are they still lovers? Is the speaker who so eloquently addressed their lover star still even *in* a body?: "Twinkle Twinkle | Tertium aliquid | Together we spawn debris." This is the debris that *gets the poem moving*. Really, dancing in an unsentimentalised diffusion of

self across the earth ("Across dawn's vast circumference") and disorganisation of the subject back to a kind of oceanic collective ("When Ubume led me through | This labyrinth of Jungian | Psychology to swim limbless").

There are more subtleties and references here than I can unpick here. There seems to be revelry and dance, where the dancing body becomes the screen – the mode of their own representation – before they are captured – recuperated, perhaps – and pixelated, fragmented into a false representation and severed from the lover/other. Then comes the lopping and cutting of limbs and the shoddy stumble home to stare at the debris of the body in a ceiling mirror. Is there anything that says "detachment" (from my body, from each other) more viscerally than a ceiling mirror? Like the reflected bodies, a landscape is left of fragments of representation and protest and destruction and decay – billboards, placards, burnt out buildings. The fertile debris that spawned a collective moment becomes the real trash of a movement crushed. Skin is sealed, intimacy forbidden, language is invented to assert ownership ("For Little Boy is telling now – | 'I have told you the word | Therefore it is mine'"). Power, possession and nomenclature are conflated as the speaker, responding to a physical shock, metamorphoses through states of passivity: into rock, tree and human body.

A close reading of this chapbook is exhausting and rewarding. I could rinse the pages of *Hix Eros* carrying on in this way (I've only mentioned half the slim volume, one of Rich Owens / Punch Press' beautiful letterpress books). I could delete everything and start again, certain that I've missed everything. I can't summarise the work, except to say try to find a copy. I expect you too would hover pro-longingly.

Love / All That / & OK

by Emily Critchley (Penned in the Margins, 2011)

Reviewed by Megan Zword

They can be bewildering poems. Sometimes it's the perplexity of poetry which for the moment is more negatively capable than its reader – it caught you unawares, and it is more "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (John Keats, 1817) than you are – and it's only a matter of recalibrating your expectations.

It is like the opposite of *Star Trek*. You don't want to be surprised while your shields are *up*.

At other times the confusion is because you're still getting used to some particular convention, like the Ashbery-esque sub-wordplay swerve from an expected sound, like

"toaster burning" (p. 75) not 'toast burning,' or like "ARMS & LEGO PIECES" (p. 47) or "heinous corpus" (p. 48), a swerve which jiggles you alive whilst leaving the conventional outcome intactly implied, should you require it to make things make sense. Or to take another example: the way a word will slip out of its usual grammatical status (as 'difficult' becomes a noun in "& again scratch | at yr difficult" (p. 22)), with a sort of Impressionist, I-think-I-know-what-that-is-and-also-what-it-feels-like vividness and spontaneity. Perhaps *these* slippages are trying to trace minuscule events of interior mental and emotional life which are too fragile for public language to convey. And/or perhaps they are sallies of volatile, cutesy toddler-speak.

Occasionally the confusion involves something simultaneously more hermetic and confidential. There is a disconcerting intensity of intimacy, without proportionately enhanced intensity of understanding. It is like going to check your Gmail, or your "Penetralium of mystery" (Keats, ibid.), and finding Emily Critchley is already logged in. You recognise some of those names, you're just searching her archives for *your* name and then you're like, wait, *how?* What? Is she in the house?

> I don't want to be
> genuinely sorry
> but am so ~ it is me involved
> in yr life ~
> no, it is her.
>
> There's not much left, of trust or ~
> because c.f. everything.
>
> (pp. 19-20)

The line length in *Love / All That / & OK* is flexible like a party noisemaker, tickle-blowing out from a single letter (e.g. "A" on p. 40) to lines so long they won't fit the page width and have to wrap into an indented continuation (e.g. p. 88). There are raw, exquisite rapprochements with formal verse (the untitled poem on p. 17, 'Honeymoon After Tikrit' (p. 23)); there are also prose stanzas, plus open field arrangements which offer the gaze several plausible paths. Many poems are filled with abbreviations characteristic of Black Mountain poetry ("yr") and of contemporary digital sociability (although idiolectic, not Urban Dictionary-style tribal: "dnt no" rather than 'idk').

These are profusely, plurally ironic poems – wildly deploying different kinds of irony recombinatively, checking for new emergent ironies, or else tuning into the fuzzy, emergency pseudo-irony between two superimposed and mutually-interfering frequencies of irony.

They go brash, sarky, colloquial, ludic, oblique, academic, hilarious, gnomic, emo, icy, camp, compulsively allusive, mellifluously polysyllabic, achingly tongue-tied and lowly, exulting, throwaway, bathetic, non-sequitur, toaster (cf. p. 75). They go gratitude-with-attitude then

> [...] plainly say "I LOVE YOU"
> & the sonnet bangs awake
>
> (p. 36).

*

But the *first* thing you notice is all the people. The two main teams are Luke and other people. There is a sequence called 'Poems for Luke' and Luke is all over the 'Sonnets' sequence too. The other people in the 'Poems for Other People' sequence are Susana Gardner, Seaton (and that poem is "(After Ashbery)") and Josh. There are *other* other people: for instance, epigraphs from Ingeborg Bachmann, Theodor W. Adorno and Ed Dorn ("STRUM | strum" (p. 11)); plus Henry Simmons designed the cover; and the salmon-pink-coloured back proffers puff quotes from Jean Day, Allen Fisher and Marianne Morris; and Seaton Gordon snapped the author photo; and Seaton is probably the "SG" to whom the whole book is one-third dedicated; '*Of All The Surprises* [...]' is subtitled '[...] *A Love Poem for Seaton*.'

What's more, the book is dedicated to "EC" and "AG" – could "EC" actually be *Emily Critchley?* Or perhaps a different Critchley, and a different Gordon for "AG"? Or could "AG" be Al Green / Allen Greenspan / Al Gore / Alex Goodall / Amy Grant? Amy Grant is the Queen of Christian Pop. If *Love / All That / & OK* were by Linus Slug, editor of FREAKLUNG, I would guess "AG" was Art Garfunkel: 'Garfunkel' is an anagram of 'Freaklung.' If it were by Seaton Gordon, that guess would be: Ali G. Could it be Astoria Greengrass or even Allen Ginsberg? 'Dear America' (p. 83) seems to recall 'America' (1956).

If the book could be divvied up as its title suggests, "SG" could get the *Love*, "AG" could get the *All That* and "EC" could get the *& OK*.

Why have so many people shown up? Now that everybody's here, what are we going to do?

Dedications are strange things. How would you feel if a book were dedicated to

you, its author, and Allen Greenspan? Or what if the dedication was to you, its author, and then the "AG" was "And Goebbels"?

*

So these can be confusing poems. But are they easy or hard? If "AG" were not a someone, it could be "Anti-Gravitas" or something. Wry and deflationary, jangling from serendipity to serendipity, easeful and self-satisficed, idling and flip, frequently outdoing their targets, whilst hesitant to claim those achievements, as though to do so might establish a precedent that they have to earn rhetorically what it is due by right. In that last bit they are perhaps a little reminiscent of Redell Olsen's 'The Minimaus Poems,' a writing-through of Charles Olson's *The Maximus Poems*.

> 'Inland, by Iceland hidden by the blood of
> jewels & discounts, I, Minimaus [...]'
>
> (*Secure Portable Space*, Reality Street, 2004, p. 77)

Supposedly it's easier to know what you're *against* than what you're *for*. The blurb describes the book as "an anti-confessional" and Day says "Critchley practises a brisk vernacular anti-lyric." Morris mentions "a new kind of anti-misogynism in poetry" and calls it "fuck-you work."

One of the poems Critchley uses, *Holiday in Tikrit* (2005), by Keith Tuma and jUStin!katKO, is also pretty "anti" and "fuck-you": raging, visionary, of staggering velocity, and extremely sweary (at least, the online version in Eratio #6 is. The later Critical Documents pamphlet is filled with black redaction rectangles). Niamh O'Mahony, reporting on a reading of *Holiday in Tikrit* in the 2011 Soundeye Festival "within the hallowed grounds of Christchurch" describes how it "was emphatic in setting any remaining behavioural or social norms of the church surroundings into tailspin from which it would not recover" (Soundeye blog, August 2011); Ernesto Priego records that *Holiday in Tikrit* is an "Enola Gay of a poem, a howl for the George W. Bush America, a big, sound, emphatic 'fuck you' to the world in the age of post-late capitalism" (Galatea Resurrects #1, March 2006).

That poem begins like this:

> After the acting up and backing off and the brushing up on
> the calling for and calming down and the carrying off [...]

