

Fiddleheads and Horsetails: On the Sex-Life of Ferns

IAIN BAMFORTH

When I was in medical practice in Strasbourg in the late 1990s, my landlord, Philippe Stoll-Litschgy, an elderly Alsatian artist and restorer, would sometimes come down first thing in the morning from the top-floor studio workshop in the building he had inherited from his adoptive parents (I rented the ground floor) and pass through the surgery before patients turned up. He was there to water the bracken ferns growing in the small courtyard at the back of the surgery and which could be seen through the louvred window across from my desk. This was his fern nursery. I was fond of Monsieur Stoll, with his beehive haircut and his limp, which made him appear to be an even more theatrical personage than he actually was; and I liked him too for his appreciation of ferns – ‘*Faut bien que je m’occupe de mes fougères!*’ he would exclaim when I interrupted him during their tending. There was never any question of his not doing so; it was his apartment, after all.

I’ve always been a fern-fancier myself, owing to their antiquity and their simplicity, and the fact that their method of reproduction for so long remained a mystery: Linnaeus himself, in his *Species plantarum*, coined the term ‘cryptogamia’ to express what seemed to be the hiddenness of the sexual cycle of algae, lichens, mosses and ferns, as opposed to that of phanerogams – plants whose reproductive organs are readily visible as flowers.

It is all done by spores. While flowering plants rely on their seeds, protective capsules with a double or diploid set of chromosomes, sporing plants – like the ferns, or *filicinophyta*, to give them their technical name – disperse single or haploid copies of the plant’s chromosomes from the underside of their fronds. These dispersed spores develop into a separate plant unit called the gametophyte, which looks nothing like the diploid plant or sporophyte: fern gametophytes are relatively undifferentiated structures and resemble tiny tangles of seaweed hidden in the undergrowth, which is why Linnaeus overlooked them. For a long time then, fern propagation was a mystery. Now, every student of botany knows that sporophyte and gametocyte run separate households: the fern sporophyte is manifestly the dominant structure (although the opposite is true of the more primitive mosses and liverworts, in which the gametocyte is dominant).

This complicated two-step contrasts with animal reproduction, in which the germ nuclei are produced by specially dedicated cell lines as a terminal process, and are directly present in every generation. Reproduction in plants such as ferns, with haploid gametophytes and diploid sporophytes, is known as ‘alternation of generations’: the stable and relatively static process of asexual reproduction is kept at a distance from the unpredict-

able and volatile act of sexual reproduction. At any rate, what we take to be the prospect of the elegantly simple fern is only ever half of its life-story – indeed, only half of a plant self, so to speak.

Although I’d grown up in the wet midlands of Scotland among gardens that sometimes seemed to be an insurge of nothing but ferns and rhododendrons, I came to associate the former (rather than the latter) with exotic places on the globe. I knew Les Murray’s companionable definition of humans as a coherent presence in the natural world in his striking early poem ‘The Noon-day Axeman’, written in honour of his father Cecil (whom I met at Les’s place in Bunyah in 1990), and in which the line ‘walking knee-deep in ferns...’ stands as his vision of intimate freedom in nature; it would be some more years before I read Oliver Sacks’s *Oaxaca Journal*, dedicated to the ‘foray’ he made to the Mexican province on the cusp of the new millennium with a bunch of North American fern-seekers; and more years still (2006) before I would be able to visit with my family the little stretch of ancient Gondwana east of Mackay in Queensland, where the massive tree-ferns with their crowns of fronds, all members of two predominant families, *Cyatheaceae* and *Dicksoniaceae*, towered over us – as close to ancient megaflora as anything that exists in the modern world. Sacks says that he saw growths like these in Kew Gardens when he was young – ‘simulacra of the fern gorges of Hawaii and Australia’ – and imagined that these two sites had to be the most beautiful places on earth.

Charles Darwin was astounded by a similar spectacle when, during his round-the-world voyage in HMS *Beagle* in February 1836, he visited Hobart, capital of Van Diemen’s Land, and walked to the summit of Mt Wellington. He conveyed his amazement at the size of the Tasmanian ferns to his journal: ‘In some of the dampest ravines, tree-ferns flourished in an extraordinary manner; I saw one which must have been at least twenty feet high to the base of the fronds, and was in girth exactly six feet. The fronds forming the most elegant parasols, produced a gloomy shade, like that of the first hour of the night.’ Being vascular plants, ferns need humidity to survive: there must have been a lot of water around when they developed as a phylum, since the sperm produced by the gametocyte also needs moisture to swim to the egg (produced by a different gametocyte) and fertilise it.

Pteridomania (the fancy term for obsessive fern-fancying) was a Victorian craze, with ferns being cultivated as indoor plants as well as appearing as motifs on pottery, glass, cast iron and pottery – Mauchline Fernware boxes (which are now prized collectables) were made by a factory in Ayrshire not far from where I grew up, using

a process in which fern fronds were applied to sycamore, the wood stippled and the ferns then removed before varnishing. Fern adoration was a singular form of eroticism permitted our celebrated world-exploring and knowledge-cataloguing ancestors, who liked to vaunt their morals but were never candid or overt about their sexual longings. The way Monsieur Stoll stroked his sporelings reminded me there was indeed something pertly erotic about the morphology of ferns, those Jurassic whorls in abruptly startled self-presentation. They nod their heads out of a sense of inner delicacy, and stay pure in their pleasures.

Darwin called some of the biological forms that he observed on his journey 'living fossils'. Perhaps for that reason I've always been moved by the relic tucked away in the larger story of the disaster which befell Robert Scott's Terra Nova expedition to Antarctica, which was still told to schoolchildren in the United Kingdom before such accounts of imperial enterprise became suspect. Scott and his team reached the South Pole in January 1912, a full month after the better organised, rival Norwegian team of Roald Amundsen and his men (who made use of survival techniques acquired from the Inuit dwellers at the other pole); Scott and his men famously died in severe weather conditions on the ice shelf on the way back to Ross Island. Remarkably, thirty-five pounds of fossil rock, which they had kept in their baggage despite having had to discard much of their gear in their effort to return to the supply stage at One Ton Depot, was found beside their bodies: this rock bore the imprint of a tongue-shaped fossil fern now known as *Glossopteris*, a Permian period relic also found in other parts of the southern hemisphere. It provided some of the first testimony as to the existence of an orig-

inal supercontinent. In fact, *Glossopteris* had been extinguished, along with 95% of all species on Earth, in the great end-Permian mass extinction circa 250 million years ago.

Ferns – once living ones – were also the star exhibit in Karl Blossfeldt's *Urformen der Kunst*, a book of photographs that became an international bestseller during the Weimar era and made its compiler famous overnight. Blossfeldt (1865–1932) was a professor of applied art at the Berliner Kunsthochschule who amassed a series of photographs taken with a homemade camera fitted with a thirty-times magnifying lens that allowed him to reveal the detailed and often dynamic structure of buds, flowers and seed capsules. These photographs were initially circulated among his students as examples of primal design elements in nature: 'The plant never lapses into mere arid functionalism; it fashions and shapes according to logic and suitability, and with its primeval force compels everything to attain the highest artistic form.' In Blossfeldt's book the furled fronds of ferns stand out as crosier staffs, scrolls for a string symphony in which Nature subtly gives form to its own creative forces. It doesn't take much to see ferns as poems themselves: furled so that they can unfurl for the person who cares for them.

A Japanese friend of the poet Seamus Heaney called Toraiwa surprised him during a meal in which they appear to have been eating steamed fern greens by asking him about the erotic. 'He said it belonged in poetry and he wanted more of it.' So Heaney presented him (in his short prose-poem 'Fiddleheads') with a little basket of them – 'frilled, infolded, tenderized'.

In some circumstances, then, the simplicity of ferns would seem to be the ultimate kind of luxury.

Poems
TOM PICKARD

provision

a stealthy heron
stalks a sinking sun

while waders skim the waterline
to follow and feed

and all I bring
is a pen that sometimes

spells your name
in a lick of ink along a line

of tides swept in under mind
and over sand

flipping lacy hems:
a seductress sea

certain of its goal
buffed up against gusts

that take us back to where
we never were

valentine

naked in our bed
blessed by your caress

while winter's wake
awakes me

underfoot
and in the air

and all four seasons
in a day

lockdoon loop loopy

tide in
tide oot

is this a poem?
this a poem

sun up
sun doon

this is a poem
is this a poem?

I think therefore
I am,

I think not, therefore
I isn't

Poems

DEVIN JOHNSTON

Futilities

Enough rain
and every route
becomes an obstacle,

tracks turn to creeks,
roads to rivers,
the paths impassable.

*

From a neighbor's yard
the dull thud of walnuts,
the dead sound of digging,
an adult male voice
amused and scornful.

*

Almost done!
Almost done!
You're always
almost done,
which means
you're never
done with this,
with this,
the only ever
conversation.

*

She waited all afternoon and evening
until in bed at last she spoke
her mind, as if to drop a coin
a long way down, and through the dark
by way of answer to her thought
came only the sound of breathing.

*

By force of habit
you inhabit
the site of love,

nothing left
beyond a slight
depression in a field.

*

The scrawled inscription
on a square of sidewalk reads
Sadie and John forever;
they both still live nearby.

*

Has anyone, in thirty years,
tried the door to find it locked?

Georgia Blizzard

Some dark November morning
when troubles circle round,
go quarry clay from Plum Creek
and bring it home in a tow sack,
a blue-gray lump still cold enough
to make your fingers ache.

Mix it with a filler of sand
and flux of silky ash,
then shape an urn of earthenware
about the size of a salt pig
with a human face
and panther haunches.

When foes distress your waking mind,
and clay turns hard as leather,
burnish the urn with sassafras,
a tonic for protection.
Low fire in a steel drum
and flash the flanks to russet.
Get rid of taunting things
by bringing them to the surface.

