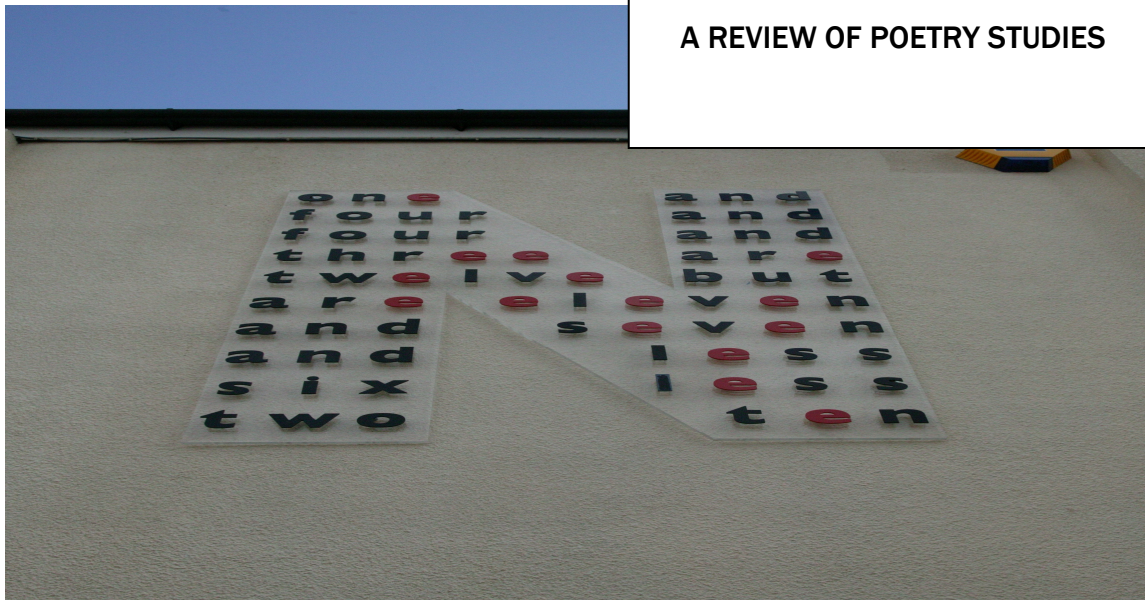


POST

A REVIEW OF POETRY STUDIES



I: Poets
in

S

e

ac

p

POST I: POETS in SPACE

edited by Michael Hinds

POST is the peer-reviewed e-journal of The Irish Centre for Poetry Studies at the Mater Dei Institute. Issues will be edited alternately by Michael Hinds and Kit Fryatt of the Centre, and will appear on at least a yearly basis. They can be contacted by email at (michael.hinds@materdei.dcu.ie or kit.fryatt@materdei.dcu.ie).

Letters to POST will be considered for publication if they are submitted in electronic form, and with the full address details of the writer. The activities of The Irish Centre for Poetry Studies are supported by the Research Committee of the Mater Dei Institute, for which we are very thankful. **POST II: POETRY AND EDUCATION** will be published in the early Autumn of 2009, edited by Kit Fryatt. **POST** would like to thank its contributors, peer-reviewers, and supporters. If you would like to be included on the mailing list for POST and The Irish Centre for Poetry studies, email Michael Hinds.

Articles are copyright of **POST**, unless indicated otherwise.

IRA LIGHTMAN



1. Ira Lightman, *Spennymoor Surname Sign*

POST I is showcasing the public poetry projects of Ira Lightman. Images of his works will intervene between some of the essays. The image on the front cover is from his series, *Spennymoor Letters*.

POST I: POETS IN SPACE

CONTENTS

Editorial: Passports to Poetry Michael Hinds	9
Poetry in the subway: Deixis and cognition in a journey through Lisbon Ana Margarida Abrantes	15
Changing Places and Merging Spaces: the Poetry of Eamonn Wall Aoileann ni Eigearthaigh	41
“AW.DAH.” An allegorical reading of Maurice Scully’s <i>Things That Happen</i> Kit Fryatt	59
Space in Nature, in Mind, and on the Page: Reading W.C. Williams’s “The Crimson Cyclamen” John Hobbs	89
No Man’s Land: Edward Thomas, <i>Collected Poems</i> Maria Johnston	99
Returning to the “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r”: The Eye-Poems of E.E. Cummings Aine Kelly	111
“To come as a foot printer”: Space and Writing in Robert Frost Candice Lemaire	125
Empowering houses in Nikki Giovanni and Rita Dove Maria Proitsaki	135
Reviews	151
Notes on Contributors	159



Photo by Michael Hinds

editorial: passports to poetry

A hoarding has been in place for the last four years or so at the front of a property development on Dublin's oozy prosperous Orwell Road. As with so many things in the New Ireland, progress on the site has stalled. Indeed, no work seems to have occurred there since the initial work of demolition took place, when a nicely-proportioned, subtly modernist, detached house from the 1930s or thereabouts was gutted to make way for an expansion of what is (perhaps unfortunately) called Orwell House, a retirement complex. Dystopian nomenclature aside, what makes this development particularly interesting for my immediate purpose is that as part of its great marketing flush, the developers emblazoned the hoarding with two famous lines from Horace I-XI:

While we're talking, envious time is fleeing;
seize the day, put no trust in the future.

Now everyone knows these lines, or at least part of them, from listening to a motivational speaker, a vicar or a consultant too many, although the latter group now favour *The Art of the War* as the quote-source *du jour*. Alternatively, you may have seen Peter Weir's giddy *Dead Poets' Society*, where the line is bawled by Robin Williams's teacher-guru-cheerleader as an encouragement to great deeds of imaginative achievement or (inadvertently) to glorious self-destruction. The Orwell screen has become an object of Ozymandian wonder to me: how many people have viewed the legend on a drive-by basis? And more pointedly, how many have come to read it at variance with its presumable function of advertising the development?

The developers of the project appear to have believed that their use of Horace was coded unambiguously, *get a room, before you die*, and that Horace's assertion is an incitement to commitment: financially, of the funds required to secure a place, and literally, in that the elderly will be signing away their own independence, or that their relatives may be doing it for them. Horace's quotation might therefore be read unproblematically as a highly tactful signifier for the need for a dignified retirement; yet the billboard also reads as an exhortation to invest, and its appearance does not shout retirement home, but property investment, indeed investment in general. As such, the billboard is much more of a *zeitgeist*-indicative document about speculation than a precise commercial invitation. Of course, all kinds of acquisition, consignment, and gross capitalistic behaviour can be seen as legitimized by Horace's lines; but contrarily, what if "seizing the day" does not mean committing yourself to another mortgage, and a thirty-year gamble, or acting now to incarcerate your mother before

they incarcerate you? What if Horace's lines mean that you should just drive on by, or go to the bookies and indulge in a five-minute gamble on the 3.15 at Plumpton, or go home and hug your kids, or hug your mother, or make the beast with two backs with the object of your affection? Or as the original poem seems to suggest, seizing the day means get your backside out in the fields again, there is plenty of work to be done. Not that this is to say that Horace scorns capitalism, although maybe he might have scorned its vulgar forms, which are perversely its abstract forms, or that he would be disapproving about his poem's appropriation by all sorts of opportunists. A gentleman farmer-poet is one kind of capitalist, a creator of retirement home investment opportunities very much another.



Photo by Michael Hinds

For my immediate purpose, what the Orwell House hoarding proves is how Poetry exists in (at least) two fundamental spaces: there is the ever-decreasing and highly prescriptive space accorded to it by Master Culture, or should that be Mastercard Culture, while there is also the space that poetry takes for itself, where the words declare resonance and significance beyond the limited coding that the developers had in mind. Horace's fragment licenses itself to acquire subversive, ironic or reactionary meanings, because it is effectively self-governing, a Pimlico under duress from the Global Market, the superstate that is perhaps the only state we have left in

a political sense. According to its logic, we are all Bennetonians now, passive in the face of supply and demand and its consequent erasure of cultural difference.

For all that we might want to claim utility for poetry, in order to justify its existence and legitimize its study on the terms of the Master Culture, which we may have to do, we must also be confident in its ability to refuse complete co-option into *use* and its constant capability to open up critical space. That is, no poem can ever be made to service entirely a marketing imperative. It will always play the Fool. The longer the development of Orwell House remains stalled, Horace's lines become less an advertisement and more like an embarrassment. Before we cheer too much about this, however, this is also obviously a problem for poetry scholars. In a context of economic rationalization such as we live in now, the absurdity of trying to justify our activities in terms of dollars, euros and sterling is nevertheless our reality.

What Mastercard culture has time and space for is Poetry heritage. Anyone can get in touch with their poetic sentiments by going to the Veneto and visiting the Petrarch House in Arqua Petrarca. In sunlight, it is a really nice house. You can read Byron's signature in the Visitor's Book, you can look at a mummified cat in a hole in the wall, you can buy a bottle of decent wine or oil in the shop adjacent. You get an experience, but the poetry is really unnecessary to the whole thing, and you would not need to see it more than once. But who would have it any other way? The things that you *can* revisit profitably, those rather peripheralized sonnets to Laura, are not what you are really being encouraged to contemplate. Nobody in marketing believes that anyone could possibly want to; and what *they* believe has an increasing priority on everyone's attention.

Italy does this kind of poetry tourism better than anywhere, fundamentally because the poets commemorated there were tourists themselves. When we go to Keats's Roman death-house, we are invited to feel the poverty of a dead backpacker's deathbed (in what is otherwise a spectacular location), and little else. It is depressingly material. More perversely (but typically), in Este about an hour from Venice, the house where Shelley lost his son and wrote his broadly affecting "Lines Composed among the Euganean Hills" is situated on Via Byron. It is not called Via Byron because Byron wrote anything in the house there, or even lived there for any time, but because he was renting it and gave Shelley the use of it. Byron's name is evidently more brandable than Shelley's double lament for a dead child and a dead political culture.



Photo by Michael Hinds

These physical poetry experiences and spaces (poets' houses, writers museums, walking tours) are a hoot, but are most fundamentally dedicated to the cretinization of the art into nothing more than a consumable. In this way, it is fair to say that we learn one thing from looking at *The Guardian's* weekly photograph of a writer's workroom; which is that they all more or less look the same, and that they get the cleaners in before they take their snapshot. The fetishization of hygiene implicit in such images can also relate to the way in which poetry is expected to play out in public, within the framing of industrial signage and nowhere else, which is significant of the turn towards circumscription and supervision of language in society at all levels, such as with the institutionalization of graffiti as an art-form. This move has seen a growing emphasis placed on its decorative aspects rather than its language, or in the branding of its prime exponents as radical chic superstars like the unfortunate Banksy; yet any real subversive power in graffiti lies in its anonymity, in our inability to authorize it, except in the sense that we authorize the anonymous Beowulf poet. For about five years, from 1980 to 1985, I walked home from school in Omagh, Northern Ireland past a wall that bore this legend in red paint: "PAISLEY IS A COUNT." I suppose I had better write [sic]. Now, the Reverend Ian Paisley had plenty of titles and pretensions to power (most of which have now been satisfied, apparently), but he was certainly never a Count, and most definitely not a papal one. Of course, the Paisley poet probably had other rich meanings in mind. This work of the Paisley poet resides in my consciousness as inalterably as "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death," mostly because of how it intervened firstly in physical, public, space then secondly and with sheer longevity in my own consciousness. It is also a redoubtable text, not readily co-optable (other than into an *op ed* piece such as this), and perhaps having insufficient decency to be incorporated into what is normally (perhaps rightly) a very dignified and elegiacally decorous poetry of the Northern Irish. Yet it got this reader through the Hunger Strikes, the Anglo-Irish and Good Friday Agreements, and has renewed with the crowning of Paisley as first minister in mutual fealty with Gerry Adams. That "PAISLEY IS A COUNT" is a poem does not even have to be argued, its claim on my attention (visually and verbally) is exactly what we would expect of a poem. It also came to me freely, most important of all. We buy books of poetry, and sometimes even read the poems inside, but they might not necessarily register with us in the area of consciousness where our poetry is stored. It is not that we forget these poems, but rather that we never admitted them to be poetry in the first place. You *can't* buy poetry. Despite my best efforts to like Stephen Spender as an Undergraduate, for example, I do not think that I was ever able to admit that his poems were poetry; they would not stick. The first time I ever heard Empson read "Missing Dates" on an old Caedmon LP, on the other hand, I knew that that was poetry. About the real stuff, the poems that we recognize as *our* poetry, we hardly ever change our mind, and this is something beyond taste, will or choice: it is the imprint of who we are.

So poetry is the first and last redoubt of our subjectivity, where our stupefaction in the face of our own complex memories and response systems finds expression, where we must admit that we like or love or hate something without entirely being able to explain why. This also relates to the relative intolerance of much of critical theory towards the atemporal zone of the poem, and the poverty of what theory can bring to it, other than banal narrative explanation or contextualization; that is allowing

for some massive exceptions, of course, in particular that of deconstruction, a theory that is the inevitable consequence of reading too much Hölderlin.

Even more importantly, however, poetry is cheap, in fact free, as it does not really require buildings, or massive grants. This is just as well, as no Pharmaceutical giant is ever going to give a Poetry research centre a billion pounds. Fair enough, Chaucer will not cure cancer; critically, however, we must assert that for some he will lessen its suffering. In its most fundamental state, poetry does not even require writing, just vocal apparatus and an imagination. It can take hold in any space, and needs no plant of its own; and if it is insignificant in the eyes of the market, that is of no significance to the art. This journal is a Poetry space, free to access and open to communication, connecting the international community of poetry scholarship. The value-for-money Irish Centre for Poetry Studies at the Mater Dei Institute will produce an issue of POST at least once a year, and POST II (on *Poetry and Education*, edited by Kit Fryatt, should be with you by Christmas). Thanks to the Mater Dei Research Committee for their support of the Centre, and thank you for reading POST I: *Poets in Space*.

michael hinds, editor POST I
michael.hinds@materdei.dcu.ie

ana margarida abrant

poetry in the subway: deixis and cognition in a journey through Lisbon¹

Social life settings are suitable for the display of aesthetic objects, which see their intensity amplified by being the target of shared attention. Sculptures and installations, architecture works, murals and paintings are privileged forms of public art that not only complement spaces, but often become the attractors or dynamic centers of parks, squares or leisure areas. This is not least the case of urban functional spaces, such as subway networks. These spaces and their elements are themselves objects of design (cf. the Art Nouveau style of the metropolitan signs in Paris, “quoted” by the Metropolitana sign in Chicago’s Millennium Park, or the tiles that decorate the modern subway stations in Lisbon). It is also common to see verbal forms of art in public spaces, ranging from famous quotes created in and for the spaces (e.g. the Berlin Wall, spontaneous murals with political messages, or mere graffiti in suburban areas) to the direct quotation of famous pieces of literature. The latter are special, however. Poetic texts and other quotes, often amputated from their original context to fit the new space, are displayed in an oversized format, and not in the manageable pages of a book. A plural volatile audience views them, instead of the individual reader. The meaning of these quotes and poems changes by the fact that they are received by readers who are in the immediate situation of being passengers in a public transport system, immersed in an urban space, their attention constrained by their immediate action purpose as passengers (do they notice the poetry at all?). What happens to the meaning of poetry and literary texts when they are transcribed into public social spaces is the question we address in this paper. In particular, we will consider the problem of deixis and the rescaling of reference brought about by the new contextualization of these texts. These issues will be approached on the basis of a concrete example, namely the poetry and literary quotations in the Lisbon subway stations.

¹ I thank the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia for supporting my post-doctoral research period at Case Western Reserve University, where the invitation for this paper first emerged.

I. public art, community life, social cognition

The thriving life of a community is displayed at its best in the public spaces¹ shared by its members. These are locations for commercial transactions or for worship, the settlement for community institutions such as the court, the hospital or the post office, the hubs of transportation systems or surfaces conceived for leisure and entertainment. Such public spaces can show a different spatial arrangement with respect to each other and to the individual private spaces of the community's members, individual houses, apartment buildings and neighbourhoods. They moreover vary in their spatial arrangement, from the Spanish plaza to the South French small town square. In older communities, and despite being cultural constructions accumulated through time, these spaces seem rooted in space, implanted in the community as a natural element would be, an unquestionable "physical" part of the topography and of the community's life. In more recent communities, the cultural nature of these spaces is more evident: they are imposed onto the landscape as cultural constructions and, unlike the former, they are strongly experienced in their recent temporality. Compare for example Boston Common, the park and surroundings in the core of Boston, and the Public Square in Cleveland and its near vicinity; while the former is a vital center of public life in the city as an attractor and orientation reference for other public spaces, and gives the impression of having been conserved as a piece of natural landscape in the city, the latter is a totally constructed place where work, worship and commerce are strongly demarcated and not fluidly integrated. The result is that the interaction of the public with this latter space is faster and more purpose oriented than is the case with Boston Common. These two public spaces are examples of two different times and they are moreover determined by the local history and the development of their communities. Yet they do strike for their difference.

With more or less success, public spaces integrate ethical and aesthetical aspects of the life of the community. The functional aspects of social organization are those elements in the life of a community that most immediately demand for a space that is shared by its members. The need to exchange goods or to ensure communication with other communities has probably worked as the motor of the development of public spaces. Here the community shares its goods (market square), solves community problems (city hall, court), ensures communication with other communities (transportation platforms, post office), guarantees security and public order (police). The natural gatherings of the community members made possible by the existence of such places also enables the exchange of news (from gossip to the local newspaper), an activity that implies a pause in the functional rhythm dictated by other community functions. Ethics, which orients such aspects of community life as work or law, then gives room to aesthetics, as these public spaces become the centers of less pragmatic aspects of community life, such as worship and leisure. It is therefore a natural consequence that these places become the attractors of artistic

¹ The notion of public space is here understood in its non-metaphorical sense of a community setting, of a place used and shared by the community. In this notion we include the two more fine grained spaces that the anthropologist Marcel Hénaff distinguishes: namely public space as the space where the public sphere is represented like in the monumental city, with its architecture centralized and organized around symbolic places of power and religion (*espace publique*), and also common places (*espaces communs*), such as streets, restaurants, shops, museums, etc. (Hénaff 2008: 176)

manifestations, from grandiose spaces such as St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican or the Millennium Park in Chicago, to more modest sculptures in parks or murals in squares. Time flows more slowly in these places and therefore they invite for reflection, pray or aesthetic appreciation, both as an individual and as a shared experience.

There are examples of a different order in the growth of these public spaces: in Downtown New York, in the midst of a fast paced business life, one is surprised by the remainder of an earlier time where the same space was the center of aesthetic life. The Trinity Church at Broadway and Wall Street strikes as a pause in the surrounding rhythm rendering evident the contrast between the spiritual and the material aspects of life. The former was there first. Even more puzzling is how people make the reverse move, as they use the adjacent graveyard as a shortcut to their workplace or as the setting for their lunch break.

Both the production and the experience of a work of art for and in a public space meet important conditions. The work of art relates in a particular way with the space where it is intended to be displayed and appreciated. The place is more than a location for the work, it is not merely the background for the work of art; instead, the work not only takes into account the place it is supposed to inhabit, as it inherits this space and necessarily has to include it as part of the creation. The ultimate challenge for the artist is thus the "spirit of a place" (from the Latin *genius loci*), the uniqueness of the place that results from the multiple layers of its cultural inscriptions. The artist thus plays the role of a mediator, who captures in a unique manner "the full perception of that voice, that sound, that music, which is supposed to resound in this place" (Kabakov 2001: 27).

The public space is by its very nature a shared space. It is crossed by a heterogeneous public, in which we devise the contours of at least two different groups. The first is made up by the inhabitants of the city or agglomeration where this public space is embedded and who are affected the most by construction and artistic interventions in the locations that constitute part of their daily routine. This group in a certain way owns the space, as it plays a relevant role in the daily unfolding of their lives. They can be attentive to transformations of the space, or realize them with surprise as they pause for a moment in their daily routes. The other group consists of occasional visitors, individuals who cross the space with an outsider look. The reactions of the two groups to the art objects exhibited in the public space are different. The inhabitants are likely to feel more passionate about changes in the public space, as they watch them being either integrated in or imposed onto the space. As regular collective users of the space, they both recognize and recreate the spirit of the space and are likely to feel passionate about interventions done to it. The case of Richard Serra's sculpture *Tilted Arc* commissioned for the Federal Plaza in New York City in 1981 and dismantled in 1989 after an intense debate and a long juridical process constitutes a clear negative example of the strong feelings that the inhabitants and regular users of a place develop about it.²

² The sculpture was a solid plate of steel, slightly tilted standing diagonally in the square. The reasons for protest against it ranged from the high cost of a bare, seemingly unfinished work, to the way it was experienced as a hindrance or obstacle to a normal crossing of the square, and especially puzzlement as to what the sculpture was supposed to mean (Weyergraf-Serra and Buskirk 1991).

Chicago's *Millenium Park*, a public space densely filled with numerous art projects, is in turn an example of a community's positive reaction to the artistic intervention in a shared space.

The visitor is likely to interact in a different manner with a public space that he is visiting. If there are art works there, he is bound to look for the continuity of that particular place in the art, to search in it the spirit of the place and the history and identity of the community that inhabits it. For the visitor, the artistic intervention relates to the public space not only intentionally, but in a sense causally. The work of art is like a natural extension of the place; the visitor encounters and perceives them at the same time.

The viewer's emotional reaction to a work of art in a public space can be instantaneous, but in fact it is loaded with cognitive processing that makes it particular and different from other forms or contexts of aesthetic appreciation. On the one hand, the aesthetic experience is intensely shared; moreover, it is *visibly* shared. On the other hand, the aesthetic experience takes place in a setting that is also (often even primarily) functional. How does this constrain or shape the aesthetic experience?

The individual fruition of a work of art is an experience of intense and shared attention. The mastery or skill of the artist is viewed as manifestation of both self-directed attention and concentration focused in the process of creating the object. This focused attention acts as an attractor of the attention of others (a dynamic as inevitable as following someone else's concentrated gaze) and generates an experience of intensity.³ The concentration of actors on stage attracts the attention of the viewers in the theatre, who suspend the attention to other possible elements in the environment to concentrate only on the stage. The experience is individual but plural, subjective but intersubjective at the same time: every viewer expects the other viewers to have attended to the play, which makes it possible to discuss it in the intermission. When reading a novel at home, the reader is aware of being one of the many addressees of the work; he is aware of the existence of other readers, even if they happen to inhabit spaces other than his reading room or live in a time different from his own. The private act of reading is therefore rarely a strictly individual act: in fact, one reads reviews of the book in search for help to categorize the work within a genre or epoch, to form or confront one's reading and opinion of the text with that of other (more experienced) readers. In case of classical canonical texts, one seeks parallel information as to the context of their production, the impact of the work in the readers of the time in which the text was produced and made public. The experience of shared attention before a work of art, which in the example of a private reader is implicit, is openly manifested in the contact with art objects in a space created for the specific purpose of sharing the experience of attending to an artistic manifestation. In galleries, concert halls or theatres as in the example above, the viewer or spectator is aware of the work, but he is likewise aware of how attention — both his and that of others — is intentionally directed towards the work.

³ "[T]he display of self-directed attention attracts attention, and the collective result of this open transitive process is a feeling of intensity, to which we attach aesthetic value." (Brandt 2004, 212).

This experience of joint attention⁴ highlights the intentionality of the work. Shared attention is a pervasive feature of human cognition; shared intention is what makes humans unique.⁵ The aesthetic appraisal of the work results both from the intensity of many individuals focusing attention on the same object (and their intersubjective awareness in the process), and also from the attunement to the intentionality of the work, to the artist's perspective over the experiential content he presents in his work and that is an important part of its meaning.

The aesthetic experience involved in the individual fruition of a work of art and in the plural attendance to an artistic performance is extended beyond public spaces intended for artistic manifestation and also concerns public spaces where art mingles with the functional aspects of social life. In public spaces, art reveals a differentiation in kind, which results from the way it evolved to include a broad spectrum of works. The first manifestations of public art were celebrative; they were the expression of dominant power, the commemorative manifestation of a military victory or the homage paid to those who helped achieve it: arches, statues, towers or columns, these monumental works seek to overcome ephemerality. Over time, they construe the space they occupy, contributing to its particular spirit.

Another kind of public art works could be named ornamental: sculptures and smaller scale installations, movable and temporally situated or constrained. These works navigate between permanence and evanescence, and they interact with the space they inhabit. They are made to relate with it: they do not occupy the space, they are hosted by it. Sculptures and installations in parks or public squares are examples of this category.

Finally there is a kind of public art that lives from its ephemeral nature. It doesn't construe the space nor does it occupy it: instead, it questions the space. This art is neither celebrative nor ornamental, but rather provocative (one could even say intrusive). It can be free from the signature of an artist, like the anonymous paintings on the Berlin Wall, or rather cry it out loud, as with Christo's wrappings. They can be socially and politically loaded, or just challenge our schematic measures and the representations of the objects and our relationship with them.⁶ Or they can simply be

⁴ We use the terms 'joint attention' and 'shared attention' roughly as synonyms. However these can be distinguished. Todd Oakley, for example, understands joint attention as the direction of plural attention to an object, the simultaneous attention of many individuals towards one given object, whereas shared attention implies intersubjectivity, i.e. the attention to a particular object caused by the interpretation of intentionality on the part of the other subject to attend to that object. (Oakley 2008)

⁵ The evolutionary psychologist Michael Tomasello claims that the capacity to share intentions, to anticipate and recognize the intentions of others is the manifestation of a collaborative cognition that is special to humans. (Tomasello 2008). The author's most illustrative example is meaningful pointing, a collaborative gesture used to convey a specific meaning, which includes both deictic reference and implicit "mindreading", i.e. the recognition of the other's intentions triggered by the object. The complex act of pointing is a human exclusive: apes can't point, and this is not only due to less dexterity of finger movement, but mainly to the absence of the shared intentionality that makes pointing relevant as a referential and meaningful act. In fact, the shared attention and intention that this gesture involves have been determinant factors for the origin of human language (discourse is necessarily grounded on a space of reference), and it is still traceable in particular language features such as the pronominal 'pointing' system.

⁶ Christo's veiling of the Reichstag in Berlin (June and July of 1995), for example, suggests a conceptual change of scale: the human action of wrapping, often directed to an object of smaller

an intermezzo in the process of reconstructing the space: examples of this “art of intermission” were the interventions by invited artists on the enclosure hiding the construction works of the Lisbon metro stations.⁷

In all cases, objects of public art engage our attention and evoke an intense awareness about their inherent intentionality and the relationship they create with the space they inhabit.

II. the subway: a non-place for art

Art spills over the purely aesthetic settings reserved for it in social life. In functional spaces of community life such as banks, office buildings or hospitals it has become a natural and expected dweller. The interaction with the art work in these enclosed spaces bears resemblance with both the individual aesthetic enjoyment of a work of art, an essentially private experience, and the collective experience of attending an artistic performance. Such public spaces are shared, but unlike spaces reserved for art like galleries, theatres or concert halls, they are primarily functional, pragmatic. Time in these spaces is essentially different from time in the aesthetic kind of public spaces. This difference in temporal perception triggers a different appreciation of works of art in these places: the paused attention required by the work conflicts with the fast pace of the viewer crossing these spaces. In other words, there is not much time for the immersion in the alternative space of the art work. Still, those spaces are hosts to a common identity, dictated either by the professional framing or the pragmatic purpose that attracts their daily users: companies, businesses, public services. Not uncommonly the works of art exhibited in these spaces are celebrative figurative representations of the activities carried out in these environments, even if they may adopt new artistic languages for depicting this same functional reality.

Other public places, however, fail to create a common identity. These are what the anthropologist Marc Augé names “non-places”, creations of modernity and mirrors of the contemporary urban life style: airports, supermarkets and, of course, the subway. These negative places emerge as a consequence of a overabundance of space (enabled by ever new rapid forms of transportation), excess of time (the surplus of live events reported by the media replaces the concept of a temporal layered historicity with the flat omnipresence of *now*), and the overabundance of the individual (as the result of the fallacious focus on the subject instead of the group). The negativity inherent to the designation *non-places* concerns the fact that these places, as the result of this supermodern constellation, negate the notion of an anthropological space, an abstract concept — both spatial and social — that comprises those places where identity is established on account of social relations defined through time and inscribed in history. Non-places negate exactly this: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.” (Augé 1995: 77) Such creations are made possible by the supermodernity that characterizes the contemporary world:

proportion than the agent, is directed in this case toward an object that largely exceeds human proportion. The effect created by this shift is that of tangibility of the object.

⁷ Vários autores. *Encenar a Cidade. Intervenções Artísticas nos tapumes das obras do metropolitano de Lisboa*. Lisboa: Edições do Metro, 1994.

A world where people are born in the clinic and die in hospital, where transit points and temporary abodes are proliferating under luxurious or inhuman conditions (hotel chains and squats, holiday clubs and refugee camps, shantytowns threatened with demolition or doomed to festering longevity); where a dense network of means of transport which are also inhabited spaces is developing; where the habitué of supermarkets, slot machines and credit cards communicates wordlessly, through gestures, with an abstract, unmediated commerce; a world thus surrendered to solitary individuality, to the fleeting, the temporary and ephemeral... (ibid)

The subway is one of these non-places. A functional space par excellence, it is continuously crossed by an undifferentiated public whose only common determination is the direction of journey and the varying degree of urgency at the station. It is a place of fluidity and transition, of departure and arrival in which travellers wait and go following a consensual contract that determines the ritual movements and regulates the collective behaviour.

When entering a subway station, the user of the network enters a space that is quite different from the urban surface he has just left. Placed side by side, the user finds two maps – one of the subway network, the other of the city – and is reminded of the schematic nature of the place he just entered. The network is a geometric abstraction of the topology of the city, a portrait of almost cubistic nature of the more or less chaotic surface. The regularity of the pattern results from the functional need for easy navigation in the network: straight lines do not depict the curves of the rails; circles at regular intervals fail to convey the real distances between stations. The subterranean abstraction therefore offers a great contrast with the accidents of the organic surface of the city, an irregularity produced by its inhabitants over time and motivated by the constraints of social life. The perception of the city from below, from the subway, is that of a schematic organized space, hardly recognizable on the surface. Moreover, experiencing the city from the subway network is seeing it as a flash at regular intervals or zapping⁸ through its different locations, i.e. it is an experience of fragmentation, different from the narrative continuity perceived as one walks through the city. When the experience of the city's irregular surface is replaced by a schematic understanding of its topology, the outcome is often a momentary lack of orientation in a space where everything is just like everything else. This is caused both by the ritual of repetitive actions (buying the ticket, passing the control, waiting for the train) and a pervasive sameness across different stations. The artistic interventions in the stations – from the discrete tile work by Maria Keil in the earliest stations of the Lisbon subway to the more exuberant projects in the network stations built in the 1990s – are an important step against this perpetuation of the mechanical routine: they make each station singular with respect to the others and in doing so they favor the impression of topological difference one experiences while walking from square to square on the surface.

The names of subway stations resonate the landmarks of the surface, and often they inherit the names of important historical persons or events celebrated in street names, squares and monuments right above. In the urban catacombs, however, these names are even more reduced to topological designations, orientation landmarks in the navigation, names with phonological enclosing but more likely to lose their original referential link than their surface counterparts. The daily passenger

⁸ Salema 2001, p. 34.

of the Lisbon subway thinks of *Marquês* as an interface of the blue and yellow lines rather than as the enlightened modern urban planner, the Minister of King D. José I who planned the reconstruction of Lisbon after the earthquake that shattered the city in 1755, and to whom Lisbon owes the clean organization of the downtown area. Likewise, *Martim Moniz* is a station under one of the central squares; the name is hardly, if at all, reminiscent of the 12th century warrior who fought the Moors towards the south. In these two stations, however, plastic art supports and encourages collective memory:



All photographs are by the author

Fig. 1— *Marquês* station, Lisbon subway. The sculpture represents Marquês de Pombal, who planned the reconstruction of the Lisbon downtown area after its destruction by the 1755 earthquake. Both sides of the sculpture depict the back of the minister, whose identity is however assured by the paper he holds in his hand (the plan for the reconstruction of the city).

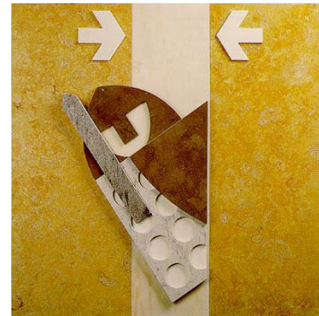


Fig. 2 — *Martim Moniz* station, Lisbon subway. The relief depicts a medieval soldier (maybe Moniz himself) trapped in the closing door of the subway train, as he holds his sword fighting against the Moorish. This is a highly suggestive temporal blend.

Art work in the subway system therefore seems to create a contradiction, which it then helps to solve. On the one hand the subway is not a place that instantiates a relational or collective identity. Its temporality is contrary to the temporality required for reception and appreciation of art. And yet, art is a prevalent presence in subway stations, from Moscow to São Paulo, from Washington DC to Lisbon. Its need is justified as compensation for the intimidating and oppressive nature of the underground space, hidden from the light, the air and openness of the surface above.⁹ Art as compensatory evasion? As memory echo for history where all that seems left is topology and navigation?

Space and time seem to conflate in non-places, as these are spaces of transition, of mobility. Space in subway stations is defined by time; schedules and timetables are the other side of lines and itineraries (Augé 1995: 104). The space of a subway station (and in fact that of the subway itself) is always a means to an end and never

⁹ In the website of the Lisbon subway we read: “Ever since the construction of the first stations of its network in the 1950s, it has been a concern for the Metropolitano de Lisboa to provide the public spaces with aesthetic conditions that can soothe the negative effects of a subterranean environment.” (<http://www.metrolisboa.pt/> - “A arte no Metro.”)

the end itself. But in this urban rhythmic flow there are moments of an inevitable hiatus, instants of awaiting dictated by the geometry of the schedules themselves. What to do with this time? In the Lisbon subway stations, the passenger is rescued by daily free newspapers, piled up for the relief of being in a place where one has nothing to do but wait to be taken away. It is usual to find passengers filling up their time with this news of dubious relevance, listening to i-pod music while studying the co-passengers or one's own shoes. More recently, video screens have been added between the lines, so that passengers can watch the news and ads while they wait for the train. In any case, there is a common perception that the time people are forced to spend in this public space needs to be filled in any useful way, and this is done in a manner that accentuates the intrinsic nature of these places as non-places: by engaging in the immediacy of the present, individuating attention, filling an awkward pause. These are only more trivial *succedanea* for art in these spaces.

If a sculpture in a park is noticed because of the slower pace that this public setting, as a primarily aesthetic space, inspires, in the subway the pace is momentarily interrupted and the subject is left alone with very limited possibilities to engage in aesthetic imagination. Why he should need to do it is something that emerges from the characteristics of the space itself: an unnatural setting, deprived of any natural sensorial stimulation and therefore intimidating.¹⁰ The sense of time is no longer measured by the changes in light; instead, time is suspended until one reaches the surface anew. Engaging in aesthetic appreciation is therefore a way to stimulate imagination, when sensorial information lacks or is very constrained by the setting. The outcome of this encounter with art is that the hiatus is overcome and the mind is stimulated.

So, when compared with free press, video screens or constant elevator music, which abound these days in the stations of the Lisbon subway, art offers sensorial stimulation and promotes active imagination that prevails even after the momentary encounter. The tourist will appreciate it as new. But even the distracted passenger that takes the same subway on the same station every day will inevitably realize the permanent presence of these silent companions, which help him overcome the forced pause in the rhythm of his day.

III. verbal forms of public art: the deictic challenge

While waiting for the train in the Lisbon subway station of Cais do Sodré, one notices isolated letters, very spaced on the wall on the opposite side of the track, and which upon a closer look to the wall as a whole form the phrase "*Estou atrasado*" (I'm late). This could be the representation of a stereotype about the Southern European relaxed interpretation of time, or the visible expression of what is in everyone's mind on the platform. Then, one notices the drawing of huge feet in a running configuration, and perceives a contiguity of this static depiction with the quick steps of the passengers continuously filling the platform. The disposition of the illumination

¹⁰ Even if on a different scale, the subway station can be viewed as the dark room in sensorial deprivation experiments. It is intimidating because it deprives the subject of the sensorial information he requires to place himself in time and place. It is thus a cognitively challenging setting. From experiments of sensorial deprivation we learn that cognition is very much dependent on the environment. The lack of sensorial information leads to disorientation and if extended can cause anxiety, depression, and even sensorial hallucinations.

in the station doesn't quite help the next step in perception, but upon being in this setting several times, one finally realizes that what first appeared to be human feet (an anthropomorphic and situated reading of a very schematic representation of feet running) are actually the feet of a white rabbit. He wears a waistcoat and holds a watch in his hand. And there: one suddenly recognizes the reference to a timeless tale.



Fig. 3 — Cais do Sodré station, Lisbon subway.
The rushing rabbit depicted in the tile panel and the phrase *Estou atrasado* ("I'm late") evokes the character of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.

This visual citation of Lewis Carroll's *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* in this setting is highly intentional: the rabbit is a charismatic representative of this tale, a character one immediately associates with this narrative (whereas evil queens and little girls are more pervasive in the genre of fairy tales). Moreover, a mapping is established between the character in the fairy tale and the passengers of the subway due to the immediate context of the viewers, which are likely to find themselves in the same situation of this character, namely late on their way to some place. The same depiction of this character hanging on the wall inside an art gallery would produce a different meaning. The relevance in that case would not emerge from the immediate location and experiential situation of the viewer. Instead, the depiction would probably be received and assessed in terms of the style of the presentation, possibly vertically with respect to other depictions of the same rabbit character, or horizontally with reference to the particular style of the artist, as one knows it from other works. But in the subway station, the signification of this visual representation

results from the situation of stress and hurry which constitutes the *tertium comparationis* between the rabbit and the viewer.

This meaning effect is highly intentional. And in order to ensure that the viewer realizes this mapping, the artist plays with both iterative space and time: the drawing is systematically repeated on both walls of the platform hall; and in spite of the illumination of the hall (the lights hang at the level of the rabbits knee, preventing one from immediately realizing the whole figure), the passenger's daily presence in the hall (iterative as the repetition of the rabbit along the wall) eventually creates the opportunity for him to realize the whole image and establish the mapping.

In this example, one single sentence together with an unequivocal visual representation triggers the reference to a whole narrative. In fact, the viewer can be tempted to elaborate this ontological mapping even further: maybe one's stress is like the seemingly purposeless rush of the rabbit, or just like the rabbit is the character of a highly surrealistic tale, so does our life often seem to us as an absurd joke of some more or less imaginative superior mind; or we might wonder who the devil queen is in our life. Wherever the analogy might take us, these elaborations are idiosyncratic; the important thing to hold is that they are based on the authorial intended mapping between the rabbit and his immediate situation, and the viewer in the situation of rushing in the subway.

The mapping is verbally anchored by the personal deictic in "*Estou atrasado*". The personal reference, rendered by the first person flexive morpheme "*-ou*", points out to the personal characteristics of the speaker situation. In fact, deixis means pointing, i.e. it is an indexical act of reference. This first person deictic marker is ambiguous in the sense that it allows for two referents: the rabbit (once we finally notice it) and the individual viewer. This deictic ambiguity is essential for the emergence of the intended meaning. Moreover, the verb tense in the form *estou*, namely the present, further emphasizes the referential ambiguity: particularly if the perception of the whole mural is gradual — first one notices the letters forming the phrase *Estou atrasado*, whose enunciator is not known, then one perceives the rabbit, who is then identified as the speaker of the utterance. The temporal deictic center of this very brief narrative overlaps with the temporal *origo* of the viewer's situation. This mapping is the core of the appreciation of the work itself.