Critchley's writing-through, 'Honeymoon After Tikrit,' belongs to the 'Poems for Luke' sequence. It begins like this:

> Won't you run with me now, past all the acting up & brushing off,
> & push me to float down *there* & there let me alone for good?
> Won't you, when I'm *an insufficient woman*, point out the errors of
> my ways, the trail by which my false moves has everyone *be-*
> *mused*, & not ablaze?
>
> (p. 23)

Obviously the "trail" in the poem is the proto-path newly worming through the wilderness, as trees emblazoned with blazes (from *blesi*, Old Norse, a pale mark on a horse's face); but the poem also ignites the irresistible sense of *trailblazer*, 'path-burner,' an incandescent scout whose scorched earth policy leaves nothing of worth for those who follow behind. A bit later in the poem: "won't you | melt my ways." Eat my ash, suckers.

It's a complaint about gendered double standards. It's about having your stuff rummaged for contradictions, then getting manhandled in among the muses by virtue of your mysteries; on the way to that desultory tent you pass a man wearing *exactly* the same ineffability as you, but also a sort of crown.

Perhaps "double standards" isn't quite the right term though – the complaint has to do with gendered valorisation in a specifically avant-garde context. The geography is discombobulated (where is "down *there*"? Is it, like, you know?), but perhaps the setting is the fringe of a certain kind of expansion, where criteria and judgments are emerging coevally. Perhaps the discrimination the poem invokes really involves 'double standards as an effect of valorisation,' rather than 'valorisation as an effect of double standards.' Cf. the way fire is used elsewhere: "The future *may be* burning or it may be very wrong. Talking | about it all the time won't bring it back" (p. 43).

Soon flakes of Christopher Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to his Love' are floating on the blaze. The float quite far across Critchley's work: there is the poem 'To his Uncool Mistress (after Marvell)' (pp. 49-50), for instance, which has a 'Dating Tips for Feminist Men' aspect to it; there's also a Critchley chapbook, *Hopeful for Love are Th'Impoverished of Faith* which contains 'Dialogue Between a Lady & her Nimble,' although that's not in *Love / All That / & OK*. The triteness of the most lucid, self-evidencing and *de facto* legitimate criticisms of patriarchy is a function of patriarchy, and 'Honeymoon After Tikrit' as the Nymph's 'Accidental' Reply-All to the Shepherd, which sardonically places the poem's interlocking dialogues among the venerable Marlovian bantz of Donne, Herrick, Shakespeare and (particularly) Raleigh, may be seen as archaism-as-exasperation: I. Cannot. Fucking. Believe. We. Still. Have. To. Explain. This. Shit. (The final stanza, beginning "Won't you screw me on the rack & rack me on the plate & plate me | to yr knife & knife me into afters?" (p. 24) has the feeling of a nursery rhyme. Especially the anony-

mous 'There Was A Man of Double Deed.' "When the seed began to grow, |'Twas like a garden full of snow; | When the snow began to melt, | 'Twas like a ship without a belt [...] When my door began to crack, |'Twas like a stick across my back; | When my back began to smart, |'Twas like a penknife in my heart." Also, regarding progress and relapse, compare these lines in Critchley's 'Perhaps Other Reasons': "It has a tension you wouldn't believe, a ssssssspiccato | Belonging to the '60s. I mean the 1660s" (p. 48)).

Locating again that "trail" related to those "false moves" (q.v.): could this "trail" also allude to the papertrails – or comments threads or email chains – of critic-poets incapable of self-expression without one eye on posterity? 'Thank you Emily for your generous provocation. How's my hair? They say the archive adds ten Pounds. I hope you don't mind if I respond to your generous and provocative errors of your ways point by point.' Perhaps these figures' "moves" are sometimes "false" too. But even smoking them out as charlatans creates a fire hazard – and then rages smoulder, violent feelings spark, tongues waggle, fiery debate spreads, hellholes illuminate. Whereas for the "*insufficient woman*," the potentially incendiary is snuffed out too early, and "false moves" recalls '*one* false move' – i.e. one tiny slip up, and you're *through*. Bub.

So is there anything left to do except – as the Tuma and .katKO! poem almost puts it – "to tell them all to ~~~~ off"? 'Honeymoon After Tikrit' appropriates / inappropriates (or maybe just nicks) the language of its interlocutors and leads it off down new routes; new routes including *old* routes, such as necessary and necessarily trite critique, some distance from the perfidious frontier; as well as weird, suspect, deniably capricious routes. ('Why have we come this way?' *[vehemently] 'I wanted to show you this Tesco'*).

> Won't you clip my wings & post them home, won't you melt my
> ways, then go out & buy yourself a telephone? Won't you live
> with me & be my love [...]
>
> (p. 23)

Here there is violence, specifically sadism: the speaker, clipped and melted; the perpetrator, maybe texting or something. Ha ha ha, "buy yourself a telephone" is uproarious! It makes the words 'smartphone' and 'mobile' sound like arch circumlocutions from a falsely lofty, epic vision of the cosmos.

It is very definitely slapdash language, a successfully haphazard episode in a distinctive pattern of skilled improvisation. There may be traces of the mocking singsong of the school bully, who will repeat whatever you've just said as though it were wrong, and segue into taunts that don't have to make sense because they are conduits for crude power ('Megan, the bégan, the big fat smegan.' Look at me now, girls on the bus in the year above. I am reviewing Emily Critchley for *Hix Eros*).

For the most part though it feels like a forbearing ease. The speaker does not want to détourn, or to endlessly secure and adorn her critique; the speaker is liable to give up, or to deliberately overdo it, or to invite distraction and whimsy halfway in. Punches get pulled in time to re-furl the fists into shadow puppets. If one of the ways patriarchy reproduces itself ideologically is by making any sustained reference to itself very boring, here is poetry sufficiently quick-witted to bore itself first. That is a tactic linked to the Ashbery-esque veer for the sake of alertness q.v. The world needs callers-out, but it also needs lerts.

*

That's not to say this is not often and in lots of ways, and probably even predominately, negative poetry. The chronologically later sequences even suggest "anti" typographically – many of their poems use a tilde (~) where you might expect a hyphen, an n-dash, a modesty-preserving asterisk ("that one time I called you a | ~~~~" (p. 47)) or an asterisk of anonymity ("A trip to ~~~~~~~" (p. 46)), or might not expect anything. You might just expect the rest of the word really, no time to lose ("Yr inscrip~tion oozes," p. 45). These tildes might be images of negation, sown like salt, since the second-most-popular way of representing the logical operator "not" (the most popular way is ¬) is a tilde (as I have mentioned ~).

Tildes were very hot in 2011. There seems to be a tilde on Critchley's forehead in the author pic. J. H. Prynne published STREAK~~~WILLING~~~ENTOURAGE *ARTESIAN* in 2009 and it's tempting to weave him into the wave-filled vacuums of 'Content-Specific' (first published January 2010):

> A trip to ~~~~~~~ / later still a vision:
> ~~~~~~~ barfing through his own tower
> Lists of the things he'd auction off like Bones & Gum & Shit
> For all of us to eat
> Later
>
> (p. 46)

...only "Cambridge" and "J. H. Prynne" don't quite fit. Each blank is one flourish shy.

Several kinds of irony and of negativity have rich affinities and intricate overlaps. For instance, Søren Kierkegaard describes Socratic irony as infinite, absolute negativity –

more or less, irony which negates (i.e. contradicts, cancels, reverses, crosses out) everything and anything indiscriminately; it "does not negate this or that phenomenon." So it is:

> [...] a qualification of subjectivity. In irony, the subject is negatively free, since the actuality that is supposed to give the subject content is not there. [...] this very freedom, this suspension, gives the ironist a certain enthusiasm, intoxicated, so to speak, in the infinity of possibilities [...]
>
> ('On the Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates')

In front of a quantity (for instance, ~0 things I shouldn't have said last night) a flourish can also imply *approximately*. I feel like *approximately* and *vagueness* are just as pertinent to this poetry's irony to than *not* and *negativity* are. Doubts, heterogeneity, complications, multitudinousness, difference and distractions are to be multiplied. Precincts are to be vaguened, connotations are to be urged to cascade. The tildes are emblematic of how connections in this collection are emphatic, foregrounded: every linkage contains a wobble, a retarded clinaman, a stagger that is "intoxicated [...] in the infinity of possibilities" (q.v.). Had it zigged without zagging, the Critchley-hyphen would hit a word on the line above.