Once the urn has cooled and sits
pinging faintly on a bench,
blow across its lip
to resonate a low tone,
as when the wind moans through a gap,
Who will weep for Edith?

Come what may, the pot will hold
no phlox, no ashes, nothing but
the hollow shape of thought.

Morning Glory

Why call this plant a weed? Some flowers
 evince no difference between
 giving and taking, all their powers
 dispersed unseen beyond a stile
 that your wants might for a little while
 be mine, and open to the light.

Some flowers don't care where they grow,
 climbing and trailing across the bricks
 with no trellis of metaphysics
 or narrow bed to call their own,
 careless as a worm through wood.
Quiebra platos, breaker of plates!
 Their tendrils overwhelm the slates
 of coping stones that have withstood
 sleet and snow, the ragged comb
 in late September hid below
 a crest of papyraceous foam.

Tough and tissue soft, loose blossoms
 open for a while to sense,
 whatever slant of daylight comes,
 then close to cold in a slow wince.

New France

It takes the stranger long to learn
 each local mispronunciation
 of names left by *coureurs de bois*.
 A long way from the Tuileries
 and the soft crunch of gravel walks,
 Gravois rhymes with Illinois
 at the ragged edge of Nouvelle-France,
 an avenue without renewal
 on which the evening sun goes down.

It may take years and years to learn
 each inconvenient indirection
 through parishes of Pawpaw French,
 the barricades and cul-de-sacs
 where children congregate at dusk,
 at ease above their handlebars.

A long way from the Tuileries,
 where swans patrol a standing pool
 in calligraphic harmony,
 you turn on Chouteau Avenue.
 No stranger to desuetude,
 you know each symptom of neglect,
 the fence of scribbled honeyvine
 or cairn of dust and gravel crushed
 from the city's porous bedrock,
 an aggregate of lost intent.

Far from any pied-à-terre,
 the puddle left from last night's rain
 reflects no cream of Paris stone,
 but only *les nuages qui passent...*
 the passing clouds, the setting sun.

'Go to work on a Braque!': some notes on advertising in poetry

NIGEL S. THOMPSON

I

If you look at photographs of the typical Victorian or Edwardian cityscape, above the streets and corners you will see a mass of advertising, and most of it verbal rather than visual. If there were a visual element to the advert, it would most probably be an image of the product itself and one found in a newspaper rather than a hoarding. Leopold Bloom is a salesman of such adverts in Joyce's *Ulysses*. Not only does he sell advertising, Bloom shows an acute awareness of the construction of adverts, especially for Hely's the stationer's and Keyes the grocer's, not to mention his imagined advert that wickedly twists the famous song in *The Merchant of Venice*: 'O tell me where is fancy bread, at Rourke's the baker's it is said.'

This targeted use of language meant to influence the public and attract consumption goes back much further than the Victorian era. One of the places it is first seen is in the murals and graffiti of Pompeii and Herculaneum, especially the walls of brothels, which advertised what was on offer both formally in menus and informally in the graffiti of customers both satisfied and dissatisfied. A modest example would be for a certain young woman in the brothel district: 'At Nuceria, look for Novellia Primigenia...' Closer to our age, in one of the first essays on advertising in *The Idler*, 40, 20 January 1759, Samuel Johnson wrote 'Promise, large promise, is the soul of the Advertisement'. He claimed that 'In lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath' and nor when writing an advertisement. His copy for the sale of Mr Thrale's brewery read 'We are not here to sell a parcel of boilers and vats, but the potentiality of growing rich, beyond the dreams of avarice.'

As it has developed since, the language of advertising is still used in basically the same way. Its meaning goes beyond the denotative and everything depends on connotation to suggest more than it says or shows. In a well-known anecdote about modern advertising, an executive says to a novice 'Son, it's not the steak you sell, but the sizzle it makes.' We can see here the same switch as in Johnson's proposal of 'dreams of avarice' over 'boilers and vats'. It is indeed the claim of 'promise, large promise'. More fundamentally, the language of advertising exploits all the resources of classical rhetoric, from the patterns of anaphora to the tropes of metaphor, with the aim of persuading the reader as to the merits of a product in the same way an ancient orator hoped to persuade his audience to vote, fight or judge. Poetry, too, hopes that its language will be so much more than the words on the page. And as we see with Leopold Bloom's slogan for Rourke's bakery, poetry has been much used in advertising and it is still a very popular and much studied technique. But what of the influence of the language of advertising on poetry?

It might seem tautological to ask whether advertising has had any influence on poetry, given that advertising shares the same means with poetry, albeit to radically different ends. It has been a surprisingly neglected field, but if we look closely, we can see several manifestations. First, there is the simple reflection of reality, the celebration and advocacy of popular products as phenomena of modernity. Then, much later, especially in the counterculture of the 1960s, adverts are manipulated in turn in a denunciation of materialistic consumerism. A third grouping can be seen in ad hoc influences on single poems by individual poets, usually for satiric or comic effect.

The first type is the most obvious in both concept and practice, where advertising creeps into a poet's reflection of reality. The mid-nineteenth century gave rise to the figure of the flâneur, typically in Paris; that is, the stroller about town who took in everything from the new shops, boulevards and arcades of Haussmann's restructuring to the old crumbling *quartiers* still extant. The finest poetic example was Charles Baudelaire, whose perambulations around Paris in his 'Tableaux Parisiens' (published in *Les Fleurs du Mal*, 1861) influenced passages in Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. In his notes to the poem, Eliot cites the opening lines of 'Les Sept Viellards' ('The Seven Old Men'), beginning 'Fourmillante cité', for *TWL* I, 60, but the influence goes well beyond these lines. Although neither poet was interested in advertising, they laid the groundwork for what was to come in later poets who focused on observing the cityscape. We can see the use of names of shops and an advertising slogan in one of Arthur Rimbaud's contributions to *L'Album Zutique* (1871), a collection of parodies written by the group around Verlaine known as Les Zutistes. In a verbal snapshot entitled 'Paris', Rimbaud names a series of shops (advertising at its simplest) but also references an advertising slogan in the lines 'Enghiens / Chez soi' used by a local chemist to advertise Enghiens mineral water tablets which allowed you to create your own mineral water 'at home'. The slogan is again referred to several pages later in 'Ressouvenir', a parody of François Coppée. In another parody of the same poet – 'Vieux Coppées' – a street scene is described that names a well-known chocolate manufactured in Toulouse:

Dans le kiosque mi-pierre étroit où je m'é gare,
– Tandis qu'en haut rougeoie une annonce d'Ibled, –
[in the narrow half-stone kiosk into which I stray/
while above me an *Ibled* advert glows red]

Similarly we see specific references to advertisements in several Futurist and Dadaist poems, which, in their cut-up technique, were able to absorb any discourse

into the resulting collage. Kurt Schwitters's prose poem 'Die Zwiebel' ('The Onion') published in *Der Sturm*, 10 (1919) reflects all kinds of language public and private, including fragments of advertising in '(Echt Brüsseler Handarbeit)' [Genuine Brussels handwork], '(Zuckerrübenmadchen)' [Sugarbeet girl] and, in English '(Bordens sweet milk-chocolate)' mingled with snippets of political slogans and much else. The Italian Futurist Ardengo Soffici was able to incorporate the actual typography of popular products in several of the poems in *BIF&ZF+18*, first published in a folio edition in 1915, then in smaller format in 1919. In correspondence with Benedetto Croce in 1921, Soffici explained the Futurist principles in one of its poems 'Passeggiata' ('Promenade'), which uses 'Sensations and images suggested by the invention of urban industrialisation... The advertisements, the mechanisms that violate nature as it was understood by traditional poets, create a new aesthetic of the artificial.'

In this poem he incorporates the large advertising block for 'Florio S.M.O. Il Miglior Marsala' ('the best Marsala'), a smaller one for 'TOT-Digestible Cachets' (digestive pills), as well as the logo for FIAT, the car manufacturer.

Perhaps the best example in English of this early referencing is the long poem *Paris* by Hope Mirrlees, first published by the Hogarth Press in 1919 and recently republished by Faber. Here Mirrlees is the flâneuse, totally absorbed in the French capital city, which is seen in a mixture of phantasmagoric and realistic scenes. These latter proclaim the adverts of posters for Dubbonet, Zigzag, Lion Noir, Cacao Blooker. Is this merely the eye-as-camera, or is there more to the choice? In this selection, probably not. Although the products are mentioned, there is none of the language associated with advertising nor their visual representation, as in Soffici.

The earliest use of the modern advertising slogan in art was by the Belgian painter James Ensor. Among the crowds assembled to honour Christ in his most famous work, *The Entry of Christ into Brussels* (1889, later to influence Adrian Henri, *vide infra*) we can see placards with 'Vive la sociale!' and 'Vive Jésus, roi de Bruxelles!' Although we don't know what fate the painter envisaged for his divine visitor, the manic nature of his crowds suggest the same volatility as those in the Gospels who were to turn against him. In 1898, Ensor made a smaller etching of the work which included more slogans, including a placard advertising Colman's mustard with what looks to be an ambiguous spelling of mustard with a final -t. It would have been this latter version that gained currency rather than the larger canvas, which remained in the artist's possession until 1928.