There are further examples in the Lisbon subway network of integration of visual and written elements in the artwork commissioned for the stations. In the *Cidade Universitária* station, in the Lisbon University campus, two quotes are displayed on the platform and in the access corridors that connect the station with the outdoor surface. One is a citation by the Portuguese poet Cesário Verde: *Se eu não morresse nunca! E eternamente buscassem e conseguissem a perfeição das coisas!* ("If I should never die! And eternally sought and reached the perfection of things!")

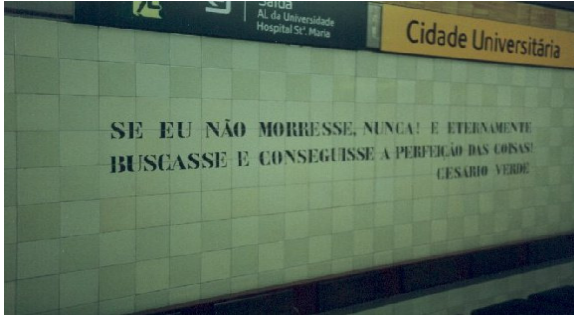


Fig. 4 — *Cidade Universitária* station, Lisbon subway.
“If I would never die! And forever sought and reached the perfection of things!”

This is the expression of an aspiration, a wish that is reality only in a counterfactual space, with respect to the speaker’s reality. The condition that would make this wish accessible is a physical impossibility: the subject knows about the inevitability of his own death, yet it is precisely this consciousness of mortality — a human anguishing exclusive — that triggers the imagination of an alternative outcome. Just as death is an unavoidable certainty, so is perfection an eternally unachievable goal, a finish line that will always be a step ahead of what the human being can reach. Yet, would the poet overcome mortality, he would have time to seek perfection. And in a space where immortality is possible, reaching perfection becomes conceivable as a possibility as well.

Again in this quote, both personal and temporal deictic markers anchor the text in a referential framing. However, reading these sentences in the subway invokes a second layer of intentionality, namely that of the artist who quotes the poet to address the viewer/passenger. In this station in particular, being the university station, the majority of its users are students. By this constraint of location this quote immediately acquires the didactic tone of a lesson. It is the invitation to imagine this counterfactual reality and to see in it, not an impossibility, but instead the ultimate ambition of all the viewers’ actions: seeking perfection (and in doing so, maybe reaching immortality through remembrance and recognition).

One second quote, attributed to the Greek philosopher Socrates, is a subjective expression of someone’s self-perception: *Não sou nem ateniense nem grego, mas sim um cidadão do mundo* (“I am neither Athenian nor Greek, but a citizen of the world”).



Fig. 5 — *Cidade Universitária* station, Lisbon subway.
“I am neither Athenian nor Greek, but a citizen of the world.”

The spatial reference is an identity marker. Citizenship consists not only of an individual's belonging to a place and the community that inhabits it, i.e. an external label that helps others categorize the subject, but it is also a subjective perception. The present tense in this quote is a marker of the subject's *origo*. At the same time, it points out to an ideal situation: it expresses both how the subject perceives himself, and the desire to be perceived in an equal manner by others (reinforced by the negation of the external categorization, in the beginning). Once again, this quote has a double intentionality, and of an even more elaborate kind: we know that the writings of Plato were compiled from Socrates' dialogues with his students, and are therefore didactic by nature. By choosing to quote them in the university subway station, it is not only the quote itself that is imported, but the argumentative content of the didactic tone is equally reintroduced and reinforced by the spatial location and the situation of the viewers as students.

Certainly, the display of these quotes is not a guaranty by itself that they are read and interpreted in this way. Not only is the subway station crossed by other users (non-students, people unaware of Cesário Verde's work or indifferent to Socrates), but what each viewer does with the quotes is idiosyncratic and should not occupy us further. What matters for our purposes is to recognize the intentionality pertaining to the works themselves and how it is (intentionally again) manipulated by the artist who quotes them in the space and the context of the specific artistic intervention in the subway station. The potential envisioned in the citation of these quotes is different from the original intention of the sentences in their textual embedding; one needs only to consider how the same text would be read in the silence of a library or the privacy of one's own home, embedded in the textual environment where these sentences first occur. In this subway station, these sentences are like subtle maxims, with the clear purpose of raising awareness of the passenger that life is much more than the daily ride in the network or the final destination of each journey.

These examples of the use of writing in a visual art work in a public setting are also different from the interventionist tone of political graffiti. In souvenir shops in Berlin one can find postcards depicting the graffiti that used to cover the Western side of the Wall. The most successful ones depict historical figures or particular moments which make up the history of this construction. The Wall itself had a quite different purpose than to serve as white surface for the anonymous creativity of the citizens, but the functional purpose evoked in the East soon met the ventilation of protest of the West. An example of such expressive acts was the quote *Hier trennen die Deutschen Deutschland* ("Here Germans divide Germany"). Written in black letters against the white surface, this sentence was a redundant depiction of what was already visually and experientially evident. Yet what overcomes the potential pointlessness of this sentence is both the precisely located referent of the spatial deictic (one could say that the imaginary pointing contained in spatial indexicals is here completely superfluous, because the signifier touches the referent) and the focus on agency: suddenly, it is not the wall that is dividing Berlin (and metonymically Germany): the wall is the instrument used by the agent (the undefined all encompassing "Germans") to the service of this division. Bottom line: it's all our fault. Moreover: this is a critical remark, not a mere assertion on the state of affairs. If it is a criticism, then underlying it is the provocation for action, a challenge for changing

“what is” into “what ought to be”. History tells us the rest. But so does another intervention on this original graffiti: a red “t” was added to *trennen*, changing it to *trennten*, the past form. The sentence now reads *Hier trennten die Deutschen Deutschland*, “Here Germans divided Germany”. The change of tense causes a temporal deictic shift and with it a change in the overall pragmatic implication of the sentence: it is no longer a didactic or rather ethic evocation or the address for action, but the narrative account of a historical event (eventually only didactic to the extent that it is the witness of a negative event and as such it should be considered of an exemplum never to be followed, so to prevent something similar from occurring once again). In any case, such phrases are not signed as is the work of the artist in the subway or the writings of a poet or a philosopher, but all of them are intentional.



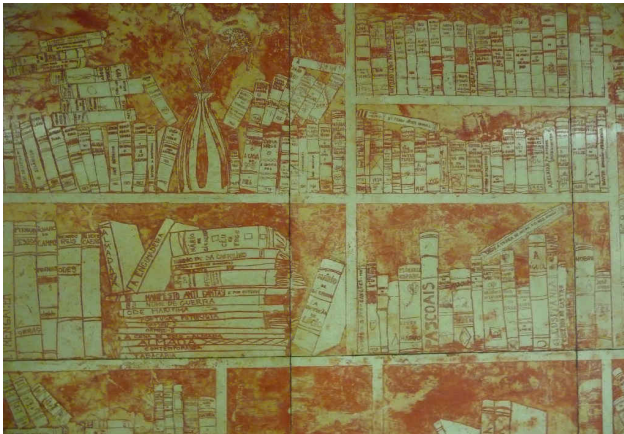
Fig. 6 — The Berlin Wall.
“Hier trenn(t)en Deutsche Deutschland.” (Here Germans divide(d) Germany.)

In the case of the quotation of existing texts, the intentional content of the original text is quoted along with the selected passages and embedded in the intentional layer of the new work. This results in a shift of the deictic markers, but not so that the initial referent is lost; on the contrary it is done in such a way that it is enlarged to encompass the personal, temporal and spatial coordinates of the new work.

IV. poetry in the Lisbon subway: Camões' *Os Lusíadas*

In this journey through Lisbon, let us detain ourselves for a little longer in the station of *Entrecampos*. This is an important transportation interface in the Lisbon metropolitan area, as it connects the subway with the suburban trains to Sintra and with the bus network of the city. For this reason, this station, which was one of the 11 stations in the inaugural network of 1959, was recently remodeled and expanded, in order to encompass an increasing daily flow of passengers. Besides the architectonic innovations, the station underwent a profound artistic intervention, authored by two contemporary Portuguese plastic artists: José de Santa Bárbara and Bartolomeu Cid dos Santos. It is to the work of the latter that we shall now turn.

When one leaves the Avenida da República and enters the main hall of the station, what strikes at first is a large mural that covers the whole north wall, like an immense bookshelf filled to its limit with books of different sizes and bindings. Upon a closer look, one discovers many titles of the Portuguese literature, dating from its beginnings to the present time. In the center, a large circle superposed on the bookshelf engraving is a void surface where contemporary writers (e.g. Agustina Bessa Luís, José Cardoso Pires, Natália Correia, among others) invited by the artist, perpetuated their signatures as part of this engraving. The reason for this homage to the Portuguese literature is related to the “spirit of the place”: the station serves the Portuguese National Library, an important archive of the aesthetic writings and historical documents of the country. Moreover, the choice of the titles displayed reveals to a certain extent the preferences of the artist himself.¹¹



¹¹ “[D]o lado esquerdo, numa pequena estante, o artista colocou os seus volumes favoritos, de autores portugueses e estrangeiros.” [On the left side, in a small book shelf, the artist placed his favorite books by Portuguese and foreign authors] (Botelho and Cabral 1994, 4).

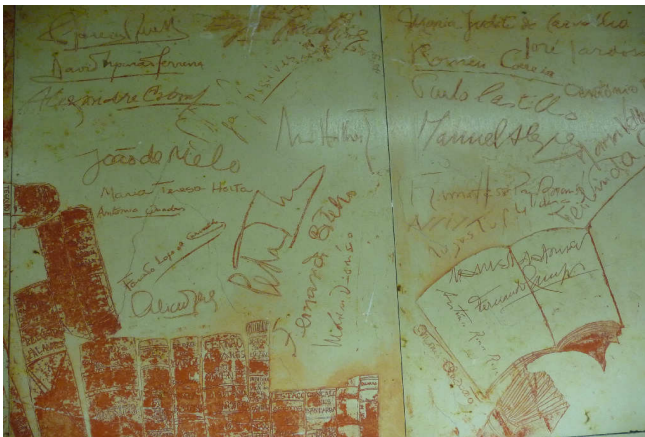


Fig. 7 – *Entrecampos* station, Lisbon subway.

View of the mural on the main hall, depicting a bookshelf filled with representative works of the Portuguese literature. Close-up of the central sphere, containing the signatures of contemporary Portuguese authors.

Descending to the platform where the trains stop, one is accompanied by images of vegetation and afterwards two immense female faces, one at each entrance to the platform. Both east and west sides of the platform are covered with engraved pictorial representations and citations from two major works by the two most important Portuguese writers: *Os Lusíadas*, by Luís de Camões, the 16th century national poet, and the *Ode Marítima* by Álvaro de Campos, one of the heteronyms of Fernando Pessoa, the most central figure in the Portuguese poetry of the early 20th century. We shall take a closer look to the mural containing engraved excerpts from the former work.

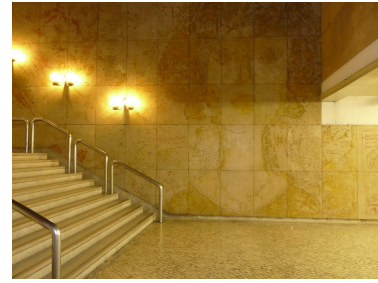


Fig. 8 — *Entrecampos* station, Lisbon subway.

Descending from the main hall to the East platform, one sees the depiction of dense vegetation that precedes the representation of a huge female face (the poet's muse), and then the illustrated quotations from the *Lusíadas*.

In a nutshell, *Os Lusíadas* is an epic poem about the journey of the discovery of the sea route to India, an enterprise authored by the captain Vasco da Gama in 1497-99. Besides this main narrative thread, the work also tells the history of Portugal, from its foundation in the 12th century until mid 16th century, the time when the work was written and published. There are also occasional references to the poet's personal experience of maritime journeys and to his life. The poem is written in the tradition of the classic epic works by Virgil and Homer, and includes many elements of Greek and Roman mythology. The fate of the human characters is narrated as the consequence of the intrigues of the gods, both harmful and helpful towards the earthly enterprise. These references however did not prevent the work's approval by the Inquisition, who understood them as aesthetic fancies, and therefore not dangerous for the understanding of the journeys of discovery as opportunities for economic and religious expansion.

Regarding its structure, the poem is composed of 10 cantos, which include a variable number of stanzas, all written in the decasyllabic scheme of the *ottava rima*. After the proposition (the introduction of the theme and the heroes), the invocation or prayer to the nymphs of the river Tagus (in Lisbon) and the dedication to the young king D. Sebastião, the narrative opens in medias res, and recovers eventually the temporal sequence of events, finishing with a prospective account of the events that occurred between the end of Gama's journey and the time of the publication of the book.

The wall in the subway platform of the *Entrecampos* station is filled in all its extension with a continuum of 11 panels that integrate both excerpts from this epic poem and their illustrations by Cid dos Santos. The following table presents the

quotes from the text and some details of the mural in which they are integrated, as well as the contextualization of these passages in the unfolding of the epic poem.¹²

Caption

Excerpt

Context



Canto I, Stanza 51

Do mar temos corrido e navegado
Toda a parte do Antártico e Calisto,
Toda a costa Africana rodeado,
Diversos céus e terras temos visto;
We have navigated every ocean
Between the Antarctic and the Great Bear:
We have rounded the coast of Africa
Seeing strange lands and new constellations

The Portuguese fleet, led by captain Vasco da Gama, has arrived at the island of Mozambique, on their way to India. The inhabitants ask the Portuguese who they are and where they are from. Vasco da Gama replies with a brief narrative of the journey up to that point.



Canto I, Stanza 56

Nisto Febo nas águas encerrou,
Co'o carro de cristal, o claro dia,
Dando cargo à irmã, que alumiasse
O largo mundo, enquanto repousasse.
Just then Phoebus in his crystal chariot
Plunged the bright day underwater,
Giving way to his sister Moon to keep
The broad world glimmering in his sleep.

The change of day to night is, as everything in this tale, the result of the workings of the gods.



Canto II, Stanza 106

Isto dizendo, os barcos vão remando
Para a frota, que o Mouro ver deseja;
Vão as naus uma e uma rodeando,
Porque de todas tudo note e veja.
At this the boats were maneuvered
To review the fleet as the Sultan wished;
They circled the ships one by one
To observe and take note of everything;

The fleet escapes a trap set for it in Mombasa, as the result of the intervention of the gods. The Portuguese now head for Melinde, where the friendly king offers to help. Small boats surround the fleet, curious and helpful. The king of Melinde asks Gama to tell him about the Portuguese.

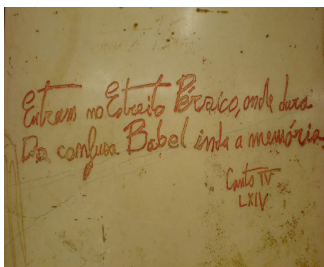


Canto III, Stanza 20

Eis aqui, quase cume da cabeça
De Europa toda, o Reino Lusitano,
Onde a terra se acaba e o mar começa,
E onde Febo repousa no Oceano.
And here as if crowning Europe's
Head, is the little kingdom of Portugal
Where the continent ends and the sea begins,
And where Phoebus reclines in the ocean.

Gama acquiesces to the request of the king and starts by situating Portugal in the European geography. Then he gives a retrospective account of the history of the country, its sovereigns and its people.

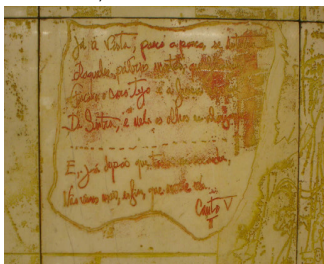
¹² We follow the second edition of Camões' *Os Lusíadas*, published in the same year of the first edition, in 1572 (facsimile version available on <http://bnd.bn.pt/> the Portuguese Digital National Library).



Canto IV, Stanza 64

Entram no estreito Pérsico, onde dura
Da confusa Babel inda a memória;
They voyaged into the Persian Gulf
Where the Tower of Babel is still recalled,

After a retrospective account of the history of Portugal from its foundation, Gama tells the king about the journeys of exploration by Pêro Vaz de Caminha and Afonso de Paiva, which were important for Gama's present enterprise.



Canto V, Stanza 3

Já a vista pouco e pouco se desterra
Daqueles pátrios montes que ficavam;
Ficava o caro Tejo, e a fresca serra
De Sintra, e nela os olhos se alongavam.

Gama narrates the moment of the departure of the fleet from Lisbon.

E já depois que toda se escondeu,
Não vimos mais enfim que mar e céu.
Little by little our gaze was exiled
From the native hills we left behind;
There remained the dear Tagus and green
Sintra, and on those our sight long dwelt
And when at last all faded from the eye,
Nothing was visible but sea and sky.

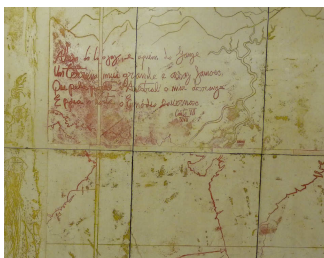


Canto VI, Stanza 8

No mais interno fundo das profundas
Cavernas altas, onde o mar se esconde,
Neptuno mora,----

With the end of Gama's narration, the fleet bids farewell from the friendly king and sails for India. The chronological sequence of the events is recovered. The passage describes the Indic ocean, where the fleet is about to face a challenging tempest, caused by the gods. The divinities (the good ones) however will help the fleet reach India safely.

In the deep chambers of the innermost
Vaulted caverns where the sea retreats,
Is Neptune's home, ----

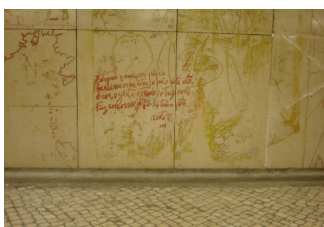


Canto VII, 17

Além do Indo jaz, e aquém do Gange,
Um terreno muito grande e assaz famoso
Que pela parte Austral o mar abrange,
E para o Norte o Emódio cavernoso.

The passage refers to India and conveys its geographical location, as well as its fame.

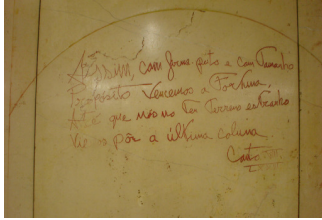
Beyond the Indus, as far as the Ganges,
Lies an enormous, celebrated land,
Extending to the sea in the far south
And to the north the Himalayan caves.



Canto VII, Stanza 23

Entrando o mensageiro pelo rio,
Que ali nas ondas entra, a não vista arte,
A cor, o gesto estranho, o traje novo
Fez concorrer a vê-lo todo o povo.
He left the estuary for the river,
Where the like never having been witnessed,
His pale skin, his garments, and strange air
Brought crowds of people hurrying to stare.

Upon the fleet's arrival to India, Gama sends a messenger to inform the king of the fleet's commercial intents. The passage depicts the messenger's impressions in the foreign land.



Canto VIII, Stanza 73

Assim com firme peito, e com tamanho
Propósito, vencemos a Fortuna,
Até que nós no teu terreno estranho
Viemos pôr a última coluna.
And so with steadfast hearts and great
Ends in view, we conquered Fortune
And reached your distant country
To plant the last of our stone columns;

In a diplomatic effort, Gama seeks to convince the king of his good intents (the king has been told otherwise by the gods). In the passage, Gama persuades the king of the ultimate goal of his enterprise.



Canto IX, Stanza 64

Nesta frescura tal desembarcavam
Já das naus os segundos Argonautas,
Onde pela floresta se deixavam
Andar as belas Deusas, como incautas.
Amidst all this fresh luxuriance,
The second Argonauts disembarked,
Where the lovely nymphs were strolling
In the forests as if unaware;

After some tense moments in which Gama himself is captured, the fleet finally succeeds thanks to the intervention of the gods and manages to trade the products for spices and bring back other evidence of the accomplishment. On the way back, the sailors arrive on an island of beautiful nymphs, a reward of the gods for their success.



Canto X, Stanza 80

Vês aqui a grande máquina do Mundo,
Etérea e elemental, que fabricada
Assim foi do Saber, alto e profundo,
Que é sem princípio e meta limitada.
This is the great machine of the universe
Ethereal and elemental, as made
By the deepest and highest Wisdom,
Who is without beginning and end.

The goddess on the island reveals to Gama and the Portuguese “the machine of the world”, the astronomic engineering that frames the world and all its knowledge. It’s the vision of how the Ptolemaic universe operates. The poem ends with an account of the events that followed the enterprise until the poet’s present time.

This mural evokes at first the impression of a totality, caused by the monochromatic continuity as well as the integration of the text in the image, as part of the visual arrangement. At a closer look, the viewer may be caught by detail in work, while waiting for the train, a possibility that the artist himself considered.¹³ These figurative visual depictions in *Entrecampos* are salient to perception, because they are complete or gestalt-like: the image of Neptune, the contour of the *nau* — the type of ship used in the journeys of discovery —, the depiction of the astrolabe, the skyline of a Moorish town, the elephants, the exotic vegetation and the representation of the muses, all these visual depictions are perceived in a moment, as visual wholes. Combined, they trigger a referential setting (both spatial and temporal) that viewers roughly situate as the period and the places of the Portuguese

¹³ “Ao conceber este painel, bem como o anterior, tive em mente, não só a criação de uma totalidade, mas também de uma pormenorização que desperte interesse a quem estiver perto das paredes aguardando a chegada do metro”. [As I imagined this panel, as well as the previous one, I had in mind not only to create a totality, but also the details that raise the interest of whoever stands close to the walls awaiting the arrival of the train.] (Botelho and Cabral 1994, 5)

discoveries. The images capture the exoticism of distant landscapes and the early technical means used in overcoming the unknown maritime distance, and they moreover suggest the adventurous nature of the enterprise and reveal the astonishment and admiration before the differences of such distant places. All these are salient elements of the space and time of the discoveries are available to the viewer's perception, the more so as this period and these events are a frequent target of commemorative or evocative public artistic manifestations in Lisbon and in Portugal, in general.

The text adds one more layer of significance to this topic and narrows the reference to the most significant evocations of this period. As one recognizes the text by Camões (either because it is in verse, or due to the indication of Canto and Stanza, or by the explicit reference in the beginning of the sequence of images), the drawings are no longer isolated or random representations of the period of the discoveries; when they are recognized as illustrations of the *Lusíadas*, they acquire a narrative structure that leads the viewer to attend to their sequence. As illustrations of this work, the images have a double referent: the epic poem itself, which includes both historical events and characters (e.g. the journey to India, the fleet captain Vasco da Gama) and fictional elements, such as the harmful and the helpful divinities or the *Ilha dos Amores*, the mythical island inhabited by nymphs somewhere in the Indic Ocean; the second referent is already contained in the first: the historical journey of Vasco da Gama and his discovery of the sea path to India, one of the most representative episodes of the historical period of the discoveries. By the process of narration, i.e. as he moves in the narrative, the viewer travels simultaneously through the structures of discourse (text and images) and the world of both story (Camões' epic poem) and history (Segal 1995: 65-67), while still being aware of his location in the subway and in a specific time.

In the quoted passages, there are several deictic markers pointing out for particular persons, locations or moments in time. However, the quotes are amputated from the original text and thus lose their immediate enunciation embedding. In fact, the poetic subject very often gives the floor to his characters and they assume the narration, as part of the overall composition. This is the case of the following passage, attributed to Vasco da Gama, as he tells the king of Melinde, at his request, about Portugal and the Portuguese:

Eis *aqui*, quase cume da cabeça
De Europa toda, o Reino Lusitano

And *here* as if crowning Europe's
Head, is the little kingdom of Portugal
(Canto III, Stanza 20)

One speculates that Gama might have been pointing to the location of Portugal in a map, as he pronounced these words, the deictic gesture combined with the iconic geographic representation. The average viewer probably does not even remember that those were Vasco da Gama's words in the narrative, so that this initial enunciation setting is probably not recovered here. However, regardless of the

precise enunciation authorship of these words, the viewer recognizes that they belong to a narrator in a fictional world, different from the real world he inhabits. And yet he reads the spatial deictic marker — *aqui*, “here” — as being relevant in his present location. “Here” ultimately refers to Portugal in a cascade of inclusive spatial reference: *Entrecampos* station, Lisbon, Portugal. The spatial deictic applies to the location of Portugal in the epic, as much as it does to its location relative to the viewer. Thus the geographical predication of the kingdom in the narrative (“Europe’s crowning head”) maps onto the predication of Portugal in the viewer’s reality: a leading position, instead of the ultimate end of the continent.

In the artistic mural, this geographic enhancement produces an effect of celebration of the country, and by extension, of its people (and thus also of the viewer). This same effect is triggered by other quoted passages in the mural, and in particular by the deictic markers in them, as is the case of the following example:

Do mar *temos corrido e navegado*
Toda a parte do Antártico e Calisto,
Toda a costa Africana rodeado,
Diversos céus e terras *temos visto*;

We have navigated every ocean
Between the Antarctic and the Great Bear:
We have rounded the coast of Africa
Seeing strange lands and new constellations

(Canto I, Stanza 51)

In the epic poem, these words are again pronounced by Vasco da Gama. The verb tense in the passage accounts for an action that is not completed, but continues up until the present of the utterance. Moreover, the first person plural contained in the flexion morpheme (“*temos*”) refers to what the viewer may vaguely identify as the Portuguese sailors in Vasco da Gama’s fleet, that is, as Portuguese discoverers who lived five centuries before him in the same country, and with whom he thus shares national citizenship. Even if separated in time, both viewer and the plural referent in the passage belong in the same category: they share identity. Moreover, there can be a further link between the actions of the subjects of reference in the poem and those of the viewer. In other words, the temporal and personal deictic suggests that the authorship of the adventurous deeds is extended to the viewer: the reader of the quote becomes the brave discoverer of unknown locations. The effect created is that of inclusion or belonging, of identification: the viewer finds himself suddenly as fearless, adventurous and heroic as Gama himself. This generates a pragmatic implication in the same lines as the one implied by the spatial deictic: it evokes a sense of pride and national elevation. These deictic markers invite the viewers to bond in the performance of actions that are greater than every individual’s current actions: navigation is a common denominator for the daily subway ride and the all changing experience of venturing out in a new world.

This interpretation is likely to be inflated, especially given the pragmatic nature of the underground setting. The subway is probably not the most ceremonious place for the expression of national glory. And this is probably why it is legitimate. In fact, the naïve simplicity of some of the drawings (see the muses, for example) contrasts with the solemnity of that glorification, and helps to understand the quotation of the epic

poem as a harmless acknowledgement of the past deeds by the collective memory. Even if the ultimate referents of the mural are in fact historical events, their celebration in the work of art is ultimately aesthetic, just as in the case of the *Lusíadas*.

afterword

A literary quote on the wall of a subway station carries a different meaning from the one it produces being read in the page of a book. The rescaling of the words is only the most evident difference. Behind the surface there is an added level of intentionality, namely that of the artist that quotes the original text. The selection of the specific citation is intended as part of the art work and in the new aesthetic and situational embedding of the original text gains a new significance, which either modifies or builds on the original meaning, but in either case always acknowledges it.

Deictic markers are particular significant in works of public art displayed in functional public spaces. The deictic shift from immediate reality and narrative world is not total in the case of public works of art, both because the surrounding reality is too present to be ignored and also because the viewer is aware that there has been a purpose in choosing precisely those passages for display in that specific location.

The recognition of one's own reality in that of the quoted sentences, and moreover the realization of what is common between the viewer and other viewers can challenge exactly what constitutes the non-place: the absence of identity instantiation. This challenge results from the shared attention involved in the collective appreciation of the art work. This is effective, because art, both in its production and reception, is an expression of existential issues and experiential conditions. These are universal and indifferent to the particular conditions of a subway station.

And if existence itself should be viewed as a non-place, and subways stations an ideal environment for the expression of existential meanings, this would help explain why art and poetry are so welcome in these settings.

References

- Augé, Marc *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*. London, NY: Verso [translated by John Howe], 1995.
Un Ethnologue dans le Métro. Paris: Hachette, 1998.
In the Metro. Translated and with an Introduction and Afterword by Tom Conley. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2002.
- Botelho, Margarida and Pina Cabral, *O Novo Interface do Metro de Entrecampos*. Lisboa: Edições do Metropolitano de Lisboa, 1994.
- Brandt, Per Aage, "Art, Technique, and Cognition". In: Per Aage Brandt: *Spaces, Domains, and Meaning*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2004: 211-218.
- Brisard, Frank, "Introduction: The epistemic basis of deictic reference". In: Frank Brisard (ed.): *Grounding. The Epistemic Footing of Deixis and Reference*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002: xi-xxxiv.
- Camões, Luís Vaz de, *Os Lusíadas*. Lisboa, 1572. Facsimile digital edition by the Portuguese Digital National Library on: <http://bnd.bn.pt/>.
- Camões, Luís Vaz de, *The Lusíads*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Landeg White. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Hénaff, Marcel, *La ville qui vient*. Paris: L'Herne, 2008.

- Kabakov, Ilya, *Public Projects or the Spirit of a Place. Progetti di Arte Pubblica o lo Spirito del Luogo*. Milano: Edizioni Charta, 2001.
- Langacker, Ronald, "Deixis and Subjectivity". In: Frank Brisard (ed.): *Grounding. The Epistemic Footing of Deixis and Reference*. Berlin, New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002: 1-38.
- Oakley, Todd, *From Attention to Meaning: Explorations in Semiotics, Linguistics, and Rhetoric*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Roseta, Filipa Maria Salema, *Metropolitano — A Cidade em Zapping*. Tese de Mestrado, Faculdade de Arquitectura da Universidade Técnica de Lisboa, 2001.
- Segal, Erwin M., "A Cognitive-Phenomenological Theory of Fictional Narrative", in: Duchan, Judith F., Gail A. Bruder and Lynne E. Hewitt: *Deixis in Narrative. A Cognitive Science Perspective*. Hillsdale, New Jersey and Hove UK: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995: 61-79.
- Stockwell, Peter, *Cognitive Poetics. An Introduction*. London: Blackwell, 2002. (Chapter 3: Cognitive Deixis.)
- Tomasello, Michael (2008): *Origins of Human Communication*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2008.
- Vários autores. *Encenar a Cidade. Intervenções Artísticas nos tapumes das obras do metropolitano de Lisboa*. 1994, Ed. Do Metro.
- Weyergraf-Serra, Clara and Buskirk, Martha, eds., *The Destruction of Tilted Arc: documents*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991.



2. Ira Lightman, *A Spennymoor Letter*.

aoileann ni eigeartaigh

changing places and merging spaces: the poetry of Eamonn Wall

Ever since Foucault declared that: “The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space”(Foucault, p.22), the importance of space in the construction of identity has become one of the defining themes of contemporary cultural studies. Foucault’s assertion that the constricting, chronological narratives of history can be replaced by the more fluid, asynchronous narratives of space is particularly attractive to theorists of the diaspora, for whom the disruption of the historic metanarrative is synonymous with the assertion of an autonomous subjectivity. This essay will examine the poetry of the Irish-born poet Eamonn Wall in the light of contemporary theories of diaspora formation, focusing in particular on his construction of a poetic persona that seeks to express and accommodate an identity that has been forged between the twin spaces of Ireland and North America. Wall was born in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, in 1955, then emigrated to the United States in 1982, and is currently the Smurfit-Stone Professor of Irish Studies at the University of Missouri at St Louis. Reflecting on his experience as an Irish immigrant in America, albeit that he is one of more privileged kind than is typical, Wall states that “I have double vision... When I look at one landscape I see it always through the lens of the other... It’s a hybrid view”.¹ This essay will focus on Wall’s quest to realize such hybridity by engaging with the images and vocabulary of the dual landscapes of his childhood home in Ireland and his adopted homeland of America. I will suggest that in spite of the poet’s apparent willingness to adopt what might be read as a postmodernist accommodation of multiple spaces and identities, he struggles to overcome his need to feel rooted in his surrounding landscape and finds it difficult to transcend the borders dividing the Irish and American elements of his identity. At the same time, it is also arguable that there is no poetic capital for Wall in resolving this tension, as it is his fundamental motive for writing. Arguably, Wall remains subtly committed to his deracination, even as he affects to agonize over it.

¹ Quoted in Katie Donovan, “Learning to Forget”, *The Irish Times* (Tuesday, August 29, 2000). Article available online at www.irishtimes.com.

Traditional theories of diaspora formation have emphasized the ongoing emotional connection between the migrant and the mythical homeland. McLeod characterizes diasporas as societies in this way: “[t]he emphasis on collectivity and community here is very important, as is the sense of living in one country but looking across time and space to another”(McLeod, p.207). Contemporary theorists of diaspora formation such as Bennett challenge this emphasis on rootedness and belonging, by situating the experience of migration amidst the inevitable fluidity and forced juxtapositions of globalization: “Once clearly demarcated by relatively static and ethnically homogenous communities, the ‘spaces’ and ‘places’ of everyday life are now highly pluralistic and contested, and are constantly being defined and redefined through processes of relocation and cultural hybridisation”(Bennett, p.4). Contemporary diasporic subjects are thus no longer limited by the binary oppositions that functioned in the past to define and inscribe them within clear-cut narratives of belonging, but are now free to assume multiple and hybrid identities.

It is widely assumed that this engagement with — and, by extension, challenge to — traditional narratives of identity liberates the diasporic subject and encourages him to explore newer and more flexible models of self-expression. Bennett emphasizes that the liminal and unnarrated spaces inhabited by the contemporary globalized subject enables him to disrupt the often limiting terms of inherited narratives of history and subjectivity: “Postmodernism is also argued to have had a considerable impact on the notion of individual identity, the erosion of those ideological forces that once prescribed identity giving rise to an endless array of possible identities from which individuals are able to choose, thus assuming multiple and shifting personas”(Bennett, p.32). The postmodern rejection of the historical metanarrative in favour of multiple perspectives has also had significant implications for the narration of the experience of migration. Reflecting on his editing of an anthology of recent Irish emigrant literature, Dermot Bolger notes that the act of emigration is no longer as final as it was in the past, making it difficult to define, especially as many emigrants now return home after a period abroad. This increased fluidity means that the very terminology traditionally used to describe the experience of emigration is now out of date: “*Exile* and *departure* suggest an out-dated degree of permanency. Irish writers no longer go into exile, they simply commute”(Bolger, p.7).

This contemporary form of migration is, of course, liberating in one way, enabling its subjects to move easily between the twin spaces of home and away without being defined and limited by either. However, it can also leave the migrant feeling doubly displaced, as he is now living between two countries, without really belonging anywhere. In an essay entitled “Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café: Notes on the ‘New Irish’”, Wall admits that his identity as an emigrant is significantly undermined by the half-hearted manner in which he embarked on his life in America: “As for becoming an exile, well that’s just something I sort of fell into. I didn’t actually decide in some rational manner that I was going to stay in the United States, I just realized at some point that I was staying, since the work was here”(“Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café”, p. 1128). Wall draws on Bolger’s description of the fluid and temporary nature of contemporary emigration, suggesting that unlike in the past: “(W)e don’t emigrate, we commute”(“Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café”, p.1129). This insouciant postmodernist description of the experience of emigration suggests that Wall has experienced no difficulty in making a life for himself outside Ireland, and that he

moves effortlessly back and forth between the two countries. This impression of fluidity is, however, undermined by Wall's admission that the act of migration, even in the contemporary world, takes an emotion toll on its subjects that situates them, whether they wish to acknowledge it or not, within a historical metanarrative of displacement and loss: "Although we are the commuters Dermot Bolger calls us, we still carry the same heavy emotional baggage which Irish exiles have always carried with them" ("Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-é Café", p.1129). This phrase aptly captures the tension that lies at the heart of Wall's writing. His bid to construct an identity that can celebrate the fluidity of the contemporary experience of globalization, while simultaneously drawing on historical signifiers and tropes of migration, is reflected in his ongoing performance of a struggle to feel rooted in the American landscape. Torn between loyalty to his homeland and a growing love for his life in America, he epitomizes the dilemma of a contemporary migrant subject, robbed of the comforting, if limiting, identifiers of the past and attempting to embrace multiplicity and flux.

Wall arrives in New York and sets about finding a poetry that he believes will enable him to bridge the twin cultures and histories of Ireland and the United States: "To be able to write convincingly about America, contemporary Irish poets must be able to partly unlearn what they have picked up in Ireland, and produce newer hybrid forms which are part-Irish and part-American" ("Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café", p.1131). The poems in Wall's first collection *Dyckman-200th Street* (1994) document his early contact with an American landscape already familiar to him through cultural texts: "Before coming to live in the United States, I lived in that vast country through books, music, and the rich visual images presented in the movies I watched in Dublin cinemas. I was enthralled by the diverse products of the American imagination, by a world which seemed larger and more vital to me than what was available at home" ("Reading Mary Gordon's *Final Payments* in America", p.30). Searching for a poetic voice that can accommodate the excitement and expansiveness of the American landscape, Wall turns to Walt Whitman and self-consciously produces a simulacrum of his effusively and sprawling line:

A tourist admires the crooked splendour of the avenue as he stands
in the shade cast by the scaffolding of the new high-rise on 57th
and 8th... ("In the Shade: on 57th and 8th")

Although apparently happy to have found in Whitman a style of writing that can describe the "dynamism" and "teeming cities"² of America, Wall quickly becomes uncomfortable about the inequalities and discordances that such long and sprawling lines can disguise. His all-too-easy adoption of an American style of writing and celebration of American expansiveness is necessarily disrupted by a series of poems which raise uncomfortable questions about the status of immigrants in American society. Reflecting on the Statue of Liberty, Wall is struck by the contradictions between the "divine and kindly warmth" radiating from the statue and the inhospitality of the contemporary immigration process ("Irish Voices, American Writing, and Green Cards", p.71). He begins to realise that simply adopting an

² Eamonn Wall, "Reading Mary Gordon's *Final Payments* in America", p.31.

American style of poetic expression is not a sufficient level of engagement with his new surroundings and that what is often perceived as what is conventionally perceived as Whitman's unquestioning faith in the bounty of the American melting-pot may be complicit in the marginalisation of immigrant experiences:

... To the right
a lady of the harbour
swathed in centennial
Band Aid
...
What does Whitman mean?
What have our bodies built for,
definitions through paper or
sunsets in familiar places?
Where in the forest grows
the Green Card? ("Hart Crane's Bridge", p.14)

His poems detailing the treatment of immigrants, both contemporary and historical, Irish and Mexican, retreat back to the short, terse lines familiar from Irish verse, as though to emphasize the poet's increasing alienation from the American culture surrounding him:

We are the paupers
on the road to Jerusalem
detraining at Chambers St.
on this early morning ("A Radio Foretold: Green Card", p.11);

Those who were broken
crawled by brown ditches
into coffin ships ("The Class of 1845", p.34).

Having made the decision to engage with historical narratives of migration and resettlement, Wall begins to question his earlier assumption that he could easily feel at home in America. He realizes that the ability to ventriloquize an American voice such as Whitman's does not automatically enable him to understand the complexities of American society:

We hear our words transformed
to sidewalks, buoys, nickels and dimes,

but have we given up the right to name
by walking through the electric doors

into the gasoline air of Logan airport? ("New Words", p.32)

Moreover, his willingness to celebrate the American landscape through the poetic lens of Whitman does not necessarily help him to locate his own identity in the surrounding streets and parks. Instead of feeling free and liberated in his adopted homeland, the poet begins to feel claustrophobic and dislocated, as evidenced by the sparse and disrupted lines of "My Love, My History, My New Home":

... you say
we can be happy anywhere, but I look

at the street, and I do not breathe it (p.21)

Dyckman-200th St ends with a series of poems set during a visit to Ireland. These poems do not demonstrate the easy, flexible “commute” between cultures which the poet claimed was characteristic of his experience of exile, but resonate with dislocations and uneasy juxtapositions. “River Slaney: New Year’s Day” describes the poet walking around Enniscorthy, reminiscing about his childhood:

Home again. Walking on the prom into the heaviness of
short-pantsed hurling, hand-in-hand memory, and confusion
in the summer about when and how the day might end... (p.49).