*

But "AG" *will* be a someone. These poems are filled with people and supported by people. There are many footnotes, filled with people, and also with their books: such as under the first poem, a footnote which says "(i) 'Love is gardened, closed now to worth,' Michael Kindellan, 'Oh No'." Oh *no*, Michael Kindellan, "Love is not gardened ~ it is wild & gone to seed!" (p. 17). There are several seeds in this book, by the way, and some seediness too. Or, for example, the footnote which forms part of the title of 'Honeymoon After Tikrit (i) [...] (i) Keith Tuma & Justin Katko, "Holiday in Tikrit'" (pp. 23-24). As well as the people I've already mentioned, we have Ted Berrigan (p. 26), Catherine Wagner (p. 30), Bernadette Mayer (p. 31), Susana Gardner (p. 39), Peter Barry and Yuri Gagarin (p. 46), Josh Stanley (p. 47), Karl Marx and William Shakespeare (p. 50), William Shakespeare and Marianne Morris (that's more like it! p. 51), Joan Retallack, Peter Zinovieff and Hegel (p. 53). The sequence 'from *When I Say I Believe Women*' (pp.75-82) has footnotes and marginalia referring to Marvell and C. Olson and Klute and Alex in Wonderland and Carla Harryman and Kathleen Fraser and Leslie Scalapino and Rosmarie Waldrop, although a

lot of those names are crossed out. There are some random old other names like Jamie and Marilyn and Catullus too.

So perhaps the collection's tildes are like its ubiquitous ampersands: they are visible seams; they are fluid, ornate, wanton, serpentine stitches, all the more imposing for their contingency, all the more inescapable for their delicacy. They sew everything and everyone together.

Perhaps in this sense, the flourishes also suggest William Hogarth's line of beauty. Devotion *might* be established through arabesques of castigation and of relent, following elaborate secret tests flunked, through the wanton kinds of chase of what some anthropologists and marketing professionals call 'high context cultures' (or perhaps of the context fronts, where the high and low meet). What can sometimes appear as a stubborn obliqueness, an impish roundaboutness, may actually be a kind of instinctual invitation to share more context. Hogarth had none of this in mind when he wrote in *The Analysis of Beauty* (1753):

> The eye hath this sort of enjoyment in winding walks, and serpentine rivers, and all sorts of objects, whose forms, as we shall see hereafter, are composed principally of what, I call, the *waving* and *serpentine* lines. Intricacy in form, therefore, I shall define to be that peculiarity in the lines, which compose it, that *leads the eye a wanton kind of chase*, and from the pleasure that gives the mind, intitles it to the name of beautiful [...]

*

Clearly they are difficult poems and easy poems in different ways. But I find their easiness both trickier to describe and somehow more distinctive than their difficulty. Perhaps it is *ease* or *easefulness* rather than *easiness* exactly – something to do with that extemporary quality.

You could say Critchley incorporates the work of other poets like one improv musician picking up a chord progression from another. Though Day (q.v.) may be emphasising the work's affinities with conversation ahead of its affinities with music when she calls *Love / All That / & OK* "anti-lyric."

> otherwise one might have to ask something as vague as when I
> write down my dreams – what fractals mean what –
> Espressos for culture. tubebombings for resistance. subdivisions of
> the Age may bring Reform, or they may just dissolve to Terror.

> Curiously a hero fakes a discovery of poetic significance
>
> Coincidentally Euridice flows into a wall of fire, an outburst, a
> starling for morning
>
> (p. 62)

To me, this passage sounds like the music fades out between "otherwise" and "terror" and then comes back on at "Curiously." Overlaid on that, it also sounds like the conversational quality gradually progressively dwindles out of it.

Marianne Morris in 'A Starling for Morning: Critical Irony and Gender in Emily Critchley's *Love / All That / & OK*' (which you can find online at the Claudius App) also looks at these lines and those that follow:

> Leaving her fake birds clothes behind she flung at the wall & was
> vaporized
>
> At that all her words got replaced by signs → → →
>
> (p. 62)

The "wall of fire" might be that literalised trailblazing again. Here it is not just the trail, but the follower who is set alight. But there's a suggestion of escape or switcheroo here. The word 'herself' is missing after "flung" – is this because Euridice is vaporised, or because she didn't *really* fling herself at the wall of fire? Did Euridice fling a ringer? Has she gone somewhere *else*, and taken her words with her (and left only untrustworthy "signs": 'she went that-a-way! → → →'?)? Sure, a "starling" is a bird, but could it be a "fake" bird? Is Critchley's version about a woman who is, okay, fairly happy to be rescued ('manscricated') from hell, but less keen on just being someone's bird – someone who insists on marching on ahead everywhere?

So what would the "starling" *really* be? A baby star? (Cf. Wilkinson's birdy star, mentioned by Josh Stanley elsewhere this issue). A baby star, AKA an "outburst," or a *nova*, which punningly combines death and birth? (Cf. Tycho Brahe's *De Stella Nova*, that is, *On the New Star*). It *looks* like a star is born, but actually one dies? *Looks* like a star dies, but actually one is born?

The intensification of lyric at the expense of the conversational may support parts of

Morris's reading, in which one of the pair of voices vanishes at the threshold to the nether-world:

> In the myth of Orpheus, Eurydice disappears when her husband turns to look at her; in Critchley's poem, the analogy suggests that to be seen as a female writer is immediately not to be heard.

And Morris continues:

> Like Cixous' Dora, whose hysteria 'is a powerful form of rebellion against the rationality of the patriarchal order' (Showalter, 1987:160), Critchley's Euridice is active in her own 'vaporiz[ing]'. The myth is détourned: the verb 'flung' is used intransitively, giving her agency in her predicament. Euridice leaves her own clothes behind, flings herself against the wall, sacrificing in doing so 'her words', which get 'replaced by signs'. The poem ends not just with Euridice's words being replaced by signs, but Critchley's own, as this is also where the poem ends, showing itself out with three unutterable arrow signs.

The story of Orpheus and Eurydice is completely baffling. Orpheus, you've done the hard part. Here is Ovid translated by a pack of eighteenth century celebrity poets. Critchley's "Euridice flows into a wall of fire" definitely appears to be analogous to Congreve, Dryden et al.'s "So soon she drop'd, so sudden disappear'd":

> Thus, while the bard melodiously complains,
> And to his lyre accords his vocal strains,
> [...]
> No more the Belides their toil bemoan,
> And Sisiphus reclin'd, sits list'ning on his stone.

Love that bit.

> Then first ('tis said) by sacred verse subdu'd,
> The Furies felt their cheeks with tears bedew'd:
> Nor could the rigid king, or queen of Hell,
> Th' impulse of pity in their hearts repell.
>
> Now, from a troop of shades that last arriv'd,
> Eurydice was call'd, and stood reviv'd:

Slow she advanc'd, and halting seem to feel
The fatal wound, yet painful in her heel.
Thus he obtains the suit so much desir'd,
On strict observance of the terms requir'd:
For if, before he reach the realms of air,
He backward cast his eyes to view the fair,
The forfeit grant, that instant, void is made,
And she for ever left a lifeless shade.

Now thro' the noiseless throng their way they bend,
And both with pain the rugged road ascend;
Dark was the path, and difficult, and steep,
And thick with vapours from the smoaky deep.
They well-nigh now had pass'd the bounds of night,
And just approach'd the margin of the light,
When he, mistrusting lest her steps might stray,
And gladsome of the glympse of dawning day,
His longing eyes, impatient, backward cast
To catch a lover's look, but look'd his last;
For, instant dying, she again descends,
While he to empty air his arms extends.
Again she dy'd, nor yet her lord reprov'd;
What could she say, but that too well he lov'd?
One last farewell she spoke, which scarce he heard;
So soon she drop'd, so sudden disappear'd.

:(

Is Orpheus really loving "too well" when he lets slip from his mind "strict observance of the terms requir'd" to preserve the possibility of love? It is good of Eurydice to speak one last farewell, not one last FFS. (Even funnier: 'Go swivel.' L'esprit d' éternité). Perhaps Orpheus also forgets her "fatal wound, yet painful in her heel" and her halting progress. Instead of checking, could the impatient Orpheus have called out? Indeed could Eurydice at a moment earlier maybe have yelled, "Wait up!"? If Eurydice is not aware of the terms of the pardon, is Orpheus concerned she might turbo-hobble across his field of vision (not a "backwards" (q.v.) glance, but still)?

Theirs could be a cautionary tale about botched solidarity. About too many great songs, not enough proper conversation.

Two words in the poem, "Reform" and "subdivisions," are also associated with increments. Vagueness as a philosophical term involves predicates with borderline cases – for instance, if there are objects which resist clear-cut ascription of a quality. Perhaps it is partly true and partly false that such an object has the quality, or perhaps neither true nor false, or perhaps it is unknowably true or false. 'Tall' and 'bald' are common examples of vague concepts. Where exactly do they begin and end? Is Vanessa Place tall? Is Charlie Brown tan?