What we see here in embryo is the use of the slogan, which came into its own in the protest and Pop poetry of the 1960s, but the association of advertising with capitalism was a problem. One of the foremost, if not the foremost, voice of protest poetry was Adrian Mitchell, who said in 1966: 'Within another ten years I hope that plenty of advertising posters (& neon signs) will be replaced by poems (& neon poems)'. He went on to say that he also wanted poets to chant (poems) on TV screens and poems to be in the pages of daily newspa-

pers. In the 'Afterwords' to his 1969 anthology *Children of Albion: Poetry of the 'Underground' in Britain*, its editor, Michael Horowitz, was also leery of advertising and its effects on young poets, 'over-exposed to the mercies of hidden persuaders. I don't want verse mass-produced and fed to queues from conveyor-belts – simply know the communications media as an unavoidable message-massage of our mass age'. If there was more than a paradoxical hint of Puritanism in the freewheeling vision of the Left Wing Poet-Priest that Horowitz speaks of here, the opposite is seen in the poetry and writing of Liverpool poet (and visual artist) Adrian Henri. He was equally committed to the same causes of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, social equality and ending the Vietnam War, but embraced the Gutenberg Galaxy in ways that other Underground poets would not. In the 'Notes on Painting and Poetry' appended to the *Tonight at Noon* (1968) collection, he discusses Mallarmé's 'donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu'. Instead of taking it to the rarified levels of T. S. Eliot, as he says, he interprets the line in his own way: 'to purify the dialect of my tribe' (his emphasis). He then specifies what that might be: 'My tribe includes motor-bike specialists, consultant gynaecologists, Beatle fans, the people who write Coronation Streets, peeping toms, admen...' and continues:

...we live in an era of communication-explosion, certain specialist uses of language seem particularly relevant: that of advertising (hoardings, slogans, tv ads) or newspaper headlines...

It seems to me that the whole post-Gutenberg Galaxy of expanding communications can become the subject matter of the poet, it's just that most poets are afraid to face up to the consequences of it.

And yet even though embracing the 'new' languages available from any quarter, Henri is wise enough to say that a poet has to develop their own voice and castigates the 'mock-American' of so-called British 'beat' poets as 'hopeless' because they follow the manner not the spirit of the Americans. This creates an interesting paradox and new challenge for the poet: how to create an individual voice out of so much public language. But true to his word, Henri did come up with amusing versions of advertising in the same volume. His 'Liverpool Poems' contain witty reworkings of the then well-known slogan 'Go to work on an egg' (apparently created by Fay Weldon) and the advertisement for Lifebuoy soap:

1
GO TO WORK ON A BRAQUE!

5
There's one way of being sure of keeping fresh
LIFEBUOY helps you rise on the 3rd day
after smelling something that smelt like other
people's socks.

No one would claim anything for these examples other than they were *jeux d'esprit* of the age, but Henri is able

to create more telling drama in ‘Commercials for “Bomb Event” (for two voices)’ which alludes to the advert for PAL dog food:

- A. Get PAD nuclear meat for humans
- B. Don’t give your family ordinary meat, give them PAD
- A. P.A.D. – Prolongs Active Death
- B. Enriched with nourishing marrowbone strontium

There are many other poems constituted by slogans, which read like the one-line instructions for conceptual poems (‘Summer Poems Without Words’). Perhaps his most successful protest poem appropriates the cut-up technique of the early experimentalists and boldly uses humour to remind his readers about the catastrophic effects of nuclear bombs. ‘On the Late Late Massachers Stillbirths and Deformed Children a Smoother Lovelier Skin Job’ is, as the poet describes it, a ‘Cut-up of John Milton Sonnet XVIII On the late Massacher in Piedmont/TV Times/CND leaflet’:

The seven-day beauty plan
Avenge O Lord thy slaughter’d saints, whose bones
Will cause up to 1 million deaths from leukaemia
Forget not, in thy book record their groans
Now for the vitally important step. Cream your face
and neck a second time.

As with the PAD poem, the juxtaposition of otherwise innocent advertising material points up the difference between peace and nuclear war in a striking way. In a later poem, ‘The Entry of Christ into Liverpool’, Henri makes effective use of the ‘placards banners posters’ he sees, some copied from Ensor’s etching, some from his contemporary Liverpool (‘End the War in Vietnam’, ‘God Bless Our Pope’) and using the Guinness advert of the time, which doled out its message piecemeal: ‘GUIN / GUINN / GUINNESS IS / ... GUINNESS IS GOOD / GUINNESS IS GOOD FOR / ... GUINNESS IS GOOD FOR YOU’. Perhaps this is one of the most egregious examples of product placement in the history of poetry!

Adrian Mitchell used the original PAL advert in its entirety as the title to one of his poems: ‘So Don’t Feed Your Dog Ordinary Meat, Feed Him Pal, Pal Meat for Dogs, Prolongs Active Life (Enriched with Nourishing Marrowbone Jelly)’, where the adjectival phrase in parentheses forms a satiric refrain. Like Henri, he was extremely popular at readings. He was also partial to the slogan, famously replying to a request for a poem to honour Prince Charles with the following: ‘Royalty is a neurosis. / Get well soon.’ In general his language is hortatory (with no accent on the ‘tory’) or declamatory (ditto), and is reminiscent of the language of advertising, but the only true example is ‘Slogan Time’, with a wide range of subjects, including the following:

EGGS ARE APPROVED BY THE DESIGN CENTRE
...
GET READY FOR CONSCRIPTION – LEARN TO SHOOT

As poetry readings were extremely popular at the time, and in places such as pubs where folk clubs were spring-

ing up, there was very much an audience for this kind of public-orientated poetry, soon labelled Pop poetry. It would be difficult to describe a good deal of it as poetry in the lyric mode, although lyrics did feature widely in many popular poems of the day. But certainly a great number of mock or jokey adverts proliferated among what used to be called the ‘small press’ or ‘local’ poets of the day, too many to list here. One of the best examples, though, is Miles Burrows’s ‘minipoet’ (1966) which appeared in Edward Lucie-Smith’s *British Poetry since 1945* (Penguin, 1970) and plays on the several meanings of the word ‘mini’ from the famous motor car designed by Alec Issigonis to the image of the equally convenient ‘minor’ poet that Burrows perceives coming in the wake of the Movement:

– slim, inexpensive, easy to discard
nippy rather than resonant, unpretentious.
We found them produced in increasing numbers
from oxford, home of pressed steel.

II

Having looked briefly at the experimental side, we now turn to more mainstream poets, albeit they were left wing or liberal, before a look at Larkin, who was neither of those. It should not surprise the reader to know that several poets earned a daily crust in advertising. Norman Cameron was an early example in the 1930s, the creator of the infamous ‘Night Starvation’ campaign for Horlicks, but post-war it was the young Australian poet Peter Porter who inspired Cameron’s contemporary Gavin Ewart (credited with Strongbow cider) to start writing poetry again after a gap of twenty-five years. When Ewart later lost his advertising job, he turned to writing full time and left a prolific output. Initially he wrote free verse in his first two collections, but later became adept at metrical and rhyming verse in a great many forms. The greatest influence on his work from advertising, however, is the slogan. Most of these were collected in the three volumes of his ‘Little Ones’ gathered in his last *Collected Poems 1980–1990*, where the poet comments wittily on almost everything and in every style. One of the best examples would be from ‘A Never-Never Slogan’: ‘Get stoned – with Stone’s Ginger Wine’. Whether the producer of the ginger wine was pleased or not is not recorded. What is certain is that this use of advertising, be it cod or a reflection of reality, did become popular in the ‘poetry boom’ of the 1960s, in the sudden growth of poetry readings and in the poetry magazines of the time.

In Ewart’s second book, *The Deceptive Grin of the Gravel Porters* (1968) we see a development in the influence of advertising from the single line into a group of lines under a single title. ‘Headlines’ is one of the first of these, and though they are not strictly advertising, they amount to the same thing when, among its eleven lines, we read one-line spoofs of historic or literary events, as in this take on Lear: ‘Daughters claim Pop unfit to rule’. In ‘The Eight Suits’, however, the language approximates more closely that of advertising:

A lightweight suit from Austin Reed,

good for the evil act.

A suit of black silk pyjamas,
flavoured with decadence.

And back to basics in 'The Twelve Slogans', including

Keep above board with Shakespeare Shoes

...

Be baroque with J. S. Bach

However popular these squibs were – and they were – adverts are an influence in longer stanzaic poems, such as 'The Small Ads Poem', which accurately reflects these miniature compositions, more or less:

Third Girl is wanted to share a maisonette,
Students for camping holidays urgently required,
Durex Gossamer and Fetherlite are guaranteed,
Yoga relaxation can rebuild you if you're tired,
Money lent, no references (Be In our Debt!),
Pregnancy tests for girls too much admired.

And it runs the whole gamut of such small ads, faithfully reporting some, wickedly undermining others, my favourite being 'Theosophy – A Talk: "Beyond Belief"'.

At the same time as Gavin Ewart was working as a copywriter, another poet was earning a living as a university librarian, and had absorbed the language of advertising in several surprising ways. Whereas poets like Henri, Mitchell, Ewart and Porter were either heavily critical or satirical about the newly emerging world of consumerism, Philip Larkin seems both to delineate and encapsulate that world without the same savagery yet with pointedness and even poignancy. In his most well-known poem, 'The Whitsun Weddings', from the eponymous collection (1964), he describes a group of young women as if in the advertising language of their world

The nylon gloves and jewellery-substitutes,
The lemons, mauves, and olive-ochres...

almost as if this were free indirect discourse from that world. Generally he is very conscious of advertising, as in 'The tin advertisements / for cocoa and twist' in 'MC-MXIV'. In 'The Large Cool Store' he again reflects the copywriter's way with the fashions on display

the stands of Modes for Night:
Machine-embroidered, thin as blouses,

Lemon, sapphire, moss-green, rose
Bri-Nylon Baby-Dolls and Shorties...

albeit this is a world 'synthetic, new, / And natureless in ecstasies'. What is noticeable here is the descriptive language that reflects the hyperbole of advertising. Yellow cannot be yellow, but has to be lemon; not blue plain blue but sapphire, and 'Modes for Night' are not simple nightdresses but the newly imagined 'Bri-Nylon Baby-Dolls and Shorties', which coyly tell us how revealing

they are while disturbingly soliciting less wholesome fantasies. In two further poems, Larkin deals with advertisements directly. With a socially critical eye, he describes advertising hoardings in 'Essential Beauty':

In frames as large as rooms that face all ways
And block the ends of streets with giant loaves,
Screen graves with custard, cover slums with praise
Of motor-oil and cuts of salmon...