The poet’s confusion about the past is mirrored in the juxtaposition of these childhood scenes with the new memories he is forging with his own children in America:

... but I have entered into other loves beyond
this solid town and landscape. A boychild builds a
snowman in a Pennsylvania backyard... (p.49).

Rather than celebrating the potential to merge his memories, past and present, and revel in the ease with which he can move between cultures, however, the poet is struck by the constant gaps and interruptions that characterize the life of an emigrant. In other words, on his return to his childhood home in Ireland, the poet realizes that he is destined to live between two cultures, never fully rooted in either. Identity is not a case of either/or, Whitman/Yeats, American/Irish:

... But you sleep one night
in your parent’s house and you have never been away; each
return and each departure are small discordances... (p.49).

In a series of essays, Wall explains why he revises his attitude to his identity as an Irish immigrant living in America. One of the things he had looked forward to when he left Ireland for America, was leaving behind the limiting narratives of Irish nationalist history and embracing the freedom that being an unknown immigrant in America would afford him: “One factor that excited me most about leaving Ireland for America was that my new home offered the possibility of escape from history... in America, I thought, I would be outside history and without a care”(“The Black Hills, The Gorey Road”, p.17). Emigrating to America thus appeared to represent an opportunity for Wall to embrace postmodernity and reject the limitations of the historical metanarrative discussed earlier in this essay. What he comes to realise, however, is that postmodern problematization of identity is neither as liberating nor as flexible as theorists might suggest, and that even the expansive spaces of American society are deeply ideological and restricting. In fact, this point is also made by Foucault who qualifies his privileging of narratives of space above those of time by warning: “(I)t is necessary to notice that the space which today appears to form the horizon of our concerns, our theory, our systems, is not an innovation; space itself has a history in Western experience and it is not possible to disregard the fatal intersection of time with space”(Foucault, p.22). Becoming a postmodern global dweller, Wall does not

discover a vicarious pleasure in plurality, but rather an inescapable sense of inauthenticity.

Wall is confronted by the inequalities which define American society when, in the process of applying for his green card, he is forced to rethink his ambivalence about his identity as an immigrant. What he learns is that it is not enough for him to see himself as an independent contemporary “commuter”, moving easily between two cultures and identities, but that he has a responsibility to all those who emigrated before him to construct a narrative from the experience:

Given that political opinion and action have grown increasingly hostile to immigrants, it is rather immoral for me, as a breadwinner and taxpayer, to observe but not vote... Ambivalence is a postmodern condition, but it is, or at least it should be, secondary to faith and commitment... One should not be ambivalent about one's fellow human beings (“Reading Mary Gordon's *Final Payments in America*”, p.32).

The poems in *Iron Mountain Road* (1997) recount the second phase of Wall's experience of migration. The volume describes Wall's move with his family from the familiar spaces of New York to the wide expanses of the Nebraskan prairies, in what practically amounts to the performance of a great American cliché, the voyage westward. *Iron Mountain Road* is perhaps the most interesting volume to explore in the context of this essay, because it captures the poet at a point of transition and confusion. Leaving the familiar landscape of New York forces him to reflect on the absence that lies at the heart of the migrant experience, an absence he perhaps did not fully acknowledge when as a young man he nonchalantly left Ireland for a new life in America. What seems to worry the poet most of all is that this constant moving will rob him of the opportunity to feel fully rooted anywhere. Reflecting on his last night in New York, he cannot help but compare the stability of his own childhood with the disruption he is introducing into his own children's:

... My own childhood
unimaginable without the Slaney humming
...
Tonight, my children are singing in the
water at the prospect of a plane ride to
another life, but someone must remember,
there must be someone to write this down (“The Westward Journey”, p.26)

These lines demonstrate the deadlock inherent on Wall's poetry of self. The central role his own memories of childhood continue to play in his identity, as well as his impulse to record and narrate his contemporary experiences, prevent him from achieving the postmodernist embrace of freedom and uncertainty to which he apparently aspires. For all of that apparent desire, Wall is in effect addicted to being Irish, with all of its rigorous rootedness. Arguably, too, Wall's anxieties are singularly bourgeois and aspirational, and his type of migration is highly untypical compared to the dire economic necessity that necessitated the journeying of others in the past. His existential agonies, and his qualms over his children's future sense of self, are luxuries he can afford. Unlike his children who look forward with confidence to the unnarrated future in front of them, Wall is anxious about the dislocations their move will engender and is unable to resist his narrativising instincts. Underlying Wall's fears is the central role that place plays in the Irish psyche. Theorists of the diaspora

have emphasized that a deconstruction of the power of place is a crucial step in the liberation of the diasporic subject from the constricting and limiting narratives of home and identity.³ For Wall, however, leaving behind the comforting spaces and resonances of his childhood is difficult, and he acknowledges that this has undermined his attempts to embrace his new life in America. He describes his dilemma in terms that again recall the clash between the modernist drive to narrate and thus regulate experience, and the postmodernist embrace of uncertainty and change: "I have remained closed to the possibility of belonging to America out of a kind of perverse loyalty to the place where I grew up. It is likely that I have adopted the attitude of the Irish emigrant for whom no place on earth can equal the locus of childhood. In fact, what defines Irish attachment to place so well is absence" ("The Black Hill, The Gorey Road", p.21).

This absence resonates in a number of poems in *Iron Mountain Road*, as the poet struggles to engage with the unfamiliar landscape of the prairies: "I look out the front window of my house at the bright sidewalks on which no one walks and experience an intense loneliness. The prairie is lonely and vast, and far from the ocean" ("Immigration, Technology, and Sense of Place", 29). The poet's loneliness is partly attributable to his inability to stop looking longingly at what he has left behind:

... I've moved around too much
opening the blinds at daylight
to search calm streets for
the view I've left behind me ("Father and Daughter: Nebraska", p.31).

The poet also finds that his Irish vocabulary and poetic sensibility cannot adequately grasp the complexities of the surrounding landscape: "I doubted whether the Irish emotional lens I observed the world through — the narrow street, the small feet, the wet grass — could accommodate these huge, dry vistas located in the center of the American continent" ("The Black Hills, The Gorey Road", p.9). In a conversation with his muse, Wall laments his inability to dialogue with the prairies:

I say to you:
"I'd like to
write prairie
dogs and Sandhill
cranes but I don't
feel comfortable:
...
a prairie poet,
Yeah, right" ("A Prairie Poet!" pp.44-5).

Just as he turned to Walt the Brooklynite to provide a mode of language adequate for New York, Wall turns to the literature of the prairies for guidance, seeking to claim for himself an authentic voice that can structure and inform his engagement with the landscape:

³ See John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000), p.216; Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging* (GB: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p.ix.

I'll drive west to seek the crane voice river with the
lovely name and your poets, Nebraska,

who read among the coloured walls of Kearney & Zeami
your performances loaded as the large, empty corn fields
in the car beside me. You know it all: I have come to
learn this river and this land ("Kearney & Platte & Cranes", p.52).

He also explores paintings of the prairies and discovers that the feelings of dislocation and alienation that suffuse his initial encounters with the American landscape underline all experiences of migration:

That day I found the centre of the prairie on an upstairs
wall painted by an immigrant from Russia. It was what I
had been searching for since County Wexford had given
me no language to describe this unfixed loneliness out-
side my door... ("Yellow Band", p.58).

Once he realizes that the difficulties he is experiencing in his bid to engage with and feel at home in the surrounding landscape are not unique to him, and that on the contrary his experiences connect him to the waves of immigrants who have come to live amidst the prairies before him, Wall discovers confidence in the idea that all identity and occupancy is precarious. Although he realises that he will never make a permanent mark on the surrounding landscape, and that his life in the prairie represents but a fleeting moment in an ongoing narrative of settlement and resettlement, his creation of a home with his family enables him to finally begin to feel rooted, and all enthralling POMO contingency is forgotten:

... Look through the doors if you will — full
length and glass — locate in deep shades some immigrant
myth. I must cut the dead tree in the backyard, clear the
ground under the buckled flagstone, make it even for the
children on their bikes. I have come from damp grass to
dry air to scrape film from formica, freed by exile to walk
out into the fresh renewing rectangle of a winter storm.
Who can say to me you don't belong — pictures hung,
Boxes folded in the basement" ("Yellow Band", p.60).

Opening himself up to the surrounding landscape also causes Wall to challenge the binary oppositions that underlined his sense of self in the past. Realizing that he does not have to choose to be either Irish or American, and that, on the contrary, he can inhabit two cultures and landscapes simultaneously, enables him to begin the process of living comfortably in two spaces:

... I
remember last year driving from Omaha, Nebraska, to Custer, South Dakota,
thinking as I saw the Nebraska Sandhills for the first time that I was once
again in Ireland ("Reverie: The Dublin—Rosslare Train", p.14);

Walking the verges that skirt
RT. 20 in Northwest Nebraska

through the dunes beyond the
14th fairway into the Irish Sea ("Sandhills", p.21).

The facility with which the poet slips between the Irish and American landscapes in these poems demonstrates none of the dislocations and gaps that characterized his earlier engagements with the American landscape. The poems in *Iron Mountain Road* suggest that Wall has begun to merge the two landscapes in which he lives, until he can effortlessly superimpose one upon the other. In his questing after comfort at all costs, Wall is delighted to become a nowhere man.

It can be plausibly argued, then, that *Iron Mountain Road* constitutes a significant shift in Wall's engagement with the American landscape, suggesting that he has started to look to it, rather than to the comfortable spaces of his childhood in Ireland, for his indicators of place and identity. What is not fully resolved yet, however, is Wall's sense of himself as an immigrant in America. Reflecting on his explorations of the American landscape, Wall suggests that while his American family can claim it as part of their heritage, he himself can only ever achieve a partial connection with it:

The feeling was one that mixed joy and sorrow: we had reached a fork in the road at which we separated — three going in one direction, myself in another, and it seemed to me that I was about to begin the immigrant experience all over again. By bringing them to the center of their landscape, I was reminded of the distance separating me from my own. At the same time, I had given a wife, a son, and a daughter the gift of the country they had been born to ("The Black Hills, The Gorey Road, p.11).

In spite of the progress he has made in his engagement with American culture on an emotional and linguistic level, therefore, Wall is still unable to conceive of an identity that is not permanently damaged by his dislocation from Ireland. Self-reflexivity has again intervened to indicate a deadlock, a predicament which the poet cannot intelligently or imaginatively overcome; simultaneously, however, it is questionable whether this is any kind of personal disaster, because Wall is not given to writing about anything other than his fascination with the conundrum of his own identity.

Refuge at DeSoto Bend (2004) sees the poet return to these complex questions of identity and belonging. However, although he still grappling with the emotional logistics of living between two cultures, the years the poet has spent in America and his realization that he will not be returning to live in Ireland have changed his feelings about his status as an immigrant. What is most significant about the poems in this volume is that Wall merges his experiences of migration with those of other migrants, both historical and contemporary. He also begins to exhibit a certain emotional distance from the landscape of his childhood. The volume begins with yet another relocation, the poet's move from the by-now comfortable, familiar spaces of Nebraska to St Louis, Missouri. The title of the volume with its choice of the ambiguous "refuge" as signifier of place makes it difficult to know whether the poet sees Missouri as a place of solace and comfort, or whether he continues to feel like a refugee, moving from place to place without feeling settled anywhere. The first poem in the volume, "How You Leave", documents the many moves he has made and reflects the contradictory emotions of "alienation and excitement" he noted in an essay as being central to all narratives of migration:⁴

⁴ Eamonn Wall, "Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café", p.1130.

... If you walk an hour
beyond our town, the old people say, you will meet

fine weather & a ceilí at the crossroads. A lake is
central to your continent. Now, add tall buildings,
underground stations, a woman at a coffee counter

holding forth on the history of cattle and native
grasses, that form of talk you heard on the dry
prairie. Here, you came to know the lore of

doorbells & children who counted cats as paid-
up members of households. Each lodging place
provided one lesson... ("How You Leave", p.15)

The emphasis here is less on the gaps and disruptions that were noted in earlier poems, but is rather on the merger of memories and places into one defining experience. This suggests that the poet finds this latest move considerably less traumatic than he did in the past. One reason for this is perhaps that Ireland too appears to be undergoing a considerable period of change and transformation, from the static, downward looking country of Wall's childhood to a more vibrant, global nation, and is now almost unrecognisable to its emigrants. O'Toole suggests that the fractured nature of the new Ireland could be problematic for its writers who can no longer draw on traditional narrative themes and styles in order to describe it: "The emergence of a frantic, globalized, dislocated Ireland has deprived fiction writers of some of their traditional tools. One is a distinctive sense of place".⁵ However, Wall suggests that the new Ireland's rejection of the limiting binaries of the past and embrace of more flexible, global signifiers of identity is immensely empowering for the emigrant writer, who can now explore multiple sources of identity without being constricted and limited in any way: "To return to Ireland in the late 1990s after a significant absence, as I have done, is such an exciting event. I am returning to a new country, which addresses me in a new language I have had to learn" ("Reading Mary Gordon's *Final Payments* in America", p.31). A number of the poems in *Refuge at DeSoto Bend* celebrate the widespread and very visible transformation of the Irish landscape, and the extent to which this mirrors Irish society's movement away from the constricting narratives of the past and embrace of more flexible, global signifiers of identity. The poet's delight at this transformation is apparent when he meets his younger self and explains how suffocating and colourless Ireland was before it opened itself up to globalization:

We were scraping our nibs across paper: we could not break
the pens or drink the ink, could not push the clock beyond
halfway & dinner was always hours away. Before global
warming and the European Union, the skies were always grey
(*"The Education of Denis Keegan"*, p.74).

⁵ O'Toole, Fintan. "Writing the Boom". *The Irish Times* (Thursday, 25 January, 2001).

Ireland's economic prosperity also has significant consequences for its engagement with its history of emigration. In a series of poems gathered under the heading "The Wexford Container Tragedy", the poet reflects on Ireland's recent transformation from a land of emigration to one of inward migration, and attempts to figure out what effect this change has on his own status as a migrant. Inspired by the discovery of the bodies of eight refugees in a container which arrived in Rosslare Port, near his childhood home, in December 2001, the poet becomes conscious of the global metanarrative of migration, which connects migrants through time and space. He juxtaposes poems about a family visit to the memorial to Irish immigration on Ellis Island with poems about the recent events in Rosslare:

Eight stowaways
including children

discovered dead,
in a container.

Wexford Business Park ("Photo & Caption", p.22);

I wait to board a ferry for Ellis Island.

Once a tower of hope and humiliation.
Now a museum and shrine to immigration ("Cormorants", p.23).

Wall is particularly struck by the coincidence that Wexford, the port of departure for Irish emigrants throughout history, has now become the point of entry for contemporary immigrants. On a visit to Ellis Island, Wall reflects on the experiences of the Irish immigrants who had travelled to the United States before him:

Turned stomachs, stern medics, New World
elders. Stern inspection.

America offering, in equal measures, forgetfulness
And food ("Ellis Island", p.27).

He sees the names "Michael and Anna Wall" on the wall of the memorial, and realizes that although his journey to the United States was far easier and less traumatic, he too is part of the unfolding narrative of Irish emigration. That this narrative has recently become even more complex is evident when, on a recent visit to Wexford, he sees two Nigerian women walking around the town:

How strange this drab November day must seem
to brave Nigerians.

How quickly for each immigrant all can fall apart
In fits of panic and dismay ("Ellis Island", p.28).

Seeing the familiar spaces of Wexford through the eyes of these newly arrived immigrants, for whom it is unfamiliar and strange, seems to undermine the stability of Wall's relationship with his childhood home, and he begins to question his easy

acceptance of the signifiers and mythologies of his homeland. He is particularly critical of the double standard characterizing contemporary Irish responses to the growing number of immigrants coming into the country. In the ironically named “Céad Míle Fáilte”, he laments the extent to which Ireland’s historical legacy of emigration has been conveniently forgotten by those who protest against the arrival of contemporary immigrants:

Grouped
residents
gather
protest

No
welcome
centre
wanted

Here
our
history
lost

Rosslare
where
we once
wept (“Céad Míle Fáilte”, p.26).

His anger can perhaps also be attributed to his mounting confusion about his own status as a long-term exile from Ireland. Maybe he worries that his will be among the histories hidden and lost as Ireland loses interest in its poverty-stricken past and looks towards the future.

Paralleling Wall’s increasing uncertainty about his status as an emigrant is a growing familiarity with the landscape and daily events of his adopted land. Instead of mourning the experience of dislocation and loss that characterized his engagements with American culture in *Iron Mountain Road*, the poems in *Refuge at DeSoto Bend* indicate a poet increasingly at ease in his new homeland. The idea that he may finally have found his refuge from the chaos of the contemporary world is suggested in “Atlantic Beach”, in which he describes his newfound sense of comfort and belonging: “Like down, Missouri enfolds. We tabulate/our ballots fair (“Atlantic Beach”, p.32). The contentment signified by the term “enfolds”, coupled with his use of the collective pronoun, suggest that he is beginning to define himself as an inhabitant of America (if not quite as an “American”). In “Homeland Security”, a poem that describes the fear and paranoia that suffuses America in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, he inscribes himself firmly within the collective memories and local concerns of his adopted community:

... We have no known
history of typhoons in Missouri. A
century now passed since the New
Madrid Fault caused the great Miss-
issippi to roll three days backward.

...
... I worry
about the Cardinals & Rams & local
taxes ("Homeland Security", p.33).

In what is a pretty arch epiphany, what Wall finally realizes is a received idea; that America as a whole is a country of immigrants: "We are all blood of other places" ("Homeland Security", p.33). This conclusion suggests that the poem's title could refer to the poet's newfound sense of security in his adopted homeland, as well as to the government department charged with protecting it from external attacks. Watching his children perform in a concert in St Louis, he realises that Irishness should not be thought of as something that constrains and limits one's identity, but rather as a framework within which a multitude of nationalities and subjectivities can be enjoyed:

These words are whispered from St. Louis
where last night children in green gathered
at the Sheldon Concert Hall to play music,
dance jigs, sing in the ancient languages of
monks, navigators, saints, sinners, builders,
homesteaders, nuns, bakers, bankers, all
peoples of a scattered cast called Irish ("From St. Louis, Missouri", p.25).

What this poem and many others in *Refuge at DeSoto Bend* suggest is that the poet increasingly feels at home in St Louis, perhaps specifically because this city is itself a place of dislocation and multiplicity. In the title poem, he reflects on the varied cultural influences that have always characterized St Louis, a city founded on the bank of America's greatest waterway, and synonymous with trade and exchange:

Square-toed ladies' boots for wild Montana mining towns
are back

in style. Wines from Bordeaux, cordials from Philadelphia,
silver, china,

handguns, rifles ("Refuge at DeSoto Bend", p.61).

At the confluence of this history of mixed influences and heritages, the poet can finally accept his own complex mix of cultural loyalties and give himself up to the multiplicity that surrounds him:

... Of
German, French, Swiss, Nigerian, and Irish
ancestry, these performers in hard shoes
gathered in our bright French city to dance
a steady narrative of removal and survival ("From St. Louis, Missouri", p.25)

Wall's most recent volume of poetry is entitled *A Tour of Your Country* (2008). This title is, once more, ambiguous. The levity of the signifier "Tour" suggests that Wall may have at last begun to move away from the heavier, more emotive language of

migration, with its emphasis on refuge and dislocation, and has adopted a more light-hearted approach to his travels. It is also unclear to whom and to which country the title is referring. The first poem in the volume sees the poet and his family pay a visit to County Wexford, where the poet teaches his children about their Irish heritage:

For guidance from our land, Fathers, I have borne
my children back to your song-lined paths and salted

brooks of Shelbourne. The road ahead will take us
through Shelmaliere West & Bantry to Ballaghkeen ("A Route to Dunbrody", p.9).

The second poem in the volume describes another trip taken by the family, this time to Yellowstone National Park in America:

Great Fountain Geyser
Fire River and Falls
White Dome Geyser ("Yellowstone Bus Tour", p.10).

What strikes the reader is that the nature of Wall's engagement with the surrounding landscapes seems to have changed. The short lines of "Yellowstone Bus Tour" suggest the poet is now content simply to record his experiences, and on his own authority. All of this indicates that having become more secure in his life in America, the poet is now capable of enjoying the surrounding landscape as a tourist rather than viewing it through the weighty lens of migration. The fact that he easily moves between family vacations in Ireland and America, and the interest he takes in exploring the varied tourist sites, also suggests that he is now claiming both cultures and histories as his own. The "Your Country" of the title thus signifies the poet's determination to enjoy the best of what Ireland and America have to offer him and his family. He is happiest, finally, as tourist in all worlds, a *deraciné* with a credit card wlaiking the flat earth of globalization.

There is another significant development in *A Tour of Your Country*, which emphasizes the poet's transcendence of the limiting narratives of identity to which he subscribed in the past. Interwoven between the poems about Ireland and America are a series of poems describing a visit to Finland. The binary constitution of the poet's sense of place is thus deconstructed and room made for travel to other countries. In his essay "Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café: Notes on the 'New Irish'", Wall explains that it is difficult for the emigrant to truly assimilate into the host country because of the ongoing ties he retains with his homeland. The time and money he must expend in preserving these ties also make travel to other destinations impossible, with the result that the emigrant's opportunities to engage with other cultures are limited: "I commute between exile and Ireland, but it's an expensive business. I often wish I were another person: if that were the case, I wouldn't always have to be saving up my money to go 'home' and neglecting all the other fascinating parts of the world. Commuting makes assimilation impossible"("Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café", p.1128). The inclusion of poems celebrating Finnish culture in *A Tour of Your Country* suggest that Wall has managed to break away from this binary life and has embarked on a more global exploration of place and identity, although one wonders if he paid for the jaunt himself.

Perhaps the most instructive poem in *A Tour of Your Country* is “Night Heron”, in which Wall reflects on the migration patterns of the heron. What fascinates Wall about the heron is that it makes its way around the world, ignoring political and cultural borders, and instead following its own unstructured though logical route:

Eschews
migration path and famine road
to record
a route peripherique (“Night Heron”, p.30).

This ability to transcend national and cultural differences enables the heron to grasp its destiny as a global migrant. That Wall is inspired by the flight of the heron is clear in the structure of this volume of poetry, which seamlessly mixes together poems set in Ireland, Finland and a variety of locations in America. It is as though Wall is mimicking the flight of the heron with his merger of landscapes and “natural” accommodation of cultural differences. Wall also uses the peripatetic flight of the heron to trace a more complex path through his own history. What he concludes is that limiting his signifiers of identity to the Irish and American elements of his experience is robbing him of a rich engagement with European culture and history. In “The Heritage Park Reverie”, he criticises Irish culture’s propensity to ignore its history of European invasion and colonisation and urges that the linguistic and cultural relations between Ireland and its European neighbours be explored in order that Ireland may open itself up its rich and varied linguistic inheritance:

... North of Scullabogue, north of Old Ross in
Waesfjord, where I had entered these dark spaces,

and farther on, more north still, to Scandinavia, Finland,
Iceland of denseness, hard vowels, midsummer’s

Salivations, soldered to lakes and endless pines. Walk on:
crossing New Ross bridge, feet and memory aligned (“The Heritage Park Reverie”, p.16).

The volume concludes with a number of poems recounting a recent road-trip the poet made to Boise, to explore the frontier towns constructed by the pioneers, among them a number of Irish immigrants. The contribution made by these early immigrants to the development and settlement of America resonates with Wall, for whom America continues to represent a source of excitement and inspiration. He is struck by the central role America continues to play in the Irish imagination and realises that people will continue to flow between the two cultures, eternally linking both the histories and the destinies of the countries:

Not one of us
willing or able to put America behind us so intent were
we to learn what we did
not know — the tenor of her ways as writ on parchment
rolls, wired faces, lumps of gold (“Leaving Boise”, pp.56-7).

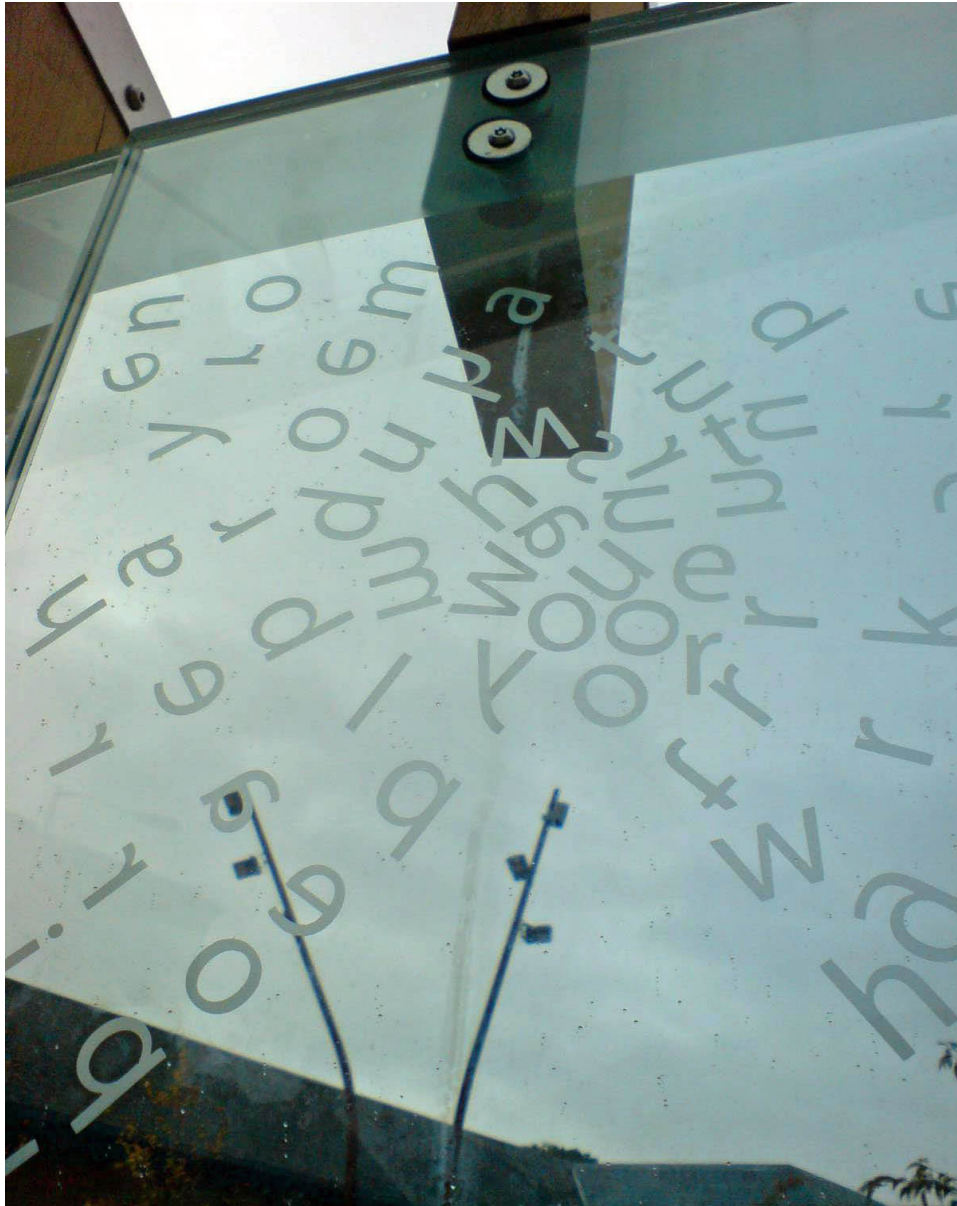
Eamonn Wall’s poetry offers a fascinating insight into the complexities of formulating a coherent sense of self within the network of competing cultures and identities on offer in the contemporary globalized world. He epitomizes the impasse

facing the contemporary migrant, who finds himself caught between a modernist impulse to limit and define his experiences in order to preserve a coherence of identity, and a postmodernist desire to transcend such limiting narratives and embrace uncertainty and multiplicity. For Wall, exploring the American and Irish landscapes offer him a chance to forge a new narrative voice that can accommodate both elements of his identity and sense of place: "If I wished to define myself in the future, I would have to begin with two huge words: Irish and American. But over the years, I have reversed both terms while at the same time seeking to understand them better. But the two can never be separated. I have double vision; I am doubled in every way" ("The Black Hills, The Gorey Road", p.72). This doubling is most effectively achieved in Wall's negotiation of a new relationship with the spaces of the Irish and American landscapes from which he draws most of his inspiration. Assimilated into American culture, Wall now moves effortlessly (and as mindlessly as anyone else) between the old and the new, the past and the present:

America is a huge and complex country. As a child growing up in Ireland, I understood it to be simpler than Ireland. Now I know it would take many lifetimes to uncover its mysteries, beauties, and divisions... I sat in the pure peacefulness of evening full of the whooping joy of arrival — watching, breathing, opening up like a flower ("The Black Hills, The Gorey Road", p.11).

references

- Andy Bennett, *Culture and Everyday Life* (London and California, SAGE Publications, 2005).
- Dermot Bolger, *Ireland in Exile: Irish Writers Abroad* (Dublin, New Island Books, 1993).
- Roger Bromley, *Narratives for a New Belonging* (GB: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
- Katie Donovan, "Learning to Forget", *The Irish Times* (Tuesday, August 29, 2000). Article available online at www.irishimes.com
- Michel Foucault, "Texts/Contexts of Other Spaces", *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986), pp.22-27.
- John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2000).
- O'Toole, Fintan. "Writing the Boom". *The Irish Times* (Thursday, 25 January, 2001). Article available online at www.irishtimes.com
- Eamonn Wall, "A Route to Dunbrody", "Leaving Boise", "Night Heron", "The Heritage Park Reverie", "Yellowstone Bus Tour", in *A Tour of Your Country* (Ireland, Salmon Poetry, 2008).
- "A Radio Foretold: Green Card", "Hart Crane's Bridge", "In the Shade: on 57th and 8th", "My Love, My History, My New Home", "New Words", "River Slaney: New Year's Day", "The Class of 1845", in *Dyckman-200th Street* (Galway, Salmon Publishing Ltd., 1994).
- "Exile, Attitude, and the Sin-É Café: Notes on the 'New Irish'", in *Éire-Ireland*, vol, XXX, no. 4 (Winter 1996), pp.7-17. Reprinted in David Pierce, ed., *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (Cork, Cork University Press, 2000).
- "Immigration, Technology, and Sense of Place", "Irish Voices, American Writing, and Green Cards", "Reading Mary Gordon's *Final Payments* in America", in Eamonn Wall, *From the Sin-É Café to the Black Hills: Notes on the New Irish* (Wisconsin, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999).
- "A Prairie Poet!", "Father and Daughter: Nebraska", "Kearney & Platte & Cranes", "Reverie: The Dublin—Rosslare Train", "Sandhills", "The Westward Journey", "Yellow Band", in *Iron Mountain Road* (Ireland, Salmon Publishing Ltd., 1997).
- "Atlantic Beach", "Céad Míle Fáilte", "Cormorants", "Ellis Island" "From St. Louis, Missouri", "Homeland Security", "How You Leave", "Photo & Caption", "Refuge at DeSoto Bend", "The Education of Denis Keegan" in *Refuge at DeSoto Bend* (Ireland, Salmon Publishing Ltd., 2004).
- "The Black Hills, The Gorey Road", *New Hibernia Review* (1998), pp.9-23.



3. Ira Lightman, *Glade 32*

kit fryatt

“AW.DAH.”

an allegorical reading of Maurice Scully’s *Things That Happen*

I find the Blackbird of
Anywhere-At-All quite likely to be in two
minds on one branch.¹

David Wheatley concludes his review of *Livelihood*, the second part of Maurice Scully’s *Things That Happen*, with an expression of satisfaction that he has managed to get through an entire review without “rehashing the debate that normally follows any mention of Irish neo-modernism faster than you can say ‘Call for Papers’ ”.² But the review’s defensive tone betrays throughout the suppressed presence of this dispute, wittily if reductively summarized by Wheatley as “[i]s Seamus Heaney a patch on Trevor Joyce? Why isn’t Catherine Walsh as famous as Eavan Boland? Discuss with reference to your favourite theory about the 1930s, identity politics and Northern Irish poetry.” (Wheatley, p.100) Wheatley’s brisk assumption that Scully’s poetry will yield accessible narratives, given enough readerly effort, stands in contrast to the obfuscatory evangelism sometimes found in criticism self-consciously sympathetic to neo-modernism. However, it also gives rise — no less than three times in a review of less than 1,500 words — to the bluff question “What’s it all about?” Wheatley is a poet and an accomplished critic of poetry, an academic with an extensive understanding of transatlantic modernism as well as an encyclopaedic knowledge of British and Irish verse. *Livelihood*’s open form, its aspirations towards an Irish version of Projective Verse can hold few terrors for him. The voice that asks “What’s it all about?” must be assumed an interlocutory one, mediating the anxieties of a reader of *Poetry Ireland Review* faced with a book rather different from the collections usually reviewed therein. Whether the diverse readership of the journal is really quite as innocent of the poetic trends of the last fifty years as Wheatley thereby implies is debatable. But this interlocutory *persona* lends some of his judgements a nervously jocose tone, as if he had elected to write a dismissive review, then suddenly changed his mind.

¹ Maurice Scully, *Tig* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2006) p.29.

² David Wheatley, “Using the Space”, *Poetry Ireland* 84 (Autumn 2005) pp.98-100, p.100.

In a sense, Wheatley is right to express this nervousness, since a kind of “sectarianism”³ is present in Irish poetry and criticism. The fault-lines which it creates sometimes resemble those in British poetry: Irish neo-modernists, like their British counterparts, are often characterised as receptive to internationalism and a dislocated, fragmentary conception of the self, hostile to regionalism and identity politics. The unattributed jacket copy of the Irish special issue of *Angel Exhaust* puts the matter in precisely these terms:

The problems of a British poetry which is creative rather than communalist, traditional and sentimental, are well known enough to anyone informed enough to reach this book jacket. Withdrawing from the cosy fug of inherited symbolic forms seems cold; gambling on unpredictability makes the reader insecure and anxious. Independence in Ireland removed the biggest political antagonism from politics, [sic] but as a social and cultural revolution it led to the “carnival of reaction” Connolly foresaw on both sides of the Border.⁴

The writer goes on to sketch a well-worn picture of mid-century Ireland in thrall to “ethnic purity”, “Victorian repressiveness” and “saccharine shamrock Georgianism”, which drove the “poetic heirs of Joyce” into self-imposed exile. The vocabulary of poetic heredity sits ill with a poetry which is supposed to reject the “communalist and the traditional”, but here the writer seems to be referring to the critical commonplace that Irish poets have been influenced more definitely and permanently by Joyce than by Yeats. This demi-semi-truth straddles criticism sympathetic to many different kinds of poetry: such claims are reflected, for example, by Neil Corcoran’s book *After Yeats and Joyce* (1997), which argues for Joycean influence on writers who might attract the scorn of *Angel Exhaust* for communalism, traditionalism and sentimentality.

Influences on Irish neo-modernists, as on poets who do not identify themselves as such, are more various than this, though attempts to trace those influences often fail as the “sectarian” opposition reasserts itself. Critics interested in their work, however, might well be called “heirs of Beckett”, alluding to the undue emphasis they place on his 1934 essay “Recent Irish Poetry”. First published in *The Bookman*, the essay characterises the majority of Beckett’s Irish contemporaries as “antiquarians delivering with altitudinous complacency the Ossianic goods”, “twilighters” in a “flight from self-awareness”.⁵ Against this unpromising background, Denis Devlin and Brian Coffey stand out as “without question the most interesting of the younger generation of Irish poetry”, having recognised and employed a modernist dislocation between the self and the world of objects. (Beckett, p.75) Thomas MacGreevy is described as “an independent [who] neither excludes self-perception from his work nor postulates the object as inaccessible”(Beckett, p.74). Blanaid Salkeld, Lyle Donaghy, Geoffrey Taylor and Percy Usher receive brief and usually backhanded commendation; of others, including Francis Stuart, Niall Sheridan, Donagh MacDonagh, Beckett claims

³ The term is Peter Philpott’s, warning against the “self-defeating vice” on his inclusive website GreatWorks. Peter Philpott, “Some Links to other sites of interest”, *GreatWorks*, (30 September 2008) <<http://www.greatworks.org.uk/links.html>>. Accessed 11th November 2008.

⁴ *Súitear na n-Aingeal* 17, ed. Maurice Scully and John Goodby (Spring 1999), back cover. The idiosyncratic style of the jacket commentary suggests that it was written by one of *Angel Exhaust*’s regular editors, Andrew Duncan, rather than Scully or Goodby.

⁵ Samuel Beckett, “Recent Irish Poetry”, *Disjecta: Miscellaneous Writings and a Dramatic Fragment*, ed. Ruby Cohn (London: Calder, 1983) pp.70-76, p.70-71.

he knows little, other than that they write and publish verse, ending with a triumphant assertion of total ignorance about Niall Montgomery (Beckett, p.76).

"Recent Irish Poetry" is a curious performance: complacent, arrogant, occasionally marked by gratuitous insinuation.⁶ Its interest as a polemic was recognised by the editors of New Writers Press when they reprinted it in the press's house journal, *The Lace Curtain*, in 1971. The article summarised the grievance of a new generation of modernists with a poetic establishment that still seemed to persist, forty years later, in antiquarianism. It is too pessimistic, however, to constitute much of a manifesto, and was never intended as an objective or scholarly survey. Even critics who endorse its establishment of an opposition between antiquarians who ignore or suppress "rupture of the line of communication" (Beckett, p.70) and modernists who exploit it, find its analysis "exacerbated"⁷ and "reductive".⁸ They nonetheless claim it as "the critical watershed for 1930s poetic modernism",⁹ the "launch" of a "literary movement".¹⁰ Some scholars have recently explored the article's relationship to contemporary poetry without resort to the stereotypes of "twilighter" and "modernist", challenged its status as a manifesto, and re-assessed the extent of Beckett's championing of Devlin, Coffey and (particularly) MacGreevy.¹¹ These writers, however, are interested primarily in Beckett's profile, not in the afterlife of "Recent Irish Poetry".

Despite its literary-critical inadequacy, the article's standing as "Irish poetic modernism's credo" has not been significantly disturbed.¹² Its contention that modernist poets differ from traditionalists in their attention to "rupture of lines of communication" still constitutes orthodoxy in the definition of Irish modernist poetics. This ill-defined notion retards criticism, as Donald Davie points out in his critique of Cid Corman's advocacy of Lorine Niedecker.¹³ Excited discoveries of ways to read fragmented material overwhelm sober technical concerns of metre, form, diction, lineation and layout, producing an exclusive, evangelical jargon. In an insular literary culture the danger might extend to the poetry itself, as poets come to believe their own propaganda.¹⁴

Peter Riley's essay "The Creative Moment of the Poem" pastiches both abstract and anecdotal approaches to criticism. Its *dramatis personae*, a poet given to self-

⁶ See W.J. McCormack's discussion of his treatment of Austin Clarke. W.J. McCormack, "Austin Clarke: the poet as scapegoat of modernism", *Modernism and Ireland: The Poetry of the 1930s*, eds Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995) pp.75-102, p.80.

⁷ J.C.C. Mays, (ed.) *The Collected Poems of Denis Devlin*, (Dublin: Dedalus, 1989) p.26.

⁸ Patricia Coughlan and Alex Davis, "Introduction", *Modernism and Ireland*, pp.1-23, p.14.

⁹ John Goodby, " 'Current, historical, mythical or spook?': Irish modernist and experimental poetry", *Súitear Na n-Aingeal*, pp.51-60, p.53.