Vagueness is brought up by Eubilides's 'heaped up' (*sōritēs*) thought experiment and Zeno's sundry trolling. In Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (1957), Clov is referencing this paradox when he proclaims, "Grain upon grain, one by one, and one day, suddenly, there's a heap, a little heap, the impossible heap." Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days* (1962) knows a bit about it too.

Also perhaps compare the concatenation of dreams, memories, changes by degrees, and Zeno's spectre glimpsed in Rosmarie Waldrop's *The Ambition of Ghosts* (1979): "[...] *Introducing Decimals* [...] A dream, like trying | to remember, breaks open words | for other, | hidden meanings. The grass | pales by degrees, twigs | quaver glassily, | ice | flowers the window." Soon, "The cat | can't lift its paw, | its leg longer and longer | with effort."

Or in the *Lawn of the Excluded Middle* (1993), where Waldrop writes about "a gap between" and "remembering contracts": "For a red curve to be a smile it needs a face around it, company of its kind to capture our attention by the | between, the bait of difference and constant of desire. Then color sweeping over cheeks is both expansion of | internal transport and an airing of emotion. Understanding, too, enters more easily through a gap between than | where a line is closed upon itself. This is why comparisons, for all their limping, go farther even than the distance | of beauty, rose or fingered dawn, or of remembering contracts signed in blood." Down in the ha-ha of the excluded middle Waldrop writes: "much can be said against its claim that | everything must be either true or false."

In Critchley's poem, the context of dreams – "ask something as vague as when I | write down my dreams – what fractals mean what" – could suggest that vagueness only carries its less technical connotations: softness, indistinctness, haziness, perhaps a dying memory.

Is a tilde 'softer' than an n-dash, by the way? We tend to talk about a 'hard line approach' and 'softer line approach' but not really 'soft line approach.' And a 'soft approach' is often ominous: a hyphen circuitously sneaking up on its prey. Also cf. p. 26: "I write across the soft wires & the hard wires."

But perhaps there is philosophical vagueness here as well. For instance, 'Having reached the realm of air' could be another interesting example of a vague predicate. That wall of fire also recalls the legal and corporate jargon 'bright line rule' and 'bright line test' – supposedly the antithesis of vagueness, and the scourge of wrangling.

An example of a bright line rule: if it is illegal to fire someone on account of their age, there might be a bright line rule that the person who has been fired must be at least 100, or that the person who replaces them must be at least 75 years younger, in order for a valid age discrimination suit to be brought. Bright line tests are contrasted with balancing tests, AKA fine line tests, in which judges are supposed to apportion weight among various factors.

'Enter the *shade of Eurydice*, veiled.' Appropriately enough, economists sometimes describe cynical, Evil Genie-type fulfilment of the letter-of-the-contract as an extreme example of 'shading':

> We argue that a contract provides a reference point [...] for parties' feelings of entitlement. A party's *ex post* performance depends on whether he gets what he is entitled to relative to outcomes permitted by the contract. A party who is shortchanged shades on performance.
>
> (Oliver Hart and John Moore, 'Contracts as Reference Points' abstract)

These shades and bright ("You airing the bright markings of others" (p. 39)) or fine or vague lines *may* give us another way of understanding the myth. Perhaps Orpheus didn't really understand the terms of the contract, or *did* understand them but because of their vagueness he reasonably believed that he *had* strictly observed them. Having just approached "the margin of the light," *mightn't* he have already reached "the realms of air"?

Problem is – it's worth picturing that scene in some detail, because it is very hard to integrate it with Orpheus's impatience. Instead, it seems Orpheus must breathe a sigh of relief. "We did it babe! Wow, it's weird having someone follow you and not being able to look back at them! You *really* want to turn and look at them! Ha, ha, ha. Okay, I'm gonna turn round. You ready? One, two, *three* – babe?"

Euridice flowing into a wall of fire is a sort of action movie moment. Orpheus crosses the threshold and turns, and as his smile turns to shock in slow motion, she flings herself towards him – "Nooo!" – too late. The wall of fire may also suggest another fairly common cinematic trope, which doesn't *quite* fit with the myth, of two people crossing an invisible threshold, with the second one being filtered out and vaporised. But the specific scene Orpheus and Eurydice remind me of most is the 'freak gasoline accident' scene in the comedy *Zoolander* (2001). A group of male models are horsing around at a gas station, dousing one another with splashes from the nozzles. The mood is joyful and ebullient. In the soft afternoon light one of them casually sparks up a cigarette and they all perish in the resulting fireball.

The premise-joke of *Zoolander* is that male models are supernaturally stupid. What you want, when you are leading your beloved from the underworld, is a proper little buffer.

You probably want to pull over and let Eurydice pass. You want to be on the safe side. You probably *don't* want to check your mirrors.

*

I think best way of reconciling the vagueness of the threshold with Orpheus's impatience is to understand his fatal swivel as not chiefly a mistake, but as a flutter, a risk, a gamble. Yes, it may also be a sort of lapse of judgment, judgement, memory or self-control, but structured as gambling.

The gamble might be: 'Okay, I think we are in the realms of air now. I'll hazard a peek.' Or it might be: 'Did they say we *both* had to be over the threshold? I think it was just me. Well, I'll risk it.' Or more subtly – and this is what I *really* mean – it might be: 'I reckon I can become this particular surge of blood. That is, I can now act on this impulse. It's been in my breast for a fair wee while now, and I know it *was* bad, but I sense that the situation has recently changed, and I just bet in this new regime it's benign. I mean, I haven't really thought through all its ramifications, but you *never* think through *all* the ramifications of any impulse, do you? At some point, you don't audit or plot, you just act. You become one particular impulse and stop entertaining the others. I'll take the risk that this is one such moment.'

Critchley's poem is evoking games of chance with "Coincidentally Euridice." Those two words share so many sounds, they have an almost anagrammatical quality, as though the letters were permutations of pips on dice faces spinning in the air, settling with the final syllable.

*

As far as vagueness and "what fractals mean what" go – I'm not even 50% sure about this, but – I think that fractals are associated with self-similarity, and also with non-linear dynamics and therefore with deterministic unpredictability, and that perhaps a kind of tension between those two things is a way of looking at how individuals experience their immersion in power, how individuals experience the privilege that subsists in vast, complex impersonal systems. For instance, a jointed double rod pendulum – a bit like nunchucks – is a standard example of a simple nonlinear dynamic system. The pendulum boings all over the shop. Technically its action is not random, because if the process were re-run (so long as the initial conditions were exactly the same) it would occur in just the same way. But it *is* unpredictable. The only way to know what the jointed double rod pendulum will

be doing at a particular time is to watch it progress to that time. Every moment sets up the conditions for the next one, and you can't skip forward. The page will not turn until every word is read. If you wet the tip of the jointed double rod pendulum with a bit of red paint, of the magic kind that hangs in the air, then the pendulum will trace you a sort of butterfly. But it wouldn't create it in any sort of symmetrical or intuitively progressive way. You'd never know what stroke of butterfly would be coming next.

So perhaps that's "the meaning of fractals" in this poem. You cannot be quite sure which pixels of patriarchy will dust into position on the next iteration, but the overall pattern which is established is unavoidable and unmistakeable. Amazement at masculine avant-gardism, bemusement at feminine mystery, for instance. The edges will always end up where they end up. Iterated Euridice flows inexorably towards her wall of fire. You cannot quite deny that they are coincidences which take her there – can you? The events aren't really random, but then again, no one planned or orchestrated them. This level of reality does not even unfold predictably enough for anyone to be justly called out for opportunism. Is it "coincidental"? Is it a stitch-up?

Like I say, 50%.

Think of this passage from William Blake's *Milton* as a treatise about sensitive dependence on initial conditions: "There is a moment in each day that Satan cannot find, nor can his Watch Fiends find it; but the Industrious find this Moment & it multiply, & when it once is found, it renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed."