In contrast, 'Sunny Prestatyn' opens with the slogan 'Come to Sunny Prestatyn', moves on to the desecration of 'the girl on the poster' image and leads to the new poster, which says 'Fight Cancer'. One could even say that Larkin has many lines inspired by advertising, especially the slogan as in the infamous first line of 'This Be The Verse' (*High Windows*, 1974), namely 'They fuck you up, your mum and dad', which – apart from the four-letter word – sounds like the intimate interpersonal language that copywriters often employ, especially in the thematic fronting where the verb is emphasised over the subject nouns 'mum' and 'dad'. In short, it is an intimate address. And the poem ends on a kind of slogan 'Get out as early as you can, / And don't have any kids yourself.' Again there seem to be echoes of advertising in 'Sympathy in White Major', despite its arty title out of Théophile Gautier and Whistler. There is the intimate and detailed description of pouring out a very generous gin and tonic, with which he toasts the imagined model human being, but adds 'Though white is not my favourite colour', which one might find in an advert where stated preferences are crucial. It is in these subtle touches that Larkin shows his awareness of social change and perception, using the language seen in advertising not to bludgeon the reader, but rather to gently add one more reminder of life's fragility, no matter how rooted and social it may appear to be.

Larkin's is a subtler way of adopting the language of advertising, and contrasts with the public voice of the Pop and popular poets of an earlier generation. But the latter spirit is not dead, as we can see in 'Shaadi.com' by the Indian poet Shanta Acharya in her recent collection *Imagine* (2017). In this parody of an advertisement for a partner to be found in dating and marriage apps, the poem moves from the expression of an ideal man to that of utter desperation in finding anyone at all:

Kind, understanding, generous, loyal, trustworthy,
goes without saying. Financially, emotionally secure,
well-educated, thoughtful...

...

Age: Doesn't matter. Marital status: Doesn't matter.
Children: Doesn't matter. Country of residence:
Doesn't matter.

Height: Doesn't matter. Education: Doesn't matter...

When the persona posts that last set of criteria we learn from the last line of the poem that 'I was inundated with suitors, crashing my computer.' The technology may have changed, but the satire, wit and humour are still there to be applied to it.

Haverins

SILIS MACLEOD

The Blake Barra Bayte

after a Gaelic waulking song

I wais on the mist-coverit moontain
Chessin the sheep an hodden a few
Quhen ewer ship's mast brak thro the lea
Clan MacNeil's oot campaynin
The blake bayte plewed the watter
Leavin ahint the laan o MacLean
Rowin tae Kisimul Castle
Fer feastin an debosheries
Dreinkin wine fra nicht tae dawin
The raucle soun o men in the haw
The harp an the pipe an the sma
Lassies o Mull snarin ther preyes

Quhen I wais a lass in mi lang, nable silk
I'd nae stretch mysel by sic a man
That gangs abrad in the blake Barra bayte
I wud select a bricht-temprit lad
A broon-hairit fella wi a bonnie visage
Quha tak the brae wi a gun on his erm
Pursueth the stag tae the marshy holla

A Scotsman Keeks the Border

'Here... is England and nowhere.' – T.S. Eliot

Ye kenna see it fer keekin
But aince ye cross ye ken
Yer naw in Scotland enymare
The aire is englafied

Faither wud swer it is the licht
That chenges qhuen ye lave
As if Pheebys has a saft-spot
Fer ye banks an ye braes

But its bathe mair an leis than this
Tak a twa pennie quoin
An whurl it as fer as ye kan
That wee bittie lang grass

Qhar it lens is Scotland an nocht
Ye ken its ferther still
Somqhar amang the Norlan pynis
Mebbe qhar ye scunner

Fer a ples tae pish by the rode
An wi yer cushie-dreel
Doon an the wind up yer hawf-kilt
Ye keek a caper coille

An cry oot lude *Alba gu bráth*
Sin its on the rode sine
That sotty-tearfu yammieness
Is Scotland an still nocht

Perhappis its on an eiland
Qhar the sea braks intae
Wan o Cherlies hidey-haws
An drewves oot the trewth

But its no here at this peelie lyne
By the hot-dawg trowly
Wi the lither-cladde byker lads
Unless that is it

Celts Macpherson an Morganwg
Kenned it weil – ye mak
A countrie by tellen whuppers
An keek qhar the tree fels

Hymn for a Scottish Humanist

I envy the crispness of your thought,
The quick air and clean descent
From the modest height of No,

The forest full of certainties
And the straight road without bend.
But do you never doubt your doubt?

A solution is not an answer,
Which craves a question
To be rolled up its steep sides

Which, reaching the top, slips
Just before the cairn
And, brattling down again

Through bracken and scree,
Loosens more questions
Than you meant to ask.

The Gairdens o' Kirkcudbright

If ther wes a plan
then it was soon lost
as nebour's swopt nebour's

fir a bigger plot
wi mair sunlight
bitter chence o' tatties

firther frae the cludgies
so that 23
has access o'er 4

and 47
crossing Tanpits Lane
has its ain fitbaa' field

but nuthin' graws in
the gairdens o' Kirkcudbright
like a guid rumor

an nothin's sae raucle
as the whisht o'
yer next door nebour

A few moments with a Scots dictionary reveals

a wealth of words
denoting bodily action
names for distinct

kinds of rough ground
dozens for hill or high place
a chapter on bovines

whether in-calf, sick or spotted
a regional variety
more precise than a map

that to *slouster* is to dabble
in mud or water and
why Tarbert (or Tarbet)

is a common placename
in a landscape often
interrupted by water

that *sklent* is one
in a list of many words
characterising rain and wind

and small measures
of strong liquid is a category
well catered for

in a language
that appears obsessed
with tiny demarcations

of water.

3

after Sorley Maclean

There are three tae qhom I huv promised love,
Tae three a service of uneven skill –
The important cause of poetry,
The bonny isle an the reid-hairit girl.

Poems

NICHOLAS FRIEDMAN

Heat Wave

Startled by jingling bells, I part the blinds:
Below, an old man steers his pushcart trike
through warping heat like a creature Ovid forgot,
his case of off-brand ice cream suddenly priceless.
Children fill this makeshift marketplace
to buy a bit of what's already bought.

The freezer shudders. It's well past dinner time,
but I won't light the stove. Better to sit
and watch the plastic fan sway side to side.
The bells jingle again, now farther off.
More children holler for their place in line.
They want some more. They'll never have enough.

A Kind of Madness

after Carlos Pellicer

I'd papered the windows, sold off the last
of the mismatched stock, and hung a sign on the door:
closed for business.

And here you have me
taking up vinyl, laying oak,
and lifting the sashes for a gust of air.

There, in a vase, the soft knot of a peony.

I've accepted all the deeply human
nonsense, and managed to forget
myself for a little while.

My constant worry is a kind of bliss,
sending its runners through the field.
When it rises, bloom and nettle,

I'll undertake explaining it to you,
my best distraction from the thought
that there's an end to this.

Contrapasso

for a friend on suicide watch

My friend, Dante got it backwards: Suffering
is what comes first. The soul falls
like a grain of spelt into an unmarked forest –

this much is true – taking root in good earth
or bad, sending up shoots.
But this is the business of living, not after.

In that Florentine hell, the Pilgrim must break
a limb from the shade before it can speak
its pain. I, too, have seen the dead and know
that they are silent.

It's June, and the gorges of Ithaca rush below
tall bridges we've walked together. The beauty
of their white water is almost indecent.

It might seem cruel at first, but let me
break this small branch from you.
I'm listening. And there's so much left to say.

An Exchange / Fall 2020

JOSHUA WEINER & DANIEL TIFFANY

Joshua Weiner: I'm excited to have this opportunity to talk to you, Daniel, because more than any other poet-critic of my generation you've pushed at my own thinking about poetry the hardest, mostly by revealing to me the histories of poetry's materiality. What I think of as a kind of trilogy – *Toy Medium: Materialism and Modern Lyric* (2000) or *Infidel Poetics: Riddles, Nightlife, Substance* (2009), or *My Silver Planet: A Secret History of Poetry & Kitsch* (2014) – is really a whole new history of modern poetry, moving in the latter volumes towards an exploration and revival of the concept of diction, which you extended in your recent essay on lyric for the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia* (2020).

That essay was particularly useful this fall for how it foregrounded some of my initial thinking around Louise Glück receiving the 2020 Nobel Prize in Literature, which also fed into my reposting of an opinion piece about Glück after the Nobel announcement, that appeared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (9 October). The piece ran under a startling banner: 'Kitschalarm, Stufe: Rot' (Kitsch-alarm, Level: Red). Actually, I found it kind of funny. The subheading reads, 'In Germany she is almost unknown, in the USA she has received all the important awards. Louise Glück is now receiving the Nobel Prize for her conservative poems. Could there not have been any stronger poets?' My posting this (on my FB page, October 11) prompted a range of responses, first from you (after I tagged you) and followed by some other poets and artists, in the US and Germany.

I thought maybe we could start there. The opinion piece (not mine) was easy to dismiss because the writer, Tobias Lehmkuhl, a noted critic in Germany, skates journalistically in his cursory attention to the surface of style and motif. He finds Glück's poetry to be quietist, an apolitical 'Confessional' poetry of psychological conflict (albeit with little cathartic process), written in a style characterised by its elemental simplicity and purity, but without the surrealism that we find in Charles Simic, for example; or she reaches for Classical topoi, but without working it through an experimental approach of a kind that we find in Anne Carson (these comparisons are Lehmkuhl's). What Lehmkuhl finds objectionable in her work most of all is what he calls 'gedanklichen Kitsch' – a kind of 'mental Kitsch' that is also a sign of 'Gespreiztheit' or 'affectation'. The pique comes to a head with a quote from *The Wild Iris* (for which Glück won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992, and is one of the two books of hers – *Averno* is the other – translated into German, both by the poet Ulrike Draesner).