¹⁰ David Wheatley, "Irish poetry into the twenty-first century", *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.250-267, p.250

¹¹ See Sinead Mooney, "Kicking Against the Thermolaters", *Samuel Beckett Today/ Aujourd'hui* 15 (2005) pp.29-42; Sean Kennedy, "Beckett reviewing MacGreevy: A Reconsideration", *Irish University Review* 35: 2 (Autumn/Winter 2005) pp.273-288.

¹² John Goodby, *Irish poetry since 1950: From stillness into history* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) p.48.

¹³ Donald Davie, "Niedecker", *Parnassus: poetry in review* 14:1 (1987), pp.201-207.

¹⁴ For an analysis of this phenomenon in the marketing and reception of Trevor Joyce's collected poems, see Philip Coleman, 'Against Evangelism; or, Reflexions on Experimental Irish Poetry and its Critics', *Religion, Education and the Arts* 3 (2003) pp.96-99.

aggrandizing speculation, and a reader, “extremely busy and rather tired”, who would rather hear “a story about your Irish grandfather”¹⁵ might stand for the worst tendencies in both “neo-modernist” and “mainstream” criticism.¹⁶ Like Wheatley, Riley is impatient with the division of poetics into “mainstream” and “neo-modernist” strands, but finds it equally difficult to escape their dichotomous pincer-jaws. In an interview with Keith Tuma in *The Gig*, in which he discusses “The Creative Moment of the Poem” in some detail, Riley lays claim to the “mainstream”: “As far as I’m concerned where I am is a normal and proper place to be, is where people like me always have been, and mainstream and avant-garde are way out on a limb, really nowhere”.¹⁷ He finds that the kind of poetry usually meant by the term “mainstream” has more in common with a reactionary and rebarbative avant-gardism, in that it “refuse[s] the world-invocation of the truly poetic, in favour of singular vision, jokes, anecdotes, games and experiments, and politics.” Yet, for the purposes of the interview, he is obliged to accept definitions that treat “mainstream” as synonymous with closed form and anecdotal content.

Riley’s response to Scully, on the other hand, implies a higher opinion of neo-modernist fragmentation than is suggested by the *Gig* interview: “Absolutely authentic...Every episode of explanation collapses into peace and war, phonemes like bullets ricocheting off the present tense. Pain, disregard and distance chop the continuum to bits and the bits roll around the wasted fields of Ireland and Africa, chiming together into a brilliant suspended hope, which is where we really are.” This is a commissioned blurb, and some allowance can be made for hyperbole.¹⁸ Nonetheless, compared to the thoughtfulness of a piece like “The Creative Moment of the Poem”, which argues against the arbitrary opposition of the terms “mainstream” and “modernist”, this tends towards the abstract proselytism accurately parodied in that same essay.

Reviews and jacket notes matter in any consideration of neo-modernist poetry, because such poets frequently direct attention to the operations of marketing and promotion in poetry publishing — for example, there is widespread hostility in the neo-modernist community to marketing exercises such as 1994’s “New Generation Poets”. They matter overwhelmingly in any account of Scully’s poetry, because of the lack of critical attention it has received hitherto. Reviews are virtually all we have, but they also tend towards either genial bafflement,¹⁹ exemplified by Wheatley’s readerly

¹⁵ Peter Riley, “The Creative Moment of the Poem”, *Poets on Writing: Britain, 1970-1991* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992) pp.92-113, p.93.

¹⁶ Wheatley, meanwhile, notes that exasperation with familial narratives has become something of a neo-modernist cliché (p.98). *Livelihood*, as its title suggests, is a very domestic work, despite Scully’s disdain for poetry celebrating “Mumsy and Popsy down on the farm”. See Maurice Scully, ‘Interview’, *Metre* 17 (Spring 2005) 134-143, 141.

¹⁷ “Peter Riley in conversation with Keith Tuma”, *The Gig* 4/5 (March 2000), repr. in *Jacket* 11, (April 2000) Australian Literary Management, <<http://www.jacketmagazine.com/11/riley-iv-by-tuma.html>>, Accessed 16th June 2007.

¹⁸ The quotation appears on the jacket of *Livelihood* and appears to have been solicited for that purpose. Randolph Healy, “Re: Livelihood”, e-mail to Kit Fryatt, 6th March 2006.

¹⁹ Or not so genial. See for example, John Xiros Cooper, “Minor Poets, Major Axes To Grind” [rev. of *Other British and Irish Poetry Since 1970*, ed. Richard Caddell and Peter Quartermain (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press: 1998)] *The Antagonish Review* 120, (2000), St Francis Xavier College, Atagonish, Nova Scotia. <<http://www.antigonishreview.com/index.html>> Accessed 16th June 2007. Cooper’s review comprehensively dismisses the editors’ introduction, including Scully’s contribution to

persona, or the unstructured enthusiasm of Riley's notice, rolling around the fields in an effort to underscore the neglected importance of this poetry. John Goodby's *Irish Poetry since 1950*, one of the first recent studies to consider Irish neo-modernism in some depth, gives Scully little attention. His work receives a mention, but no analysis, in *The Cambridge Companion to Contemporary Irish Poetry*. Longer assessments, both with some limitations, are offered by Alex Davis²⁰ and Harry Gilonis.²¹ Davis, writing in the aftermath of a successful conference, is perhaps unduly evangelical, and Gilonis' essay treats only *Livelihood*.

The reasons for his neglect are broadly the same as beset most poets publishing work with small presses: limited print runs and problems with distribution, the inadequate resources and frequent collapse of such independent publishers, making a sustained involvement with one press difficult. Until the publication of the chapbook series *Prelude, Interlude* and *Postlude* with Wild Honey Press in 1997, Scully did not publish two successive works with the same press. Those pamphlets were also his first with an Irish publisher since *Love Poems & Others* (1981), his first collection. Wild Honey also published *Livelihood* (2004) but Scully returned to British presses to complete *Things That Happen*. Reality Street, with whom Scully had previously worked on *Steps*, published *Sonata*, and Shearsman the coda *Tig* (2006). This fragmentary publication history belies the regularity with which Scully releases new work and his firm commitment to sequential poetics. All of his work since *Love Poems and Others*, with the exception of a children's book,²² forms part of the "constellation" *Things That Happen*.²³ Scully rejects the term "collection" for his volumes of poetry, preferring to think in terms of the book, or even larger sequential designs, though he also admits that the shape of *Things That Happen* was not planned in advance, "it just 'grewed'".²⁴ This serial vision no doubt also plays a part in Scully's neglect, with few publishers able to sustain their attention over 25 years and hundreds of pages of self-referential work. This neglect is general. Some substantial Irish modernist collections, such as Trevor Joyce's *with the first dream of fire they hunt the cold* (2001), with considerable effort from the poet's supporters, have achieved cultural visibility. Considering the reputations of his supporters and the extent of their efforts, however, the level of recognition remains relatively low.²⁵

it, while paying little attention to the poems anthologised, a reactionary sub-genre of review brought to an ugly nadir by Sean O'Brien's assessment of Keith Tuma's *Twentieth Century British and Irish Poetry* (2001). Sean O'Brien, "Bizarro's Bounty", *Poetry Review* 91:2 (Summer 2001).

²⁰ Alex Davis, "No Narrative Easy in the Mind": Modernism, the Avant-Garde and Irish Poetry', *For the Birds: Proceedings of the First Cork Conference on New and Experimental Irish Poetry*, ed. Harry Gilonis (Sutton: Mainstream Poetry / Dublin: HardPressed Poetry, 1998) pp.37-50.

²¹ Harry Gilonis, "The Spider, the Fly and Philosophy: Tracing a Clew through Maurice Scully's *Livelihood*", *The Gig Documents* #3 (2005), pp.29-43.

²² Maurice Scully, *Was sieht die Katze bloß? / What is the cat looking at?*, ill. Bianca Gruenwald-Game (Leipzig: Faber & Faber, 1995).

²³ "Maurice Scully", *Irish Writers Online*, Philip Casey, <<http://www.irishwriters-online.com/mauricescully.html>> Accessed 17th June 2007.

²⁴ Maurice Scully, "Interview", *Metre* 17 (Spring 2005) pp.134-143, p.138.

²⁵ See J.C.C Mays "Scriptor ignotus, with the fire in him now [The Poetry of Trevor Joyce]" *Dublin Review* 6 (Spring 2002) pp.42-65, for an example of such scholarly advocacy. Marcella Edwards has written a PhD on Joyce. "Poetry and the politics of publishing in Ireland: authority in the writings of Trevor Joyce 1967-1995", unpublished PhD thesis, University of Strathclyde (2001).

II

Given the absence of critical material on Scully's work, a description of the structure and technique of *Things That Happen* may be useful. The title, a late addition — for many years, Scully's working title was *Livelihood: the set* — alludes distantly to Paul Celan's Bremen Prize acceptance speech. Celan spoke of the effects of the Holocaust upon language: "It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through all this happening."²⁶ The imprecision of the allusion is calculated to avoid appropriation of Celan's suffering and that of European Jewry, while it quietly draws attention to everyday enormity. Celan's phrase is "that which happened", unnameable and unique. Without claiming equivalence with "that which happened", Scully's title maintains that "things" do "happen" and the poetry "carries a lot of grief in its back pocket" (*Metre*, p.143). In a coincidence which highlights the absurdity of poetic "sectarianism", the phrase has a resonance similar to Seamus Heaney's "Anything Can Happen", a translation from Horace produced in support of Amnesty International, and subsequently included in *District and Circle* (2006).²⁷

The first volume of *Things That Happen*, *5 Freedoms of Movement*, was published in 1987 by Galloping Dog Press. It was reissued, with some revisions and in a different format, by etruscan books in 2002. The Galloping Dog edition is A4 format and uses a typewriter font, while the etruscan is shorter and broader than a standard trade paperback, almost square. In both editions Scully uses photographs to introduce each of the five sections, and the cover, frontispiece and end-pages feature his own drawings of moving bodies, based on Libyan cave paintings. *5 Freedoms* also makes extensive use of found material. A number of poems are based on creditors' notices, phrasebooks and Linguaphone courses, Enid Blyton's children's novels, works of natural history, medical textbooks and operating instructions. Scully revised the poems between the two editions, publishing some of the results in European poetry magazines and in *etruscan reader IV* (1999), alongside the work of Bob Cobbing and Carlyle Reedy. He deletes a number of poems, and makes a few additions, though the order and structure of the work remains fundamentally unchanged. The poems excised from the etruscan edition tend to be either lyrics apparently addressed to a lover, such as "I close my eyes"²⁸ or satirical work which identifies the speaker quite precisely as an impecunious writer living in Dublin during a bleak period of economic depression, examples of which include "Tart balm this: withdrawal from the salt details" (*5 Freedoms* [1987], p.11) and "That winter I could hardly think" (*5 Freedoms* [1987], p.39). Scully's purpose in reworking *5 Freedoms* seems to be to minimise the contribution of a lyrical poet-persona whose feelings and circumstances make a claim on importance simply because they are rendered in verse. The working poet is still a presence in the revised work, but inclinations towards self-pity and self-aggrandisement are muted, in line with Scully's ambition "[n]ot to write an autobiography, not to sketch a hero and edit amazing events, but to interact with the world... Not to meditate on the world, but to be *in it*" (*Metre* p.143). The account of *5 Freedoms* below takes the etruscan edition, the most recent and most easily available text, as definitive.

²⁶ Paul Celan, 'The Meridian' trans. Jerry Glenn and Beatrice Cameron, *Chicago Review* 29: 3 (Winter 1978) pp.29-40.

²⁷ Seamus Heaney, *Anything Can Happen* (Dublin: Townhouse, 2004).

²⁸ Maurice Scully, *5 Freedoms of Movement* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Galloping Dog, 1987) p.10.

The first section, “Unauthorised Credits”, begins with a reproduction of Yves Klein’s “Leap into the Void”(1960), a photomontage of the painter diving from a ledge, apparently part of a wall surrounding a suburban park. The title of this first section is taken from a creditor’s letter, which appears as a found piece later in the section:

It is disappointing to note that you have not
responded to a previous communication in connection
with your account and that you are continuing to avail
yourself of unauthorised credit.²⁹

The pun on “unauthorised” alerts us to Scully’s disinclination to adopt the stance of a god-like author, or as Gilonis puts it, the role of an “all-encompassing Master of Ceremonies”(Gilonis, p.32).

“Instances”, the second section of *5 Freedoms*, is prefaced by a photograph of a tiny male figure leaping across the gap between two huge rock formations. His position in mid-air makes it difficult to judge whether he will make it to the other side, but if he does, he will certainly have to make the jump again, because the formation to which he is jumping is isolated from the main spar of rock, like a huge pillar for a modern Stylites. Befitting this implication of a desire for asceticism and isolation, the poems in “Instances” have a meditative tone, detailing precise effects in nature and art.

“A Record of Emotion”, the third and longest section of *5 Freedoms*, subdivided into “Side A” and “Side B”, uses a photograph of a stage magician holding a luminous hoop and apparently making his female assistant levitate. The heads of his audience are visible in the foreground. Again, this photograph seems to refer to Scully’s distrust of the manipulative author, as the ironic title does to his scepticism concerning transparent communication between the poetic self and the world of objects. Elsewhere, Scully links sub-Wordsworthian sentiments about poetry’s origin in recollected emotion to commodified and half-forgotten versions of “history”.³⁰

The fourth section of *5 Freedoms*, “Two Caterpillars”, starts with a photograph of a toddler standing beside a brick wall. The child holds a photograph in front of his or her face. The image in this photograph is of the same child and brick wall. In this section, a pastiche of a children’s story about “Fat Caterpillar” and “Fatter Caterpillar” frames a series of vignettes about sexuality, consumption and the artist at work: a childlike idiom brackets poems which confront the subtleties of adult life. The caterpillars’ life of consumption is naturalised by the distinctly mediatory tone of a children’s story, while the poet, observant and detached, details economic and interpersonal nuance that belong most definitely to culture rather than nature.

5 Freedoms closes with “One Wallflower”. The photograph associated with its lyrics of minute movement is a Muybridge stop-motion study of a man performing a long jump. Some familiar motifs re-appear here – an Italian nursery-rhyme quoted in “A Record of Emotion” is remade to describe intellectual motion, though the logic of the thought quickly breaks down: “for argument you need words/ in blocks fit to ideas with/ sticky ends to fit block/ for block together”(5 *Freedoms*, p.88). This final

²⁹ Maurice Scully, *5 Freedoms of Movement* (Buckfastleigh, Devon: etruscan, 2002) p.9.

³⁰ Maurice Scully, “(HISTORY)”, *Livelihood*, (Bray, Co. Wicklow: Wild Honey, 2004) pp.59-61.

section leaves us with the impression of a mind at work, Scully's characteristic pose of watching, thinking and recording. It's also an optimistic finale for a book that has been preoccupied with straitened circumstances:

It is an occasion in that sense too
that I knew it: that quite particular colour
dark but clear & the cool smell of rain on
a changed breeze
[...]
a tight schedule
allows relief elsewhere
more air in lungs & cooler
a white line in a blue sky
moving & the mind laughing at itself (p.91)

Livelihood (2004) is a work in five books and three "interstices", which Scully refers to as "the Ludes": "Prelude", "Interlude" and "Postlude". Most of the work in *Livelihood* has been previously published, whether as extracts in magazines, chapbooks or book-length publications. Some of *Livelihood*'s texts also appear on a CD, *Mouthpuller* (2000), read by Scully. The frontispiece and end-piece of *Livelihood* is a sketch by Scully of a Sumerian clay container, the shape of which gave rise to the logograph for "legal", "decision", "trial" and "peace". The front matter of the book also features a childhood drawing of birds by the poet's daughter Leda, which first appeared on the cover of the pamphlet *Over and Through* (1992).

Livelihood opens with "Prelude", first published as a chapbook in 1997 by Wild Honey Press. Like all the "Lude" chapbooks, "Prelude" has a reproduction of a yarn painting by a Huichol artist on the cover. The Huichol are an indigenous Mexican people, descended from the Aztecs, who preserve shamanic traditions in their art and belief system. This artwork is not used in *Livelihood*. The poems in "Prelude", mostly arranged in irregular tercets, describe the world around the speaker in sometimes disturbingly galvanic terms: "a penpoint purred", "take us/ home pleaded the dice/ inside tight on/ the floor/ & whingeing"(pp.9-10). The tone of puzzled grief that pervades much of the book is already evident in "Stone", in which the speaker finds himself before a grave:

I who
could never

read you of a sudden
reading yr
stone

reading yr
stone. (*Livelihood*, p.11)

The first book of *Livelihood*, "The Basic Colours", was published by Pig Press in 1994. The Pig Press edition uses a different version of the Sumerian logograph sketch, and also reproduces Leda Scully's drawing. In addition to these there is an unidentified title-page drawing of shapes representing a fish, a cup, and perhaps a leaf, and an abstract pen and ink drawing between the poems "sonnet/ flying past

this impossibly repeating lattice” and “A maker of cages. Whispers too quite acute”. Three poems in the Pig Press edition, “There is this specific machine”, “parquet” and “THE START” do not appear in *Livelihood*.³¹ Otherwise alterations are minor, mainly involving changes in lineation. The revisions are like those to *5 Freedoms*, however, in rejecting the personal lyric and in particular, the elegiac lyric. In its Pig Press version, “**sonnet**/Open, wondering” confronts a recent death: “I’d like to thank you for the loan of the house./ crisp vertical layers. It’s late. &...you’re dead”(p.31). This has been emended to “it’s late. You’re gone” in *Livelihood* (p.40), and a later iteration of ellipses followed by the phrase “you’re dead” is omitted altogether.³² According to Scully’s note, “The Basic Colours” takes its title from an English/Greek phrasebook, *English/Greek Dialogues*, “which contains no dialogues”(Livelihood, p.331). Pedagogical concerns — Scully has worked as a teacher of English to language learners for much of his career — animate this book of *Livelihood*. In “**sonnet**/ (we went out to look at the tree”, one of Scully’s personae, a “literate / old Yahoo”, mock-pedantically anatomises the rhetorical questions of “Among School Children”:

 this is the Bole, these the Branches, that the Canopy —
 stand back. Underneath you know
 is where the Roots go
 to live & hold the Ground together.
 & look at the Top
 how compliant it is to the weather. (*Livelihood*, p.28)

The pedagogue’s symbolic mode deranges cause and effect: because the individual integrity of the parts he describes are unimportant to him even as he names and distinguishes them, roots can “hold the ground together”, the top of a tree be “compliant [...] to the weather”. The last line, in particular, parodies a Yeatsian vocabulary of complaisance and gracefulness. The conclusion of “**sonnet**/...” introduces an uneasy human relation — that between a teacher and his students — to the inherent instability of Yeats’s rhetorical questions:

 I see nodded each student in the dance
 intent, pretending, chipping at the fact
 to teach me something, something quite different
 I see I think (*Livelihood*, p.28)

Like Yeats’s poem, this engages with urgent issues of discrimination. What is the difference between intentness and pretence or between seeing and thinking? What is the different thing the students wish to teach their teacher? How can the grammatical structure “I see” contain these possibilities?

The subtitle of “The Basic Colours”, “a watchman’s log”, and the section headings “On Site: A” and “On Site: B”, refer to the watchman’s job that Scully held to supplement his income in the 1980s. Many of the poems can be read as the observations, thoughts and dreams (the persona wakes with a start in the penultimate poem) of a man doing a very boring job.

³¹ Maurice Scully, *The Basic Colours* (Durham: Pig Press, 1994) pp.52-4.

³² cf. *The Basic Colours* p.31 and *Livelihood* pp.40-1.

The watchman persona is sustained in “Zulu Dynamite”, the second book of *Livelihood*, which opens with an account of his routine:

It was one of my duties as a night watchman on the site
to check the site every hour on the hour & to enter in
the site logbook, every hour on the hour, Sit normal.
Nothing to report then to phone HQ to report that there
was, in truth, nothing to report. (p.75)

Shortly after this, it seems, the watchman loses his job for excessive interest in the plans left in the site office, an interest Scully shared: “I used to pore over the plans in the engineer’s office. Years and years of detailed work. Quite like art really.” (*Metre*, p.143) “Zulu Dynamite” takes its title and epigraph from a prose piece, “Msinga”, by the South African writer Rian Malan. It is arranged in five subsections, named after the notebooks in which they were composed. One of these, “The Yellow Logbook”, seems to have been liberated from the building site. The contents of “The Red Notebook” are read by Scully on the CD *Mouthpuller*. “The Dun Copy” was published in 1997 as a folded card by Longhouse Books. The Longhouse Books version includes some italicised lines later omitted. These, like most of the material Scully excises in revision, are of a personal and confessional nature: “*the pain of waking up/ can be the pang of love/ yr hand*”.³³

The third book of *Livelihood*, “Priority”, is in two parts, “Prior” and “Over and Through”, with a single-poem “Coda”. Some of the poems in “Over and Through” were published in 1992 by Poetical Histories as a pamphlet which also includes some work not collected in *Livelihood*. “Work Day”, the “Coda” to “Priority”, appears in a slightly different form in the Poetical Histories pamphlet. In 1995 Scully published *Priority* as a book with Writers Forum. The Writers Forum book had an extremely small print run and is vanishingly rare. It does not include “Interlude”: “I wrote the ‘Ludes last”, Scully notes.³⁴ Parts of the Writers Forum book, omitted from *Livelihood*, appear in *Tig*. The closing pages of section II of “Bread”, for example, are derived from the 1995 version of *Priority* (*Tig*, pp.73-74).

“Interlude”, the second of *Livelihood*’s interstices, is placed between “Prior” and “Over and Through”. It contains some of Scully’s most explicit engagements with authority and its symbolic forms, particularly in “The Sirens — a ballad”, where we encounter Cuchulain, “the giant/ spinning in his/ skin”, as a personification of Order (*Livelihood*, p.140). The slender tercets of “The Sirens” also recall “Prelude”, reminding the reader of formal links across the five books of *Livelihood*.

“Over and Through” differs substantially from the Poetical Histories pamphlet. Scully has added twelve poems, retitled two, and expanded two. The poem that appears as “Rain [A folder falls open]” in *Livelihood* has been both expanded and retitled. In a number of other poems he has changed lineation and syntax. The additions and revisions develop our sense of Scully as a political and social satirist. The precursor of “Rain”, “Sound”, ends on a note of multisensory observation: “Tensed rosettes of brilliance/ patterns, chance, the seam glistens.../ the hammer

³³ Maurice Scully, “From Zulu Dynamite”, (Guilford, Vermont: Longhouse Books, 1997) n.p.

³⁴ Maurice Scully, “Re: Priority”, email to Kit Fryatt, 29th July 2006.

taps".³⁵ "Rain" replaces this with "Legislation is the rules of the fight, a rondo in/ plot-pages, not a comfort, honey, or didn't you know?/ Opulently produced by. Irk and then manipulate. Beware."(*Livelihood* p.156) The new poems in "Over and Through" also touch on literary politics: in "Fire", "a Language Poet grins &/ flickers in the ghost of svarabhakti in the west of Ireland/ risk misting the screen"(*Livelihood*, p.164). "Svarabhakti", a Sanskrit word meaning "loyal vowel", is used by some grammarians to denote the "helping vowel" sound interposed between consonants to aid pronunciation. Synonymous with the Greek "epenthesis", the effect is common in Irish, occurring for example in *gorm* ("blue") and *ainm* ("name"). It may also refer to the interruptive equals sign (=) sometimes placed between each letter of "Language" when referring to that poetic movement. Svarabhakti is disruptive of morphology but phonologically helpful; Scully, undogmatically but distinctly concerned with sound, relishes the idea of simultaneous interruption and facilitation. The juxtaposition of a Sanskrit word with "the west of Ireland" reminds the reader of connections between Irish and Indian nationalism, and the interest taken by Yeats and his circle in both Indian philosophy and the folklore of the Irish west. Svarabhakti might stand as a metaphor for Yeats's enabling and inhibitory effects upon his successors. Scully notes both Yeats's flexibility and his forbidding grandeur: "What I like about Yeats is his will to change. Right up to the end. The rhetoric can be just too hard to swallow, for someone of my generation anyway, sometimes."(*Metre*, p.139) "Language" poets typically oppose nationalistic literary culture of the type that Yeats seemed to promote, but their late modernist anti-identitarianism could not exist without the example of high modernist masks and personae. Scully's ghostly, flickering Language poet is an implicit acknowledgement of the spuriousness of a poetics which opposes the "creative" to the "communal".

Steps, first published as a self-contained book by Reality Street in 1998 and scarcely revised for the 2004 publication, has a simpler structure than *Priority*, which looks forward to the less intricate third and fourth volumes of *Things that Happen*. It is divided into three numbered sections and a coda. A number of the poem-titles used in *Priority* recur here. As Scully remarks, "[t]itles of 'poems' are a bit slippery in *Livelihood*. They can be 'serious', tongue-in-cheek, oblique, picking up a motif from elsewhere or pointedly omitting it and...sometimes a few of those things at the same time"(*Metre* p.139). As an example, Scully compares the first piece entitled "Responsibility" in *Steps* ("the fid, stirps") and a later one with the same title ("Washing her clothes"). The first poem combines a carpenter's specialist vocabulary ("fid", "kerfed", "rabbets") and classification ("stirps") with an ironic attack on the centrality of religious institutions to Irish public life in the twentieth century. The Yeatsian metaphors of bole and blossom, used to satirical effect in "**sonnet/** (we went out to look at the tree", are revisited in the poem's coda (*Livelihood*, p.204). The second poem is also concerned with specialism and knowledge, featuring "The Oxford English Dictionary of Spraints, The Pretoria Encyclopaedia of Mortgages, The Concise Cambridge Political"(*Livelihood* p.215) but this informationism is set against the optimistic figure of a young woman insouciantly washing her clothes in a rusty wheelbarrow: "her bright brown eyes/ and mouth connect in a smile whose radiance and playfulness the fine/ skin black"(p.215).

³⁵ Maurice Scully, *Over and Through* (Cambridge: Poetical Histories, 1992) n.p.

“Adherence”, the fifth book of *Livelihood*, has a similar tripartite structure, with a coda. The parts are entitled “ABC”, “Cohering” and “DEF”. “Adherence” celebrates a stoical, though still minutely observant mode of life that looks back to “In Praise of Painting Doors” in “Priority” and forward to the elegy “A Song (& A Dance)” in *Sonata*. This book also contains poems with an explicitly scientific theme – “The Geometry of Soap Bubbles”, for example – and some sorties in metacritical footnotes (*Livelihood*, pp.290-291).

Of the final interstice, *Postlude*, Scully notes “guest appearances include: Paul Celan, George Herbert, Emily Dickinson, Miyazawa Kenji, Anatol Stern, the Great Vowel Shift, Lao Tsu and Mary E. Carroll [...] all a very welcome set of hectics at the party” (*Livelihood*, p.331). Scully’s allusions and quotations usually go unacknowledged in the texts themselves; many are not even mentioned in the concluding note. “Guest appearances” complicate Scully’s attitude of “humility in the face of the material” (*Metre*, p.139). He imagines *Livelihood* as a kind of carnival, but unacknowledged quotation is nonetheless requisition of a kind. He misquotes, as in the title *Things That Happen*, in order to evade appropriation of other writers’ substance, but the strategy cannot be accounted wholly successful.

Sonata, the third volume of *Things That Happen*, has a much simpler structure than its predecessor. Longer than any individual book in *Livelihood*, it is arranged rather like “Steps” and “Adherence”, in three numbered sections followed by a coda. This arrangement establishes Scully’s partiality to tripartite structuring, and echoes the construction of *Things That Happen* as a whole. Of *Sonata*, the poet notes, “[t]he binding motif is the circle, so there are lots of repetitions, doublings, turnings, arcs, zeros, returns” (*Metre*, p.143). Unlike his acknowledged precursors Thomas Kinsella and Eugene Watters, however, Scully seems consciously to resist cosmic understandings of circularity. Where *5 Freedoms* and the first books of *Livelihood* were edited to exclude personal content, *Sonata* follows “Steps” and “Adherence” in admitting elegiac and more explicitly autobiographical poetry. “A Song (& A Dance)”, written in memory of the poet and publisher Richard Caddel, stands out among Scully’s elegies. The poem’s variable rhythms evoke Caddel’s own work, “a poetry rich enough to mirror the actual world, compositionally complex enough not to need an external music”.³⁶ Caddel, an asthmatic, was particularly interested in the relation of breath and speech. He was also a distinguished elegist: his book *For the Fallen* (1997) commemorates his son Tom with a hundred versions from the old Welsh *Gododdin*.

Tig, the coda to *Things That Happen*, appeared in print before *Sonata* in 2006, published as a trade paperback by Shearsman. Like *Sonata*, its frontispiece and endpaper feature a simple circle motif. “Tig” is an Irish word for “house”; Scully notes “English sense also intended”, presumably that of the playground game also known as “tag” or “it”. The title is also reminiscent of Irish “tuig”, “to understand”, which gave rise to the informal English usage “to twig”. *Tig* has two parts, “Stepping” and “Bread”, each of which are subdivided into five sections: three numbered, followed by a coda and a “coda coda”. These sub-codas, wryly acknowledging how the project “just grewed”, gesture towards the unfinishable nature of a poetic sequence.

³⁶ Harry Gilonis, “Richard Caddel: Obituary”, *The Independent*, 11th April 2003, repr. in *Jacket* 22 <<http://jacketmagazine.com/22/caddel.html>> Accessed 9th August 2006.

Things That Happen is large in many senses: formal, chronological, geographical. The history of its composition demonstrates Scully's interest in mutability over ordered, preordained structuring. The "trilogy" is a psychological anatomy, in which different locations symbolise aspects of the speaker-poet, though he also tries to resist this kind of alignment of the outside world with the self. It is a *psychomachia*, in which the poet confronts psychic obstacles, grief and injustice. Because of its size and chronological spread, it is inevitably ambivalent and self-contradictory. It tries to evade coercive aggression towards its raw materials, but the speaker is often forced to acknowledge his ordering impulse in moments of irony. The growth of the project demonstrates an aptitude for infinite extension: although Scully has now finished *Things That Happen*, he acknowledges its actual, physical presence in his new work. For example, "The Pillar and the Vine" (*Livelihood*, pp.5-11) and certain parts of *Tig*, "I feel I should feel better now" (*Tig*, p.69) and "fat stem/ tiny branches/ enormous yellow flowers" (*Tig*, p.29) were originally part of a "diary-book" entitled *The Pillar & the Vine* which Scully "disassembled" before 1990, but continued to use in composition: "That 'fat stem etc' even occurs in [the] present book I've been working on for some years now. This book is not part of *Things That Happen*."³⁷ Scully's account of the diary-book's disassembly powerfully suggests the apparent autonomy of the work, its independence from the poet's control and its almost non-human quality. In response to a question about when he decided to unpack *The Pillar & the Vine*, he notes,

re: "decide to disassemble": much more organic than that: the mass of contiguous writing developed such a force that it burst apart anything in its way not strong enough to resist. P[illar]/V[ine] was in the way & had an unfinished feel to it. This would have happened perhaps (not sure exactly) late 80s, perhaps 1990.³⁸

These qualities — largeness of scope, attention to the symbolic relation between the self and its surroundings, unfinishedness, mutability and autonomy — prompt a consideration of *Things That Happen* as an allegory. It is a self-reflexive one in that it takes seriously the ethics of allegory's fictive transfer of properties, as something that might have implications for real human bodies in the real world. If allegory is, as Joel Fineman puts it, inescapably the "hierarchizing mode",³⁹ then in *Things That Happen* we have an allegory by a poet concerned to resist hierarchy, yet drawn to a mode which offers the opportunity of making on a large spatial and temporal scale.

III

Dream vision and parable emerge as prominent modes in *Things That Happen*. "Two Caterpillars", in *5 Freedoms of Movement*, is styled as a parody dream vision. Its framing story adopts the deliberate tone of a story for young children: "There once were two young caterpillars, Fat/ Caterpillar and Fatter Caterpillar, that lived/ on a windowsill under a tree." (*5 Freedoms*, p.63) *5 Freedoms* contains a number of found poems based on children's books: Enid Blyton is a particularly useful source. Scully

³⁷ Maurice Scully, "Re: anti-talent", email to Kit Fryatt, 9th August 2006.

³⁸ Maurice Scully, "Re: pillar/vine", email to Kit Fryatt, 9th August 2006.

³⁹ Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire", *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1981) pp.1-38, p.32.

juxtaposes the limited vocabulary and simple syntax of such texts with the pedantic idiom of material for language students:

"I say, look," said Peter in amazement,
"a castle on a cloud. Who lives there?"
"I don't know," said Chinky, "I do hope
it's someone nice. I don't want to meet
a Giant this morning."

*

Yes. No. Please. Thank you. I like it.
I don't like it. That is too expensive.
Please let me have. How do I get to...?
What is the time please? I need. I
would like. I don't speak. I don't under-
stand you. These

are important expressions. (5 *Freedom's* 33)

Children and language learners are in similar positions of powerlessness, which is apparently emphasised here by the intrusion of racist vocabulary (in the Blyton novel from which this is an extract, *The Adventures of the Wishing Chair* (1937), Chinky is a pixie, and no racist connotation pertains to him). They experience patronage from teachers and adults, who are their authors as well as their authorities. The children's novelist writes ingenuous dialogue for her protagonists, the language teacher offers basics of communication, "important expressions" as pre-packaged units independent of grammatical understanding. Child characters and language students, in that they are given words to say, have meaning imposed upon them, as an allegorical figure has meaning forcibly ascribed to her or his body. Meeting a Giant — that staple of allegory as well as fairy-tale — resonates, in this context, for both.

The Caterpillars of "Two Caterpillars" are Scully's own invention, influenced perhaps by Eric Carle's ubiquitous children's story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969). They present a more complex dynamic than the juxtaposition of Blyton with "important expressions". The Caterpillars are defined by their natural impulses to eat and sleep, which they do persistently and paratactically, "*they ate and ate and slept and slept/ quite happily on the white windowsill/ under the tree*" (5 *Freedom's*, p.63). The windowsill, apparently not connected to a window let alone a dwelling, alerts us to the odd interplay between nature and the man-made in the following poems.

In the next stanza "a bankman" sits under the tree "balancing a book". At the end of "Two Caterpillars" we discover that "bankman" as well as his book-balancing is a pun, as he is swept away by a river in flood, but for the moment he serves to introduce the dream-vision motif:

*in his dream he saw a bankman falling asleep
under a tree with his money and a book and
beginning to dream of a man dreaming he was
making money out of a book (in which he featured
quite prominently) under a tree beside a window-
sill upon which were two young caterpillars
[...]*

*that dreamed they lived
on a windowsill under a tree. (5 Freedoms 63)*

It is not uncommon for the protagonist of a dream-vision to fall asleep within his dream, nor for him to enter a further allegorical vision upon doing so. Such a manoeuvre occurs in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, for example. Scully's parody of such dreams-within-dreams also evokes the sort of philosophical puzzlers — how do we know we are not simply figments of someone else's dream? — popular with children a just a little older, perhaps, than those who enjoy reading about Hungry and Fat Caterpillars. The bankman is also related to the financiers who have pursued the poet throughout *5 Freedoms*, demanding the repayment of "unauthorised credits".

The bankman's presence in the narrative allegorises it: because he and his only action of book-balancing are puns, the reader is alerted to the metaphorical implications of the caterpillars' consumption. As we might expect in a book about money and movement, "Fat Caterpillar" and "Fatter Caterpillar" are also capitalists or fat cats. In this newly allegorised world, nothing happens naturally. The coercive allegorist is always present: "*one day an Autumn Leaf fell on the Fatter / Caterpillar to the sinister snip of scissors*" (*5 Freedoms* 64). This action by an invisible human turns the caterpillar itself into a visionary, who begins to dream a human life, articulated in a series of ten brief poems.

Casting a caterpillar as the dreamer inverts allegorical hierarchy, whereby active human agents dream the world around them into significance. The poems which make up the caterpillar's dream vision in turn resist the imposition of allegorical meaning upon the world. The difficulty of such resistance is suggested by the structure of the poems, which often begin in a patient, observant mode and inch almost imperceptibly towards allegory or allegoresis, before stopping short in a moment of irony. The first poem of this dream vision sequence performs the manoeuvre twice before breaking off. It begins: "between the paper & the trees where the sun / gets through between the branches to the grass / under a leaf on a curving stem", but before the landscape can be moralised, it is dismissed as a "pseudo-fairytale" which abets a possessive "lyric" view of the world (*5 Freedoms*, p. 65). The poet presents another scene, at first as if for someone's approval, from which he again draws away:

how's this? A girl goes by from elsewhere
to set street music its cryptic rhythm against another
how can you live to a different beat an old radio
in a hut on a deserted building site paid little to
live & as to writing/well! But between stations
to pick up the possible & go with that from there (*5 Freedoms*, p.65)

The poet resists an impulse to find meaning in the girl or the temptingly "cryptic" street-sounds or 'music' and retreats to his night-watchman's hut (about which the reader discovers a great deal more in *Livelihood*), reflecting on his poverty. His ambition seems to be to exist in the white noise between definite and clear transmission of meaning: "between stations". In "pick up [...] & go with that from there", however, there is wry acknowledgement that these "stations" might also be

stages in a secular Passion: a shared mythology continues as a ghostly, ironic possibility.

The second poem in the series extends the theme of “street music”: its first stanza imagines a troubled, restless woman suffering from “love-grief”. Her actions are self-conscious and distraught: she “pretends to try to read” and hears “the / wind in the street playacting along with music”. In interview, Scully explains his attitude to what the interviewer terms “ambient noise”:

Ambient noise...oh, something wrong there, for me. [...] it's neither ambient nor noise, but the penetrating signature of...everywhere I've lived. All the many houses I've lived in, rooms worked in, they've all had their own highly distinctive song, sound. Composed certainly of quite mundane things [...] but in combination, extraordinarily distinctive. Not to privilege human language and stuff it with ego but listen, the poet a contributor not an imperious editor. (*Metre*, p.142)

For all its humility, this remark bears traces of an “editorial” attitude: unconnected noise is still gathered and processed into “the penetrating signature of...everywhere I've lived”. Similarly, the woman performing her “love-grief” to herself attributes similar “playacting” to the wind outside. Allegorical manoeuvres — the pathetic fallacy being one such — are surprisingly difficult to avoid, as the second stanza of this poem notes. The speaker imagines a chilly, empty outdoor scene in contrast to the “clammy, tropical” enclosure of the previous stanza, and the main agent seems now to be a man, moving through a deserted urban space of “gantries” and “alleyways”, turning his collar against the cold, sensing “wads growing with each / breath in yr breast pocket”. Money, which often behaves in a peculiar, galvanised fashion in Scully’s poetry, seems to impede breath, stopper or “wad” normal human function. Such representations of *polis* and *oikos*, conditioned by economic concerns and conventional gender roles, the speaker concludes rather glumly, are “very popular very human”(5 *Freedoms*, p.66). The third poem in the series, like the last, records a moment of communication and the speaker’s attempts to avoid analysing it. The exchange is a sexualised one, “tight cloth in motion / over the pelvic rhythm”, followed by an “eye kiss”, “returned”, with grave mock-formality, ‘with thanks & best wishes’ (5 *Freedoms*, p.67).

Scully then returns, with the fourth poem, to the question of sound and “music”. The verse is more open here than in previous poems — Scully leaves large spaces between words to represent “pauses developing in places”, and conversely, suggests rapid “bustle” by using an oblique slash instead of a space between words (5 *Freedoms*, p.68). The music begins to intersect with the poet’s artistic practice, as he “wonder[s] how it works” and the music “leans / forward into its own danger”(p.68). The dangers that the poet faces, in inadvertently endorsing egotistical, “editorial” ways of thinking about his surroundings, encourage him to develop a listening, contributory mode of being:

the tenacious details of daily getting by
fog interspersing as no some mist emphasis
counter simultaneous emphases/bustle in the enclave underground
& a ghost from another station (5 *Freedoms* p.68)

Sibilance indicates the space “between stations”, while the broken syntax suggests the poet’s reluctance to invest the world around him with allegorical meaning.