*

Conversational poetry and lyric poetry aren't clear-cut contraries. For instance, Wordsworth's experiments in prosaic verse and a few of Coleridge's 'conversation' poems first appeared as part of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Conversation poetry is a misnomer insofar as there is really only one speaker. You can't get a word in edgeways in a convo with Colero. He originally grouped most of what we now – following George McLean Harper – call his 'conversation' poems, together with some other poems, under the heading 'Mansplainy Poems in Blank Verse.' Joke! 'Meditative Poems in Bloke Verse.' Harper repurposed the term from one of those poems, 'The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem.' In that poem, there *is* arguably a second conversationalist: And hark! the Nightingale begins its yak. Perhaps it's fake, like that starling? Harper characterised this group of poems as "more fluent and easy than Milton's, or any that had been written since Milton" (1928). These 'conversation' poems, in their relative brevity; in their domesticity; in their discursive substrate intelligible as the continuous emotional progression of an individual consciousness; and in their givenness to shifts from vigilant sympathy with and absorption in the scene at hand towards epiphany, and perhaps towards points of public or even universal authenticity –

shifts sometimes expressed in gestures left shamefully unfinished – actually convey many of the qualities often presented as distinctive of 'lyric' poetry.

So they're not clear-cut contraries. The term 'confessional' poetry is also hovering somewhere nearby. That term really belongs to Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, Robert Lowell, et al. – though I think the way I've heard it used nowadays, its connotations of sensational, insistent, harrowing indecency, of embarrassing intimacy, and of taboo-shoogling autobiographical doodles are much less strong. Maybe 'confessional' poetry is becoming another funny term – a misnomer insofar as it is rarely extracted or even politely enquired after. The confession may be the kind of confession you make when you say, 'I must confess I like soft mints.'

Perhaps the distinctiveness of confessional poetry relies on an increased reluctance to generalise? Perhaps for confessional poets, engineering a collision between the anecdotal and the public – or the *universal* – might be the equivalent of turning yourself in, signing a confession, *and then rigging the jury to get yourself off*. Maybe confessional poetry's distinctive ease is clocking off a bit early, and leaving any general significance to whoever has the shift after you. Argh. The whole thing is a mess. Forget I said anything.

*

'Difficult conversation' is a proper collocation nowadays; 'easy conversation' less so.

Maybe whatever is conversational about *Love / All That / & OK*, and perhaps a lot of contemporary conversational poetry, has less to do with Wordsworthian emphasis on common language than with the Blakeian true friendship of opposites, and on the divisions, contradictions and over-determinations within society and within individuals.

But perhaps *that* division – the Wordsworthian / Blakeian thing – doesn't hold up, not even temporarily. "Espressos for culture" (p. 62): I am thinking of the way that a million cups of coffee or something can make you write better, even as it makes you less able to evaluate and control what it is you're writing. There is a whole category of being in which the more you enable yourself to do something, the less you are able to know if you are doing it. Wordsworth's idea of good poetry as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling, recollected in tranquillity, *already* points to a kind of auto-collaboration, a collaboration between different pieces of the self.

I am thinking also about other poets I know whose work can be conspicuously confessional, or which has a real investment in opening up, in 'proper' or 'amazing' or 'huge' conversations. Just like Critchley, none of the ones whose writing I like work exclusively or even mostly in such a mode – even when it's their poems that *are* in that mode, that rhetoric of oversharing and/or probably unsustainable intimacy, which I think I like best.

For instance, Colin Herd begins his colinloquial, colinversational and colinfessional

collection *Too OK* with an epigraph from John Wieners: "that is not Confessional verse; it's obsessional." But *Too OK* contains, for instance, ekphrasic work and work which seems to deftly re-purpose manoeuvres of various visual arts modernisms and avant-gardes, and it definitely contains this poem which repeats a short stanza about a purple pellet being smushed into your forehead ("[...] IT'S A BLUEBERRY, NITWIT; DON'T ALLOW HIM TO CONTINUE!!!") five times. Herd's *Like* is verbatim transcripts of 'how to' YouTube videos.

Or there's Sophie Robinson, who has worked extensively on tiny dogs being sent on rockets to space, but also writes in a non-confessional mode. Colin Herd has a very limited edition chapbook bound in elastic from his M&S pants.

Would it be possible to isolate senses in which Critchley, Herd and Robinson are confessional poets, by spotting what's different about their confessionalisms? I'm not sure. Write down what you think, without discussing it with your neighbour and then we'll all compare. Okay, two more minutes. Okay, I put that *ease* seems appropriate for Critchley and Herd's confessionalisms ('critchfessionalism™' and 'colinfessionalism™') but doesn't really fit with Robinson's ('emo recollected in trans* equality®'), and *expressive* more appropriate for Critchley's and Robinson's than for Herd's – see diagram – and that whilst all three are interested in interpersonal drama, Critchley is the most invested in Protagonist and Antagonist, whereas Herd and Robinson gravitate more towards the Narrator figure, and the micro-politics of irresistible description. Robinson's work in particular seems willing to have a go at truth-by-means-of-beauty, willing to create terms of understanding and remembering which make otherwise impossible stories temporarily, shakily, leakily possible. One subtract one does not *immediately* equal zero, for extremely piff values of one, and anyway, come with me! – I've got the aggro glamour of we two post-teens spinning in opposite directions against the scene of a lit-up a cityscape, with our arms for cog teeth, with the homesickliness that will take us somewhere domestic, and the prospect of complex surgery conducted entirely through semi-serendipitous self-harm when we get back there. Herd can also do the alt interpellation bit – can machinate a landscape in which you long to find traces of yourself, even if it means changing yourself – but his work seems less to want to intervene than to salvage, especially to salvage a witty watchfulness from experience, an exemplary tranquillity-anticipated-in-emotion. Maybe you could say: it's a tiny wee grid of intelligibility, whereas Robinson's is the sparkling detritus from numerous audacious doomed grids of intelligibility re-entering the atmosphere. I might also say that of the three confessionalisms, colinfessionalism seems most low key, the most content to dwell in narratives where there are few strong feelings, although perhaps strength of feeling is also part of what it tries to salvage. What did you guys put? Oh yes: but in all cases, poetic value sometimes feels proffered as a gift to say sorry for unilateral collaboration. 'Your life is in my poem. I hope that's OK.'

Occasionally the confessional-inclusive-pluralism exists in a single poem or a single series or project. There is the Adderall 'n' anguish end of some alt lit writing, for instance. There is Peter Manson's *Adjunct: An Undigest* (2005). Or there is the methodically heartbreaking recent work by nick-e melville, that adopts found poetry and constraint-based approaches to melville's email archives and medical records, synthesising confessionalism with an almost Flarf-esque impersonal epic prankishness.

*

Love / All That / & OK is also unilaterally collaborative and auto-collaborative in a slightly more mundane way. It is metatextual with its own textual history. The book could be called *Selected Poems*, except that the chapbooks it selects stay conspicuous – the names of the micro-presses appear throughout, for instance – and perhaps preserve a kind of priority. So really this feels a bit like a Critchley Reader, urging you to go track down the chapbooks.

Perhaps to track them down to check out their little differences: e.g. in the earlier version it's not 'To his Uncool Mistress (after Marvell)' (p. 49) but 'To his Uncool Mistress (1) [...] (1) After Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress". Obviously." (*HFLATOF* p. 28). When the image of the power tool ("Hot Gun!") on p. 47 was first published it was blue, recalling blue-balling.

Love / All That / & OK also feels almost like it's the intermediate, the middle term. Down *there*: the stapled chapbooks have been lossily compiled into this perfect-bound collection. Up *there*: on some higher plane, *Love / All That / & OK* is united with other poetry and other poets into a kind of social codex.

What kind of binding would a social codex, or 'folk book' use? The usual options are stapled, glued or sewn. Staples are probably the closest to the chains mentioned by Karl Marx, or by Jean-Jacques Rousseau:

> Mankind is born free; and everywhere is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater slave than they. How did this change come about? I do not know. What can make it legitimate? That question I think I can answer.
>
> (Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762))

It's interesting that this quotation doesn't look towards the removal of those chains per se. It seems they can conceivably be just jangled into legitimacy.

In 'For Seaton (After Ashbery)' Critchley tries the cute (because knowingly stalkerish) and incredibly painful and dangerous glue option:

Two
Faces
Glued
Fast
To
Each
Other
Permanently

(p. 42)

In 'Supper is done' (p. 21) torn flanks seem to be glued together: "[...] It is a close re~run of a re~aired television episode you've already | laughed yr sides open at. Somebody somewhere's gluing those | pieces back on, somebody somewhere else hasn't got enough | money to eat let alone this much or is being oppressed for an | Idea. How to keep things proportionate [...]"; compare also the gluegun from the 'The Sonnets' sequence, p. 31: "I'm sick of all you bourgeois boys ~ who haven't read Catullus | *or* understood him ~ | so I think you into the same shape, | & knock you into the same size, | like this & this & this. | | That way, the next time you come in the room | I'm primed & ready with my gluegun. | To wipe up tears & spill the beans, | to make it so much worse."