Of course, there are curiosities to chew on for anyone interested in cultural differences between European and American attitudes towards literature and society and other kinds of freshman seminar subjects. But Lehmkuhl's piece, however limited it is by its occasion, implies questions that go to the core issue that you've

been thinking about lately, about diction in relation to form and style; the submerged histories of that tension, between notions of purity and impurity (monstrosity); and as you suggest in one of your responses on FB, to the current culture of writing poetry, its predominant institutional setting, and the kind of reading that is part of an 'apprentice' poet's training curriculum in the various traditions, mostly of lyric.

Thinking about Louise Glück's poetry in terms of its diction *in relation* to what we're hearing elsewhere in the various constellations of diction that light up the contemporary poetry world, are we in a new place in the poetry culture – if so, how would we describe it, how would we recognise it for its difference from the past; if not, in what ways do you find that it's essentially the same?

Daniel Tiffany: Thanks so much for your comments about my critical work and for drawing attention to this German critic's sounding of a 'kitsch alarm' in relation to the poetry of this year's Nobel Prize winner. I should probably start by noting that the attribution of poetic kitsch feeds directly into my thinking about diction, as you suggest, an aspect of language integral to any poetic text, but also a critical concept which has lain dormant during a century dominated by formalism (and formal experimentation) in the arts. My evolving attention to matters of diction in poetry of the past and the present has led me to wonder whether we may be in the midst of a prolonged and confusing transition – in the context of poetry – from a century pre-occupied with *form* to an emergent period grounded in the phenomenology of *diction*.

The widespread experimentation with diction in poetry today is occurring, disconcertingly, just as academic literary criticism aims to re-assert the importance of literary *form* as a means of accessing and recording the world outside the poem. Thus, at the very moment when a new generation of literary scholars is seeking to elaborate and extend the premises of modernist formalism in new ways, contemporary poetries in English are vigorously engaged in exploring the ontologies of *diction* in texts and spoken word, casting new light on questions of diction in earlier periods (an aspect of literary language that is not often acknowledged or examined in the latest models of poetic form).

Ultimately, the elaboration of New Formalism in academic literary criticism today may be less important as a revival of formalist principles than as an energetic but inscrutable memorial to the primacy of form in poetry and poetics of the last century. By contrast, the emergent preoccupation with the expressive powers of diction in poetry anchors a massive interrogation, recovery and documentation of social identity, intersectional identities and even nonidentity. More specifically, the

priority of diction in matters of social expression and identity finds its central paradigm in the historical experiments of African-American poets shifting between standardised and vernacular expression – a process of code-switching that continues to distinguish and invigorate that tradition. (The counterpart in the UK would be the history of poets writing in English and Scots or, more recently, English and West Indian dialect.) In addition, more perplexingly, the correlation between diction and social expression resonates with the vocabularistic orientation of computational ‘distant reading’, even as the problem of diction also makes it possible to ask new theoretical and historical questions about the alienated substance of poetic kitsch (with its burgeoning online presence) – and about the manufacture of synthetic vernaculars.

But what exactly is *diction*? In the most general sense – a reference that can seem impossibly vague at first glance – diction concerns the kinds of language used in a poem and, more precisely, the scope and textures of *vocabulary* as a general feature of all texts. Typically, we notice the effects of diction only when we read or hear language that originated in a time or place remote from our own (while naturalised diction, or vocabulary, often goes unnoticed). But even ‘standard’ diction, which remains undetectable to its own speakers, will eventually come to seem odd or strange – and may be revealed instantly as such to listeners outside the mainstream. Diction thus becomes evident to us most commonly through varying degrees of incomprehension, obscurity or estrangement. Anachronism, or the use of dialect, or new jargons and lexicons, for example, betray the effects of diction. While poetic diction is formulated under conditions analogous to diction as a general feature of language, poetic diction has historically maintained some degree of separation from larger territories of social diction. But poetry’s renewed preoccupation with diction today is marked by the erosion of this distinction between poetic diction and varieties of social diction. Mallarmé locates this transformational shift in poetic language at the core of a modern ‘crisis of verse’: ‘There is verse as soon as diction calls attention to itself.’

As a vector of poetic crisis, the emergent grounding of diction today might, in contrast to the discourse of formalism, be understood best as a revival of the orientation of *philology*. Not as an academic method or disciplinary technique, but as an approach to poetry and poetic texts defined by a feeling for language (as Vico reminds us), by desire for language, attraction to language, but also caring for language, in its broadest sense. Yet Friedrich Schlegel’s jarring translation of the term *philology* as ‘logical affect’ (adjacent to his concept of ‘chemical wit’) points towards a more polarised relation (combining attraction and repulsion) between language (or thought) and feeling. More specifically, as theorists ranging from Norman O. Brown to Werner Hamacher contend, the philological ‘chemistry’ between desire and language takes root in the matrix of poetry: ‘Poetry is *prima philologica*’ (Hamacher). At the same time, philology, as a longing for language, can only be fully grasped in contrast to the dangerous move-

ment of *logophobia*: a fear of language, a hatred of language. And yet the fear of language in our own time may be inextricable – via conditions of exile, fugitivity, estrangement and translation – from the wellsprings of philology.

JW: Thanks for slowing me down a bit, Daniel. You’re right to back up and reframe this in terms of diction as a critical problem and to situate it historically. My own introduction to thinking in this way, though, as far as it had an influence on my awareness in trying to write poems is, I’d say, pretty old school: Barfield, Empson and Jo Miles – back in the day Miles put grad students to work counting and tabulating poets’ word choices and frequency of use across historical periods. Those books (*Poetic Diction*, *The Structure of Complex Words* and *Eras and Modes in English Poetry*) helped me understand diction, as such, by critically removing poetic words from the immediate context of sentences in poems and the formal rhythms of verse, which are enchanting and transporting, and sometimes brain-scrambling. Yet each of those critical works had a kind of humanistic touch. The new ‘distant reading’ promoted by Moretti, enabled by computers, hasn’t been much help to me. It seems ‘out of touch’, you could say, with how poems actually work on us. I know that begs a question, but okay.

I hear you making a point that a renewed critical attention to diction distinguishes itself by collapsing differences between poetic diction and other kinds, and that historically this has been a concern situated in modernism: that verse happens with a certain awareness, intention and use of words, regardless of whether or not those words sound as if they belong to the world of lyric poetry. What was a crisis was also a difficult but exciting renewal of a verbal art form by virtue of new words flooding into the poetic field. Poetry as grounded primarily in a love of words calls forth that longing for language you describe.

Turning back round to Louise Glück’s poetry, it’s been helpful for me to think about what American poet I would place opposite her in the uni/verse. Maybe Hart Crane? They’re both quite complex, but in different ways: Crane’s diction is a little decadent; he favors ‘rare’ words; he’s keenly sensitive to diction in its synesthetic values – volume, for example, weight, density, scale: there’s a real sense in his poetry of language *as* material, and often the sense of the meaning of the poem is very much circumscribed by style itself, which can be opaque: the meaning of the poem is the language of the poem, the holistic experience of the language of the poem. Well, he is a modern Romantic, you could say: meaning is just beyond reach, but you can feel that you’re almost there.

The challenge of Glück’s poetry is not in its diction – which is often elemental, monosyllabic, recognisably lyric – and not in its syntax, either, which is easily graspable: the challenge is in reading the implications of the sentences, the way one sentence opens to the next, and the power of the unsaid, what’s felt in the movement or leap between lines and sentences as much as what’s in them. If you atomised a poem by Crane, and made a

collection of his words, thereby removing them from their poetic formal relation to each other, you'd still have some sense of what a poem by Crane might be like; if you did that with a poem by Glück, I don't think you'd have any idea. In other words, in the first example, focus on diction would maybe rearrange your awareness regarding the experience of the poem, but not remove you from it; in the second case, it really would. Crane's poetry is vatic and symbolist; Glück's is psychological. Neither of these poets, however (one a living poet, the other a poet of last century, firmly situated in its history of modernism) comes across as *vernacular* in their diction; and maybe that's what my earlier question was driving at. Is current vernacular as it enters, you could say, the vocabulary of poetry, significantly changing the forms of poetry that we're reading and hearing today? And is a contemporary vernacular *a priori* not kitsch, whether it comes, for example, from a world of street living or a world of machine language? The question underneath this question has to do with the life of poetry, and what renews it at the level of diction, and how that process happens, which may be a social process, but also a process of intense and wide reading – to not write kitsch, you have to really know what it is, and what it was before it became that. It requires study as well as instinct.

DT: Josh, I'm eager to respond to the particulars of your comparison of the dictions of Crane and Glück. Your opening remarks allude to an article sounding a 'kitsch-alarm' at the highest level on the occasion of Glück's Nobel Prize, and your description of Crane's diction (decadent, rare, synaesthetic) can be aligned with the common judgment that Crane's diction is *hyperlyrical* and therefore susceptible to the vapours of high kitsch. Challenging implicitly the kitsch alarm sounded by the German critic, you find the diction of Glück's poems to be 'elemental' and so conventionally lyrical (or naturalised) that scrutiny of her diction in isolation would (in contrast to scrutiny of Crane's diction) reveal little about the poems themselves. While it may be true that Crane's diction contains more eccentric words (which, though they may distinguish Crane's diction from Glück's, can still be easily situated within the historical territory of lyric diction), it's entirely possible that their poems share a matrix of diction that's quite recognisable – from a different perspective. If we view Glück's lyric diction in contrast to the diction of other modes of poetry, it becomes quite clear that Glück's diction is not neutral – and could indeed tell us a great deal about the poems and their social matrix. Compare, for example, two data sets (or concordances) of the ten most common words in hip-hop lyrics in contrast to the least common hip-hop words, and one can detect immediately the distinctiveness of Glück's diction:

Most Common hip-hop words	Least Common hip-hop words
1. Chopper	1. Sailed
2. Stunting	2. Emptiness
3. Flexing	3. Sigh
4. Mane	4. Desire
5. Trill	5. Sea
6. Trapping	6. Broken
7. Homie	7. Heart
8. Balling	8. Cried
9. Realest	9. Mountain
10. Snitch	10. Alone

From these two sets (compiled by 'distant' computational reading), we can hear that the least hip-hop words belong – not coincidentally – to the territory of lyric diction as it is employed variably by Glück and many other poets. Hence what first appear to be distinct varieties of diction in Crane's and Glück's poems also belong quite obviously to a shared matrix of diction – a pool of language that is rich in social and historical significance (as is, of course, the diction of hip hop).