This breakthrough is followed by another poem using the authoritative tone of a language primer. Simple sentences in French are undercut by reflections from a more involved and difficult life:

*Marie est debout
près de la fenêtre.
My wife the sun the rent
Je suis assis dans un fauteuil.
Is due my headache is due
to your headache
Pierre est à genoux sur le plancher
il joue avec son train.
Pierre is screwing
that tart from Kimmage.
Bonjour mon ami.
Ecoutez s’il vous plait. (5 Freedoms, p.69)*

Funny as this is, it represents a regression from the insights of the previous poem, in both its easily playful line-breaks: “the rent [...] / is due my headache is due / to your headache” and its facetious rejection of the bland simplicities of elementary language learning. The request “[e]coutez s’il vous plait”, is, however, typical, and marks a mid-point in the dream vision. The following poems explore allegorical structures in more forensic detail.

The dense sonnet-shaped poem beginning “diverge the gaps” describes some of the structures that we employ in order to make the world meaningful: “our what really is matter to be expressed our / our bright tininess our understandings reticulated”(5 *Freedoms*, p.70). “What really is” becomes “matter to be expressed”; the allegorical protagonist understands himself to be “reticulated”, tied into a network of meaning which pulls in and encloses everything it encounters. This speaker sees himself and other agents as microcosmic — “our bright tininess” — but nonetheless in competition with others for control and mastery of their surroundings: “we meet they-you-I & retreat / parry & plunge”(p.70). The poem ends with figures of mutability and flux, but it is far from certain that the speaker has been able to escape or resist allegorical hierarchy. Scully’s choice of a sonnet shape for this poem is interesting, particularly in view of the many poems in *Livelihood* entitled “Sonnet”, none of which take a fourteen-line pentameter form. (Not all the lines in the “Two Caterpillars” poem can be scanned as pentameters either, though a number can.) The sonnet shape conveys an enclosed economy which resonates with the poem’s interests in reticulation and microcosmic ordering. That the last word of the poem is a participle form of the first emphasises this closure, while it allows for limited change and mutation. In *Livelihood*, Scully’s understanding of networks which tie and bind, like the form of his “sonnets”, becomes more flexible.

The seventh poem in the series takes further the brief evocations of allegorical violence in the sixth, and reminds readers of both the fiscal framework of this dream-vision and the monetary preoccupations of 5 *Freedoms* as a whole. “doing business”, in terms reminiscent of Kinsella’s *A Technical Supplement*, sees the capitalist economy as a slaughterhouse:

Getting the knife in deep & clean
preferably into as many as possible
to line up simultaneously in a good
straight voluntary & vulnerable file
(memory) then suppressing the adrenal twitch
to simplify the mind
& steady the hand (memory) (5 *Freedoms*, p.71)

The allegorical personality becomes almost psychopathic in its disregard for the bodies which it turns into meaningful objects: an analogy might be drawn between allegorical production of significance and capitalistic production of profit. “Memory” brackets an act of coolly considered violence — this is affective, coercive, instrumental memory, the kind which tears past events from their context in order that they may make an impact on the future. Of instrumental memory, Mary Carruthers writes, “the accuracy or authenticity of these memories — their simulation of an actual past — is of far less importance [...] than their use to motivate the present and to affect the future”.⁴⁰ It “simplifies the mind” and makes violent action easier.

Scully then moves from the metaphor of the abbatoir to a characterisation of a more profound allegorical violence:

confidence in ignorance to be eaten
hatch in the victim’s alimentary canal
laid in the places frequented by any suitable
victim species hatch into minute active larvae
the later stages Collide There are things we meet
They have nothing to do with/Flash/Don’t let it end (5 *Freedoms*, p.71)

Scully is fascinated by parasitoids (that is, parasitical organisms which kill their hosts), and descriptions of their life-cycles recur throughout *Things That Happen*. Allegorical meaning can be understood a literary parasitoid, inhabiting bodies and objects to obliterate and replace their integrity. Gordon Teskey, in *Allegory and Violence*, locates allegory’s eradictory impulse in a philosophical poser little more sophisticated than the childish solipsism implied by the dreams-within-dreams of the caterpillar story. We perceive that our consciousness is a product of nature, and yet we also perceive nature as something other than ourselves. This dilemma of consciousness is resolved by casting others as coterminous with ourselves: we assert that because the self is in the world, the world must be in the self. The microcosm-macrocosm analogy produced by the identification of self and world is one of allegory’s most cherished features, cherished, argues Teskey, because it expresses the desire in which allegory originates. This is “the desire of the organism to master its environment by placing that environment inside itself”,⁴¹ a desire which is expressed in the allegorical vision of the universe as a giant. Northrop Frye identifies this vision as characteristic of his “anagogic” phase of symbolism:

⁴⁰ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p.69.

⁴¹ Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1996) p.7.

when we pass into anagogy, nature becomes not the container but the thing contained and the archetypal universal symbols [...] are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man [...] This is not reality but the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal and hence apocalyptic.⁴²

Immediately, however, we perceive that any subject who desires to contain nature in this way is in competition with all other bodies, which all have the same desire. These other bodies must be eliminated in the most complete way possible: by devouring them. The structure underlying allegory is one of mutual devouring — Teskey calls it “allelaphagy”(Teskey, p.8).

Scully figures the later development of the parasitoid as a collision between it and its host: “Collide There are things we meet”, which echoes, in a much more sinister fashion, the sexual exchange of the third poem in the series, and looks forward to the baffled chance meeting of the last poem. The last line appears to be a disingenuous denial of the violence underlying systems of representation, a reading that can be confirmed by reference to the 1987 version of *5 Freedoms*, published by Galloping Dog, in which it reads “They have nothing to do with life”(p.70). The parasitoids of this poem remind us that the series is the dream-vision of a larval creature, and while they contrast starkly with the anthropomorphised Fat and Fatter Caterpillars, they are also linked by their shared relevance to money and capital.

Emphasising this financial theme, the eighth poem in the series begins “Credit all this lumber!” It lists the contents of the poet’s study — a “shaky”, “riddled”, “overcrowded” environment in which there is little of purely economic value. The poet’s poverty means that he cannot even consume: “gas fire — turned off, economy in the cold”. He reflects that he has some superficial resemblance to the insects (which, we recall, are dreaming him and his study) but their “madness of aggregation” has a “logic”, which his collection of “lumber” lacks. The poem concludes with an ironic demand for the poet to be written into a system of meaning, made the subject of “a new entomology”(5 *Freedoms*, p.72). It inverts accepted allegorical procedure, whereby humans both give meaning to the non-human and encompass it through macrocosmic figuration, but it also endorses the aggregative potential in allegory.

The penultimate poem in the dream-vision series proposes a saner, less aggregative attitude to the world. The poet returns to his observant, reserved persona, concluding:

sometimes sudden self-anger
sometimes blank falling
I forget the most simple things elsewhere
wherever my mind elsewhere taking a walk as if
among very many as if’s very
demanding labyrinthine but I think I
think lost (5 *Freedoms*, p.74)

⁴² Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957, repr. 1971) p.119.

The reticulated allegorical view of the world is exposed as a kind of madness “mind [...] lost”. The final poem in the sequence, meanwhile, suggests an awareness of otherness which undermines allelophagic competitiveness. The solipsistic poet, meeting others in the street, finds them grown older and unreadable: “a new solid film over their features [...] masked”(5 *Freedoms*, p.75). Instinctively hermeneutic, he reflects that “I read too much into it or / [...] / they’re half thinking the same thing / too *him!*”(p.75). Basic allegorical procedures — aggressive interpretation and violent conflict with other agents — are summarised here.

The dream vision ends with this articulation of fundamental structures, and the story of the caterpillars and the bankman is resumed. The bankman, who, it appears, must have been sleeping on the bank of a river, is drowned when it floods, and Fat and Fatter Caterpillar undergo their metamorphosis into butterflies, pausing “as a *mark of respect*” on the flowers on the bankman’s coffin. “*Before moving on.*” The bankman’s death is a deliberately absurd *deus ex machina*, evoking not so much stories for children as stories by them (dream vision narratives, are of course, a staple of both). In parabolic terms, the bankman seems to be too obvious a representative of capitalism and the pain it has inflicted on the impecunious poet to be allowed to live. (The fish in the river catch his money.) Instead, the “fat cat” caterpillars are transformed into kinetic signifiers and diffused into the world, rather as ideologies penetrate consciousness by presenting themselves as natural objects.

The dream vision is also appears in *Livelihood*, especially in the first half of the volume, in which the protagonist is a night-watchman, working on the building site from which he must report every hour “that there / was, in truth, nothing to report”(Livelihood 75). The night-watchman dozes occasionally, and wakes up with a start, a motif that is continued, with variations, throughout *Sonata* and *Tig*.⁴³

Another motif in *Things that Happen* takes parabolic form. Like the dream-vision discussed above, it begins as a found work drawn from children’s literature. Gianni Rodari’s poem “Ci vuole un fiore”⁴⁴ is translated by Scully as:

To make a table
you need wood
to make the wood
you need a tree
to make the tree
you need a seed
to make the seed
you need fruit
to make the fruit
you need a flower
to make a table
you need a flower (5 *Freedoms*, p.40)

Scully changes the poem’s grammar: the passive voice of the Italian *ci vuole un fiore* — “it takes a flower” — becomes an active construction which can be read as a direct address to the reader, a memorandum to the self, or an informal use of “you” to mean “people in general”. This ambiguous use of the second person is very common

⁴³ For examples, see *Sonata* p.59, p.92 and *Tig* p.44, p.83, p.84.

⁴⁴ Gianni Rodari, *Ci vuole un fiore* (Rome: Gallucci, 2003). The poem was popularised as a song by Sergio Endrigo.

in Scully's work, and relates to his impatience with the lyric self: "As a 'prentice poet in the '70s the 'I' was very big in Ireland. [sic] It still is? Me, my, I. I love you. You love me." (*Metre*, p.141).

Rodari's poem is a charming, if slightly saccharine, illustration of human dependence upon nature and the necessity of even that which we may regard as purely decorative. Scully's use of the motif in *Things That Happen* explores the allegorical structures which underlie even such an apparently innocent caprice. Rodari depends for most of his effect on a childish bit of illogic: the notion that "trees" and "flowers" belong to separate categories of being. It is not a very remarkable thing to state that to make a (wooden) table you need wood, which comes from trees, and from that point on the poem deals with different parts of a single organism: a tree, its fruit, seeds and flowers. So in essence, the poem states that to make a table you need a tree, which is not a delightful or charming thing to say at all. A further iteration — actually, simply a truncation — of the poem in *5 Freedoms* effectively makes this point:

to make a table
you need wood
to make the wood
you need a tree
to make the tree (*Livelihood*, p.47)

"You need a tree / to make the tree" is true in a biological sense: it simply omits the intermediary stages which give Rodari's poem its piquancy. It emphasises the circularity of argument which makes this motif particularly useful to Scully in *Sonata*.

Scully's English distinguishes between definite and indefinite articles in a way that the Italian does not: "*ci vuole il legno / per fare il legno ci vuole l'albero / per fare l'albero*", but "to make the wood / you need a tree / to make the tree". "You need a tree / to make the tree" also expresses with remarkable concision a central dynamic of allegory: an ideal representation ("*the tree*") must find its substance in the world of individual trees. In becoming *the tree*, a tree suffers a loss of individuality which is smoothed over by Scully's idiomatic English translation. We might not mind it happening to trees, but the point is that allegory treats everything in this way, even human beings.

Scully demonstrates his concern with the violence involved in making objects and persons allegorically meaningful in his subsequent uses of the motif in *5 Freedoms* and *Sonata*. He criticises the weakness of Rodari's reasoning towards the end of "One Wallflower":

for argument you need words
in blocks fit to ideas with
sticky ends to fit block for
block together (*5 Freedoms*, p.88)

Rodari's sentimental category mistake is implicitly compared to a child's toy — alphabet blocks, perhaps, or Sticklebricks — and his seemingly basic argument is actually constructed of 'blocks' of unexamined assumptions. The surprise of Rodari's poem depends on children *not* recognizing that tree, fruit and flower are part of the same organism, which resonates with Scully's allusive discussion of Yeats's "Among

School Children” in *Livelihood* (p.28). In that poem, discussed above, the pedantic speaker shows a disregard for individual parts of a tree — bole, branches, canopy — which predisposes him towards a Yeatsian vocabulary of compliance with and acquiescence in authority. His mistake is the opposite of Rodari’s, but it turns out to have similar results. Rodari places a tree and its own flower in artificially separate categories in order to make meaning, while the speaker of “**sonnet**/” implies a signifying unity which overrides the individual integrity of the tree’s constituent parts.

Rodari's poem evokes natural cycles, and its flawed argument depends on logical non-progression, so it is appropriate that it is often quoted and parodied in *Sonata*, the governing figure of which is a circle. These parodies expose the violence that underlies allegorical signification: "to make a table / you need a gun / filled with rhetoric" (*Sonata* p.55) perhaps also has Yeatsian rhetorical questions as its target, while other examples interrogate the hierarchical abstraction of the allegorical mode: "to make a table you need power / pierced by childhood" (*Sonata*, p.57), "to make a table / you need theory-in-excelsis / pierced by groundswell" (*Sonata*, p.63). These examples also demonstrate the ambivalence of allegory, its propensity to incorporate (without necessarily modifying) even resistance to its own structures: power is shot through by powerless "childhood"; celestial theory punctured by reality on the ground. Can such ambivalence be liberating, or is allegory simply, voraciously encompassing everything which it encounters, even resistance to itself? In *Sonata*, the "to make a table" motif is always followed by an elliptical query or challenge to a writer or thinker:

So you're another — what?
Storyteller twiddling dice
In a game called Risk? Two parts

confection, one part grit. (*Sonata*, p.55)

[...]
So you're another lyricist?
My mother remembers
yr brother. (*Sonata*, p.57)

[...]

So you're another novelist?

Tell me yr novelty. (*Sonata*, p.63)

These are queries about making. The first offers a recipe for narrative in which toothsome make-believe is moderated by “grit”, though the result is “a game called Risk” not risk itself. That the board game so named advertises itself as “the game of world conquest” might return us to the anagogic man. The second seems to challenge the familiar and familial context of much lyric poetry, with which, as noted above, Scully is often exasperated, while the third skewers the opposite vice, a preoccupation with alleged novelty. All three remarks implicitly question how the work of making meaning helps us live in the world, a concern which is made clear in the final iteration of this motif:

to
make a table
you need a
leg to

stand on.
So you're
another
pragmatist? (*Sonata*, p.83)

It is in *Livelihood*, however, that Scully's critique of allegory and authority is at its most angry and overt. "Pattern", Harry Gilonis notes, "is, for Scully, a net, a snare" (Gilonis, p.30), and *Livelihood* draws close parallels between reticulation — the web of meaning — and consumption, as of a fly by a spider. Both of these allegorical processes are in turn connected to authority, order and power:

/the Police are perfect
God is perfect
God is the Police/

and in a cabin on a building site
watching. Hatching near spring
to net the one pet fly

thrums the web to lull her
then motions as to bind her
(blue whale's residual pelvis)
and rarely gets away

/the Rule is No.
the Rule is Good.
Take take take take take/
the pieces (*Livelihood*, p.63)

Gilonis quotes the second stanza and remarks:

there is positivity [...] in this passage. Even here in the natural world, our great cultural "other", not everything is red in tooth and claw. (The next stanza refers to mating and the birth of young.) Also, a spider like — a poet — is a pattern-making animal and activity in both cases is predicated on observation, on attentiveness. (Gilonis, p.30)

While this is indeed a passage about the confrontation of the self with the "other" as represented by nature, it is perhaps more ambivalent about the desirability of pattern-making than Gilonis suggests. The stanzas about feeding and mating spiders are framed by an authoritarian syllogism and a sharply reductive account of the dynamics of inequality: a "Rule" which equates prohibition with "Good" while rapaciously and indiscriminately taking. The "pieces" are perhaps the disintegrating body of the male spider, who dies after mating, or perhaps his sloughed-off cuticle, which implies maturing and aging, if not decease. These "pieces" appear alongside evidence of new life — "eggpouches" — as "little luminous pieces of the love story" (*Livelihood*, p.63). In the end, the poet finds it difficult to refrain from being a

“pattern-making animal”, co-opting death and birth into a cyclical narrative, which may also enable and endorse authoritarianism. Gilonis is right to comment that Scully does not metaphorise spiders in the usual ways: they are neither loathsome “others” nor emblems of “industry and perseverance *qua* Robert the Bruce”, but nor can they be, as Gilonis puts it, “simply [...] item[s] in the inventory of the world.” (Gilonis, p.32) Or, rather, they *can*, but being an item in the inventory of the world is not a simple matter. The idea of “an inventory of the world” immediately revives allegorical, hierarchising modes of thought, and returns us to the realm of the figural. Scully’s spiders, because they are both predators and pattern-makers, often signal reflections on the nature of figuralism itself.

“The Sirens” revisits these concerns about authority. The title suggests that the alarm and action implied by a klaxon in the street is a form of seduction by power. The sirens offer wisdom, but the consequence of giving in to their temptations is a passive, lingering death; the only way to listen to them safely is in a state of enforced stillness. The poem’s subtitle, “a ballad”, indicates a narrative, though a vernacular one rather than formal epic, making it again “of the street”. Other “ballads” in *Livelihood* show humans working within and aligned with nature: “marram builds directed builds / my children too [learn, learn, learn & do]” (“Ballad”, *Livelihood*, p.216) or demand a withdrawal from interference in the world. The first word of “Ballad” from the book “Adherence” is “Stop.” (*Livelihood*, p.249) Echoing the importance of the form for Romantic poets, Scully’s ballads confront and complicate distinctions between nature and culture.

“The Sirens” begins with a flat statement of the disparity between precision and function: “Everything *correct*. And no / use.” (*Livelihood*, p.137) The italicisation of “*correct*” suggests that the speaker doesn’t share this opinion of the rectitude of his surroundings; but given Scully’s distrust of instrumental meaning, it might also be an expression of approval — such ambivalence is characteristic of allegory, given its purposeful muddling of nature and consciousness. The scenes that the poet observes might be *paysages moralisés*: “Broken glass blood- / stains / spiked fences deskamps dream- / homes” or “Lithified beach / dense starscrap” (*Livelihood*, p.137), but the speaker refuses any hermeneutic activity: “I mean as far as I can see / that’s as far as I / can see.” (p.137) The rebuttal is immediately undercut by *Livelihood*’s characteristic figures for consumption and pattern-making: “A spider eating jagged/ shadows under a / leaf” (p.137).

The syntax and lineation of “The Sirens” enacts the reader’s search for allegorical significance, the singular goal that draws us into the realm of reticulated meaning:

In a shimmer of
hollow surfaces
at so many

removes from
so-called
reality

in the unworld
where Unity
is

and True/False
tremble
in

the ring — darkness/
coyote
scat. (*Livelihood*, p.138)

The passage embodies allegorical distaste for “reality” and the search for unified meaning in an “unworld”, but the search concludes with an animal howl, “coyote / scat”. “Scat”, by association with “scatological”, suggests waste as well as the free-form vocalisations of jazz singers. “Scat” in both senses is free of semantic content: the allegorical pursuit of meaning is temporarily halted. The ballad continues with another reticulation, which this time involves human bodies:

Let the skeleton set off
then down
the

laneway through the gate and
be gone. Gorgeous Art!
Joints

click. Blank. (*Livelihood*, p.138)

The skeleton, itself an intricate system, is dispatched on a quest “out of silence / and back into it / and out again”(p.138). The figure of labyrinthine pursuit which follows is emphasised by choppy line-breaks and discontinuous syntax:

Of all the many links in the set
of all things
plural

that make up
the twisted
chain

in ngile an tráthnóna
in mainistir na
feola

sirens thread the streets
ferry the
dead — (*Livelihood*, p.139)

“Set” refers both to the totality of the poet’s daily experience and the poetic work at hand. The title *Things That Happen* is a late addition: during the work’s composition Scully called it *Livelihood: the set*. The “set” of books that eventually became *Livelihood* — “set” is a term Scully prefers to “sequence”, because it is “more

radial”⁴⁵ — is visualised here as a “plural [...] twisted chain”. It’s a figure which fuses the hierarchical — the chain as *scala naturae* — with exploratory plurality. Similarly, “sirens thread the streets / ferry the / dead” suggests an eclectic myth, conflating the figures of Odysseus, Theseus and Charon with the mundane, though instrumental, urban sound of an ambulance on the street. As readers, we’re tempted to install the mythic meaning above the everyday one, to consider it more important because it requires (only slightly) more recondite knowledge — this is one of the functions of allegorical hierarchy — but Scully insists on bodily reality:

dying — injured — past where
you live (repeat)
(clack)

to the table in
the corridor
or

slab
in the
dark

splash of
vomit on
the path (*Livelihood*, p.139)

In order to reject mythological significance, the poet must conjure pain: “dying — injured” and violent expectoration: “splash of / vomit”. The violence of instrumental meaning intrudes even where it is consciously resisted.

Peace, “the sound of no-one there”, disturbs the speaker no less (*Livelihood*, p.140). It admits possessiveness (here filtered through the poet’s cat) and self-regard:

cat vanishing from a
sunlit ingle

to brush your ankle
as you pass: *mine*:
keep out.

See! Said the Mirror
we are civilized —
subtle urbane

tolerant witty — (*Livelihood*, p.140)

This self-caressing mood is immediately productive of an allegorical figure:

Whereupon there
rose up a thing

⁴⁵ “Poems 14”, *Pinko.org*, Andrew Duncan, [n.d.], <<http://www.pinko.org/91.html>>. Accessed 27th August 2007.

called

Order — the giant
spinning in his
skin —

AW. DAH. (*Livelihood*, pp.140-1)

“Order” both embodies allegorical hierarchy and is subject to it: he is the allegorical system (he is Frye’s anagogic man), but in that he is a personification, is also contained by it, which impossible self-reflexivity produces the warp-spasm oscillation. Cúchulain’s position within Irish culture is analogous: the ancient hero has meaning imposed upon him by modern nationalism, but as that nationalist icon he himself forces bodies into meaningfulness, impelling real violence and suffering. Allegory’s uncanny interventions in our world have never been more precisely conjured than by Yeats in “The Statues”: “When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side / What stalked through the Post Office?”⁴⁶ Scully can manage nothing like this, in which magnificence resides in absurdity, but “The Sirens” nonetheless registers allegory’s persistent interference in the real world. The appearance of Cúchulain as the personification of Order further suggests a satirical swipe at Kinsella, the best-known translator of the *Táin*, whose portentous preoccupation with psychic ordering is the reverse of Scully’s non-interventionist aesthetic (which is not to say that preciousness is entirely foreign to such an aesthetic). Scully’s description of Cúchulain’s warp-spasm — “awe-inspiring and a bit ridiculous” (*Metre*, p.138) — might also apply to his older contemporary. “The Sirens” concludes that “the point is”:

just to breathe
and live

sing/passing a little
fruitshop on a corner
by the lights/

the sirens
Yr move. (*Livelihood*, p.142)

Aspiring to a non-hermeneutic contentment, the poet turns over responsibility and agency to the reader. It is a weak conclusion to an attack on authoritarian ordering of experience, but withdrawal may be Scully’s only possible response to allegorical voracity.

Allegory is powerful. Not only does it intervene forcibly to impose meaning upon things and persons, it takes up resistance to itself and rewrites it into its signifying system. *Things That Happen* opposes “AW. DAH.”, but the pleasure that it offers is that of “tracing a clew”, as Gilonis puts it, of spotting pattern and lighting on recurrence. Scully’s strategies of evasion often result in poetic unsuccess, poems that equivocate their way to a muted whimper. “Backyard”, one of two poems thus titled in *Tig*, attacks capitalistic avarice in terms which startlingly recall the notion of allegory’s origin in “allelophagy”. The poet, engaged on a quest through

⁴⁶ W.B. Yeats, “The Statues”, *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: J.M. Dent, 1990).

“chequerwork / barbed dazzle” of a rather Coleridgean “Difficulty-in-Life”, spies first a “gap in the defences”(Tig, p.28) and then encounters an obstacle which is instantly personified: “boulder in yr / path: / Calculated Greed.”(Tig, p.29) This obstruction prompts polemic:

an accelerating bubble on a swollen
tide — machines of war memory perception —
whose meanings can't any more be pre-
figured or absorbed cultures inverted

to prey on not “cradle” “civilisations”
lulling or eliminating peoples for the
use of a few invisible manipulators of
no country or allegiance — theft —

parasitic on a scale never before thought
possible to succeed — eating up humanity.
Eating it up. Meanwhile old world lyrics
get prizes in small quaint corners. &

good luck to them.

This gets to the heart of what allegory does — “eating up humanity”, both in that it is driven by devouring desire and it annihilates humane attitudes — but its devices are crudely imitative: the line break “pre- / figured”(worse, in the preceding stanza there is a “frag / mented”); the inverted commas cradling not just “ ‘civilisations’ ” but “ ‘cradle’ ” itself; the poetic sectary’s attack on “lyric” as innately reactionary, immediately and ambivalently retracted.

On the other hand, some of Scully’s most successful critiques of inequality in “our Overdeveloped Pig World”(Metre, p.139) are perilously near to “old world lyrics” both in their form and their deployment of symbolic material. “Liking the Big Wheelbarrow” advocates a characteristically attentive stance in a kinetic world:

Wait. The instruction was to wait. Be still.

Dust particles collide and bounce away, collide
again elsewhere and stick until a thicker
filamentary delicate medium sinks to the central
plane of the disc which breaks into rings (*Livelihood*, p.168)

Scully’s resources here are aural and syntactic rather than spatial and typographic, and the result is far more achieved poem than “Backyard”. “Liking the Big Wheelbarrow” concludes with that most “mainstream” of devices, an epiphanic anecdote which revises the foregoing lines:

A four-year-old child who said to a pilot
on their way to the plane on the air ferry tarmac
“I like your big wheelbarrow.”(*Livelihood*, p.168)

Allegory intrudes instantly, capturing the child's utterance, simultaneously making it significant of innocence and stripping it of innocence. Significance is inimical to such simplicity: to perceive it at all the reader must be self-conscious, not simple.

The success of "Liking the Big Wheelbarrow" and the mixed achievement of *Things That Happen* as a whole suggest the difficulties inherent in moralising a poetic stance. Scully is painstakingly thoughtful about the implications of poetic form, and the ethics of organising experience into artefact. That he is perhaps at his best when he forgets his own strictures and dares to write a lyric which might win the approval of "small quaint corners" does not render invalid his reservations about instrumental meaning. And though some distrust of allegory's system, order and hierarchy is wholesome, we should not allow ourselves to become melodramatic or self-castigating about the violence done to raw material or experience in the creation of a poetic artefact. *Things That Happen* is large enough to admit some diffuseness, some allegorical ambivalence. Immediately after his attack on prize-winning lyric in *Tig*, the poet finds himself on the margins of the "Forgotten Gaelic Tradition", mediating the equivocal voice of the "Blackbird of Anywhere-At-All quite likely to be in two / minds on one branch." The irony is heavy enough — at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the various poetic blackbirds of "Gaelic Tradition" are probably the least "Forgotten" thing about it — and the line break "two / minds" is as wince-making as any example I've quoted. But the sentiment is large-hearted, and it alerts us to Scully's other deployments of Irish tradition in *Tig*: the allegorical-mnemonic kennings or *briatharogham*, which like *Things that Happen* itself, are "oblique, obscure and undependable. And extraordinary." (*Tig*, p.101)



4. Ira Lightman, *Glade 14*

john hobbs

**space in nature and on the page:
reading William Carlos Williams's "The Crimson Cyclamen"**

One of the major trends in modern poetry was impersonalizing the poem as an object on the page. Rilke, after visiting Rodin's studio, felt inspired to write poems that likewise "implant the thing into the surrounding space...The thing is definite, the art-thing must be still more definite..."(Cook 36). Charles Olson contended that "every element in an open poem (the syllable, the line, as well as the image, the sound, the sense must be taken up as participants in the kinetic of the poem just as solidly as we are accustomed to take what we call the objects of reality"(Cook 291-2. Louis Zukofsky saw the modern poem as integrating "any human emotion, any discourse into an order of words that exists as another created thing in the world..." occupying space (Cook 297). Critics described this objectifying trend in more philosophical terms. Maurice Blanchot, for example, saw the poet as creating "the 'poem-thing' which would be, so to speak, the language of mute being"(Cook 333). Roland Barthes wrote that "modern poetry is a poetry of the object...Nature becomes a succession of verticalities. Of objects suddenly standing erect, and filled with all their possibilities"(Cook 305). In the nineteenth and twentieth century romantic tradition, according to Paul DeMan, "poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object"(Cook 415) with its parallel space on the printed page.

Yet as Joseph Frank points out, there is an "internal conflict between the time-logic of language and the space-logic implicit in the modern conception of the nature of poetry"(1966, 13). Reading a poem is, at least initially, a linear cognitive process. Taking William Carlos Williams's "The Crimson Cyclamen" as an exemplary modern poem that struggles with this conflict, we can see how the poet choreographs the slow motion dance of the flower in the natural space and time of its growth and decline with the added tension between the upward growth of the flower and the downward direction of our reading of the lines on the page.

In "The Crimson Cyclamen" botanical descriptions of leaves and flowers are overlaid metaphorically with an argument about the transcendence of thought by passion, all of this spread out on the page in Williams's typically short energetic lines. Some lines function as horizontal vectors of release into the white space of the page,

suggesting the flower's thrust. Other lines and sections suggest parts of the cyclamen without making the imitation obvious. Williams's challenge, like that of the modern painters who fascinated him, is to represent three-dimensional nature on a two-dimensional page using a linear text. However, space in this poem is not a static pictorial realm but a field of action and struggle in the time or organic growth (and our reading). Williams does not so much describe the flower as he re-enacts its organic development in words, especially active verbs. These complex motions in the flower's natural space and the written space of its poetic representation also engage the poet's (and the reader's) physical responses, for as Williams wrote, the poet "does exactly what every eye must do with life, fix the particular with the universality of his own personality," so that he feels "every form which he sees moving within himself"(CPI, 193), the body's mirroring inner space.

The particularity of the cyclamen is harder for the reader to grasp than a more familiar flower such a daisy, rose, or sunflower would be. Especially since Williams refers in great detail to what makes it different from other flowers, focusing on "those inimitable particles of dissimilarity to all other things which are the peculiar perfections of the thing in question"(SE 16). Williams's critics, lacking his botanical knowledge, have made appreciative comments and then quickly moved on. Not that the poem is easy to get past, since at eight full pages in his *Collected Poems* "The Crimson Cyclamen" is by far the longest poem between "The Wanderer"(1914) and his late poems which it foreshadows in the apparently casual narrative constructed from extended descriptions. As Gérard Genette reminds us, narrative follows a temporal sequence of events, whereas "description must modulate, in discursive succession, the representation of objects that are simultaneous and juxtaposed in space"(136); such as the parts of the cyclamen, for example.

Thinking of the poem as an object in space inevitably raises the vexed question of referentiality in creative tension with poetic form. As Henry Sayre aptly sums up William's complex attitude, "he believes in the necessity of order, the design of abstraction, but he will not deny the multiplicity and chaos of experience merely to satisfy this necessity"(29). Williams's own comments do seem to come down on both sides of the debate. On the one hand, he vigorously attacks the "constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world"(CPI 177), complaining that in most poetry the "truth of the object is somehow hazed over, dulled...There is too often no observation in it..."("The Descent" 46), whereas in writing four poems about flowers he "looked at the actual flowers as they grew"(IWWP 35). Yet his observation is far from being detached, since he "always had a feeling of identity with nature"(IWWP 21). So in constructing his praise of a chicory flower, for instance, he "gives the poem over to the flower"(SE 17) although the poetic artifice can only be his.

On the other hand, Williams is quick to defend this artifice and its distance from reality, arguing that "the only realism in art is of the imagination...It is only thus that the work escapes plagiarism after nature and becomes a creation"(CPI 198). He admires the still-lives of Juan Gris, for example, because the painter releases simple things like plants "from ordinary experience to the imagination...they are recognizable as the things touched by the hands during the day, but in this painting they are seen to be in some peculiar way — detached"(CPI 197). Yet Williams can also be critical of abstract art in which "the world is always seeking meanings! Breaking down

everything to its 'component parts...' (SE 234). The best painter or poet "does not translate the sensuality of his materials into symbols but deals with them directly....Picking out a flower or a bird in detail that becomes an abstract term of enlightenment" (SE 198), and avoiding the clichéd links of "emotions with natural phenomena such as anger with lightning, flowers with love..." (CPI 188). Poet and painter run similar risks of falling into their own forms of sentimental realism.

The painter closest to "The Crimson Cyclamen" is, of course, Charles Demuth, the dead friend for whom the poem is an elegy. As Williams's biographer notes, "All his life Demuth had painted flowers, and now in fitting tribute, Williams would paint his own flowers for Charlie" (Mariani 384-5), although the poem's vital celebration of organic growth contrasts with the languid fragility of Demuth's many floral watercolors. The flower motif is, of course, common in traditional elegies, yet Williams's poem is more about life's persistence than it is about death, although the mortality that parallels the plant's natural decline is implied by the end.

As a physician intimately familiar with the biological processes of life and death, Williams nevertheless resists scientific explanations of the cyclamen's growth and structure, even refraining from dissecting its complex, concealed blossom, for example. In fact, the poem shows no evidence that he so much as touches the delicate petals and fleshy leaves, despite his well-known "stress on '*tactus eruditus*'" (CEP 63), on the primacy of contact as opposed to the secondary distancing of the 'eye'" (Riddel 134). He instead remains fully engaged by what his unaided eyes can discover. His biographer mentions that Williams watched the flower grow and die during the winter of 1935-6 in his New Jersey home (Mariana 385), but in the poem the cyclamen could be almost anywhere, either indoors or out in the garden. He remains the anonymous observer, giving the reader direct access to his vision undistracted by any details of his own personal context in space and time.

I

Far from resolving the tension between realistic details and abstract design, Williams takes it to unpoetic extremes with an essayistic argument and a botanical description. Out of these contradictory approaches he fashions a poetic comparison between the life-cycle of the flower and the changing relations between thought and passion. As one critic notes, Williams "adopts a philosopher's diction to assert the likeness of the leaf pattern to pure thought" (Ahearn 157-8). Seen from this perspective, "The Crimson Cyclamen" reveals a four-part structure:

- I. Introduction (ll. 1-29): the plant's name contrasted with its appearance.
- II. Leaves as Thought (ll. 30-109): their unusual pattern, the growth of the younger leaves, and their undersides.
- III. Flowers as Passion (ll. 110-224): the opening of the petals and the decline of the aging flowers.
- IV. Conclusion (ll. 225-243): the day viewed as a flower.

The introduction and conclusion function almost like prose paragraphs, while the two middle sections relate more formally to the leaves or flowers they describe. In III, for example, Williams subdivides the long sections into four-line stanzas to suggest the climactic opening of the five petals, although he avoids the obvious imitation of a

five-line stanza. Similarly, he exploits the tension between the natural upward growth of the flower and the downward direction of the poem as we read it, each line momentarily extending horizontally into the margin before our eyes drop down to the next line. This tension can also be seen in his use of at least three different kinds of line-breaks: most just proceed to the next line, some pause for rhetorical emphasis. But still others evoke the action spatially:

that the flower should rise
...
were already spread
...
flows to release

These climactic verbs placed at their line's ends aim beyond themselves into space with what one critic has called "arrows of force" (Miller 300).

If this were a realistic flower painting, pictorial space would be defined by the light that also guides the viewer's eyes. In the poem the sunlight actively embraces and penetrates the clustered pink petals, revealing in them a whole color spectrum:

...the light
that enfolds and pierces

them discovers blues
and yellows there also—
and crimson's a dull word
beside such play—(ll. 8-13)

This light is poetic as well as physical. Williams also finds this active light of discovery in Marianne Moore's poetry where "apprehension perforates at places, through to understanding — as white is at the intersection of blue and green and yellow and red. It is this white light that is the background of all good work" (SE 122-3). He goes on to compare modern poetry in general to "a disc pierced here and there by light, seemingly chaotic but actually patterned" (SE 122-3). So as he describes the cyclamen Williams also demonstrates what a modern poem should do to balance realistic details and design.

In keeping with his close scrutiny of the cyclamen's color his descriptions link it metaphorically to the motions of vast natural forces. Although the flowerplant is a small passive object in his New Jersey home, it grows into a space depicted as a field of action and struggle:

the petals flare back
from the stooping craters
of those flowers
as from a wind rising (ll. 4-7)

In fact, unlike most flowers, the cyclamen blossom has a short open tube that hangs upside-down, so that its five petals gradually unroll from below like an opening umbrella, growing up and around the tube's edge.

The volcano metaphor magnifies this process, so that the tubes become “stooping craters” out of which the petals spread like windblown flames. The rising wind likewise both magnifies and accelerates the slow growth of the rising petals, as with these metaphors Williams compares this tiny flower to huge natural forces. Compared to the crimson petals, the dark green leaves prompt more sober thoughts.

Looking back from winter Williams recalls the early fall when each flower was just a “pink pointed bud still/ bowed below” the heart-shaped leaves that:

were already spread
quirked and green
and stenciled with a paler
green
irregularly
across and round the edge — (ll. 37-44)

The ragged rhythm and lineation of the last four lines suggest these scattered blotches, the final line being the lower edge of this section.

Then, after describing the leaf’s overall appearance, he analyses the pale green pattern as if it were an abstract painting, since “more/ of logic than a purpose/ links each part to the rest” — skeletal lines with no apparent biological function. This painter’s logic produces a particular “abstraction” which, like the earlier “play” of sunlight, is “playfully following/ centripetal/ devices, as of pure thought.”

The “centripetal” pun evokes the petals that later surmount the utilitarian leaves, although as Williams goes on, the leaf pattern is seen to be elaborately structural:

the edge tying by
convergent, crazy rays
with the center—
where that dips
cupping down to the
upright stem... (ll. 53-58)

Williams re-enacts the time of its growth on the space of the page. The pattern’s “center” is itself in motion, connecting the converging lines with the stem:

the source
that has splayed out
fanwise and returns
upon itself in the design
thus, decoratively—(ll. 58-62)

The design, then, visually completes the leaf’s growth from the stem, recapitulated here with an acceleration that transforms the static pattern.

After he dramatizes the younger leaves’ struggle to replace the older leaves, “impatient of the slower/ stem” that sustains the “form/ stiffly a while longer,” his indefatigable eyes turn, not back to the lovely flowers as the reader expects, but to the leaves’ undersides where he discovers that “the ribbed/ design — if not/ the purpose, is explained” by the green veins that parallel the whitish “crazy rays” on the leaves’ surface. Exploring the splaying growth that he intuited from the leaf-pattern, he notices how:

The stem's pink flanges
strongly marked,
stand to the frail edge,
dividing, thinning
through the pink and downy
mesh — as the round stem
is pink also — cranking
to penciled lines
angularly deft... (ll. 88-96)

Williams's description follows the plant from its growth to decline, where even the underleaf's tiny veins are "strongly marked" and assertively "stand" rather than merely extend "to the frail edge" — the line-break supports its meaning. With the underleaf, then, he recapitulates the sequence from the maturity and decline of the leaves to the appearance of the flowers, his imagination actively supplementing his observation.