Then there is sewing; I mentioned the ampersands and flourishes earlier. Cf. Beckett's short lonelypunk prose work 'Ping' (1967) – "White feet toes joined like sewn heels together right angle ping elsewhere no sound."

Then there are less obvious options, like wire spiral binding or comb binding. Maybe halfway between stitching and chaining up? Some kind of "dead pully system" (p. 30)? A cat's cradle? Or maybe it could be like stringing an instrument:

That cat gut you've inserted through my mouth,
It travels down my spine, fires & tugs
With every movement, 'specially in my loins ~
It is the fruit of all seasons; a bird
For every journey ~ on each vital organ.
It has a tension you wouldn't believe, a ssssspiccato
Belonging to the '60s. I mean the 1660s.
It is a little heinous corpus when I
Bend under. If you squared it with the up stroke,
You might smooth things over for a while ~
At least till I [...]

(p. 48)

Spiccato is a technique in which the bow bounces lightly upon the string (cf. *pizzicato* of 'Ping' again maybe). The stringed instrument here is the speaker of the poem, tightly wound, highly strung, and thrilling to the touch. Cat gut isn't literally out of a cat, but the hint of a cat lingers, in the anagrammatized lions, the bird who may be eaten like a fruit, and perhaps "ssssspiccato" suggests whispering, 'puss, puss.'

In the 'The Sonnets' sequence, our guts are in our cats ("the cat"): "Don't hype up sympathy | for laughs, we cld do this | feelingly if our guts were only | in it, not the cat" (p. 30). Why? Perhaps there was nowhere else to put them?

In 'from *When I Say I Believe Women*' Critchley puts:
[...] Or: way too erotic.
When I say lips like chances are the keys to all
surface like a true domestic animal, you
should see into my room, I haven't vacuumed
in days. There is almost no SPACE left.

(p. 78)

The cover of one tributary chapbook, *Hopeful For Love Are Th'impoverished Of Faith* (Torque, 2010), is by Marianne Morris. I'm not sure, but I think those words (*Hopeful For Love*...) are actually part of Morris's collage: if so, the title is kind of collaboratively composed.

Critchley has written collaborative work in the conventional sense, but there's also a sense in which all her work, with its concentration of confession, pastiche, citation, allusion and dedication, is compulsorily collaborative. It is unilaterally collaborative.

Morris's image involves a woman dandling a big white bird. The person looks a bit like Marianne Morris but not much. I have a feeling it could be her sister. At a first glance it might come across kind of twee and emo, but if you look more carefully you might notice that (a) it is a colour image (there's just not much colour in it – only some green stitching), and (b) that the woman and the bird are stitched together facing each other. And that really changes things somehow.

The image makes me think of the nurse-maids in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, especially the one on the *Songs of Innocence* title page with a big book open on her lap (cf. Critchley's "Meanwhile he has dropped something secretive onto yr lap, it | bleats its mouth open suspicious, you don't know what is | to be used for, your up-

turned hands turn it over in yr lap, | simultaneously they break breadsticks as if these were so much amité ~" (p. 21)).

A nurse might signify both stereotypical hyperfemininity and an instrument of socialisation (into an order which is, among other things, patriarchal. Cf. Critchley's "I'm wondering about nursing & cooking & following you round, wiping saliva from your tongue"). I think Blake often de-temporalises corruption. In other words, it doesn't exactly go: *innocence first, experience later*. The two things are tangled up, each presupposing the other. For instance there are the "little sorrows" that "sit and weep" and "cunning wiles that creep" in the sleeping infant in 'Cradle Song.' The swashbuckling anti-hero of 'Infant Sorrow' starts out "like a fiend hid in a cloud" before undergoing three types of social binding: father's hands, swaddling bands, mother's breast:

> My mother groan'd! my father wept.
> Into the dangerous world I leapt.
> Helpless, naked, piping loud;
> Like a fiend hid in a cloud.
>
> Struggling in my father's hands,
> Striving against my swaddling bands;
> Bound and weary I thought best
> To sulk upon my mother's breast.

Isaac Watts might remind Blake's sulking babe, "How much better thou art attended | Than the Son of God could be" ('Cradle Song') – play nicely; Christ never had as good a weird wood duck as yours.

In Blake: held, swaddled, suckled. In Critchley: glued, stitched and strung with wires. Each little gesture bleeds you out.

The Morris image also reminds me of the artist David Khang, who attached butterflies on threads to his tongue. And it is a resolutely poetic image insofar as hearts and the wings of birds are committed to a word whose violence is most energetically reformed by hearts and wings: the word *beats*. And finally the image also reminds me of the strangely poignant moment in an episode of MTV's Jackass in which a bee shackled to a thread thaws out, comes to, and springs three feet into the air like a little kite, provoking a hush – it is shown in black and white – and of the horror film *The Human Centipede* (2010).

The version of *Hopeful For Love Are Th'impoverished Of Faith* which appears in *Love / All That / & OK* lacks the original epigraphs: "this is the last | Labour that thou and I shall waste' (Sir Thomas Wyatt, 'My Lute Awake') and "They can chew you up but they gotta spit you back out" ([Detective] McNulty, *The Wire*). The latter is actually perhaps a

second-order quotation: the episode "Collateral Damage" from which it is drawn uses it as an epigraph.

"Wasting "[l]abour" reminds me of Blake's nurse again. Her wards waste their "spring" and their "day" in "play":

> When the voices of children are heard on the green,
> And whisperings are in the dale,
> The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
> My face turns green and pale.
>
> Then come home, my children, the sun is gone down,
> And the dews of night arise;
> Your spring and your day are wasted in play,
> And your winter and night in disguise.
>
> (William Blake, 'Nurse's Song,' in *Songs of Experience*, 1794)

Blake has two poems called 'Nurse's Song,' one in *Innocence* and one in *Experience*.

> 'No, no, let us play, for it is yet day,
> And we cannot go to sleep;
> Besides, in the sky the little birds fly,
> And the hills are all cover'd with sheep.'
>
> 'Well, well, go and play till the light fades away,
> And then go home to bed.'
> The little ones leapèd, and shoutèd, and laugh'd
> And all the hills ecchoèd.
>
> (William Blake, 'Nurse's Song,' in *Songs of Innocence*, 1789)

Each copy of Blake's *Songs* is unique; the relief-etched copper printing plates could be coated with different inks, and the printed sheets individually watercoloured afterwards. Could there be a Critchley where the hot gun is *not* blue? I've been told that there is definitely a permutation of Blake's title page where the nurse's chair-back is transformed into an enormous rat's tail, although I can't see it in any of the digitised facsimiles online. (Cf. *Love / All That / & OK:* "God bless you Luke. You were the only rat | that every really took me to your hole. | Nights run into days & yes I wish yr new wife well" (p. 33)).

The *Innocence* 'Nurse's Song' is *just a nice poem, okay*, on the theme of playing outside. Although 'come home' would have been a lot nicer than "go home," and there's a slight implication that the nurse is actually (or perhaps, *fantastically*, *sarcastically* – as an empty threat) sacking off childminding for a bit. 'Walk home in the dark, kids: I'm off!!!' We might say, in mish-mash of Social Contract Theory-type terminology, that the children have tacitly exited their protection/obedience covenant. (See for instance Pitkin, Simmons and Dunn on John Locke's ideas of consent, and especially the debates on his *Two Treatises* 2.120; for protection/obedience, see Thomas Hobbes somewhere).

Even sheep have a shepherd, and whilst Providence does proverbially keep stats on sparrows (see Matthew 10:29), the sparrows don't actually make it out alive in that one. Meanwhile, those echoing hills advertise the children's co-ordinates to the enemy.

This must happen sometimes. The responsible adult, not unreasonably irritated (or exhausted: "Well, well") by their hyperactive charge, ever-so-slightly risks the child's life, and it just so happens that on *this* occasion...

*

I have a hunch a lot might depend on that final word, "ecchoèd." Have you yelled into a sheep? I better not get any deeper into this Blake ditty. Cf. also 'The Ecchoing Green': "And sport is no more seen, | On the darkening Green."

Orpheus, you've done the hard part. I find it hard to think of an easier task than Orpheus's or of a greater reward.

There is another interpretation of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth, which does not psychologise Orpheus in quite the same way as I've been doing. Orpheus might be seen as a kind of contrary to the biblical Abraham, as a figure exemplifying superlative resistance to all arbitrary authority, no matter how self-destructive that resistance, nor how desirous the fruits of obedience. Orpheus may allegorise resistance principled way out past the limits of reason. Among the many lines I'm excavating from the poem, we'd have to include tube lines: "tubebombings for resistance" (p. 62).