It is crucial here to note that the scale of vocabulary in hip-hop poetry is vast compared to data sets of other song genres. For example, using data sets of 35,000 words derived from songs by individual poets, the number of words unique to a given hip-hop poet is significantly larger (and sometimes several times larger) than the number of words unique to poets in data sets of songs in the genres of pop, country, or rock songs. In other words, hip-hop poets employ much larger vocabularies than songwriters of any other variety.

And, of course, one wonders what might be revealed by comparisons between hip-hop and lyric poets. At the very least, the seemingly frivolous remark by Kenneth Koch that John Ashbery's greatness lay in part in the gargantuan scale of his vocabulary takes on new (and puzzling) significance. Should we acknowledge that Ashbery's historical significance as a poet may be rooted primarily in his renovation of poetic diction? Or, more boldly, should we entertain the possibility that certain correspondences between hip-hop poetry and Ashbery's sprawling lyrics may be divulged by considering them in light of the territories and tectonics of vocabulary? Thinking about vocabulary might also disclose certain verbal morphologies, or meridians, shared by hip hop and poets such as J. H. Prynne and John Wilkinson, for example, whose vocabularies are especially copious and variegated. At the same time, the framework of diction might lead one to consider the effects of poets whose vocabulary is extremely narrow or limited – a verbal economy which could sustain a discussion about minimalism, but might also lead to consideration of the strangely arrested vocabularies of poetic kitsch.

JW: This is helpful because it raises a confusion of mine. This trend in academic 'New Formalism' (not to be mistaken for the old New Formalism in the US that was the expression of a reactionary poetics in the 1980s that sat, in an ideologically overdetermined way, opposite Language Poetries) – this trend in thinking seems to get it totally wrong, in my view. Well, maybe kinda wrong? I

mean, form and diction are not *the same* thing; but is the latter not an attribute or element of the former? Form stands as a kind of holistic notion, in my view, about all the qualities of shape and correspondence and historical meaning of words, associative interactions, tissues of allusion and other kinds of binders, echoes and lexical qualities that contribute to the sense we have of a poem being a verbal object that is powerfully kinetic in initiating apprehensions of fluid material processes that take up space and duration in the mind.

Maybe that's too broad an understanding to be of much critical use, though; I don't know. But, for example, it's this sense of form which seems very much alive in your own reading (in *My Silver Planet*) of Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro': the way the haunting Dantean image of that first line ('The apparition of these faces in the crowd') can join the kitsched out haiku-ey second line ('petals on a wet black bough') to constitute a genuine living poetic form. Maybe what really excites me, actually, is the drenched artifice of it; maybe it's more akin to David Lynch's kitsched-out *Twin Peaks* (which I love) than Heraclitus...

But, how do you talk about diction in this instance (crowd; bough) without talking about rhyme (crowd; bough); without talking about form (two accentual trim-

eter lines and monosyllabic end rhyme to make a couplet; or: Dantean hell image in first line plus Asiatic nature image in second line to create a transhistorical-cultural perceptual complex realised in a flash of intuition (an intuition that is *grounded*, you could say, in reading the classics)? Is diction here *not* an aspect of form?

More pressing to me is the question: why might this distinction (between form and diction) be an important understanding with consequences for the reading and writing of poetry? *Or*: Is this an academic question that really has little bearing on how poetry is experienced?

Maybe I'm being a little *snickety* here, if not too *pernickety*. If so, it's in contrast to how I feel about those hip-hop word sets, which really light my fire! Those columns are so suggestive, and they demand that I entertain the 'distant' analysis I was, well, distancing myself from a moment ago. But the experiment is not really fair, either; because you've taken words from one conglomerate source (hip-hop lyrics) and sifted that source for two categories, most and least common: but the source is the same for both, and the least common words only *imply* the character of Glück's lyric diction. What if we narrowed it down. Here's the prominent diction from a well-known poem by Glück:

<u>Nouns</u>	<u>Verbs (minus copula)</u>	<u>Adjectives</u>	<u>Adverbs</u>
moon	tell	paralysing	these
flowers	lighting	low	always
yard	hate	humiliating	still
sex	sealing	pursuing	
mouth	escapes	old	
body	hear	tired	
cry	fused	mock	
premise	mounts		
union	see		
mind	drifts		
tonight	rest		
question			
answer			
sound			
selves			
antagonisms			
scent			
orange			
window			
odor			
world			

You're right! Glück's diction in her poem 'Mock Orange' clearly belongs to the column of words least common to hip-hop. Okay, hold on. What if I broaden the sample, not with another poem by Glück, but with a poem by a poet she admires intensely and one we would never associate with the idea or experience of kitsch.

<u>Nouns</u>	<u>Verbs (without copula)</u>	<u>Adjectives</u>
beauty	bedding	small
forest	nuzzle	wild
deer	tear	effortless
eyes	dangle	soft
lips	scattering	alien
teeth	nibbled	small
grass	shade	strange
roots	hang	
mouths	crying	
earth	startle	
woods	stare	
paths		
fields		
leaves		
distances		
sun		
nouns		
faith		

So, I picked this poem, 'Psalm', by George Oppen, because if we set Glück's poem against his, we might bring a different set of textual evidence to bear on the tension you identify between a lyric vocabulary that exploits the power of an expert minimalism, as you posit, and where I feel you going, in your next step, towards characterising a vocabulary of poetic kitsch. To front load it, my immediate thought is that diction alone cannot really create a kitsch effect; isn't it diction *and syntax* together that generates the affect that we identify as kitsch?

DT: Josh, I think I should begin to respond to some of your queries and remarks here by addressing your comment about distinctions between form and diction. Diction could conceivably be regarded as an element of a poem's form, but only if 'form' were understood as encompassing, or equivalent to, *all* the material aspects of a poem (from prosody and syntax to diction and even spelling or typography). The term 'form' would thus simply become a synonym for the poetic artifact in its entirety. This happens to be the model of form adopted (often unwittingly) by many proponents of academic New Formalism – though their 'descriptions' of poetic form rarely encompass the features of diction in a text. In this case, what's called the variegated 'form' of a poem has nothing to do with iterability or the possible replication of certain patterns from one poem, or poet, to the next. This holistic, material conception of poetic form is thus entirely at odds with the conception of 'form' enabling the history of poetic *forms*, in which form is conceived as a general model of which there may be infinite examples or versions (a sonnet, for instance, or a terza rima stanza, or iambic meter, or the counting of syllables in tanka and cinquain forms). Form, in this traditional sense, is *not* equivalent to the material artifact of a poem – indeed, it is not a material thing at all; it is an abstraction, a general model.

A changing modern conception of poetic form has indeed pushed beyond this idealist model of form (a

'crisis', as Mallarmé noted, which makes it impossible to say what sets poetry apart, in a material sense, from other genres and media). Poetry in this case becomes whatever 'form' a text assumes, encompassing all of its material features. When the term 'form' is used in this way, poetry can no longer be identified generically by certain material characteristics (e.g. a text not written in prose). From this perspective, anything can be poetry, or at least poetry's name can no longer be withdrawn from any sort of textual, performative or graphic production. At present, the tensions between idealist and materialist conceptions of poetic 'form' remain entirely unresolved, contributing to a persistent – and productive – incoherence at the very heart of our most basic ideas about the nature of poetry.

Let me now say a few things concerning your remarks and questions about reading the diction of particular poems. A comprehensive analysis of a poem requires, of course, attention to all of its possible features: syntax, prosody, rhyme, imagery, vocabulary and form (in a more restricted sense) – not to mention its possible meanings. But this requirement does not imply that one cannot consider a poem's diction in isolation: Pound's slant rhyme of crowd/bough, for example, can be evaluated solely in terms of its diction. The anachronism of the word 'bough' clearly marks it as a feature of high lyric diction, while the word 'crowd' (animated by controversial theorising about crowds – Gustave Le Bon, for example – during the period of the poem's composition) introduces (like the word 'Metro') elements of contemporary diction into the poem. Indeed, one could say that the incipient and transitional modernism of the poem stems in part from this admixture of diction.

In a corresponding way, examining in isolation solely the diction of poems by ostensibly divergent authors – as you do with texts by Glück and George Oppen – can yield surprising insights, which scramble conventional readings and genealogies. Who would have expected the Objectivist Oppen's diction – when viewed in isolation – to correspond so closely to Glück's high lyric diction?

This unexpected alignment is precisely the sort of jarring revelation exposed deliberately by the tabulations of words on index cards (a precursor of computational distant reading) carried out by Josephine Miles and her graduate student helpers in Berkeley. Who knew, for example, that Pound's ostensibly 'modern' vocabulary is closer to Coleridge's diction (as Miles revealed) than to the vocabularies of his modernist peers? But, then again, perhaps the diction of Pound's modernist peers may not be as modern as it is presumed to be.