As he did with the top of the leaf, Williams again moves from a botanical description to conceptual analogies, taking off from the artistically "pencilled lines:"

angularly deft
through all, to link together
the unnicked argument
to the last crinkled edge — (ll. 96-99)

If the leaves represent elaborated thoughts, the stem is the basic "argument. These lines again echo his essay on Moore in which he describes her putting words "clean, perfect, unnicked beside other words in parade," adding that "there must be edges"(SE 128-9), spatializing her poetic language. As we have seen already, "The Crimson Cyclamen" is full of "edges," usually placed strategically at the end of lines. Looking back he sees the leaves as:

the conclusion left still
blunt, floating
if warped and quaintly flecked
whitened and streaked
resting
upon the tie of the stem — (ll. 104-109)

Here Williams neatly combines the utilitarian function with the oddly decorative pattern where the action verbs "floating" and "resting" reach toward the open space of the page and suggest a slight pause in our reading.

When the poet returns from the leaves to the flowers, he finds the buds "half hidden" under the leaves, yet the force he calls passion "begins that must/ put thought to rest," just as the younger leaves took over from the old. In fact, the cyclamen is unusual in that its tiny buds start their lives on one-inch bent stems that are hardly visible beneath the forest of three-inch stemmed leaves surmounted in turn by six-inch flowers. This passion "wakes in tinted beaks/ still raising the head," and it is loosed when they open. Until then the passion is just in the "small lusts/

addressed still to / the knees and to sleep” like little children. Even as he accelerates the buds’ growth, the dramatically-spaced lines slow our reading:

lifts
through the leaves
day by day
and one day opens! (ll. 122-5)

The opening process that Williams summarized early in the poem where the “petals flare back/ from the stooping craters” is seen once again but in a close-up:

From such a pit
the color flows
over a purple rim

upward to
the light! The light!
All around — (ll. 140-46)

This fluid can defy gravity, and the downward sequence of the lines first imitates it and then reverses its flow.

By this effortless flowing “five petals/ as one” in their timed motion form “inverted/ a full flower,” yet one edge of each petal twists inward at an angle from its base, a process Williams personifies:

each petal tortured
eccentrically
the while, warped edge
jostling
half-turned edge

side-by-side (ll. 151-56)

As he maps it spatially on the page, the edges both push and support each other, fortifying the delicate petals. The “half-turned edge” of each petal meets the others over the now-concealed center, a unifying move that prefigures the final gesture of their slow dance when:

the petals fallen now well back
till flower touches flower
all around
at the petal tips
merging into one flower — (ll. 239-43)

This symbolic symmetry emphasizes the human bond he retains with his dead friend Charles Demuth. The cyclamen’s actively unfolding growth yields to this slow fading away. As in many Williams poems “the motion is completed by the end of the poem, there is a return to stillness...”(Miller 348), in this case the natural stillness of a flower.

Even Williams’s extended — at times microscopic — description of a single plant must be selective. For the poet, as for a painter, the problem remains: “How shall the

multiplicity of a natural object, impossible to detail or completely encircle, be presented by pigment on canvas” — or by words on the page (Embodiment 21). Although Williams describes many parts of the cyclamen twice with an overview followed by a close-up, some aspects that a casual observer would notice have been altered. Most strikingly, on the mature plant all stages — buds, leaves, blossoms, and bare stalks — are usually visible at the same time, whereas Williams constructs a unified sequence of growth, maturity, and decline to dramatize the implicit elegiac theme of birth and death.

In conclusion, if Williams had decided to omit the title, “The Crimson Cyclamen” would have met Pound’s imagist challenge to describe “a tree without mentioning the name of the tree (larch, pine, etc.) so that the reader will not mistake it for the description of some other kind of tree”(66). Any reader familiar with the cyclamen would surely identify it, although for others this unusual flower might remain a puzzle. Yet the poem is far from a simple imagistic depiction, since Williams imposes on the plant’s natural structure an extended analogy to the conflict between thought and passion, creating an intellectual design that directs the realistic details. Key lines and sections are spaced on the page so as to parallel parts of the cyclamen without resorting to obvious imitations, just as the downward sequence of the lines works against his accelerated descriptions of the plant’s upward growth. If Demuth’s flower paintings more effectively convey the color, texture, and shape of the cyclamen, Williams’s poem has the advantage of dynamic development within a space that is not just a pictorial stasis but a field of action for both the flower’s organic growth and the reader’s cognitive process. In fact, “The Crimson Cyclamen” draws its poetic energy from what Joseph Frank has identified as the “internal conflict between the time-logic of language and the space-logic implicit in the modern conception of the nature of poetry”(1966, 13).

references

- Ahearn, Barry. *William Carlos Williams and Alterity*. (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1994).
 Cook, Jon. *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000*. (Oxford, Blackwell, 2004).
 Mariani, Paul. *William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked*. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1987).
 Miller, J. Hillis. *Poets of Reality*. (New York, Atheneum, 1969).
 Riddel, Joseph N. *The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams*. (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State UP 1974).
 Sayre, Henry. *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*. (Urbana, Illinois UP 1983).
 Williams, William Carlos. *The Collected Poems*, Vol. I, 1909-1939. Ed. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan. (New York, New Directions, 1986). [Cited in text as CPI]
 “The Descent of Winter.” *Exile I*, Autumn, 1928, 46.
 “*The Embodiment of Knowledge*.” (New York, New Directions, 1974).
 “*I Wanted to Write a Poem*.” Ed. Edith Heal. (Boston: Beacon, 1967). [Cited as IWWP in text]
Selected Essays. (New York, New Directions, 1969). [Cited as SE in text]



5. Ira Lightman, *Gateshead*.

post 1

maria johnston

no man's land

Edward Thomas, *The Annotated Collected Poems*, ed. By Edna Longley (Bloodaxe Books, 2008) £12 (pbk)

The shelling must have slaughtered many jackdaws but has made home for many more.
Finished Frost's *Mountain Interval*. Wrote to Frost. A quiet still evening. [...] Owls on
Daneville Road. Machine guns and hanging lights above No Man's Land.

This is Edward Thomas's diary entry for February 23rd, 1917, written at the Western Front. Less than two months later, during the Arras 'Easter Offensive' in April 1917, he was killed instantly at his Observation Post by a stray shell. Thomas is the great poet of landscape and the stark, uncompromising terrain of war is rendered by him in exact detail throughout his war-time correspondence from the front: "I could not see a living thing, only snow, posts and barbed wire, a dark shadowline marking the enemy trench, a line of trees and houses along a road behind," he had written to Eleanor Farjeon of this corpse-strewn landscape around the trenches (Farjeon, 248). No Man's Land is a deeply suggestive term through which to read Thomas's poems. As well as its obviously military meaning "the terrain between two opposing (usually entrenched) armies", it intimates a range of other definitions, as the *OED* elucidates: "a stretch of disputed territory; waste or unowned land; an uninhabited or desolate area esp. in early use as a place name, often referring to a place on a boundary or between boundaries; an imaginary or intermediate place; a dangerous or forbidden place; a no-go area; an indeterminate state, a state of confusion or uncertainty." For that other soldier-poet Wilfred Owen, writing to his mother from the trenches in January 1917, No Man's Land under snow was "like the face of the moon, chaotic, crater-ridden, uninhabitable, awful, the abode of madness" (Stallworthy, 158). Owen and Thomas despite their war-time proximity to each other — Owen was stationed about thirty miles north-west of Thomas on the Western Front — never met. Elsewhere, the No Man's Land of the First World War has been rendered thus:

No-man's-land became a synonym for the void — a place where no man ought to be — pitted with shell holes, stinking from decaying bodies, puddled with mud and gas, a poisonous wasteland, a lifeless and threatening expanse of nothingness, and yet a space that acquired extraordinary value, reckoned by the dead piled up fighting for it. It was alternately a place of

maddening noise and unnerving quiet. Telephone lines ran to the front and stopped: once there a soldier could be suddenly lost in silence. (Kern, 301)

It is strangely appropriate that Thomas was killed at his observation post; this poet's gift was for noticing the life that goes on in silence, and his own diary entries and letters speak to this sense of being "lost in silence". Thus, the last page of his war diary: "Neuville in early morning with its flat straight crest with trees and houses — the beauty of this silent empty scene of no inhabitants and hid troops, but don't know why I could have cried and didn't". For Thomas looking out over No Man's Land, there is a brittle beauty as well as terror in the scene. Indeed, Robert Frost's poem "Range-Finding" from *Mountain Interval* was, as Thomas wrote in a letter to Frost from the trenches, "a surprisingly exact description of No Man's Land" (qtd. In Sergeant, 189):

The battle rent a cobweb diamond-strung
And cut a flower beside a ground bird's nest
Before it stained a single human breast.
The stricken flower bent double and so hung.
And still the bird revisited her young.
A butterfly its fall had dispossessed
A moment sought in air his flower of rest,
Then lightly stooped to it and fluttering clung.

On the bare upland pasture there had spread
O'er night 'twixt mullein stalks a wheel of thread
And straining cables wet with silver dew.
A sudden passing bullet shook it dry.
The indwelling spider ran to greet the fly,
But finding nothing, sullenly withdrew.

As the poem expertly zooms in on a resilient natural world the effects of human violence on the plant and animal life of the battle field — the ripples of disturbance created by a passing bullet — are caught in exquisite slow-motion. Thomas was equally alert to the frailty of life, the minutiae of the world. Although none of his poems deal directly with warfare or with the soldier's experience in the trenches, reading through his *Collected Poems* one is struck by how Thomas's entire poetic output may be said to be the poetry of no man's land. So many of his searching poems sound as fragile human articulations out of the silence, the empty wastes of no man's land as the poet imaginatively traverses the indeterminate borderlands between the known and the unknown.

Thomas was, as has been well documented in Eleanor Farjeon's essay "Walking with Edward Thomas", an explorer, a walker of town and country and his role in the army was suitably that of map-reader. The impulse to map the co-ordinates of home and elsewhere are central to his work, as it was for another of his fellow soldier-poets. When Helen Thomas visited Ivor Gurney in the mental asylum after Thomas's death she brought along her late husband's maps of Gloucestershire, "spreading them out on the bed, and guiding Ivor Gurney's finger along the lanes he had once walked, and seeing him smile once more as he recognised 'home'" (Blythe, 265-6). For Thomas, "home" is not so easy to locate or define. The silent, ghost-filled

landscapes of the world, these uncertain territories, are the places of Thomas's poetry and he travels them through these small but infinite poems. Indeed, the poems themselves act as ways through in their exploratory mode as they strike out for the strange, uncharted spaces of experience. As Jamie McKendrick has commented, Thomas's art offers "an unerring sense of the poem as a means, often by indirections, to 'find directions out' as though the poem itself was a compass, or a 'path, winding like silver'" (*Branch Lines*, 167). Similarly, in the poem "Women he Liked" — surely one of Thomas's finest and most endlessly compelling poems — Lucy Newlyn has identified a "path-like structure" and describes the process of the poem as being "like a walk that ends in a clearing" or "a conversation, moving towards clarity". Indeed, this enthralling poem has been read in very different ways by both Stan Smith and Edna Longley; a testament to the limitless possibilities for interpretation that these strange, shadowy statements make available. Thomas is a lone journeying-poet, a poet of the contingent, unknowable world, its constantly shifting and mutable realities. As a number of commentators have identified — echoing Frost's remark that Thomas's poetry "ought to be called 'Roads to France'" — he is a poet of the open road and these roads come to symbolise the journey of the isolate, the outsider, trying to make sense of the unknown that lies all around. As Thomas described it in *The Icknield Way* (1913):

I could not find a beginning or end of the Icknield Way... It is thus a symbol of mortal things with their beginnings and ends always in immortal darkness (vii).

This immortal darkness makes up the atmosphere of the poetry but it is also along these roads of inquiry that human interaction and conversation is possible. Farjeon herself employed the road metaphor in her account of the convergence of Frost and Thomas as poetic kindred spirits: "He and Robert were walking it [the same road] when they met and instantly found mutual understanding" (Farjeon, xvii). Walking the roads, the paths across the countryside was as central to this poetic friendship as it was to Thomas's poetics and it was on such excursions that their shared poetics came into being, as Farjeon describes these revelatory ambulatory exchanges elsewhere: "[Frost] and Edward and I were strolling along a lane, and Robert was talking of what he called the 'cadence' in the human voice, which accompanied the speech that came natural to it" (Farjeon, 90). Frost himself, writing many years later in his essay "The Romantic Chasm" (1948) was still recalling the rich intellectual and philosophical significance of these deeply enabling exchanges, lamenting their premature termination and Thomas's absence:

I wish Edward Thomas (that poet) were here to ponder gulfs in general with me as in the days when he and I tired the sun down with talking on the footpaths and stiles of Leddington and Ryton. I should like to ask him if it isn't true that the world is in parts and the separation of these parts as important as the connection of the parts. Isn't the great demand for good spacing? (Frost, 158)

Thomas's poem "The Sun Used to Shine" recreates the journey of this poetic friendship. Like an expertly choreographed piece of complex footwork, their footsteps harmonise in rhyme, each moving in perfect sync with the other, through the thought-filled silences and the undulating cadences of their speech-rhythms:

The sun used to shine while we two walked
Slowly together, paused and started
Again, and sometimes mused, sometimes talked
As either pleased, and cheerfully parted

Each night. We never disagreed
Which gate to rest on. The to be
And the late past we gave small heed.
We turned from men or poetry

To rumours of the war remote
Only till both stood disinclined
For aught but the yellow flavoured coat
Of an apple wasps had undermined;

Or a sentry of dark betonies,
The stateliest of small flowers on earth,
At the forest verge; or crocuses
Pale purple as if they had their birth

In sunless Hades fields. The war
Came back to mind with the moonrise
Which soldiers in the east afar
Beheld then. Nevertheless, our eyes

Could as well imagine the Crusades
Or Caesar's battles. Everything
To faintness like those rumours fades —
Like the brook's water glittering

Under the moonlight — like those walks
Now — like us two that took them, and
The fallen apples, all the talks
And silences — like memory's sand

When the tide covers it late or soon,
And other men through other flowers
In those fields under the same moon
Go talking and have easy hours.

The words roll and flow so smoothly over the line-ends and the spaces of the stanza breaks that one has to quote the poem in its entirety, and it is itself mimetic of the endless fluidity of communion and communication that made up this most intimate poetic friendship. The harmonies of rhyme are persuasive: “walked” and “talked” resound as “walks” and “talks” in the penultimate stanza. Even as the poem recreates these walks and talks it also elegises their loss cast as it is in the past tense. The war may at first seem “remote”, in the background, yet the forces of war are everywhere; they cannot be detached from even this seemingly pastoral haven in the English countryside. In this way, the glare of the moonrise brings war “back to mind” as the flora and fauna become harbingers of conflict and death: the betonies form a “sentry”, the apple has been “undermined” by wasps while the crocuses call to mind the dark underworld of death itself, the fields of “sunless Hades”.

In the same letter to his mother from the front, quoted earlier, Owen reported of his comrades: “they wanted to call No Man’s Land ‘England’ because we keep

supremacy there". "To call it England", Owen exclaimed, "I would as soon call my house Krupp Villa" (Stallworthy, 158). Although Owen is merely commenting on an instance of misplaced patriotism out in the trenches, for Thomas, in his poetry, the no man's land of war and that of England are truly interchangeable. As Roger Ebbatson concludes in his persuasive essay "The Imaginary England of Edward Thomas", we see in the war diary "the ultimate transfiguration of the South Country into a theatre of death" as Thomas in his entry for March 21st 1917 likens No Man's Land to Goodwood racecourse in Sussex (Ebbatson, 175). Through Thomas's poetry, one comes to see how the landscapes of human life are the same everywhere, whether on a site of military warfare or on "home" soil. Every human site is marked by loss, death, devastation and the elegiac strain of Thomas's poems is unrelenting. Indeed the existential reality that is voiced throughout so many of these poems is that of the everyday condition of human life – the "avenue, dark, nameless, without end" of "Old Man" – and it is this reality that the no man's land of war brutally intensified. In *The South Country* (1909) Thomas conveys in prose a child's fears of annihilation and alienation in a moment which, though far from the fields of war, encapsulates all the same the everywhere no man's land that humans inhabit:

There was suddenly opened before me like a yawning pit, yet not only beneath me but on every side infinity, endless time, endless space; it was thrust upon me, I could not grasp it, I only closed my eyes and shuddered and knew that not even my father could save me from it, then in a minute it was gone. (58-9)

This moment of existential crisis – "an intimation of the endless pale road, before and behind, which the soul has to travel"— recurs throughout Thomas's creative journeys. "I am like the child spell-bound by the accumulated powers of the night, — darkness, the sound of silence, loneliness, infinite possibility, all mingled in a vast horror" he wrote elsewhere (R. George Thomas, 56). Yet these prosaic descriptions of the limitless reaches of our human terrain lack the impact, the multi-valent resonances of Thomas's taut, masterful poems where the same anxieties and tensions are transformed into lasting dramatic articulations. Thomas's poem "The Chalk-Pit", a dialogue between two travellers as they survey a disused hollow chasm – "a silent place that one rang loud" – is at times terrifying in its evocation of a seemingly ordinary landscape haunted by ghosts of the past:

[...] Why, what I mean is
That I have seen the place two or three times
At most, and that its emptiness and silence
And stillness haunt me, as if just before
It was not empty, silent, still, but full
Of life of some kind, perhaps tragical.

It is the mystery that lies at the heart of this poem that discomfits the reader and which cannot be explained away. Words reach across the silence in their need to order, interpret, but they cannot ultimately disclose the ineffable enigmas of the universe. To my mind, these silences become part of the music of Thomas's poetry. "Lights Out" begins thus:

The tall forest towers;
Its cloudy foliage lowers

Ahead, shelf above shelf;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself.

The silence of the forest is a necessary state of being. As Thomas made clear in a letter to Farjeon, the poem is about the military curfew: “I wish it were as brief — 2 pairs of long notes” (Farjeon, 218) after which the soldiers are plunged into darkness and silence. “Home” ends with the necessary labours that produce vital sound in the face of life-negating silence, the rhymes of the poet answering the hard-worked sounds of the labourer’s saw:

Then past his dark white cottage front
A labourer went along, his tread
Slow, half with weariness, half with ease;
And, through the silence, from his shed
The sound of sawing rounded all
That silence said.

In many ways, Thomas’s poems are made of silence even as they strive to break the silence, the white spaces of the page, with their momentary music. The rest is silence, it has been said, and the fathomless silences of Thomas’s poems remind one of Samuel Beckett’s question about the two-bar rest in Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony: “What happens during that silence?” (quoted in Grindea, 184). Indeed, with the impenetrable forest of “Lights Out” in mind it is interesting to read Thomas Clifton’s fascinating insights on musical silence:

To focus on the phenomenon of musical silence is analogous to deliberately studying the spaces between trees in a forest: somewhat perverse at first, until one realizes that these spaces contribute to the perceived character of the forest itself and enable us to speak coherently of ‘dense’ growth or ‘sparse’ vegetation. In other words, silence is not nothing. It is not the null set. Silence is experienced both as meaningful and as adhering to the sounding portion of the musical object. Silence is experienced as embodied substance or activity. This suggests that silence participates in the presentation of musical time, space and gesture (Clifton, 163).

As Clifton concludes, it is “the interaction of silence with musical tension” which creates the most complex music (181). Thomas himself was a lover of music, as Eleanor Farjeon remembered in her memoir: “the Thomas home-life embraced songs and music as well as tales and rhymes: rollicking sea-shanties, haunting folk-tunes, sweetest of all the songs of Wales sung in Welsh by Edward” (Farjeon, 278). The poet’s own anthology, *Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air*, contains the music for many folk songs and shanties along with the texts of poems, as Thomas wrote in his introduction: “I have added about sixty of the sweetest songs which it seemed that a wise man would care to sing, or hear sung, in the fields, at the inn, on the road, at dawn or nightfall, or at home” (vii). What is more, music, the importance of rhythm was for Thomas what distinguished poetry from prose: “If I am consciously doing anything I am trying to get rid of the last rags of rhetoric and formality which left my prose so often with a dead rhythm only” he wrote to Farjeon in 1915 (Farjeon, 110). It is the musical quality of Thomas’s poetry that inspired the

poet and composer Gurney to set a number of these in the song cycle “Lights Out” (1926).

Gurney also set Thomas’s “Snow” to music and it has been brilliantly performed in a recording by Ian Bostridge. The poem, which has a child’s cry set in the mute whiteness of snow, foregrounds exactly the way in which Thomas’s poems are in essence, articulations out of an engulfing silence, the words, cast in lines that strain towards the margins, barely relieving the stark whiteness of the blank page:

In the gloom of whiteness,
In the great silence of snow,
A child was sighing
And bitterly saying: “Oh,
They have killed a white bird up there on her nest,
The down is fluttering from her breast.”
And still it fell through the dusky brightness
On the child crying for the bird of the snow.

To my mind, the poem has something of Frost’s “Design” about it, described by Randall Jarrell as an “albino catastrophe”, but it also seems to suggest Stéphane Mallarmé’s “blanche agonie” of artistic endeavour. Thomas’s “silence of snow” is captured in Gurney’s sensitive setting for piano and voice; the relentlessly minor tonality of this protracted adagio intensifying the tense poem’s pained expression, the tragic undertones of every deliberately carved word. The shifting harmonic landscape has the song modulate into a number of minor keys and the ghostly piano’s patterns of quietly restless quavers — which occasionally double the vocal line and move almost imperceptibly at times when the voice’s intense upward reach takes over — suggest underlying disturbances and slight dissonances. Gurney’s simple setting of the text emphasises every word of the poem in a sustained way. Appropriately, for a poem that centres on a lone child in a desolate landscape, the singing voice is left isolate, unaccompanied, on two pivotal words, “bird” and “snow”. Gurney captures exactly the edgy stillness of the poem with its impassive world hushed to the child’s grief and the cries that are swallowed up in immeasurable silences. The poem’s use of delayed rhyme — the first line’s “whiteness” is suspended over the lines only finally harmonising in rhyme on “brightness” in the penultimate line — along with the line-end repetition of “snow”, create a deadlock which the song heightens through the delicate fragility of the vocal line. Made up of mostly repeated notes, the slow, expressive vocal line is constantly weighed down — even the upward lifts are heavy-hearted — and there is throughout an inexorable downward impulse as the piano is anchored in the bass. After a heart-breaking melisma on the word “crying” — which has the vocal line lift up to its highest pitch to signify the reach of pain in the child’s wrenched articulation only to then plunge down an octave on the final syllable — the song approaches its end and the voice is silenced, leaving the accompaniment to play itself out, dying away and drifting downwards to its rest.

The composer’s musical setting foregrounds the words and the way that Thomas’s poem is sounded through silence and across the expansive whiteness of the empty page. This poem is open to more than one reading and in this way it is limitless, memorable and singular. I myself see it as a remarkable portrayal of a child’s first experience of the reality of death and the indifference of a world in which the slaying

of a white bird is covered up, hushed by the cruel coincidence of an obliterative snowfall. Yet the recently published *Annotated Collected Poems* does not seem to allow for such a reading and in this way the hefty annotations are not always true to the vitality and possibility of Thomas's poetics. In some ways, Longley's annotations serve to lessen the dramatic impact of these articulations as each poem is surrounded by suffocating notes that function too much as solidifying explication. If one is to turn to the notes for "Snow", for instance, one is disappointed to read the rather clinical appendages: "If snow fell, there was no more of it in the valleys than if a white bird had been plucked by a sparrow-hawk. The idea is traditional as in the riddle of the snow and the sun, which begins 'White bird featherless / Flew from paradise'". As well as allowing for only one reading, this rather banal explication trivialises the bleak tragedy that is at the heart of the poem, reducing the chilling scenario to little more than a charming childish mistake and so very often the excess of annotations limits the possibilities for interpretation and spoils the reading and musical experience of these intricately crafted pieces. Longley's justification for such annotative excess is that the "prose hinterland behind Edward Thomas's poems helps us to understand their depth and complexity" but these poems should be left to sound their own music instead of being drowned out by prosaic clamour in this way. Too often, the "prose hinterland" simplifies the profound mysteries of these timeless articulations and engulfs the human voices that sound from their no man's land, their cavernous clearings and not, as these annotations would have it, from some easily definable and locatable point of reference. Although one can see how these endless annotations are undoubtedly a very helpful resource — particularly for students in search of a dissertation topic (all their research has been done for them) — this prose hinterland encroaches too much on the poems themselves in a way that risks diminishing their power and the over-reliance on prose that lacks its own music too often detracts from the impact, the ambivalence and endlessly searching quality of the poems.

Thomas has been remarkably well-served by critics and poets alike. Two anthologies of poetic responses have been published; the best of these being the recently-published *Branch-Lines* which features responses by poets — including Geoffrey Hill, Seamus Heaney, Tom Paulin, Anne Stevenson, Penelope Shuttle, Peter McDonald, Paul Muldoon, and no less than seven by Michael Longley, a true follower — as well as a perceptive essay by Lucy Newlyn on Thomas's tracks in contemporary poetry. He is a poet that readers keep returning to. A substantial number of recent essays on his work exist: those worthy of mention include Tim Kendall's essay on Thomas and Charlotte Mew in his *Modern English War Poetry*, Ebbatson's already cited Thomas's "Imaginary England" and Jonathan Barker's fascinating short piece on Thomas and the Folk Tradition. Edna Longley has long identified Thomas as a "prophet of eco-centrism" (*Poetry and Posterity*) and it is true to say that the range of this poetry is boundless. As the bibliography at the back of this new annotated collected makes clear, Thomas has been the subject of a number of biographies, critical studies and theses. His letters, diaries along with memoirs written by those who knew him have steadily appeared since the 1960s as well as a number of editions of his poems; Longley herself edited his *Poems and Last Poems* in 1973. Thirty years on, she has, as she sees it, grown to a fuller understanding of the work and this new *Annotated Collected Poems* is undoubtedly a remarkable labour of love.

Despite this, one would have preferred her to expand the groundwork so expertly laid out here into a proper critical study in its own right. Both Edna and Michael Longley are erstwhile Thomas pilgrims, the poet describing the impact of finding the poet's grave at Arras, both fighting back tears: "We stood just feet away from the skull that had contained the brain that had produced the lines that had filled our minds for many years". This (somewhat grisly) vignette of poet and critic paying homage at the grave of Thomas encapsulates the way that Thomas's work has inspired nothing less than adoration from both poets and critics alike over the decades and across national boundaries.

Longley has long been a champion of Thomas and has over the years devoted much space to the cause of claiming a place for his poetry on the critical map. The new *Annotated Collected Poems* stands as a monument to her pains and it is without doubt a staggering achievement, a compendious research guide. Indeed, the idea of a "monument" is doubly accurate for its connotation of stasis, immobility, lifelessness; the glut of annotations here leaves the reader feeling forcibly overwhelmed with little room to move around in. Like the killdeer bird of Paul Muldoon's poem, "The Killdeer" from *Moy Sand and Gravel* (2002) Thomas tried to clear a space; indeed an important experience for Thomas in his journeying was the moment of coming to a clearing. The poem, although it may not be about Thomas directly, was written under Thomas's influence, as Muldoon has testified: "I was hoping against hope that the spirit of Edward Thomas might have been breathing down my neck as I wrote it." Like the bird, Thomas's survival into posterity depended on him discovering his own space, his own unique form of creative expression:

Why was he trying to clear
a space in the forest of beech
by turning beech posts and, by beech pegs,
fitting each to each?

For the reason at which the killdeer
seems to be clutching
when she lays her four pear-shaped eggs
with the pointed ends touching. (Cuthbertson, 180 – 1)

Thomas valued the freedom — imaginative, creative, intellectual — that space makes possible, as well as fearing the void, and his poetry reflects that duality. Writing to Frost from High Beech in October 1915, he described the importance of Frost's presence in terms of a welcome space: "The next best thing to having you here is having the space (not a void) that nobody else can fill" (Spencer, 98). Thomas was, more than anything, an explorer of borderlands, of the spaces between; the trajectory of his life and art were bound up in this way. In a letter to Frost in 1915 he noted that the future seemed "less explorable than usual" for he was a map reader to the end, a charter of time and space. What is more, it was Frost who, mindful of this, offered Thomas accommodation, a place to write and live in America, as he wrote in this letter to Thomas from New Hampshire in August 1916 across the distances of time and space in a bid to bring his friend nearer:

My whole nature simply leaps at times to cross the ocean to see you for one good talk.[...] But as I said, what's mine is yours. Here are a house and forty odd acres of land you can think of as a home and a refuge when your war is over. We shall be waiting for you. (Spencer, 142)

Frost, as we know, was never to see his friend again for a “good talk” and Thomas never made the transatlantic journey. The words alone survive and the space to hear these unique expressions must be granted them so as to allow the resonances of their music to reach further and the possibilities for interpretation to remain open and alive.

references

- Barker, Jonathan, ed., *The Art of Edward Thomas* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987)
- Blythe, Ronald, *Borderland: Continuity and Change in the Countryside*, illustrated by Mary Newcomb (Canterbury Press, 2007)
- Clifton, Thomas, “The Poetics of Musical Silence”, *Musical Quarterly*, LXII. 2 (April 1976), 163–181.
- Cuthbertson, Guy and Lucy Newlyn, eds, *Branch Lines: Edward Thomas and Contemporary Poetry*, foreword by Andrew Motion, afterword by Michael Longley (London: Enitharmon Press, 2007)
- Ebbatson, Roger, “The Imaginary England of Edward Thomas”, in *An Imaginary England: Nation, Landscape and Literature, 1840-1920* (Ashgate Publishing, 2005), pp. 159–175.
- Farjeon, Eleanor, *Edward Thomas: The Last Four Years*, foreword by P.J. Kavanagh, introduction by Anne Harvey, rev. edn (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997)
- Frost, Robert, *The Collected Prose of Robert Frost*, edited by Mark Richardson (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007)
- Grindea, Miron, “Beckett’s Involvement with Music”, in *Samuel Beckett and Music*, ed. By Mary Bryden (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 183–188.
- Gurney, Ivor, “Snow”, in *A Third Volume of Ten Songs*, preface by Marion M. Scott (London: Oxford University Press, 1952)
- Kern, Stephen, *The Culture of Time and Space 1880 – 1918*, with a new preface (Harvard University Press, 2003)
- Sergeant, Elizabeth Shepley, *Robert Frost: The Trial by Existence* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960)
- Spencer, Matthew, ed., *Elected Friends: Robert Frost and Edward Thomas to One Another* (New York: Handsel Books, 2003)
- Stallworthy, Jon, *Wilfred Owen: A Biography* (Oxford University Press, 1988)
- Thomas, Edward, *The South Country* (London: J.M. Dent, 1909)
- ed., *The Icknield Way* (London: Constable, 1913)
- ed., *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air* (London: E. Grant Richards, 1907).
- Thomas, R. George, *Edward Thomas: A Portrait* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).



6. Ira Lightman, *Gatesheads*.

aine Kelly

returning to the “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r”: the eye-poems of e.e. cummings

We need only consider Emily Dickinson’s radical use of ellipsis and lineation, William Carlos Williams’ experimentation with stanza shapes, blank space and punctuation, or Charles Olson’s playful use of the typewriter to tilt lines and entire stanzas in *The Maximus Poems*, to see that explicit graphic play has long characterized the work of modern American poets. Measured by sheer bravery of experiment, however, perhaps no American poet was more flamboyant or more recognizable in his challenge to traditional formats than E. E. Cummings. In a range of lyrical experiments throughout his career, Cummings investigated the full visual possibilities of language, taking a radical attitude toward rhyme, metre, stanza and typography. His most characteristic poems do not lend themselves to being read out loud; they are so embedded in print that to voice them is perhaps to sacrifice their visual integrity. The typographical eccentricities of these “eye-poems” — so called because they appeal to the eye as well as the ear — destroy customary relations of grammar and syntax and replace them, in effect, with a new language, a language of the visual, in which a poem’s appearance is as privileged as its musical rhythms.

From the recognition that obvious poetic formulae must be avoided in order to evoke a fresh response from the modern reader, Laura Riding and Robert Graves, in their influential assessment of modernist poetry, claim that “poetry in the future must be written in the Cummings’ way if it is not to fall to pieces altogether”(19). Some honour Cummings as the grandfather of all American innovators in poetry and ascribe to him a diverse progeny (Robert Creeley, Charles Olson, Jack Spicer, Louis Zukovsky) that includes virtually any poet who considers the page a canvas and allows silence to be part of poetry’s expressiveness. Indeed, Billy Connolly has

recently suggested that even the post-modern prose of Dave Eggers and Jonathan Safran Foer bears the mark of Cummings' typographical innovation.¹

Departing from the American context, this article seeks to establish the Cummings eye-poem as a transatlantic adaptation of specific European modernisms. Placing Cummings in a visual tradition extending to the Cubism and Futurism of Guillaume Apollinaire and Filippo Marinetti, I argue that these European experiments with syntax and visual association accord with Cummings' interest in the materiality of language (his attention not only to words and sentences but also to parts of words and sentences, to syllables, parts of syllables and even to individual letters and punctuation). Moreover, highlighted in Cummings' encounter with European modernism is his interest in the visual arts. While the leading spirits of American poetry in the second decade of the twentieth century (Pound and Williams foremost among them) were working for clear, concrete images and for the accents of the spoken language, Cummings was beginning to develop an attitude toward language which paralleled the attitudes of contemporary European painters and sculptors. Sharing with Marcel Duchamp and Pablo Picasso an intense awareness of the nature of art and the relation of various mediums to one another, the European visual arts taught Cummings, primarily, to think of poetry as a structure of inter-related parts that appeared on the surface of the page. More pointedly than any of his American contemporaries, Cummings' aesthetics were those of an art era.

Establishing a relationship between Cummings and European modernism (or singling him out as the American poetic inheritor of specifically European modernist ideas) doesn't, in itself, constitute an original approach to the poet's work. As early as Norman Friedman's landmark study (1960's *E.E. Cummings: The Art of His Poetry*), these relationships have been identified and variously elaborated on. However, reading Cummings from the perspective of European modernist visual culture opens his poetry to a fruitful interpretation within the German philosophical tradition of phenomenology. This tradition is usually dated by the work of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger (most prominently in the 1920's and 30's) and is given its literary critical inflection by Georges Poulet's "Phenomenology of Reading" (1969).

Like the work of his European counterparts, Cummings' poems demand a heightened level of attention and concentration. His self-conscious poetic exercises appeal to the subjective experience of their audience, encouraging audience participation and a re-imagining of the artist/audience dynamic. By highlighting central issues of perception, experience and consciousness, the phenomenological approach questions the significance of this dynamic and explores how exactly it is created. Poulet's literary criticism, for example, stresses the disappearance of the book (or poem) as object and argues that meaning is created "at the point of fusion" between reader and writing. Although more usually applied to narrative, his ideas resonate strongly with the experience of visual poetry. Indeed, with its idiosyncratic ability to make its reader *work* towards meaning, Cummings' visual poetry (particularly the famous "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r") is perhaps the ideal medium within

¹ See, for example, Gerald Locklin, "The Influence of Cummings on Selected Contemporary Poets" Spring 2 (1993): 40-47 and Billy Collins "Is *That* a Poem? The Case for E.E. Cummings" <http://www.slate.com/id/2117098/>

which to investigate the phenomenological idea of consciousness as “intentionality”, as always directed towards some object or other.²

I

Cummings’ technical innovation can be situated in a long tradition of graphic experimentation, from the pictorial word representations of the ancient Greeks to the symbolist experiments with the whiteness of the page. His experimentation with blank space and “readable silence”, for example, has been most recently compared to the work of Stéphane Mallarmé (Landles). Drawing from this tradition of verbal-pictorial synthesis, Cummings was one of several poets in the early decades of the twentieth century to move beyond the line as the structural unit of poetry.

Modernist experiments with free verse, visual association, perspectivism, word patterning and blank space added increasing diversity and momentum to this iconoclasm, challenging and extending the linguistic conventions of the West. Central to these linguistic conventions is the printed page as the basic structuring agent of language, a support upon which ink is laid to form the verbal composition. As a physical surface where the poem is inscribed, the white on the page gains meaning and contrasts as silence with the verbal inscriptions that resonate as representations of sounds. Once printed, the verbal sign is fixed on the surface and its signification is bound by the rigidity of the page, very much like a line drawn on a canvas. Indeed, as both modern poetry and modern art searched for the specificity of their materials simultaneously (leading to non-narrative poetry and non-figurative art), the comparison with painting is not accidental. As modern painting moved away from the pictorial becoming abstract, modern poetry moved away from the linear becoming fragmented. Also among the conventions is the left-to-right orientation of the reading process, an arbitrary representation of the linear chain of spoken language. This is valid also for the two-dimensional page, which inherited the norm and is read from left to right and from top to bottom.

The development of modern visual poetry strove to explode this standardised reading process and inscribe the poetic space with a visual dynamism. In 1909, and in search of what he called “wireless imagination”, Filippo Marinetti launched a Futurist manifesto that would have a profound impact in modern art and poetry. Marinetti aimed to move beyond free verse and to develop “*le parole in liberta*”: verbal compositions in which words took on visual properties and were freely arranged on the page in order to reflect dynamic aspects of modern life. This Futurist sense of “words in freedom” was of words liberated from the rectilinear measure of the compositor’s page and recomposed on the analogy of telegraphic communication, where words were broadcast without the material support of “cable” or syntax. At the same time, Guillaume Apollinaire sought a Cubist approach to poetry, scattering fragments of sounds and images on the page. One of the most important artistic movements of the early twentieth century, Cubism attempted to

² Originally a concept from scholastic philosophy, “intentionality” was reintroduced in 19th-century contemporary philosophy by the philosopher and psychologist Franz Brentano in his work *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* (1874). The concept, often simplistically summarized as “aboutness”, was elaborated on by Brentano’s student, Edmund Husserl.

present a subject from several different viewpoints at once, on a single canvas. Parallelling the pictorial strategies of Picasso and Braque, Apollinaire created works of concise verbal rhythm and rarified semantical density. Like Marinetti, his account of the possibilities of modernity is exuberant and optimistic. He set out a program for a poetry of the future; one that would embrace new technologies of sound and image, moving poetry away from a strict identification with the printed word.

In 1913, The Armory Show arrived in Boston. The first opportunity for the American public to experience the experimental work of Picasso, Braque and Duchamp, the exhibition was lauded as one of the most influential events in the history of American art. Visiting the Armory Show in 1913, Cummings was particularly impressed by Picasso's paintings, by their ability to view the world from such a fresh and personal perspective. A poetic tribute which voices Cummings' aesthetic at least as much as it does Picasso's begins:

Picasso
you gave us Things
which
bulge...

[*Poems 1923-54*, p. 144)

However, it was Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2*, which emphasized not only the multi-perspectivism of the Cubist experiment but its emphasis on dynamism, which made the greatest impression on the young Cummings. Duchamp positioned one abstract figure over another as if to show, in one picture, how the complete descent of the staircase looked over time. Irate viewers compared the painting to "disused golf clubs and bags", "a dynamited suit of Japanese armour" and "an orderly heap of broken violins"(Reef, 18). The New York Times famously described it as "an explosion in a shingle factory"(19). Duchamp's painting was one of a number that had revealed new aesthetic possibilities to a generation of American poets.