St. Anselm in his handy guide *Why God Became Man* makes some suggestive remarks:

> If you should find yourself in the sight of God, and one said to you: "Look thither;" and God, on the other hand, should say: "It is not my will that you should look," ask your own heart what there is in all existing things which would make it right for you to give that look contrary to the will of God. [...] what if it were necessary either that the whole universe, except God himself, should perish and fall back into nothing, or else that you should do so small a thing against the will of God? [...] So heinous is our sin whenever we knowingly oppose the will of God even in the slightest thing; since we are always in his sight, and he always enjoins it upon us not to sin.

If we do treat Orpheus as an allegory of superlative resistance, what might Critchley's ambiguous zotzing of Euridice allegorise? Is Euridice a comparably extreme figure of resistance – a suicide bomber disrupting a transport line which only she uses? Or has she thrown up a raging wall of fire as a screen, and slipped away from this contrived scene of futile sacrifice through some nuanced loophole? I feel this is a poem which, in its fiery evasion of failed cooperation, desperately desires the means for *easy* resistance, resistance which wastes no labour nor spring nor day whatsoever. The word "Reform" gets a gallant, dramatic initial capital along with "Age" and "Terror." Almost like "Reform" has replaced the word 'Revolution.' *Could* resistance be easy? *Frictionless*?

Of course, as well as other interpretations of Orpheus and Eurydice, there are many other versions and translations, and many other similar stories – e.g. Savitri and Satyavan, Izanagi and Izanami, Itzamna and Ixchel, and Lot and his wife. Critchley's spelling, "Euridice," is also suggestive of at least three pastoral operas (there are nymphs): around 1600, one by Peri with Caccini's help, and one by Caccini, and an Eighteenth Century one by Gluck. In Gluck's, Orfeo's careful refusal to look back almost leads to catastrophe, as Euridice supposes him indifferent and figures she'd rather linger in Hades. But in the end, in all three operas, Orpheus's exfil is *successful*.

*

Why have so many people shown up? How can the ones who got the chairs but don't really want them discreetly get to the floor? "All these people in a tube crushed in together ~ | strange" (p. 26).

(Look down that tube from the other end – p. 62 – and you'll find "tubebombings for resistance").

All these people could have to do with standpoint theory and situated knowledge. This isn't just the idea that all knowledge happens to be known by some subject, with some specific social and psychological identity, and therefore shaped and coloured in some specific way. It's more that situatedness is part of what makes truth possible, part of what makes knowledge knowledge. So I guess it's a bit different from relativism and from perspectivism.

Perhaps poetry which traces its sources and debts, poetry which makes its anxieties and desires – its desirable desires and its undesirable desires – as explicit as possible, is

trying to acknowledge that knowledge is situated, and nurture its emergence and nourishment in a network of unique interdependent subjects. Not only interdependent, but inter-accommodating, collectively overdetermining: stapled, sewn, glued, swaddled together.

Certainly several poems seem to dream of turning socio-political disadvantage into epistemic privilege, and maybe even ultimately into political advantage. The sequence 'from *When I Say I Believe Women*' is wary, for instance, of lazy or fervent accusations of essentialism and appeals to social constructionism.

> *When I say I believe women* & men read &
> write differently I mean that women & men
> read & write pretty differently. Whether this is
> biologically 'essential' or just straightforward
> like when you left the toaster burning or
> because women have a subordinated
> relationship to power in their guts I don't
> know. Is this clear enough for you to follow. I
> don't know. When I say we should try not to
> forget the author, this is because that would be
> bad manners as well as ridiculous. When I say
> there is a centre into which exclusion bends I
> mean *nothing*. When I hear you ask [...]
>
> (p. 75)

Taking cues from other poems, guts can end up in cats. But cat gut can end up in women (or at least, speakers of poems). Interior and exterior, perhaps nature and culture, are problematised and the "subordinate / relationship to power" is ambivalently or multiply situated. So there is a lot to get on with. But if the toaster is burning, it must be dealt with now.

Critic. I don't know, I'm a bit uncomfortable about what feels to me like a kind of biological essentialism in some of –

Poem. Well, duh. Biological essences are like the *most* socially constructed things there are. They're practically *natures*. Are you new at this? And did you leave the –

But if you think all these people came here just to situate knowledge, uh-uh. There's something else going on. As well as this system of overtly citational echoes and copypasta, there are just so many obvious but unmarked allusions. For instance, "Ain't gonna work on our farm no more" is an allusion to 'Maggie's Farm' (1965) by Bob Dylan. (I wonder if "Nights run into days & yes I wish yr new wife well. | The weather is hot" is a bit Leonard Cohen 'Famous Blue Raincoat'-y as well, by the way). Plus the presences who are named

are outnumbered by the presences who are nameless. One minor example: the title of the sequence, the part in italics, is a quotation of the opening of Rosmarie Waldrop's *Lawn of the Excluded Middle* (1993). Presences, I should say, which are nameless or code-named – the more I read about Luke, the more I start to suspect that he is not Luke, that names have been changed to protect the sublatedly innocent-and-experienced-and-neither.

Moreover, this work isn't naive about subtext, or about the Kristevan semiotic (i.e. roughly, the mobile patterning of instinctual drives prior to the acquisition of denotative language, which continue to exist in and beyond that language), or about practical know-how or *savoir faire*. It isn't naive about the ways people communicate outside of words, or using just their edges and fringes, their glints and shadows. "When I was in with you as if we didn't have to talk" (p.85). It is work which knows that when you promote things out of the subtext, *new* things loom to replace them. "[W]ere I a man, | for whom love studied & love unattained was less | Vivid, resounded less than the *real thing*" (p. 49). It also knows enough about unspeakability to know that trying to talk everything out is often a category error. There's "so much still not to be said" (p. 19).

'Full disclosure' is one crowd-construing monocle. Another is 'coterie' – less giving credit where credit is due, more selecting and canonising. *Love / All That / & OK* is Americana-irrigated. (For instance, the "don't" (p. 19) in 'I have been thinking' *could* be a Cockney "don't," not an American one, but then maybe the sentence should begin "Oi" not "Hey"). It's quite possible that the pattern of naming names comes partly from Frank O'Hara:

> In O'Hara, it's not that such an "inner circle" is an irrelevant figure – it's hugely important – only that O'Hara is aware of and interested in what happens when poetry escapes these contexts, as it must if it meets any kind of wide publication and anthologization.
>
> (Lytle Shaw, 'On Coterie: Frank O'Hara,' Jacket #10, October 1999)

> O'Hara, one could say, uses three types of non-canonical proper names and naming practices to rethink both familial and literary historical models of kinship: first, proper names too obscure to have a family of attributes; second, those, just as unknown, that pick up such a "family" only contextually in his work; finally, famous proper names that gain a surrogate, often queer, "family" – as in O'Hara's camp appropriations of Hollywood stars and action painters.

(Shaw, ibid.)

But although much of what holds true for O'Hara holds true for Emily Critchley, it doesn't feel right to try to fit the two into a common framework of coterie poetics. They may both denature social bonds with "contingent, what one could even call allegorical, modes of social linkage" (Shaw, ibid.), but Frank O'Hara is just *not* on Facebook. Poets generally are, and they stay on one another's sofas too. They are coteries, but they are also class fragments, demographics. Critchley's poem on p.47, for instance, is titled with a fragment of Facebook architecture. It is possible she copy-pasted it directly, without ever typing the individual letters.

Perhaps the people have shown up to do conceptual poetry. There have been a number of name-heavy projects, often slightly trollish, over the past few years. *Issue One*, edited by Stephen McLaughlin and Jim Carpenter, attributed around three thousand computer-generated poems to around three-thousand poets. *Issue Two*, also edited by Stephen McLaughlin and Jim Carpenter, only managed two hundred or so, and also attributed one conceptual poetry project to those two editors. Michael J. Weller's *& Holly Pester Does it Better* (Home'Baked Books, 2010) is mostly a list of women poets. The inside covers of Harvey Joseph and Lindsay James's *Sea Adventures, or, Pond Life* (Runamok, 2011) list different prices for different individuals. Josef Kaplan's *Kill List* (Cars Are Real, 2013) is interesting:

> Lanny Jordan Jackson is comfortable.
> Jewel is a rich poet.
> Josef Kaplan is comfortable.
> Justin Katko is a rich poet.
>
> (p. 29)

Etc. As the Poetry Foundation's Harriet blog says, "It's a quick, rather funny (alphabetical!) read." Emily Critchley is not in it.

We don't tend to tell one another how rich we are. The ideological function of this decorous silence – the mystification of disparity – I think is actually pretty obvious. A less obvious aspect of that silence, although an obviously connected one, is that it is incredibly difficult for anyone to work out how rich they are. I for one have never been in charge of so much gold in my life, but I'm stumped about how to estimate and express it.