JW: I think I hear what you're saying about diction as an element of style, and the difference between a strong style – by which I mean a strongly individuated feeling for language that indicates something like authorial intention and identity, 'one's way with words' – and form, which is abstract, replicable and shared – shared as practice and shared for being recognisable as such. You and I share the same form of human male body, but you have a recognisable style of standing and moving and speaking that I don't have. We share a physical form but not a physical style.

The idea of poetic form being essentially formless is appealing because it *covers* the ground of possibility! I *can't* disagree. At this point, for a thing to be a poem, in terms of form, requires, to begin with, at least two people – one person to make it and call it a poem, and another person to agree. There is no *essential* grounding.

I'm glad you raised the example of the sonnet; that's really helpful. If you said to me, 'I just read some sonnets from the English Renaissance', I'd have a good idea of what the poems you read were like, in terms of their form. Although a sonnet by Wyatt, and another by Sidney, would be stylistically very different, they would be formally very similar; and if I added Spenser and then Shakespeare, I'd still have a range of formal qualities or aspects which would create an instantly recognisable field of form in which each sonnet would have its place. But if you said, 'I just read some American sonnets written in the past five years', I'd have no idea of guessing what they might be like, in terms of their form. Because the tradition of the sonnet at this point also includes something like the anti-sonnet, and because 'the sonnet' is also an abstraction or concept of form that poets play with, subvert, extend and in other ways experiment with. Basically, you could title anything you might write 'Sonnet', and no matter what it was like, stylistically or formally, by virtue of establishing a conceptual relationship to the idea of sonnet as a form, it would be that thing. I see how true that is.

Let me try it. Here's a poem I'm making up on the spot that let's pretend someone else agrees is the thing it claims to be:

Sonnet

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose
times fourteen
equals a poem that you cannot think of / not / in
relation to the idea of the form.

Works for me! It actually really does. I grabbed the fa-

mous line of Gertrude Stein's (from her 1913 poem, 'Sacred Emily') because what word is more saturated with lyric symbolism than the word 'rose'? It screams *Kitsch Alarm*. But that's precisely why Stein grabs it – in order, in a sense, to refute it.

One does feel this kind of tension in Renaissance poems, too, of course; they are modern also in that sense. When Donne opens Holy Sonnet 14, with 'Batter my heart, three-person'd God', he is clearly thinking hard about diction as a way to awaken the form of the sonnet as profane love poem to sacred love poem. And he does it by bringing together the diction of warfare (batter) with the diction of love (my heart) with the diction of Christian theology (three-person'd God).

I guess that's why I turned to Oppen's 'Psalm', as well. I see your point, that looking at the diction, as we've isolated it, in Oppen's poem and in Glück's 'Mock Orange', is startling for what it suggests that these two poets, so different from each other, share in terms of their relation to lyric kitsch. But there's one word in the Oppen list that perhaps disrupts the poem's constellation of lyric diction; it's the least lyric word in his poem, and the most mysterious, in how it's used: the word is 'nouns'. 'The small nouns', he writes, 'Crying faith'. In a way, the poem is a song that evokes the sacred ('Psalm') and the idea of the divine in relation to our language, our poetic language, our 'nouns', our awareness of the words *as* words. In a way, it's the perfect poem for thinking about diction because it seems, on at least one level, to *be* a poem *about* diction. My point is that the value I'm discovering in the attention to diction, per se, that you're advocating, highlights precisely how Oppen's awareness of the lyric register is very much a part of how he complicates conventional lyric form, and escapes kitsch. (Does he escape it? I want him to escape it!) Thinking about diction in this isolated way, through the experiment of putting the poem's words into function sets, returns me to the more holistic reading of form that I was gesturing towards earlier. Or at least I'd like to think so. Maybe I'm wrong about that though. I guess my big question here is, how do we practice the lyric in a way that recuperates a diction that, after all, are the words available for signifying our most elemental existence?

DT: I do agree that the word 'nouns' points Oppen's diction, at least for a moment, away from the more lyrical diction he shares with Glück (which is what triggers the 'kitsch alarm' noted by the German critic). And your reference to the correlation, and differences, between style and diction helps us to return to the task of bringing the category of diction into clearer focus. It's reasonable to suggest, as you do, that diction is an 'element of style', but only if diction can be directly shaped and manipulated by an individual – that is, if it possesses a performative dimension. But it's crucial to emphasise the basic difference between the two: diction pertains to a collective and therefore trans-personal dimension of language, whereas style is more commonly associated with distinctive features of an individual author. The nonsubjective character of diction provides a matrix for the most nuanced and immediate expression of collec-

tive social being in a poetic text.

Diction may become visible, or even influenced, by individual performance – as when a poet experiments with received diction (African-American vernacular, for example), or adopts speech that is entirely outside his/her own social history (an act now associated with cultural appropriation) – but the verbal substance of diction always derives originally from collective experience. More precisely, diction becomes manifest in particular vocabularies arising over time from shared, but also isolated, historical experiences: the contours of diction may be determined by race, class, geography, age, gender, vocation, level of education, media exposure or any restrictive domain of sociality.

Even something like poetic diction – a mutable vocabulary associated with lyric poetry – comes into being through a similar process of social accretion. Lyric diction is cultivated and preserved by the circulation and recirculation of canonical poems over centuries amongst poets who form an evolving, generic vocabulary rooted in those poems (hence the poetry workshop's function as an institutional site for the inculcation of poetic diction). This echo chamber of reading, in which poets of diverse backgrounds acquire, both deliberately and unconsciously, a generic 'poetic' vocabulary, helps to explain why poets as ostensibly different as Oppen and Glück use language in ways that exhibit the habituated effects of lyric diction. At the same time, by contrast, this model helps to explain how poets who, by circumstance or by deliberate evasion, develop outside this echo chamber may introduce vocabularies that deviate from the pool of lyric diction – and may come to alter significantly the characteristics of that reservoir.

From this perspective, poetic kitsch can then be defined quite precisely as issuing from an extreme concentration of lyric diction in an individual poem: a distinct verbal texture – easily detectable – which accounts for other properties often associated with kitsch but usually described in psychological or rhetorical terms: generality, sentimentality, superficiality and even stupidity. The lyric diction of poetic kitsch becomes so stereotypical, so formulaic, so clichéd, that the distinction between style and diction, between the individual and the collective, simply collapses. Poetic kitsch engenders a verbal matrix where the guise of subjectivity harbours its opposite, where the personal becomes impersonal – and where style truly becomes, strictly speaking, an element of form.

In this sense, the language of kitsch is genuinely monadological (to use Leibniz's paradigm) – windowless – an instrument of solipsistic perception which can offer knowledge of the world (or personal interiority) only through the reverberations of a language which has no relations with either the external world or the inner life of subjectivity. The language of poetic kitsch is thus a language without qualities; it emerges from the echo chamber of lyric diction, distilling that vocabulary to the point of maddening redundancy – kitsch is a broken record – in order to describe feelings, experiences, histories which, although familiar, become strangely unreal, unfamiliar, through the hyper-lyrical diction of kitsch. From this perspective, kitsch – the most com-

mon form of poetry, we must admit – appears to resemble in its effects and even at times in its verbal posture the insular and enigmatic precinct of Symbolist poetry.

The fact that the aesthetic problem of kitsch first arose in the context of poetry in the early eighteenth century (and not in the visual or decorative arts, as one presumes today) marks kitsch as a problem associated with the genre of poetry in particular – a crisis of generic insularity and enclosure. One could even say that lyric poetry fell into a lengthy, troubled sleep during the eighteenth century, eclipsed by the manufacture of its sinister double, poetic kitsch. More specifically, the toxic profile of poetic kitsch – tautology, fraudulence, sentimentality, meaninglessness – emerged in the context of lyric poetry's troubled incorporation of 'vulgar' languages (under the guise of the so-called ballad revival) and through a series of spectacular forgeries of 'folk' poetry (the 'lullabies' of Mother Goose, for instance). The enduring correlation between the falsehood of kitsch and the actual forgery of 'strange vernaculars' means that the problem of kitsch continues to be implicated in poetry's ongoing incorporation of marginal languages – in its fabrication of synthetic vernaculars (reminding us that all vernaculars may, to some degree, be synthetic). In this sense, poetic kitsch could be regarded as the archetype of a modern paradigm of corrupt 'minstrelsy' and even – absent the parodic and murderous intent – as the forecasted blackface of lyric poetry.

In a nutshell, the vocabulary of kitsch is therefore integral to lyric poetry – from the meanest to the most exalted lyric – and can easily be detected in the matrix of lyric diction (though it may remain inscrutable to most eyes). As a purely verbal phenomenon, kitsch is thus the alienated essence of lyric diction, converted into a verbal substance that is at once toxic and beguiling. This genetic relation between high lyric and poetic kitsch helps to explain the submerged 'family resemblance' linking the poetic diction of Glück, or even Oppen, to the wellsprings of poetic kitsch.

From this perspective, the attribution of kitsch in poetry can never be a simple term of disapproval or contempt – referencing an isolated sphere of degraded lyric – since the verbal substance of kitsch is inseparable from the vocabulary of the most exalted lyric poems. The language of a poet like Keats, for example, or Glück, oscillates between profundity, or subtlety, and fakery, since it teeters on the divide between high lyric diction and poetic kitsch. Indeed, the toxic substance of kitsch is detectable, to varying degrees, in all lyric poets.

The relation of high lyric to poetic kitsch may therefore be described as *homeopathic* – a cure that is a residue of the disease it seeks to eradicate. Or that dynamic could, in a more scandalous sense, be inverted: poetic kitsch aims to 'cure' high lyric of its hagiographic self-regard. This dreadful and unacknowledged genetic relation helps to explain why kitsch remains an object of excruciating shame and disgust in the context of poetic evaluation and why the attribution of kitsch still retains a savage vigour in defense of 'serious' poetry (while kitsch has been provocatively 'turned' and subtly incorporated into the context of other arts). That an ar-

tifact often associated with indulgent and childish pleasures should be regarded by poets as utterly contemptible reveals that kitsch may be the prototype of art that elicits a fatal ambivalence, which Sianne Ngai attributes to a new set of disorienting 'aesthetic categories', each of them teetering between affection and disgust. From this perspective, kitsch may even be, as Adorno woundingly suggests, the future of art.