In university, Cummings had followed the Imagist principles for poetry laid down by Pound: to use the rhythms of common speech rather than metrical regularity, to strive for compression and precision in language, to avoid worn-out poetic diction, and to make poetic statement by means of images. But by 1918 Cummings had created his own poetic style. Because he was a painter as well as a poet, he had developed a unique form of literary cubism: he broke up his material on the page to present it in a new, visually directed way. Some of his poems had to be seen in their printed arrangement before they could be completely understood. A good example of this literary cubism is Cummings' "n(o)w", included in his 1954 book, *Viva*, which provoked Malcolm Cowley's ire because of its "unreadable" typography (Rotella, 215-232):

n(o)w

the
how
dis(appeared cleverly)world

is Slapped:with;liGhtninG
!

at
which(shal)lpounceupcrackw(ill)jumps
of
ThuNdeRB
loSSo!M iN
-visiblya mongban(gedfrag-
ment ssky?wha tm)eani ngl(essNessUn
rolli)ngl yS troll s(who leO v erd)oma insCol

Lide.!high
n , o ;w:
theralIncomIng

o all the roofs roar
drownInsound(
&
(we(are like)dead
)Whoshout(Ghost) andi(voiceless)O
ther or im)
pos
sib(ly as
leep)
But l!look-
s

U

n: andi andi(IEAp)Openi ng
t hing ; s(
-sing
)all are aLI(cry aLL See)o(ver All)Th(e andi

?earth)N,ew

The unorthodox word divisions and non-standard use of capital letters in this poem contrive to replicate the rhythm of thunder and lightning. Its twenty-one lines are spaced to occupy the full page and punctuation marks are interjected into the middle of words. The first few lines, “recombined”, become: “How the now cleverly disappeared world is slapped with lightning”. The middle section, leaving out all punctuation and concentrating solely on individual words, becomes: “At which shall pounce up crack will jumps of thunder blossom invisibly among banged fragmented sky what meaningless unrollingy strolls whole over domains collide high now the rain coming a all the roofs roar drown in sound and we are like dead who shout ghost at once voiceless other or impossibly asleep”. Finally, the concluding lines may be recombined to become “But look — Sun, star, birds, leap, opening, things, sing, all are alive over all the green earth new”. By reconstructing the elements of Cummings’ syntax in this manner, his reader comes closer to the poem’s narrative. The poem’s grammatical idiosyncrasy frustrates, initially, linear reading, but the presence of narrative elements — nouns, verbs, adjectives, conjunctions and imperatives — suggest that such a linear reading is possible.

The Cubist elements of this poem are, most obviously, its break-down of central content and its encouragement (through the visible, though scrambled, narrative

elements) to re-construct. This desire to break through conventional perspectives and to reveal things as they really are illustrates the realistic impulse that obsessed Apollinaire and Marinetti, Picasso and Duchamp. As Gertrude Stein argued, the artist's greatest struggle was to find a way to represent what he saw — what he actually saw, that is, rather than a combination of what he saw and what he remembered he thought (*Picasso*). Cummings follows in this realist tradition. His general position is implicit in his reference to Picasso's "beautiful, beyond wonder, murderings of reality"(foreword to *is* 5). The suggestion here is that "reality" needs to be murdered because it has become merely a compound of conventional ways of seeing. And, like Picasso, and many other artists since the Impressionists, Cummings searched persistently for significant techniques of fragmentation and recombination.

In lines ten and eleven of "n(o)w", for example, the "blossoming" of thunder is expressed as "B[
and!o!M". The exclamation mark before the word's final "M" suggests the surprise of the speaker. Dividing the word over two lines shows the duration of the thunder's sound, and capitalizing four of its five letters replicates, arguably, the rolling sound of thunder. Cummings' typography infuses not only every word, but every character, with meaning. By his own version of syntax, he manages to "dislocate" content, forcing his reader to recombine letters and syllables first into words and then into phrases. As his cubist devices fracture the reader's expectations about the meanings of words and their relationship to one another, the reader is thus forced to a more immediate sense of reality than would otherwise be possible.

William Carlos Williams described the impact of the Armory Show as an electrifying moment that gave new hope and inspiration to the young men and women attempting to write a typically American poetry. According to Williams, this moment of hope was cut short by the 1922 publication of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*:

Those were the years just before the great catastrophe to our letters — the appearance of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. There was heat in us, a core and a drive that was gathering headway upon the theme of a rediscovery of a primary impetus, the elementary principle of all art, in the local conditions. Our work staggered to a halt for a moment under the blast of Eliot's genius which gave the poem back to the academics. We did not know how to answer him (Williams, 146).

Williams' references to "a primary impetus" and "the elementary principle of all art" would have resonated with the young Cummings. And although Williams was to return to Imagism (and, arguably, to the attempt, after Eliot, to rescue American poetry from "the academics"), Cummings embraced this new spirit, this "heat" and "core" and "drive", and enthusiastically welcomed the communication between media that European modernism (especially the Armory Show) had encouraged. Another contemporary, Wallace Stevens, was to gesture to this communication in his essay "The Relations between Poetry and Painting" but Stevens (who viewed poetry and painting as compensatory values in a disillusioned and secular age) was never as graphically ambitious as Cummings. The latter's exposure to Cubism not only encouraged him to paint in this new style but also to develop a poetry that mirrored painting, to wrench language into new meanings through fragmented statement, harsh juxtaposition and grammatical and syntactical distortion.

The convergent stimuli of Futurist poetic theory, painterly abstraction and Cubist multi-perspectivism inspired Cummings to a new liberation of the poetic word. "The

symbol of all art is the prism”, he declared, “The goal is unrealism. The method is destructive. To break up the white light of objective realism into the secret glories it contains”(*Tulips & Chimneys*, x). Incorporating the linguistic fragmentation of Marinetti and Apollinaire, the emphasis on break-down and restructuring that obsessed Picasso and Braque and the focus on movement, perspective and simultaneity that had exposed Duchamp to ridicule, Cummings’ eye-poems strikingly illustrate how European modernist ideas were rendered in an American poetic. I turn now to his most famous eye-poem, “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r”, from his 1935 volume, *No Thanks*.

11

According to his biographer, Richard Kennedy, Cummings' *No Thanks*, brought forward "more linguistic experiments and more obscurities than any volume Cummings ever produced"(351). As most Cummings' readers know, *No Thanks* bears an acknowledgement in the shape of a funeral urn, listing the names of reluctant publishers to whom the book was dedicated. Because he published the text privately, Cummings had extensive control over format and placement of the poems on the pages. Echoing Marinetti's plea for "words in freedom", Cummings bound the volume at the top instead of at the left, to avoid the conventional disturbance of page-breaks. Making its entire appeal to the eye, his poem "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" is often cited as a good example of Cumming's "un-readability":

r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r
who
a)s w(e loo)k
upnowgath
PPEGORHRASS
eringint(o-
aThe):l
eA
!p:
S
a
(r
rlvInG
.gRrEaPsPhOs)
to
rea(be)rran(com)gi(e)ngly
,grasshopper;

Cummings' poem scatters its letters, syllables and words across the page, emphasizing, as ever, the break-down and re-structuring that was so central to the Cubist technique. Critical analysis of the grasshopper poem, correspondingly, usually accounts for its reading process as one of progressive unscrambling or unravelling of the differently and successively less scrambled words for "grasshopper". Typographic jumbling, dispersion and, finally, stability, are seen as enacting the transformation of the motionless grasshopper into a leaping blur of energy which suddenly comes to

rest. The poem is often viewed as an attempt to deal with words visually, to force poetry towards a closer kinship with painting and the plastic arts.³

Departing from this critical consensus, Norman Friedman has argued that the overall intent of the grasshopper poem is not primarily visual at all, but figurative and aesthetic. The appearance of the poem on the page, he argues, does not resemble, “by any stretch of the imagination”, a grasshopper leaping. Friedman writes:

The important fact to grasp is that the spatial arrangement is not imitative in itself, as is the case in representational painting or drawing in which the lines and colors actually resemble some object; it is rather that the spacing is governed by the disruption and blending of syllables and the pause and emphasis of meaning which produce a figurative equivalent for the subject of the poem, as the reader reads in time (123-124).

Friedman’s point here is that the leaping grasshopper is not mirrored in the poem itself, but in the reader’s experience, over time, of the poem. “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” is not straightforwardly representational. This highlights an important aspect of the Cummings’ eye-poem — its temporal dimension — an aspect that is often overlooked by its critics. Sam Hynes, for example, sees Cummings’s grasshopper poem as an attempt to create art as a single experience, “having spatial, not temporal extension”(276). Presumably Hynes is here referring to the poem’s “unreadability”, to its disturbance of the codified reading process with its forward uni-directional momentum. This is underscored by the attention he draws to “word-clusters”, to the fact that Cummings’ dis-assembled words “are to be received simultaneously and not as words occurring one at a time”(277).

Hynes is right to identify the poem’s disturbance of linear reading but perhaps overly-hasty in exiling its temporal dimension. Although “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” is visually striking in the manner of a painting or sculpture (its reader, we might say, receives the poem as a single unit or “block” of representation), our habits of reading are so ingrained that this unity of impression is immediately followed by an attempt to identify and re-assemble the constitutive parts, to de-codify the poem through the normal reading processes. Irrespective of the initial impact, we still begin at the poem’s first line and “read” our way to its fifteenth. As we grope and fumble our way along this jumble of syllables and letters, our minds gradually assemble the connections which normally obtain among them: rearranging the letters, we are given: “grasshopper, who, as we look, now upgathering into himself, leaps, arriving to become, rearrangingly, a grasshopper.” Reading the grasshopper poem unavoidably registers its temporal dimension.

Friedman argues that when the reader has reviewed the entire poem once or twice, he recreates in his mind the very effect of a grasshopper leaping (123-124). This effect is produced by the fact that the syllables of “grasshopper” are rearranged four times (including the normal spelling); partially by the distribution of parentheses, punctuation marks, and capitals; and partially by the joining, splitting, and spacing of words. Pushing further on Friedman’s analysis, perhaps we might suggest that in replicating the reading process (forcing its reader to a parallel activity of

³ See, for example, Stephen Cushman, *William Carlos Williams and the Meaning of Measure* (Hew Haven: Yale UP, 1984) and Max Nanny, “Iconic Dimensions in Poetry”. In Richard Waswo (ed.), *On Poetry and Poetics*. Gunter Narr Verlag, 1985.

“upgathering”, leaping, disintegrating and rearranging), Cummings’s eye-poem draws attention to itself, not as object, but as experience. In this reading, the distance between (reading) subject and (readable) object is diminished, and emphasis is re-directed to the point of contact between reader and writing. To a greater extent than usual (as reading always effects a certain closing of this gap), the reader’s consciousness is not conceived as separate from but as “intended towards” the poem. It is this idea of intentionality, I wish to claim, that opens “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-a-g-r” to a phenomenology of reading.

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena in which “phenomena” refer to things as they appear in our experience. The founding father of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, used the concept of “intentionality” to explain the relationship between mental acts and the world. The main characteristic of human consciousness, Husserl argued, is that it is “intentional”: it does not exist independently but is always directed towards an object of experience. By studying the intentionality of consciousness, Husserl believed that phenomenology could provide a firm basis for all human knowledge, including scientific knowledge, and so establish philosophy as a rigorous science.

The phenomenology of reading, in turn, aims to explain the establishment of meaning, by a reader, of a literary text. According to the Belgian literary critic, Georges Poulet (1902-1991), the literary text is a combination of the author’s and reader’s consciousness, leading to the somewhat radical conclusion that the meaning of a literary text does not exist without its reader. Indeed, Poulet claims that until they are read, all books are “dead objects”(58). With its consonant emphasis on reader participation and the demise of the classical quest for a text’s objective meaning, Poulet’s phenomenology of reading pushes further on theories of “reader-response”(spear-headed in Germany by Wolfgang Iser and Hans-Robert Jauss and in America by Stanley Fish and Norman Holland) to emphasize the significance of human interaction with the words on the page. This radical subjectivity is informed by the phenomenological idea that the only valid focus of philosophical inquiry is consciousness and not, as previously assumed, objects in the world. Initially, the reader was external to the text while meaning resided within it. In contrast, Poulet describes the relationship between reader and text as one of mutual dependency: “You are inside it, it is inside you; there is no longer either inside or outside”(65). Meaning, then, is created at this moment of coincidence, at the point of fusion between reader and writing.

Returning to “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-a-g-r”, the poem is undoubtedly presented as experience as well as object. Cummings’ gestures to this foregrounding of subjective experience in his remarks on visual poetry: “The day of the spoken lyric is past,” he proclaimed. “The poem which has at last taken its place does not sing itself; it builds itself, three dimensionally, gradually, subtly, in the consciousness of the experiencer (foreword to *is* 5).” Cummings’s typographical jumbling encourages a re-arrangement of letters, syllables and punctuation marks into words and phrases and the “point of fusion” between reader and object, a moment usually hidden or latent in our reading experience, is highlighted to an extreme degree. The poem only comes to life, or comes to meaning, through its reader’s experience. This seems an almost perfect illustration of Poulet’s “dead object”; there is no “re-arranging grasshopper” until it is subjectively re-arranged.

However, the intricacies of Cummings's poem trouble a reading that would seek to privilege the reader's conscious experience with any degree of inevitability. The phenomenological approach, while insightful, is limited, as the reader of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r", having re-assembled the poem's constitutive parts, is still confronted, on finishing the reading, with the stubborn appearance of the poem's "dis-assembled" parts. Reading as re-assembly can only go so far, as the poem's obscurities can never be rendered completely transparent: when imaging the leaping and re-arranging of the grasshopper, the reader of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" will be blind to the letters and syllables on the page. And when reading ("reassembling"), the poem, the reader will fail to imagine the leaping grasshopper.

Paradoxically then, the very intricacy of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" precludes the perspective that is necessary for its full and proper appreciation. While the visual and verbal elements of the poem support each other to aid meaning, these elements fail to allow the reader direct access to the poem's central content. Simply put, the practice of reading undermines visibility. As Timothy Matthews writes, in his discussion of Apollinaire's "Calligrammes", "reading the poems dismantles the identification of the objects that the word shapes seem to suggest"(164).

The difficulty of reading a Cummings eye-poem in this manner is one anticipated by post-structuralist theory. Foucault, for example, has famously argued that seeing and reading can never completely coincide. He writes,

As soon as [the reader] begins to read, in fact, shape dissipates. [...] The very thing that is both seen and read is hushed in the vision, hidden in the reading (26).

In *Memoirs of the Blind*, Jacques Derrida makes a similar point. Allowing that the artist has traditionally embodied the power of seeing and making visible, Derrida argues that this drawing always originates in blindness (48). The object or model, even if facing the artist, cannot be seen at the same moment as the mark of drawing is made. There is always a gap or delay. The mark relies on memory, and when memory is invoked, the present object is ignored: the artist will be blind to it. Thus, the artistic power of seeing and making visible is inhabited by blindness it cannot recognize (52). In Cummings' case, the overall idea of a leaping grasshopper, while present in the poem's visual aspect, is hidden by linguistic re-assembly. The artistic medium intervenes between reader/observer and the central idea and, paradoxically, the reader of "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r" is too close to the poem to read it.

Similarly, the reader of "n(o)w" does not, at least on a first reading, experience the unpredictability of a thunderstorm. The reader's concentration simply cannot focus on the poem in its entirety as she is far too preoccupied with reassembling its individual letters and syllables into complete words. Such reassembly makes for a highly cerebral reading experience. It is a slow, painstaking process and it is further complicated by the presence of alternative "recompositions"(unlike "r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r", it is not immediately obvious how the elements of "n(o)w" are to be reassembled). In both cases, however, the mode of the poem's representation fails to simultaneously convey its meaning. As Foucault puts it, "The poem never speaks and represents at the same moment"(26).

Furthermore, the phenomenological approach (emphasizing, as it does, experience over object) perhaps sacrifices too much of Cumming's authorial

intention, an intention that his eye-poems so keenly illustrate. Cummings, we might say, has an unusually developed sense of the reality of a third poetic world; neither that of material objects nor that of immaterial significances but a world of language, of words, their orthography and grammar. In this sense, he is an “anti-nominalist”,⁴ for whom words themselves have important concrete reality, both in sound and in physical extension. Cummings’ eye-poems, then, do not direct his audience outward to something else but stimulate them to look inward at the words themselves and to let these words deliver a content, fostering, perhaps, an attitude of internalization. As Maurice Blanchot writes of Mallarmé:

In Mallarmé’s poetry, we are no longer referred back to the world, neither to the world as shelter nor to the world as goals. Words, having the initiative, are not obliged to serve to designate anything or give voice to anyone, but have their ends in themselves (41).

For Mallarmé, as for Cummings, words are realities in themselves.

To conclude, therefore, a phenomenological reading of Cummings, though highlighting central ideas of reader perception and participation, perhaps glosses too quickly over a central aspect of the poet’s authorial intention. Though encouraging audience participation in the Cubist tradition, Cummings’ eye-poems always maintain a certain gap between poem and reader, always draw attention to themselves as artefacts, or works of art. As established through the readings of “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” and “n(o)w”, furthermore, the phenomenological approach fails to account for the essentially paradoxical experience the eye-poem gives us: the re-assembly which it encourages will always blind us to the poem’s visual aspect. Cummings’ eye-poems undoubtedly invite constructive acts from their reader. There is always a sense, however, that the poet holds something in reserve; that he presents his eye-poem as artistic object above and beyond subjective experience, his “r-p-o-p-h-e-s-s-a-g-r” as somehow unreachable.

references

- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Space of Literature*. Trans. Ann Smock. Lincoln, NE.: University of Nebraska Press, 1982.
- Carlos Williams, William. *Autobiography*. New York: Random House, 1948.
- Collins, Billy. “Is That a Poem? The Case for E.E. Cummings” <http://www.slate.com/id/2117098/>
- Cowley, Malcolm. “Cummings: One Man Alone” in Guy Rotella, ed. *Critical Essays on E.E. Cummings*. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1984.
- Cummings, E.E. *No Thanks* Reno, NV: Golden Eagle Press, 1935.
- Tulips & Chimneys*. New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1923.
- Is 5*. New York: Boni and Liveright, 1926.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Foucault, Michel and Rene Magritte. Trans. James Harkness. *This Is Not a Pipe: Illustrations and Letters by Rene Magritte*. California: University of California Press, 1983.

⁴ Ted Honderich defines “anti-nominalism” as “a doctrine which affirms the real existence of universals”. (Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 224).

- Friedman, Norman. *E.E. Cummings: The Art of his Poetry*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1960.
- Graves, Robert and Laura Riding. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*. London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1927.
- Hynes, Sam. "Cummings' Collected Poems" *Explicator* 10 (1951): Item 9.
- Kennedy, Richard. *Dreams in the Mirror: A Biography of E. E. Cummings*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1980.
- Lagayette, Pierre, ed. *Strategies of Difference in Modern Poetry: Case Studies in Poetic Composition*. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998.
- Landles, Iain. "An Analysis of Two Poems"
<http://www.gvsu.edu/english/cummings/issue10/Landles10.html>
- Locklin, Gerald. "The Influence of Cummings on Selected Contemporary Poets" *Spring* 2 (1993): 40-47.
- Marinetti, F.T. "The Futurist Manifesto"
<http://www.cscs.umich.edu/~crshalizi/T4PM/futurist-manifesto.html>
- Matthews, Timothy. *Reading Apollinaire: Theories of Poetic Language*. Manchester: Manchester U.P., 1987.
- Poulet, Georges. "Phenomenology of Reading". *New Literary History* 1.1 (1969): 53-68
- Stein, Gertrude. *Picasso*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940.



7. Ira Lightman, *A Forest of Family Trees*

candice lemaire

**“to come as a foot printer”:
writing on space and the space of writing in the poetry of Robert Frost**

Most collections by American “farmer-poet” Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) can be read as different illustrations and depictions of one same delimited space: that of New England and its idiosyncratic landscapes and inhabitants. From *A Boy’s Will* (1913) down to his last published volume *In the Clearing* (1962), Frost develops a poetry of landscape and space by essence, gradually building up his own spatial poetics through his vibrant tribute to the North-Eastern part of the American territory. Space is seen as the realm of plurality, and alternatively explored through the notions of geographical space, of prosodic rhythms and melodies — “the spaces of the footed line” — but also through the inscription of the Frostian *persona* into the natural sphere. Analysing this Frostian space / landscape diptych in which poetry rhymes with geography, this study shall focus on one aspect of the poet’s spatial variations: that of the appropriation of space by the Frostian subject, made possible by his peregrinations and wanderings and his desire to leave traces, printing on the “landscape-page” in a deliberately palimpsestic act. Frost’s New England, in which the space of writing and writing on space are superimposed, can thus be perceived as highlighting the playful reflectiveness between poetical text and landscape, but also appears as an extremely fragile space, verging on the disquieting and the strange when the incarnation of the subject is challenged. Though ambivalent, Janus-like and complex, Frostian space finally inscribes itself into a saving and protective in-betweenness, asserting an unshakeable faith in the power of art.

Geography and poetry are two linked notions in Robert Frost since they both nourish the imagination and the creative process, the poetical text indeed gradually turns into a reflection of the landscape, in a mirror-effect. Poetical structure appears as mimetically built onto the natural landscape from which it arises; such a powerful reflectiveness between poetical text and landscape is made possible through the conjuring-up of a “landscape-page”. Frost’s poetry is concerned with the constant quest by the *persona* for his own place in nature, his inscription among the objects that fill his surroundings: his attempt at inscribing and appropriating space can be noticed through the *persona*’s wanderings within the New England area. The Frostian subject is a wavering, hesitating subject, often stopping and contemplating natural

scenes: the “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” rondeau¹ furnishes a striking instance of such immobility and stasis:

Whose woods these are I think I know,
His house is in the village though ;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

In this occasional-like poem, the contemplation of snowy woods by the horse-rider leads to an inner meditation: the title of the rondeau itself is already suggesting a key to a photograph or a picture, as if fixed, “frozen” and instantly framed. The isotopy of sight (“see” / “watch”) is doubled by the insistence on stasis: “stopping here” and “to stop” both carry a strong iambic stress. The *persona*, just like the landscape, is immobile, as if within a suspended temporality. Other poems, like the famous “The Road Not Taken”, are illustrations of a moment of reflection at both a physical and a metaphorical crossroads. “[T]wo roads diverged in a yellow wood” is the New England displacement for the Latin *trivium*, a moment of productive and contemplative stasis, since the traveller has to decide on the choice he has to make. With “And sorry I could not travel both”, the physical *trivium* is being turned here into a crossroads of interpretations, of decisions. Such a poem is much more complex than it looks, however; the title suggests indeed that the main concern of the poem is the very road the traveller has not taken, the choice he has not made, thus inviting the reader to wonder about the issue of choice and regret: “And sorry I could not travel both”, “I shall be telling this with a sigh”. Yet what the poem is really about is the road the wanderer did take, highlighting the difference this choice may have created: “I took the less travelled by / And this has made all the difference”. Ian Hamilton argues that pondering over the concept of mistake and regret is misleading, because “to Frost, it doesn’t seem to matter much which road he took, or didn’t take. It is that indifference which should have been the real subject of the poem”.²

But the Frostian *persona* is also a moving, mobile entity, trying to appropriate and domesticate space through his agricultural work (haymaking, mowing, picking apples,

¹ All quotations and layouts refer to Robert Frost’s *Library of America* reference edition. *Robert Frost : Collected Poems, Prose and Plays*, ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson. New York: Library of America, 1995.

² Ian Hamilton, ed. *Selected Poems, Robert Frost*. London: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 18-19.

piling wood), and is generally captured as a traveller, a horse-rider or a mysterious wanderer on a quest (as in “The Mountain” or “Directive”). This journeying *persona* is also eager to leave “traces”(the title of an uncollected poem) of his presence on the landscape, turning nature into a text, a support for writing, a natural parchment. Landscape is here subject to constant (re)writing, and becomes a palimpsest³ bearing the traces of time, such as the cycle of seasons (notably winter). Snow is the key-element to the Frostian palimpsest since it covers the initial colour of the soil, metamorphosing the earth into a blank page. “A Patch of Old Snow” and “Closed for Good” are palimpsest experiences — in the latter poem, the poetic “I” turns himself into a “foot printer” while it is still possible to see some remains of a former “text” underneath the fresh traces, “the shape of leaves will show / Beneath the spread of snow”, which is exactly what a palimpsest is. The octave “A Patch of Old Snow”, in *Mountain Interval*, also powerfully embodies this idea of printing on landscape:

There's a patch of old snow in a corner
That I should have guessed
Was a blow-away paper the rain
Has brought to rest.

It is speckled with grime as if
Small print overspread it,
The news of a day I've forgotten —
If I ever read it.

The small patch of snow, originally blank and immaculate, is now “speckled with grime” and dirt, the black grime the newspaper ink engendered when running under wet snow. The “print” left on the snow is thus no longer that of a foot but that of letters (emphasising the polysemy of the term “print”). The verb “overspread” underlines this act of palimpsest, this rewriting black over white, ink over snow. The winter landscape enables this superimposition of writing on space and the space of writing, preserving a memory of a former state of nature.

But footprints over snow are not the only manifestations of the Frostian palimpsest — so are the diverse transformations and metamorphoses of nature, such as snow melting, earth being ploughed and sowed, grass being mowed. Snow melting in “The Star-Splitter”(in *New Hampshire*), “And underfoot snow melted down to ice, / And melting further in the wind to mud”, echoes that of “To the Thawing Wind”(in *A Boy's Will*), melting under wind and rain and uncovering the original landscape that had been hidden: “Give the buried flower a dream /(...) Find the brown beneath the white(...) / Melt it as the ice will go”. In “A Hillside Thaw” the heat of the sun magically frees life imprisoned under a snowy blanket: “the hillside on the day the sun lets go / Ten million silver lizards out of snow”. As the poem has it: “it looks as if some magic of the sun / Lifted the rug that bred them on the floor”. In each of these poems, the palimpsest process is linked to a revelation, a gradual unveiling of the different layers of the landscape, putting into relief the sensual and physical materiality of Frostian nature.

³ Ancient Greek word “παλίμψητος” (“scratched again”) was a manuscript whose initial text had been erased by a scribe to write another one. The palimpsest material was generally parchment or papyrus, often erased with a pumice stone.

Another form of rewriting is earth being ploughed or sowed (as in “Putting in the Seed”, for instance) or even mowed as under the action of the scythe in the sonnet “Mowing” : “My long scythe whispering to the ground /(...) and left the hay to make”. Agricultural activities thus engender a constant rewriting and remodelling of nature, tools turning into quills, as Henry David Thoreau best expresses:

Look at their fields, and imagine what [the great men] might write, if ever they should put pen to paper. Or what have they not written on the face of the earth already, clearing and burning and scratching and harrowing and plowing and subsoiling, in and in, and out and out, and over and over, again and again, erasing what they had already written for want of parchment.⁴

The most subtle and delicate metamorphosis however is described in “Hyla Brook”(*Mountain Interval*), in which an analogy of riverbed and paper (from “A Patch of Old Snow”) is explored:

By June our brook's run out of song and speed .
Sought for much after that, it will be found
Either to have gone groping underground
(And taken with it all the Hyla breed
That shouted in the mist a month ago,
Like ghosts of sleigh-bells in a ghost of snow) —
Or flourished and come up on jewel-weed,
Weak foliage that is blown upon and bent
Even against the way its waters went.
Its bed is left a faded paper sheet
Of dead leaves stuck together by the heat —
A brook to none but who remember long.
This as it will be seen is other far
Than with brooks taken elsewhere in song.
We love the things we love for what they are.

The poem lies on an imperceptible gradation from “brook” to “book” — the dried-up river gradually being metamorphosed into a heap of paper sheets: “Its bed like a faded paper sheet / Of dead leaves stuck together by the heat”. The Frostian water brook has become a water book through a palimpsestic process. Frostian writing on space and the space of writing are thus linked within an ephemeral and transient temporality.

The *persona*'s attempt at rooting himself in the New England landscape thus appears successful at first sight, and yet the superimposition of space and writing can also be seen as painfully challenging, highlighting the great fragility and instability of Frostian space — an elsewhere where objects fail to deliver a stable meaning, and where the *persona* resists incarnation.

Frostian poetry, as seen from the point of view of more recent criticism, is perceived, on the contrary, as a fragile space, a disquieting elsewhere — the realm of the strange in which Frostian objects and natural elements become opaque or at least ambivalent: both meaningful and resisting interpretation. “A Boundless Moment” (in *New Hampshire*) epitomizes this instability: “We stood a moment so in a

⁴ Henry David Thoreau. *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, in *Walden and Other Writings*, New York: Bantam Books, 1979, p. 29.

strange world”, turning Frostian space into a dead-end. Frostian poetry of objects includes these very objects in the space of paradox — the various natural elements of New England are pictured as Janus-objects, both links and obstacles between the human subjects themselves. The *personae* that people Frost’s poems have indeed a very interesting relation to natural and cultural objects,⁵ turning them alternatively into conflict or contact zones. The partition wall in “Mending Wall” is the epitome of such an ambivalent object, playing both an isolating and linking role — by turns seen as an impassable barrier and limit between two neighbours (“set the wall between us again”, “my apple trees will never get across / And eat the cones under his pines”) but also as a welcoming zone of greeting since the two neighbours are led to exchange a few words while building up the wall (the pronoun “each” rapidly becomes the pronoun “our”). Such an in-between zone is progressively endowed with a neutral quality since one no longer knows what is being walled in or out, “to know what I was walling in or walling out”, and such a space of communion and exclusion constantly wavers between human fraternity and loneliness through the play on objects.

The Frostian window is also an interesting Janus-object as far as its screening qualities are concerned — “The Wind and the Window Flower” in *A Boy’s Will* can be of use in understanding such a double role:

Lovers, forget your love,
And list to the love of these,
She a window flower,
And he a winter breeze.

When the frosty window veil
Was melted down at noon,
And the andi yellow bird
Hung over her in tune,

He marked her through the pane,
He could not help but mark,
And only passed her by,
To come again at dark.

He was a winter wind,
Concerned with ice and snow,
Dead weeds and unmated birds,
And little of love could know.

But he sighed upon the sill,
He gave the sash a shake,
As witness all within
Who lay that night awake.

Perchance he half prevailed
To win her for the flight

⁵ Natural objects can be defined as landscape elements, but also animals, fauna and flora, whereas cultural elements are rather pictured as tools, and necessary items to the human beings that inhabit this very nature. Two poems are quite telling in that respect: “The Ax-Helve” and “The Grindstone” (in *New Hampshire*) which both insert a cultural object back into its natural setting.

From the firelit looking-glass
And warm stove-window light.

But the flower leaned aside
And thought of naught to say,
And morning found the breeze
A hundred miles away.

This long poem narrates the impossible love of the winter wind for a flower spotted on a window sill, “She a window flower / And he a winter breeze”. The window (or rather the window pane) through which the flower is seen plays the ambivalent part of love link (for unveiling the flower when the frost melts under the sun – “When the frosty window veil / Was melted down at noon”) and also insurmountable glass screen which prevents the wind from reaching the object of its desire: in spite of all its sighing and blowing it cannot manage to lift the sash, “he sighed upon the sill, / He gave the sash a shake”, finally seeing the flower “lean[ing] aside”.

An element such as the mountain is also worth discussing: in the narrative poem “The Mountain” in *North of Boston*, it partitions the valley with its shadow (“the mountain held the town in a shadow”), dividing the sky and “tak[ing] all the room”, but it also shelters and protects the villages and the traveller: “I felt it like a wall / Behind which I was sheltered from the wind”. The natural and cultural elements of Frostian nature thus form a system of elaborate thresholds that the *persona* endlessly crosses, a network of liminary and meaningful objects.

But the Frostian (non)sense of a place within such a New England elsewhere is also conveyed through the enigmatic dimension of the landscape, a mysterious realm that often resists interpretation. The opacity of message in poems such as “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” or “The Oven Bird” is a clue to the understanding of Frost’s New England as an instable, fragile space, a world of “desert places” (the poem of *A Further Range*). “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” depends on a referential ambiguity linked to the identity of the “he” that is fearfully mentioned by the *persona*: “his house is in the village though ; / He will not see me stopping here”. The owner of the woods is never clearly identified. In the sonnet “The Oven Bird”, the poem is also extremely obscure when the thrush-like bird is given the role of announcing the fragility and decay of the post-lapsarian world: “And comes that other fall we name the fall. / He says the highway dust is over all. / (...) The question that he frames in all but words / Is what to make of a diminished thing”. Frostian New England is thus an empty, decaying territory, a network of ontological and geographical desert places (“my own desert places”, as the eponymous poem has it) in which objects resist interpretation and subjects always verge on anonymity. In conjuring up such an opaque sphere, Frost departs from a more traditional and positive subject / object relationship, as developed by the Hegelian dialectic for instance:⁶ this theory states that it is necessary to apprehend what is intelligible in reality, in objects. In Hegel, the human subject faces the objective world and transforms or modifies it so as to brand it, to leave his own trace on it (which the Frostian palimpsest theory evoked earlier was a preliminary attempt at such an appropriation). In doing so, he manages to fulfil his own incarnation, which is

⁶ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807). English translation: *Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A.V. Miller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

precisely what the Frostian subject fails to achieve. The Frostian *persona* indeed appears to be a remote, abstract entity, imprisoned in a material world of objects in which he finds no place, no status. His uneasy and painful incarnation is made visible through the vast network of voices at work in the collections. “I am too absent-spirited to count. / The loneliness includes me unawares”, the disembodied *persona* of “Desert Places” says. Frostian subjects are very often reduced to mere voices, which reminds them of their own loneliness: “The Most of It” illustrates, for instance, the dangers of such an absence of incarnation:

He thought he kept the universe alone ;
For all the voice in answer he could wake
Was but the mocking echo of his own (l. 1-3)

The Frostian subject appears to be locked up in a chamber of echoes where only voices respond and where the surrounding objects seem to leave no room for him and his attempts at incarnation. The writing on space and the space of writing thus do meet in Frost, but they are also used to emphasise the instability and sheer fragility of the Frostian world, turning it into a mysterious, disembodied space of the strange — a dead-end space in which meaning is challenged.

Yet, interestingly enough, it appears that Frost’s poetry explores the paradox of its own fragility and wishes to give this meeting of space and writing an ironical dimension. In an attempt at erasing the tensions such an encounter might arouse, Frost’s work asserts trust and faith in the power of art.

Frost’s poetry seems to be conscious of the paradoxical and ambivalent aspect of its own instability ; indeed the poems are very much concerned with taking a distance from the sibylline tensions that the space / writing diptych arouses, and trying to analyse them from a neutral, in-between point of view. In this Janus-poetry — the ambivalent creation of an ambivalent artist⁷ — the superimposition between writing on space and the space of writing has an irenic intention: founded on the solving of conflicts, writing enabling the tensions of existence to be suspended. Such a superimposition is seen as an embodiment of beauty and mutual enrichment and no longer as an antithesis: Frost’s poetry seems to value harmony above all, and constantly refusing to decide — as Robert Faggen suggests: “Frost found beauty in the unresolved conflict of equally worthy principles”.⁸ Although the world around does not make perfect sense (or fails to be made sense of), although “it does not cohere”, faith in the power of art remains, precisely because coherence is not crucial to creation.⁹ So for Frost, “to come as a foot printer” and wishing to make sense of the

⁷ Robert Frost was often depicted as a double-sided author, far from the bright public image that was given to the American readership. As Donald G. Sheehy puts it, he is a “Janus-Frost”, in “Stay unassuming”: the Lives of Robert Frost’, *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. Robert Faggen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.7.

⁸ Robert Faggen, in *The Cambridge Companion to Robert Frost*, ed. Robert Faggen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 5.

⁹ Ezra Pound’s “It does not cohere” highlights the importance of art in spite of the chaotic meaning of the world. A message can still arise from such a lack of order — this is also modern American poet Hugh Seidman’s position who, by taking up Frost’s stand years alter, writes:

It does not cohere, Pound said.(...)
Years later(...), it dawned:
It need not — cohere -- .

surrounding chaos, to leave a trace on the landscape, can be perceived as a sort of poetic manifesto, or a programmatic line. Frost indeed conceived poetry as fundamentally surprising, an art in which the poem's creator is the unique unveiler:

When I begin a poem, I don't know — I don't want a poem that I can tell was written toward a good ending. (...) You've got to be the happy discoverer of your ends.¹⁰

Such a playful and infinite unveiling of poetry (and of art) is thus essential since it is linked to an instant of revelation, of *aletheia*: Frostian poetic art has to do with "dawn", understood both as a brutal revelation and as a "message from the dawn" (a line from "The Tuft of Flowers", in *A Boy's Will*):

I've often said that another definition of poetry is dawn — that it's something dawning on you while you're writing it.(...) And the feeling of dawn — the freshness of dawn — [is possible when] you didn't think this all out.¹¹

Poetry escapes all precision and calculation, all goal-oriented perspectives, to focus only on the perfect match between emotions and words: "a complete poem is one where emotion has found its thought and the thought has found the words".¹² If the space of writing does exist in Frost, it is thus clearly trustworthy because it is the space of emotions and hope.

Robert Frost's poetry, in its role of foot printer over New England soil and space, appears as the place in which the space of writing and writing on space are superimposed; by turns perceived as a space of appropriation whose gist is progressively captured by the *persona*'s peregrinations and wanderings, but also by his palimpsestic acts on the Frostian "landscape-page". Such a never-ending (re)writing on the page of nature is a manifestation of the extreme reflectiveness between poetical text and landscape. However, such a blend between space and writing should not be taken for granted for the sheer fragility of Frostian space should not be ignored — a territory filled with opaque objects, both carrying and resisting meaning, the realm of painful incarnation and an earthly elsewhere. But, as the ambivalent creation of an ambivalent artist, Frost's poetry explores the paradox of its own fragility, establishing the various collections in the space of echoes, of plurality. Beyond the conflicts and tensions aroused by the meeting of space and writing, Frost always wishes to present them as mutually enriching — the proof of an ever-lasting faith in the power of art and writing, beyond the aporias of a world constantly seeking for meaning.

(Hugh Seidman, "Case History: Melancholia", in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Spring 2000, p. 344).

¹⁰ Quoted in "Conversations on the Craft of Poetry: Cleanth Brooks, Robert Frost, Robert Penn Warren and Kenny Withers", 1959, in *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose and Plays*, ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson. New York: Library of America, 1995, p. 857.

¹¹ Robert Frost, in *Ibid.*, p. 858.

¹² Robert Frost, in *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose and Plays*, ed. Richard Poirier and Mark Richardson. New York: Library of America, 1995, p. 701.

maria proitsaki

empowering houses in Nikki Giovanni and Rita Dove

Images of houses signify in a unique way for black women. According to Angela Y. Davis, “domestic life took on an exaggerated importance in the social life of slaves” since it provided “the only space where they could truly experience themselves as human beings”(16-17); and bell hooks notes: “We could not love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that ‘homeplace,’ most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits”(42). So, as Erlene Stetson points out, for black women “the house is — and has been — more than a symbol for identity or family; historically, having a house of one’s own has been an economically difficult, if not impossible, goal to achieve”(xxiii).

A distinction between the public and the private domain has not been clear-cut for black women, due to their specific historical experience, which deprived them from all forms of power while rendering them the objects of ownership, and mastery. When it came to survival, for example, black women could not count on their houses to function as safer source of shelter than the woods, while in general they had to count on the involvement, the aid and/or the support of other members of the black community in order to cope. Nevertheless, moving through collapsed boundaries of usually non-separate public and private spheres,¹ they developed individual strengths. The house functioned as a source of empowerment, offering them space for both self and communal affirmation.

Black women writers keep focus extensively on what takes place in and around domestic milieus, and insist on exploring domestic experience, which certainly indicates the great importance these themes have for black women; but this also challenges, and perhaps defies, the meaning of set perceptions relating to this kind of thematic choice.² In the poetry of black women, the domestic sphere tends to be

¹ hook’s concept “homeplace” corresponds to such both communal and domestic spaces, where private and public life overlap. See “Homeplace: A Site of Resistance” (41-50).