You could start by giving an account of your bank balances and other assets and debts, of sums you expect to appear and disappear, of lines of credit, of relatives or friends

who you think would help you out in a pinch, of what your more-or-less fixed costs are, and what fixes them, and of any health care or state benefits or other stuff to which you have some kind of privileged free or cheap access. For a remotely realistic level of detail, your account would have to cover at least the past few years, and also involve the story of your work and other commitments and constraints. So it would also have to speculatively cover the next few years – for instance, any "free" time is potentially something you could sell, but *could* you actually sell it? Such an account would probably have to be organised as a series of nested if/then statements, or risks and opportunities, or upside and downside scenarios.

It is not as though the comfortable poets are excluded from the kill list. Presumably someone is supposed to kill them. So why differentiate between the rich and the comfortable? Because *Kill List* cannot mention all the poets (cf. *Issue One* q.v.), so instead of supplying a list of wealthy poets, it supplies *a definition of wealth.* The way to decode the poem fully is, first, to draw up the kind of account just mentioned for each poet which it includes. You would need access to their lives. Next, you sort of reverse engineer an algorithm which, when applied to that data set you have researched, outputs the list which was invented by Kaplan. The same poets must be spat out in the same categories of prosperity. Any algorithm which you can figure out which will do this is then your stipulative definition of wealth. It is a criterion which could also be applied to poets who are not on the list.

Keep in mind that this criterion might have counterintuitive results. In principle you might be penniless and sleeping rough and still be wealthy by its measure and for its purposes. One way of picking among multiple valid algorithms would be to prefer any which roughly resemble a more normal way of talking about wealth.

I think murdering rich and probably also comfortable people – poets or otherwise – carries unavoidable connotations of egalitarian revolution. Assuming that's right, the title *Kill List* also stipulates the purpose of this criterion. *Wealth-for-the-purpose-of-buying-a-Coke-and-having-it-with-you* has a different set of solutions to *wealth-for-the-purpose-of-requiring-to-be-revolutionarily-murdered.* There is no reason to believe that Kaplan's definition would be correct, of course.

That's all a bit elaborate. Another shortcut or heuristic I've been turning over in my mind goes like this: "Hail! Describe some recent wishes you've had which have been thwarted by economics, and how, and what that's been like."

That could be another place to start to figure out who is rich, who is comfortable, and who is not. People made suicidal or otherwise insane by debt don't always have time for *hail* or *thwarted* but that's heuristics for you.

Anyway, the revelation may be overrated. Knowing where the money is demystifies a little, but money *itself* is mystification. Money is another kind of decorous silence. In other words, an arrangement by which obligations are discharged anonymously and

through proxies, to prevent as far as possible opportunities for forgiveness from arising. Without it, if we are spooning, and I want to switch the side I am lying on, and our bodies are stitched or stapled together, then the morsels which my restless slumber prise loose are really my responsibility. *With* money, we are snoozing in a cat's cradle of such intricacy it is difficult to identify which wires convey ripping force from individual to individual, unless you zoom out and see classes.

I am about 60% sure of this bit.

*

Finally (and I like this focus more than an emphasis on situated knowledge, on coterie, or on conceptual poetry, although these divisions are a bit artificial) perhaps this is poetry whose basic Lego piece is not a word but a speech act.

> The actual conversations we had were not about content.
> The actual conversations took place somewhere different: stylistics.
>
> (p. 88)

Stylistics overlaps with pragmatics and speech act theory. Poets are in charge of their language, but they are also in charge of many of its contexts, "cutting [...] deeds out of words" (p. 20). The things that happen because of poems – the illocutionary and perlocutionary dimensions of language, say – don't go away just because you're avoiding eye contact with them. See e.g. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (1955/1962) and John Searle, *Speech Acts* (1969).

So the names (e.g. "Josh") can be seen in light of the line-lengths q.v. Perhaps including the names of real people is really just changing the line length. It is really just a matter of Critchley's gently adamant, probing formal pluralism – this poetry is trying out all different configurations of the open field, all different sizes and shapes of fragments. It is poetry; why wouldn't it?

The party noisemaker tickle-blows into many dimensions. Out of the page, into social space. Down the neck to the heart. Out the eyes and ears.

*

Academia is gently, elusively evident, here especially in the chronologically earlier work. It isn't exactly that the work is peppered with philosophical and literary critical jargon. But take the passage of love poem spread out pp. 72-73: here the dismembered remembrances enclose terms like "not-too-extensive," "spatial properties," "discontinuous," "speculative,"

"monitor," "leitmotifs," "incongruous." Yet it feels as though thresholds are crossed, that the scholar who carries her scholarship to and fro from its core area of use is constantly confronted with altered schedules of risk and prospects for refreshment; the personal is the academic and the academic is the personal. Nor is it exactly work seasoned with bywords of the contemporary feminist counterpublic. Terms like *problematic*, *appropriation*, *privilege*, *enable*, *mansplain*, *trigger warning*, *cis*, *ally*, *phobia*, *normative*, *sister*, *TERF*, don't really pop up. The words *oppressed*, *difference, Imperalism* and *alienation* are there at least once. But mostly it's more like:

> [...] So pushed up the texture toward the code.
> & leant back structure [...]
>
> (p. 85)

With her academic hat on, Critchley is attentive to the social construction of subjects. OK, the fact that people are profoundly shaped by their circumstances, including other people, is a pretty basic piece of wisdom in the humanities. Can we zoom in a bit? I think *Love / All That / & OK* tries to trace our overlapping, mazy, constitutively vague thresholds, and the social bonds which are necessarily vectors of both suffering and ecstasy, as they necessarily both bind us together and tear us apart. Maybe that's also what Fisher is getting at, esteeming the work's "intelligent frays." In many of these poems, living as a person among other people seems a bit like some wound you can't leave alone and allow to heal (because it hurts so good) writ large.

But with her colander of wiggling wands hat on, Critchley cannot always be bothered with the social construction of subjects.

We break our bones against binaries that barely budge. Play does not always succeed in gamifying toil. Dreams of détournement startle awake into sarky parodies or hugely comforting in-jokes. Dialectics are confined to habits of mind, concepts getting honed to hug contours they never extend far enough ever to find. We don't overlap with each other enough to rescue, with some surfeit of ourselves, anyone who at risk or lost (as Leslie Scalapino writes, "we'd have to have monopolies | for me to communicate with someone who has died" (*This eating and walking at the same time is associated all right* (1979))). De facto Foucaultian-Butlerian grids of intelligibility and disciplinary regimes both attract depressingly dextrously unanswerable apologia in the red top press and also make possible the subjectivities of people we love. The easy bits are the hardest. Reinscribing our expurgated passions into our political activism we start to sport hostility blinkers or fall prey to rumination and Zeigarnik Effect-style idle loops. We overlap just enough to make just being honest with each other categorical nonsense. Anger is often not a cogni-

tive augmentation but a lip-biting regret to try to forget or to spin. Denatured biological essences turn to tokens in zero-sum quarrels over shards of symbolic capital, sad pastimes whose higher order impact on the survival of those essences is arbitrary and indifferent. Or biological essences seduce us as irresistible heuristics, the transient cost of denying them prohibitive, our critiques all too much like the handles by which we can pick them up and use them safely.

Which is all probably just an unnecessarily complicated and obscure way of saying that I feel like, despite its evident interest in socially constructed, performatively gendered subjectivity, *Love / All That / & OK* also transmits a robust dose of traditional liberal individualism: the kind that values all manners of independence and laissez-faire, the kind that makes endless reference to the inimitable, atomic, autonomous individual, and the kind that thinks the main point about difference is that people choose to live in different ways, and should be allowed to as much as possible, especially me.

Which is probably a slightly complicated and obscure way of saying that *Love / All That / & OK* also must have its 'me' time.

Perhaps a conservative or reactionary force is thereby set in motion; but what I encounter way more forcefully is this work's frisky, reflexive particularist watchfulness; its resistance to the new, difficult-to-recognise (and often anyway single-use-only) patterns of domination that get uncovered by avant-garde and counter-hegemonic trailblazing; and its vigilance against lapsing – under the banner of overcoming domination – back into prior forms of domination, which perhaps were only ever superseded with much luck and labour. In other words, it is poetry for which Emancipation is often just one of the more prestigious and well-funded research laboratories which Oppression has to offer.

That got a bit out of control. It's more of a Critchley scrapbook than a review. Going to leave it though. "We could be Hix Eros, just for one day" ~ David Bowie.

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