JW: But I love that adverb stuck to Adorno – it speaks to the ugly affect connected to kitsch. And yet that shame and disgust – I'll cop to those feelings! My teeth were cut on a modernism for which kitsch was derided and its presence suppressed – that affect seems dated now, too, doesn't it? I mean, isn't one sense of the post-post-post-of whatever it is we're in, an *absence* of that affect? That kitsch becomes just another quality, a kind of thread to be worked into the weave of a singular style, or a modality of montage? Still, I feel that Adorno is wrong about the future of art, though his future may already be our immediate past: within the bell jar of a theoretical projection, the teleology is delectable; but in fact the resourcefulness of writers, especially poets, responding to the world, is continually replenished in practice by the language, because the language is always in a state of change. 'For last year's words belong to another language,' as Eliot writes, 'And next year's words await another voice.' ('Little Gidding'). The texture of poetry's upper limit, of music, is determined in part by its lower limit, of speech (Zukofsky). That's why I keep coming back round to the question of vernacular, which you're also alluding to in those poets who deviate from that diction pool of lyric.

But here I am skating over the surface of my deep disease, which is what you've put your finger on and pressed hard: that the lyric – let's call it the genuine lyric – often contains that toxic substance of kitsch. Your mention of Keats brings me to that awareness; because there is often something faintly ridiculous in Keats – for example, the presence of 'faerie' in 'Nightingale' – that is, for me (as much as I adore Keats) like a fingernail on the proverbial chalkboard. (I think Jane Campion captures this duality in Keats quite well in her film.) Please allow me to make a jump here and press forward by tagging back to a preoccupation, split into two parts: 1) if the vocabulary of kitsch is integral to the lyric, and persists over time, what do you think is the future of the lyric – how will the lyric continue to thrive (rather than lapse into total kitsch)? and 2) considering Lehmkuhl's criticism of Glück, how do you think translation interacts with the apprehension of kitsch?

DT: Let's start with the important question of whether the modernist conception of kitsch (if not the term itself) may already be outdated, irrelevant. The possibility that kitsch – since the term itself first came into circulation during the 1920s as an indispensable counterpoint to modernist priorities – may now be an anachronism, as you suggest, depends on what art form one is considering and, more specifically, on that art's relation to popular culture (that is, whether kitsch continues to function as an illegitimate relay between high

and low culture).

As a specifically modern aesthetic category that often functions like a necessary but ill-defined placeholder – however familiar the term may be – the shallowness and latency of kitsch continue to produce certain kinds of mental 'cramps' or blind spots in our thinking (especially about poetry). For the visual and decorative arts have incorporated the affective and curatorial pleasures of kitsch to a degree that kitsch may indeed in those contexts be received in a post-critical manner – as one possible style among many.

But this tolerance and affection for kitsch is nowhere to be found in evaluations of contemporary poetry, where the term 'kitsch' is one of the most derogatory (and condescending) things one can say about a poem. The only exception to the virulent hatred of poetic kitsch among poets today – aside from the massive wave of Instagram poets, who don't even recognise their work as kitsch – may be found in the poetry and manifestos of Johannes Göransson and amongst poets sympathetic to his polemic. Precisely because the unremitting hatred of poetic kitsch harbours a vulgar repertoire of taboos and verbal anathema, Göransson and other poets of the rhetorical abyss subject the bane of kitsch to a relentless process of transvaluation. Yet this process fails to escape the snare set by kitsch, which continues blithely to exercise its maddening allure, at once cuddly and contemptible.

One of the most despised properties of kitsch stems from the fear that poetic kitsch *arrests* language, as you suggest, making it impossible for the diction of poetry to develop and incorporate new words and phrases, to remain historically engaged. Kitsch is the final stage of the reification of lyric vocabulary. In this sense, poetic kitsch is often equated with a kind of verbal stupor – and even with intellectual, emotional and poetic *stupidity*. Indeed, conceived as a state of unknowing, stupidity continues to be essential to models of the poet as a non-reflective or neutral platform (ranging from Romantic to documentarian profiles). To examine and exploit the perversion of kitsch necessarily involves, then, addressing plainly the conceptual trap of stupidity (attempts to understand stupidity induce stupidity) and its volatile resources.

By arresting language, however, kitsch exercises a subversive power that is easily obscured or misunderstood – but essential to some of the most basic social and aesthetic functions of language. The social isolation and circulation of certain words and phrases within a specific context – arresting language so that it may be repeated – finds a poetic analogue in the lyric refrain. And the logic of the refrain therefore supports the emergence and continuity of social identity, of the tribal bonds of community: distinctive vocabularies or phraseologies (anchored in the experience of race, class, place, age, vocation and so on) whose iterability helps to hold communities together over time. In fact, the stereotypical modality of poetic kitsch, with its capacity to manufacture clichés and insinuate them into common speech, may also reflect poetry's most concrete political aptitude, the production of mottoes, axioms, battle cries and slogans: 'Black Lives Matter', the '#metoo move-

ment', the '99 per cent' – not to mention the frequently violent verbal tags and memes of right-wing online culture.

More narrowly, the diction of lyric poetry is, as I have indicated, a historical formation of arrested, or stilled, language. This concentration of language, at once specialised and generic, gradually becomes a kind of *interruption* – which may function as a social or political tool, a speech act, or even as a kind of event. Under these conditions, language interrupts itself, alluding to the encroachment of silence (as a refuge of critique, reflection, or even disengagement) into the verbal matrix of poetry. Adorno's glancing remark about kitsch as the future of art (testing the dialectical wisdom of the philistine) echoes Walter Benjamin's promotion of the poetics of the cliché, which gives priority to the social expressivity of kitsch (in terms of collective identity) and, also, to poetry's narrow but forceful capacity to operate on a mass scale. At the same time, the prospect of arresting language through kitsch resonates with the militant refrain of a general strike, a linguistic and political caesura, evoking a phenomenological bracketing of experience inherent in the structure of paradise.

JW: I like the idea of ending our thinking here together on the word you land on, *paradise*. It returns me to two poems that are linked historically, both of which I rath-

er adore – Marlowe's 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love' and Raleigh's 'The Nymphs Reply to the Shepherd' (1600) – and I wonder if it suggests an antecedent tributary to the eighteenth-century stream of kitsch you map out with such startling detail in *My Silver Planet?* Raleigh's nymph in a sense *gives the lie* to Marlowe's shepherd by identifying his kitsch diction, a pastoral fantasia of 'valleys, groves, hills, and fields / and woods' (and oh, don't forget the 'steepy mountains'), all of which she knows is crap, and which she flings back in his face: those 'coral clasps and amber studs', 'belt of straw and ivy buds', 'finest wool gowns', 'slippers' and 'buckles of the purest gold' – all that stuff that Marlowe's shepherd tries to seduce her with, she knows it's all fake and she calls him out. But at a meta-level, it's Raleigh who knows that Marlowe's pastoralism, caught in that diction, is really what's fake. And he's calling out the whole tradition. Well, that didn't stop poets from imitating Marlowe, again and again, through the decades and centuries (maybe Day Lewis finally ended it with his parody of 1935). For Raleigh and his disabused nymph, *joys* – the joys of the body and the joys of a particular diction, perhaps, as well – do have due dates, just as she argues: they don't last forever, and only a fool would think otherwise. But our desire to stay in the garden of the lyric doesn't seem to die, even when we stumble on a human skull.

Symptomatology

JIM JOHNSTONE

1.

Let me tell you what I was told: the virus
will spare those who stay two meters
apart. Those who stay inert. Generations
of passers-by pass through our masks
as a dog lugs a piece of wood
that could be left over from the ark,
the hull of the ship splintered
like the animals paired off in the Good Book.
Two-by-two they walked out of the sea,
and two-by-two they bred and stank
and barked until they spread disease.
I cast my line. A man with the body
of a shark tells me that the only option
is to keep my distance, don't talk, don't hug
friends or family. There could be blood
in the water. We all swim but it's swimmers
who are the problem, those who issue
a trail of cells with every stroke.
I'm telling you, we're still too close.
To bridge the gap I reach across
a sea of laptop screens and touch
my loved ones on the other side.
Like an animal I cut off my hands and attach
them to my phone. I'm cut off from the world,
cut down on the path where I walk
and read what neighbouring artists spray
in red and silver: *we're free to suffer*
and *at times I'm not myself*.
If I'm being honest, when I repeat
their words I evolve into something other, else.

3.

In a waking dream the virus bombards
the air so violently that a halo
of rain erupts, then reanimates
into the blueprint for a new body;
a pathogen that learns to move
when I move, speak when I speak,
and now, come to think of it, 'waking'
is the wrong word – the virus breeding
in the bowels of unfamiliar room,
the kind of place where I'd mistake
my wife for a bird of prey,
hold my breath and start to rise,
float, and without saying a word,
return to the dream where I'm able to fly.

2.

First there was fear. Fear of being shut in, a continent of shut-ins, shut up.

Fear without breath.

Fear of continental drift, the advance of the recently landed.

Fear hovering between two ways

bronchioles
deflated like punctured balloons.

Fear of the body, the body bag, bodies zipped and dragged
from home.

Fear leading by example.

Fear untouched, unchanged.

Fear darkening the forest in each lung, expanding into pleural
cavities.

Fear passed from hand to hand.

Fear as king,

as crown, as the rush to subsume the twilight of the valleys.

Fear become first and last.

Fear looking wildly between animals to determine the origins
of disease.

Fear running free.