² In “Paradoxes and Dilemmas, the Woman as Writer”, Margaret Atwood highlights how reviewers habitually perceive domestic themes differently in the work of male and female authors: “when a man

an intersected and heavily spirited site where past and present, duty and guilt, affection and obsession overlap. Moreover, this space does not seem to have clear limits since the “house” itself seems to comprise a number of ideas. This is how Stetson comments on the wide use of the house as a metaphor:

The house represents the historic quest by Black women for homes of their own — apart from the house of slavery, the common house of bondage, the house of the patriarchy. The house embodies women’s search for place and belonging and for a whole and complete identity, as well as representing the historical house that was so difficult to get. In addition the house is a symbol for place — heaven, haven, home, the heart, women’s estate, the earthly tenement, the hearth — and for region — Africa, the West Indies, America, Asia, the North, the South. (xxii)

A house, which evading its common physical dimensions, can metaphorically incorporate anything as the above, could hardly be associated with the inferiority of those who dwell in it. It follows that the desire for a house in the work of black women poets, or the lingering about its “private” spaces, can hardly be taken as a symptom of a limited perspective; on the contrary, I suggest that their focusing on the domestic sphere may be seen as both subversive and potentially empowering.

The thematic similarities that arise in Nikki Giovanni’s and Rita Dove’s preoccupation with the domestic sphere are intriguing, in spite of differences in the style of their poetry and their perspective. In Giovanni’s and Dove’s poetry, the house and its “private” spaces signify an important position. While the two writers often “step out” of the house, they refuse to abandon it and the concerns around it, affirming rather than dismissing their importance. Giovanni and Dove celebrate, rather than try to escape, conventional — or not so conventional — domestic spheres. The house offers space for peace and self-assertion while opening towards the outside world, and thus hardly ever becomes claustrophobic. Most often, instead of being a place of confinement and discouraging isolation, it is a privileged site where the recognition of domestic creativity enables empowerment.

In Giovanni’s and Dove’s works,³ the house is focused upon from several points of view. There are poems about the houses of the parents and grandparents of both writers, as well as others where there is direct reference to the writers’ own houses, and poems where women, not necessarily the writers themselves, are portrayed at home. Women work at home, cleaning, cooking, and raising children. The stress is usually on the culturally vital context in which simple daily chores take place, but of course there are poems where women toil performing their allegedly predefined

writes about things like doing the dishes, it’s realism; when a woman does, it’s unfortunate feminine genetic limitation” (105). Nikki Giovanni makes a similar comment in *Sacred Cows . . . And Other Edibles*, pointing out that “[w]hen women write about the reality of our lives, it’s called dull; when white men write their lives, it’s called heroic” (33).

³ Here I focus on the early poetry of Giovanni and Dove, especially four works that seem to have some kind of parallel structure: *My House* and *The Women and the Men* (with poems previously published in *Re: Creation*) by Giovanni and *The Yellow House on the Corner* and *Thomas and Beulah* by Dove. I also pay some attention to Dove’s *Museum*, which comes before *Thomas and Beulah* as well as *Grace Notes* that follows it, and in Giovanni’s case, to *Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day*, which follows after *The Women and the Men*.

gender role.⁴ The house organizes all kinds of important or unimportant events in women's life: girls growing up and becoming women, relationships between men and women, parent/grandparent bonding with children, as well as other family relations. Both writers linger upon porches, backyards, bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchens and make recurring references to food.

But Giovanni and Dove also manage to blur the limits of the house by dealing with different kinds of rooms historically and/or geographically. Dove "enters" rooms of houses, huts, palaces or artist studios, an old people's home, a ruined residence, even a houselike tomb. The buildings are located in America, in Europe, in Africa or in Asia, in the past or in the present. Giovanni usually "moves about" houses inhabited by Black people, "visits" the home of their common mother, Africa, remembers/imagines the houses of the past and tells of imaginary rooms in the future. The variation which characterizes these conventional and unconventional domestic milieus encountered in Giovanni and Dove, as well as the temporal and/or spatial location of these houses, endows the figure of the house with an abstract quality of open-endedness. This use of expanded domestic spaces in the works of Giovanni and Dove deserves particular attention.

I

The word "house" is found in the titles of two important poetry collections, *My House* (1972), which is the fourth volume of poetry by Giovanni, and *The Yellow House on the Corner* (1980), the first published volume by Dove. Moreover, a fine press edition with the title *The Other Side of the House* was published in 1988 by Pyracantha Press, (Arizona State U, Tempe, Arizona), containing seven poems that are later to be found in Dove's *Grace Notes*. As far as strictly domestic imagery is concerned, the two early collections do not include more poems focusing on the domestic sphere than the rest of the early volumes do — I have found that in general about a quarter of the poems of each volume include direct references to the domestic sphere. Instead, the use of "house" here serves a variety of purposes.

In her critical assessment of *My House*, Virginia Fowler claims that the poems in this collection, as suggested in the title, "constitute Giovanni's emphatic statement to the world about her identity as a black woman and a poet, about her values and about her intention to live the kind of life and write the kind of poetry she wished" (*Nikki Giovanni* 57). Fowler also sees the past along with the people of the past as a "cornerstone" of Giovanni's house. The poet's house is then, according to Fowler, a metaphor for her way of living: "The Rooms Inside", the first section of the volume, deal with "personal development" and "The Rooms Outside", the second section, put the "personal self" into a larger historical and cultural context (61-69).

The division into "rooms inside" and "rooms outside" is analytically useful, as the house in Giovanni's perception seems to consist not only of an interior — a space between walls, a protected space — but also an exterior; and yet the "inside" section includes poems like "The World Is Not a Pleasant Place to Be" and "Just a New York Poem" that could well belong to the "outside" section. The title poem, furthermore, which is the most emphatic when it comes to a demonstration of strength and control

⁴ As Jane Drake notes, while "[d]ifferent cultural groups vary in their expectations of women's economic role", it is widely assumed that "whatever else a woman may do, she bears the main responsibility for running the home" (24).

over the poet's house/life, comes at the end of the volume, closing the section of "The Rooms Outside".⁵ I find this crossover stands for the possibility of communication between what is inside and what is outside the house, and also indicates the relevance of domestic life to public life. Furthermore, Giovanni works against the establishment of two separate spheres, one public and one private, as these are conventionally defined by the presence of the house.

Erosion of the house's boundaries is also indicated by the illustrations in the beginning of each of the two sections. First there is a corner of a room seen from the inside, empty except for a huge semi-transparent rose, which appears to be leaning on a window, almost covering it. Due to its transparency, the exact location of the flower is elusive: while its stem is clearly inside the room, it is difficult to claim that it not partly outside of the window. In the second illustration, there are two closed windows seen from the outside, with a black girl's figure visible behind one of them. Again then, outside space is defined not as away from the house but rather in connection to it, as if it constitutes a vantage-point to observe the inside from. Within a contained, internal, domestic space, Giovanni marks the possibility for a move, or expansion, towards the outside, while when outside she turns and focuses on the inside.

While the interior and the exterior merge in a way that trying to locate what is inside and what outside becomes necessarily confused, in the second section of the collection there is an expansion of the metaphorical role of the house in geographic and historical terms. Here Giovanni makes an effort to identify what place African Americans may claim as home, and indirectly associates the idea of house with that of region. In the search for belonging, the house opens up into particular geographic areas, to become in turn historically definable ancestral homes. Africa, the imagined archetypal home, represented in the image of "a young man bathing / in the back of a prison fortress" ("Africa I") turns out to be a disappointment for the writer, when she visits the continent as a tourist, especially after she sees the dungeons of the British fort,⁶ the temporary home for thousands of slaves before they were shipped to the New World: "and I wanted the lock maybe for a door / stop to unstop the 18th century clock" ("Africa II"). Protesting the sheer scale of victimization that is linked to the place, Giovanni finds her voice "lost in the room / of the women with the secret passageway / leading to the governor's quarters", an allusion to the great dimensions of the suffering of her ancestors. Consequently, in "They Clapped", as African Americans embarked in their return flight from Africa realize "that they are strangers all over", America solidifies into a home made easier to accept.⁷

⁵ Suzanne Juhasz argues that the poems in this section "are not calls to action from the public platform; they are dreams, some funny, some apocalyptic, of old worlds and new" (170).

⁶ The Cape Coast Castle, in Ghana served as the headquarters for the British colonial administration for almost 200 years and housed slaves prior to their transport to America.

⁷ The house is metaphor for America even in the essay "Our Own House Is in Disorder" (*Sacred Cows . . . And Other Edibles* 161-162). Yet Giovanni does not remain consistent in her ideas about the home of African Americans. In *Sacred Cows* she says that Black Americans "really have no home" (166), while later, in *Racism*, she agrees with a claim that their home is Virginia, the place where they first landed in the new continent (131).

II

The title of Rita Dove's *The Yellow House on the Corner* is directly evocative of the neighbourhood, another kind of domestic, or intradomestic, space. In an interview, Dove suggested that this first work of hers constitutes "a very domestic scene, a real neighbourhood" (Schneider 115). The neighbourhood, though more local and concrete than community, is still linked to communal space (and the dynamics of communal life), which is in turn considered a part of the domestic sphere by African Americans. According to Patricia Hill Collins, this has its roots in slavery:

The entire slave community/family stood in opposition to the public sphere of a capitalist political economy controlled by the elite white men. . . . The line separating the Black community from whites served as a more accurate boundary delineating public and private spheres for African-Americans than that separating Black households from the surrounding Black community. (49)

Collins emphasizes that even after their migration to urban centres in the north, African Americans continued to form self-contained communities. A demarcation of these communities from their surroundings continued to be better defined than the differentiation of each household from the rest of the Black community. This demarcation was indeed perceived as a public/private split which occurred where these communities were separated from the surrounding "frequently hostile white hood" (58). Even hooks, in her testimony about growing up in a segregated town, speaks of "living in a marginal space where black people (though contained) exercised power" and were "truly caring a supportive of one another" (35). Black neighbourhoods emerge thus with a domestic aura, and constitute safe and familiar ground that is neither exclusively private nor public. Such in-between space may satisfy the need for communal belonging and simultaneously enable further departures towards the larger community and then the wider outside world. The introductory poem in Dove's *Selected Poems* (1993), "In the Old Neighborhood",⁸ stands as such a point of departure, from where the poet confidently sets off and where she appears comfortable to return in the rest of her volumes.

The neighbourhood image in Dove's work is undoubtedly dynamic, particularly in how it expands towards new geographic and historic locations. *The Yellow House on the Corner* (where only about one fifth of the poems include concrete references to houses and/or the domestic sphere) tends to address transnational issues as it contains several poems obviously inspired by Dove's trips abroad. A neighbourhood in Tunisia consists of "Roofless houses, cartons of chalk, / catch the sky in their mirrors of air" ("The Sahara Bus Trip"). In "Ö", the last poem in the volume, and the one which includes its title phrase, the house, beyond its potential opening towards the outside (as it also does in "Geometry"), even presents the significant ability to depart:

The present extends its glass forehead to sea,
(backyard breezes, scattered cardinals)

and if, one evening, the house on the corner

⁸ "In the Old Neighborhood" is not an early poem. It is placed first in the *Selected Poems* volume however, before the much earlier poems from *The Yellow House on the Corner*.

took off over the marshland,
neither I nor my neighbor
would be amazed. (SP 64)

The house/neighbourhood then is neither sealed nor permanently “stranded”,⁹ but on the contrary ready to sail and thus open to the rest of the world as well as to history. This openness, as realized in the poet’s preoccupation with domestic milieus of other ages and/or places, which continues further in Dove’s next volume, *Museum*, is certainly a move away from the particular houses of her “real hood”, and at the same time a refusal to abandon the domestic theme. Functioning similarly to Giovanni’s “The Rooms Outside”, *Museum* “attempts to register personal human experience against the larger context of history” (according to Fowler’s argument in Schneider 115). Culturally specific domestic spaces, as in “Nestor’s Bathtub”, or “Boccaccio: The Plague Years” and “Fiammetta Breaks Her Peace”, thus acquire a new meaning. Instead of concealing and isolating, the private houses in the neighbourhoods Dove creates are links that connect individual histories throughout a more general historical and geographical background.

III

Houses, figuratively or metaphorically, also help establish empowering connections among the people who reside in them, especially between women and men. This is certainly the case in some poems in Giovanni’s *The Women and the Men* and in Dove’s *Thomas and Beulah*.¹⁰ Dove’s poems are mostly family oriented, while Giovanni is more concerned about the individual, yet in both cases the house image defines the background¹¹ against which significant bonds are developed. The domestic sphere becomes a crucial meeting point, a place where people of all ages get together, in sorrow or in joy, in excitement or in boredom, where they spend a great part of their generally simple lives. A house may form a concrete common ground where a relationship flourishes, as depicted in Giovanni’s “How Do You Write a Poem?” “when i come / home if you’re not there / i search the air / for your scent”. But it might also serve on a metaphorical level, linked to a poetic persona’s life, as in her “Housecleaning”, where the activity of tidying up one’s house is employed to tidy up one’s personal relationship.

I always liked housecleaning
even as a child
i dug straightening the cabinets
putting new paper on
the shelves

⁹ The image of the house or of the community as a ship is one that recurs in Dove’s poetry. See “Courtship” (TB 16-17), “Refrain” (TB 18-19) and “Gospel” (TB 35-36). Moreover, a “picture of a ship” in the house is found in “The House on Bishop Street” (TB 60).

¹⁰ In *The Women and the Men* the poems are arranged in three sections: “The Women”, “The Men”, and “And Some Places”. In *Thomas and Beulah* the first section, “Mandolin”, is written from Thomas’ perspective while the second, “Canary in Bloom”, gives Beulah’s point of view.

¹¹ However loose its frame, the physical presence of a house is either pronounced, or can easily be assumed. Interestingly, one can trace domestic spells even in a few poems with other themes, such as Giovanni’s “For a Lady of Pleasure Now Retired” (“there was pork cooking / on the stove”), and Dove’s “The Charm” (“Sunday mornings / fried fish and hominy steaming / from the plates like an oracle”).

washing the refrigerator
inside out
and unfortunately this habit has
carried over and i find
i must remove you
from my life (WM)

Giovanni and Dove examine whether women enjoy being at home or not, as well as how their daily domestic experience affects their own lives along with the lives of those around them. In fact, when the house is in the foreground, it is usually in relation to the life of the women: they are the ones who occupy its rooms while the men are elsewhere. As hooks points out, “houses belonged to women, were their special domain, not as property, but as places where all that truly mattered in life took place – the warmth and comfort of shelter, the feeding of our bodies, the nurturing of our souls”(41). Both writers highlight and even make attempts to elevate the domestic role of women by emphasizing the function of the house as a point of reference, but also by showing its importance in keeping people together.¹²

IV

As in their poetry, Giovanni and Dove make several references to houses in their autobiographical and other non-fictional writings. The function of the house as a metaphor in some of these texts is especially intriguing. Differentiating between house and home in a highly ambiguous manner, Giovanni cherishes a wide variety of homeplaces, ranging from the most solid building structures, either existing or remembered, to abstract notions of metaphorical homes as the expression of will, commitment and loving interpersonal relations. Dove expresses her awareness about the house directly, elaborating on the house/poetry metaphor and analyzing some of her poems that deal with houses, as well as indirectly, describing, often in considerable detail, a series of rooms she has dwelled and created in.

In Giovanni's autobiographical *Gemini* (1971), the figure of the house stands for a crucial source of creative energy, which turns personal efforts into achievements, and without which even mere survival can be difficult. With its fundamental and benign influence on the individual, one could claim that the house tends to stand for the origin of life itself. In “400 Mulvaney Street,” the first essay of *Gemini*, the writer narrates her return “home” to Knoxville, Tennessee, where she used to live with her grandmother. She describes the old house and the neighbourhood and lingers upon memories, all of which conclude with her grandmother's death, a death she blames on “progress”. The old Louvenia had to move into a new house with “no familiar smell”, no sounds, no marks of bygone days, in a street that “was pretty but it had no life”, since her house had to be pulled down for the construction of a road (10). Giovanni is convinced that for her grandmother, as well as for other old people, being forced to move was a devastating blow. When the nurturing powers of their houses cease to exist the old people become lonely and die: “Like my grandmother would probably have lived another ten or twenty years, but urban renewal took her home that she had lived in for forty-three years, and she was disjointed and lost her will to

¹² In *A Dialogue*, Giovanni shows concern about the circumstances where Black men end up battering Black women at home (43, 45). But neither Dove nor Giovanni explore the issue of domestic violence in their poetry.

live”(65). This thought emerges in connection to Giovanni’s memories of her parents’ homes in “Don’t Have a Baby till You Read This”. Giovanni refers here to the time she was hospitalized, after giving birth to her son, an experience that almost cost her life. “Visions of the old house”, a clear deviation from her immediate concerns, emerge before her face as she decides to take a walk to the nursery and back (64-66). Particular domestic scenes around her family’s move to a new house when she was a teenager sustain her physical progress down the hospital corridors. Moreover, in these recalled images she finds a model for the transition she undergoes in her life and there she derives the energy to complete it: “Yep, I would be good and glad to get home”(66). Giovanni, who lives in New York during her pregnancy, gives birth in Cincinnati while visiting her parents; evidently, as Martha Cook puts it, “she asserts herself and goes ‘home’ to New York”(281). Yet, in *Gemini* Giovanni neither claims New York nor Cincinnati but Knoxville (where her grandparents lived, and where she herself lived as a child) as a home for her son — so that he knows that they “come from somewhere”, and they “belong”(12). The determination to claim a specific home however, is more of an exception rather than the rule in her work, since Giovanni generally recognizes multiple homes.

The homes in Giovanni’s text are released from a house’s strict geographic location. While she identifies the houses of her childhood as homes, having travelled extensively around the country for her work, Giovanni eagerly disassociates home from the materiality of a house. In *Sacred Cows . . . And Other Edibles* (1988), home is described in terms of love rather than defined by specific locations: “I don’t think of a home as a house, which is another thing I don’t own. Certainly, though, I do live in a house that I have made my home. . . . But I also readily concede if there is no love a building will not compensate”(166).¹³ For Giovanni, the houses of her childhood constitute the kind of archetypal locations where homes were established through the generous investment of loving relationships. However, she believes that home may develop independently from any kind of concrete domestic space: “They say Home . . . is where when you go . . . they have to take you in. I rather prefer Home . . . when you could go anywhere . . . is the place you prefer to be”(166).

This last definition of home involves an element of agency, which arguably becomes even more intriguing when contextualized with reference to slavery, enforced relocation and more generally the humiliating objectification of Black people. In Giovanni’s further explorations of the concept of home she places it in a historical context and associates it with the pioneer spirit of those who came or were brought to the New World:

Home is not the place where our possessions and accomplishments are deposited and displayed. It is this earth that we have explored, the heavens we view with awe, these humans who, despite the flaws, we try to love and those who try to love us. It is *the willingness to pioneer* the one trek we all can make . . . no matter what our station in life . . . the existential reality that wherever there is life . . . we are at home. (SC 167, italics mine)

¹³ *Sacred Cows* is not part of her very early works but contains illuminating statements of Giovanni’s standpoint. Much later, in 1994, Giovanni writes: “I have room space from New York to Cincinnati to San Francisco. . . . I thought I’d try a noble experience of letting my son know that home is where we are . . . not a building nor a place . . . not things but a feeling” (*Racism* 127-128).

According to Giovanni then, home may stand for both origin and destination, as well as for the commitment to connect with others and the eagerness to undertake its creation. Giovanni refers to a greater home and gradually comes to encourage a dynamic awareness beyond family, or even local community; in *Racism* she refers to the earth/this planet as home (123, 181). Moving beyond a mere plurality of homes, the home in which she imagines herself and her female personae is an all-encompassing homeplace, one that constantly becomes rather than simply exists.

At the same time, if home can be seen as a site of agency and the expression of will, the house, in as far as it is the physical location for a home, may by extension also serve the proclamation of its owner's will. Interestingly, when in the spirit of the Black Arts Movement Giovanni advocates a Black Revolution, she employs metaphorically the imagery of the destruction of a house. Giovanni elaborates on a metaphor where land is a woman, here a Black woman exploited by the white man. She means that the Black man is a tenant, who has more right to the land, yet the white man owns it; also whatever the Black man builds on the land indirectly belongs to the white man. Under this kind of circumstances, much as the building of house by an exploited tenant may be perceived as the result of certain freedom, burning the house could equally be considered an act of freedom:

After you're alone with your piece of land you remove very carefully anything that cannot be replaced, like pictures of your first lay, your joints, etc., and you throw kerosene on everything else. You see, it's yours and if you can't enjoy it in freedom and peace, then land wants you to destroy it. (*Gemini* 49)

Keeping in mind that land itself cannot be destroyed, Giovanni indeed encourages the burning of "a house, a building, a fence", as they are markers that stake the claim people have on land, when under the threat of the white landlord demanding it back: "That's when you burn. You don't burn to get the thief to fix it up; you burn when you have staked your claim and they try to steal it from you. And I really believe that after you've fixed it up and made it yours, you'll kill for it"(49). While she extensively ponders on the importance of a house then, Giovanni does not place its value on stereotypical definitions. Instead, by authorizing its strategic destruction, she urges rather for the maintenance of the sense of freedom inspired by the construction and the existence of the house. Resulting from this freedom, the willingness to destroy, is itself liberating, and thus rendered a legitimate resistance alternative.

Giovanni's viewing domestic space as a source of empowerment falls within the tradition of Black women's understanding of homeplace as a site of affirmation, daily struggle and resistance.¹⁴ It could in fact be claimed that Giovanni not only follows this tradition but even enhances it. Her returning to her childhood homes in her writings certainly strengthens her sense of belonging, while in her contemplation of her grandparents' and her parents' different homes there emerge unmistakable empowering elements. These were generated mainly through the tight bonding among individual family members. When, for example, Giovanni's grandmother signs up for her granddaughter's participation in a demonstration without having asked her first and the young Giovanni feels obligated to go, it is obvious that their trust has an

¹⁴ See especially hooks' "Homeplace: A Site of Resistance" (41-50).

inspiring and empowering effect (*Grand Mothers* xiv-xvii). At the same time, the rooms Giovanni inhabits as an adult provide new, more fluid, domestic spheres. As her sense of home expands into the world, Giovanni advocates bonding among all black people, then among all people. Furthermore, keeping in mind the “radical political dimension” that the “construction of a homeplace” has in African American history (hooks 42), Giovanni’s suggested metaphorical destruction of the house, as a means for asserting one’s position and claiming one’s will, could be seen as an enriching deviation, but is still in line with the tradition developed by Black women before her.

V

The domestic sphere takes new empowering dimensions again in Dove’s prose writings, where her awareness of domestic spaces is particularly prevalent. Introduced already in *The Yellow House on the Corner* in poems like “Nexus” and “Ö”, the idea of the house in relation to poetic creation is developed by Dove more than a decade later in *The Poet’s World* (1995), where her Poet Laureate lectures are included. Here, along with the extensive use of the house metaphor¹⁵ in Dove’s discussion of poetry, there is an analysis of several poems that deal with houses. Furthermore, especially in the autobiographical part of this volume, there are extensive descriptions of the rooms inhabited by the poet during different periods in her life, where the creation of her work took place. Dove proceeds with an analysis of the role the house plays in her work, where it becomes evident that for her the house is empowering and energizing.

Dove admits that in relating the house with poetic creation she was influenced by Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*. Beginning her first lecture with his statement “The houses that were lost forever continue to live on in us”, she explains how this in her case resulted in “a kind of poetic consciousness of occupied space — of the space we inhabit, of the shape of thought and the pressure of absence”(PW 15). “To inhabit space with thought”, Dove continues, “is analogous to the notion that language is the house we inhabit — a poet is someone who explores those spaces of sensual apprehension made inhabitable by vocabulary and syntax”(PW 17). And to illustrate further how interiors are externalized into poetry she quotes her favourite passage from *The Poetics of Space*:

Words — I often imagine this — are little houses, each with its cellar and garret. Commonsense lives on the ground floor, always ready to engage in “foreign commerce,” on the same level as the others, as the passers-by, who are never dreamers. To go upstairs in the word house, is to withdraw, step by step; while to go down to the cellar is to dream, it is losing oneself in the distant corridors of an obscure etymology, looking for treasures that cannot be found in words. To mount and descend in the words themselves — this is a poet’s life. To mount too high or descend too low, is allowed in the case of poets, who bring earth and sky together. (PW 18)¹⁶

¹⁵ That the house is the controlling metaphor in *The Poet’s World* becomes obvious in Prosser Gifford’s short preface in the volume, as he indicates the content of the two lectures: “She spoke of the double vision from the poet’s house, looking out to the world beyond the front and back doors and also within the house to her own creative experience” (7).

¹⁶ This passage is quoted twice in *The Poet’s World*, being included both in the first and in the second lecture (45-46).

This house of words enables the poet and the poem happens. It is thus the location where the poet dwells with thought during the creation of a poem but it is also the ingredient of the poem itself; each poem that has been created has its own “house of sound”(PW 18). Dove, accounting for a poem that came to her easily after a period of “concentration and continuity” in a rented house, claims becoming herself “living language — which is to say language was no longer a commodity to be traded but had become a reality to be lived out”(PW 50).

The house as physical site/space has heavily influenced Dove’s work, an influence she herself initially ignored. Its different spaces seem to have not merely been a source of inspiration, but a driving force, which settled in her poems in the form of metaphors. But Dove moves beyond a purely theoretical level and recognizes parallels between spaces occupied by imagination and real houses. The correspondence of a house in its physical dimensions to spaces inhabited by imagination, as they surface in her poetry, can be identified in terms of empowerment. This becomes explicit in a discussion of “the dynamics of inside versus the outside”(PW 19), where Dove explores the house and its compartments as having inspired, or directly made their way into her poems, as well as in the work of other poets. The house here actively intervenes, affects, or even becomes the catalyst in the creative process.

For example, Dove admits to have discovered the frequent occurrence of backyards in her work during a creative writing task she unknowingly prepared for her students.¹⁷ She consequently came to realize that she had imagined several of her poems to take place in backyards, with the presence of the backyard in the poem either explicit or implied. The immediate realization of her fascination around “occupied space”, was followed by the recognition of the concrete influence her childhood backyard had in her poetry: “The backyard that figures most prominently in my work is the one behind my parent’s house, the yard I could go into at any time as a child without supervision, where the outside was safe”(PW 19). The specific backyard with her father’s garden is the setting in “Adolescence —III”, where it “emerges as a place for confrontation. All the required elements of a psychic landscape — comfort and loss, suffocation and risk — come together in the struggle of enclosure versus exposure”(PW 21). From the poet’s perspective, the yard in the back of the house is associated with childhood; it is where the first step towards the world can be taken safely. Her introduction to the literary world later is to take the same direction, the first step being taken towards well-trodden and safe “domestic” ground. Dove confesses that in her early poetry she kept herself in the sheltered yard behind the house, exploring territory which was specific and familiar¹⁸ and venturing “only as far as the back half of the side yard”; but the backyard never ceases to exist in her imagination and she would still return to it there despite leaving it in actuality (PW 22), as she does in “A Father Out Walking on the Lawn”. Dove also mentions

¹⁷ She asked them to draw what they thought of when hearing the word *home*, then to draw their homes at the time. She finally asked them live with their drawings, “inhabit space with thought” for a week. Dove explains that the assignment was not consciously planned in advance; it was the result of the house having “risen again” in her (16-17).

¹⁸ In *The Given and the Made*, Helen Vendler claims that Dove’s first work is an attempt “to school herself in Black historical memory” (63). The volume has also been seen as concerned with the “movement from girlhood to womanhood” (Gates and McKay, *Notron Anthology*).

how she and a friend (a professor, photographer and mother), having spent days in her backyard trying to define an area to collaborate, finally realized that they are “right in the middle of it”(PW 28). Again, the poet is initially unaware of the largely influential role of the backyard: this part of the house that in the end proves to be so vital for her has originally constituted ordinary and taken for granted space.

The back door, the opening to the backyard, is for Dove undoubtedly one of the most significant parts of the house. Moreover, its function appears to be the most empowering: “When one uses the back door, one *pushes* the obstruction (i.e., the door or the screen) *forward* and steps out. As with a screen door, the opening is effortless — in fact, the barrier between exterior and interior is illusory, a grey space: already one can see the outside”(PW 23-24). This grey zone is significant in that it filtrates experience and constitutes a transparent barrier which allows a two way flow. What Dove acknowledges is the familiar and inviting “outside”: “the exterior sensations filter into the interior space, taking up residence in one’s storehouse of memories, becoming recollections of the outside. This sets up in me a peculiar state, one in which I am in two places at once and yet, curiously, not there at all”(PW 24). Similar to the illustrated images in Giovanni’s *My House*, (the window as the contact point where the inside does not simply interact with the outside but where the two are blurred), the back door contributes, according to Dove, to the creation of a moment “of ultimate possibility, and of ultimate irresponsibility.” And she continues: “Of course there is no absolute demarcation of the moment when *in* becomes *out*; indeed, one passes through a delicious sliding moment when one is *neither* in nor out but *floating*, suspended above the interior and exterior ground”(PW 24). The screen door opening to the backyard allows a kind of evasion of the inside when one is still physically in the interior of the house and encourages a smooth transmission to the outside since this is already part of the inside. In “Geometry” the properties of the screen door seem to apply also to windows, and even to ceilings and walls: “As the walls clear themselves of everything / but transparency, the scent of carnations leaves / with them. I am out in the open”(SP 17).

One would expect the front door, being the central and most legitimate entrance and exit point, would match the status of the back door as an empowering spot, but Dove does not privilege it equally; instead she perceives it as having a lesser status. She finds it to be “the threshold of propriety and solicitation”, where “[f]ear lies in wait” as well as the door through which the exit acquires a quality of finality: “When you exit through the front door of your family home, you are saying goodbye to a womb, you are about to sell yourself to the world. The wind that meets you is chilly”(PW 25). Because the front door is usually closed, and because it opens more directly to the perils of the street it is far less private and thus contributes to the creation of a state of uncertainty and insecurity that those standing by the door might experience:

Bad news arrives by telegram. Neighbors watching from the street witness incriminating domestic indiscretions. Death meanders through the streets while we crouch behind out front door, in retreat. . . . Fear enters the house. Fear is let in when we open he door, whether we step out or just look out to see what’s going on in the streets. What does it help to keep the door locked if you venture outside for a breath of fresh air, a bit of life? Can you count on making it back inside? (PW 26)

The contrast between the interior and the exterior is the sharpest at the front door and therefore the front door opening threatens the safety of the domestic milieu, part of which is indeed the back door and the backyard.

The polarity that Dove sees between the front and the back doors corresponds to the polarity she claims exists in the interior of the house with the living room in the front and the kitchen in the back. Dove expresses her fascination with the welcoming space of the kitchen as opposed to the sterile environment of the front room, which used to be preserved, permanently tidy, only for visitors. As with the backyard, she defines these two different parts of the house in relation to their availability to children, as well as in relation to whether they were frequented by women or not.¹⁹ From this perspective, the living room with its covered furniture “protected from wear and tear as if it were meant to endure forever” infuses false safety “the proud owners insisting on long-lasting interior values while the world outside, sometimes even the outside of the house itself, due to neglect, went from decrepit to dangerous”(PW 25) and is the least inviting part of the house. In contrast, the kitchen with the “warmth of the hearth” becomes “a place for conversation, for social intercourse, for oral history. It a place where the daughter, home from the wide world, can join her mother . . . and ‘Lean at the sink, listen to her chatter / while the pressure cooker ticks / *whole again whole again now*’”(“In the Old Neighborhood” 27). The kitchen in the back of the house then, which historically has always been seen as the legitimate place for women and the “proper place” for a black person to occupy in white people’s houses, ceases for Dove to be marginal and uninteresting. Being the meeting place for neighbours and for members of the family alike, it constitutes a public and private place. In its informal milieu all kinds of communications take place, making it “spiritually speaking, the source of nourishment and intimate communion as well as the repository for folklore and affairs of the soul”(PW 31). The kitchen, “that ancient haven for gossip and nourishment”(PW 48), functions as the spiritual core of the house and is the place with the most fertile ground for the cultivation of empowering relations, especially among women, who are the ones who frequent it.

In her lectures,²⁰ in pursuing her overriding argument about the need for American poets to reach out while retaining their inwardness, Dove relies heavily upon the discussion of the house as a metaphor. Clearly the position of the kitchen with its always-open door is in this perspective pivotal, since it is the kitchen where the connection to the self as well as to the empowering down-to-earth wisdom of the African American culture is made possible. Dove outlines a correspondence between a daughter leaving home and the poet who steps out to the world. She claims that “[w]hen a woman leaves the kitchen through the back door, she retains the interior life – that handful of intimacy – even while she moves away from her own mother’s life”(PW 28). At the same time she categorically points out that any “female or ethnic artist who eschews the kitchen completely also denies the positive anima of the

¹⁹ The forbidden front room territory and the lively environment of the kitchen where children receive food and comfort she views as anticipating “our reception into the world” (25). The image of the house interiors Dove explores here reflects that of suburban houses in the 1950s and 1960s. The writer confesses her interest in the way American life has been portrayed through TV series from that era (27-28) and marks the continuing influence of various contemporary TV programs (38).

²⁰ The titles of her lectures are “Stepping Out: the Poet in the World” (divided in two parts, “House and Yard” and “A Toe Over the Threshold”) and “A Handful of Inwardness: the World in the Poet”.

spiritual domicile — its privacy and intimacy, its down-to-earth gritudes and communal acceptance”(PW 32). She understands that recognition means entrance to the house by the front door, but warns against the difficulties it entails, which force the artists abandon the house and thus lose their soul.²¹

Dove recognizes the presence of the house in her work as in the work of other poets and explains that she keeps her focus on houses because she finds them to have been in different ways embodied in the American psyche (PW 41). But the physical presence of the house affects her and her poetic creation heavily even on another level. The empowering influence of the domestic sphere becomes evident in detailed descriptions of particular houses as well as extensive accounts of domestic routines and events that might easily be considered unimportant in a literary perspective. Both in her lectures and in the autobiographical part of *The Poet's World*, Dove marks the space in which she moves and her satisfaction or dissatisfaction with it. How appealing the room is and whether the writing process is successful are often interrelated. For Dove, who continuously refers to the houses or apartments where she has lived, the association of domestic space with creative production is unforced. An early version of *Through the Ivory Gate* is created in a rented house in Dun Laoghaire, Ireland, “in the ground floor dining room, peat fire at my back.” *The Yellow House on the Corner* is completed in a two-storey apartment with “whitewashed, light-filled arches and corridors” and windows with a view of the Old City of Jerusalem. In Berlin, different rooms entail different kinds of production: “In that cold ‘loaner’ apartment I wrote short stories in longhand into a red notebook; our oven-warmed room I reserved for writing many of the poems that would make up my second book, *Museum*”(PW 89-90). Along with a description of a rented house in France, and the particulars around their daily working schedule, Dove states: “In a temporary rental situation like ours, two weeks in a house we’d never seen before, two weeks we hoped to write, the strange new physical space and the mind must develop alliances that provoke imagination and creation”(PW 49). Yet the parameters within which creation takes place may be very concrete: after the dishes are washed, in the absence of a television and pinned to a seat because of fear of insects in the new house the poet starts to dream (PW 49-50).²² It is as if a kind of empowering transfusion takes place, of the concrete into the imaginary, as the mind evades the real house to move into the house of words.

VI

Giovanni and Dove understand and relate to the house in similar empowering terms, although they approach it from different perspectives. The house image constantly shifts from solid to elusive in shape as well as in location, from functioning as a

²¹ Dove is against controlling the streets at the price of one’s soul, which is an interesting remark, and especially relevant to Giovanni’s work as well, since Giovanni is one of the artists who controlled the streets and yet she never abandoned the kitchen.

²² This does not always necessarily succeed. In the Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio, Italy, which houses scholars and artists who instead of working are found strolling through the estate gardens the poet ends up simply drowsing or watching the goldfish in a pond (101-102).

metaphor to being used figuratively, allowing a range of dynamic combinations of meaning. As traditional homeplace, it might stand for origins, affirmation, safety, power of will, connection, love, but it also signifies, hope, freedom, inspiration, imagination and creation. Viewed as a site of which both departure and return stimulate and enhance successful commitment and creation, the house stands as an inexhaustible field of empowering possibility.

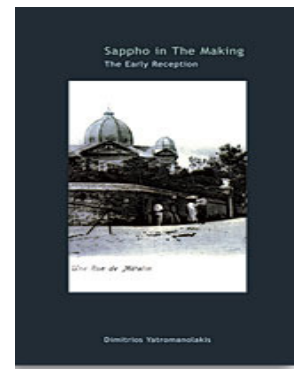
References

- Atwood, Margaret. "Paradoxes and Dilemmas, the Woman as Writer". Eagleton pp. 103-105.
- Collins Hill, Patricia. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. (New York: Routledge, 1990).
- Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000).
- Cook, Martha. "Nikki Giovanni: Place and Sense of Place in her Poetry". Inge pp. 279-300.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race and Class*. (New York: Random House, 1981).
- Dove, Rita. *Grace Notes*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989).
- Museum*. (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon, 1983).
- Selected Poems*. (New York: Vintage, 1993).
- The Poet's World*. (Washington DC: The Library of Congress, 1995).
- The Yellow House on the Corner*. (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon, 1980).
- Thomas and Beulah*. (Pittsburgh: Carnegie-Mellon UP, 1986).
- Through the Ivory Gate*. (New York: Vintage, 1993).
- Drake, Jane "Women and the Meaning of Home". Gilroy et. All, pp.11-30
- Eagleton, Mary, ed. *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996).
- Fowler, Virginia C. *Nikki Giovanni*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992).
- Gates, Henry Louis and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).
- Gilroy, Rose and Roberta Woods, eds. *Housing Women*. (London: Routledge, 1994).
- Giovanni, Nikki. *A Dialogue: James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni*. (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1973).
- Black Feeling, Black Talk/Black Judgement*. (New York: Morrow, 1970).
- Cotton Candy On A Rainy Day*. (New York: Morrow, 1978).
- Gemini: An Extended Autobiographical Statement on My First Twenty-Five Years of Being A Black Poet*. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971).
- Ed. *Grand Mothers: A Multicultural Anthology of Poems, Reminiscences, and Short Stories About the Keepers of Our Traditions*. (New York: Henry Holt, 1994).
- My House*. (New York: Morrow, 1972).
- Racism 101*. (New York: Morrow, 1994).
- Re: Creation*. (Detroit: Broadside Press, 1970).
- Sacred Cows . . . And Other Edibles*. (New York: Morrow, 1988).
- Selected Poems of Nikki Giovanni*. (New York: William Morrow, 1996).
- The Women and The Men*. (New York: Morrow, 1975).
- Hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. (Boston MA: South End Press, 1990).
- Inge, Tonnate Bond, ed. *Southern Women Writers: The New Generation*. (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1990).
- Juhasz, Suzanne. *Naked and Fiery Forms: Modern American Poetry by Women, A New Tradition*. (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976).
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. (London: Picador, 1988).
- Schneider, Steven. "Coming Home : An Interview with Rita Dove". (The Iowa Review 19:3 1989). Pp. 112-123.
- Stetson, Erlene, ed. *Black Sister: Poetry by Black American Women, 1746-1980*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1981).

Vendler, Helen. *The Given and the Made: Recent American Poets*. (London: Faber and Faber, 1995).
Walker, Alice. "Everyday Use". Washington pp. 78-90.
Washington, Mary Helen, ed. *Black-Eyed Susans: Classic Stories by and about Black Women*. (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1975).

short reviews

in praise of urning



Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, *Sappho in the Making: the Early Reception*,
Center for Hellenic Studies/ Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2007.

At its very best, classical scholarship offers an exemplary paradigm of reading for any literary scholar, and in particular, any poetry scholar; it produces readings that continually conjure with possibility for connectedness in the minute aspects of the text, and tends to resist narrative explanation as the ultimate aim of scholarship, instead showing a preparedness to admit that some textual problems should not, cannot, be resolved. Such minute attention then tends to uncover massive possibilities. Anne Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet*, for example, is not so much a book about Sappho, as a modestly-expressed but grandiose theory of all being and art. For Carson, reading Sappho is an exercise in living, not just identifying confusions and problems but embracing them as part of the vividness of the poetry. Carson does not perform the work of detecting the real Sappho for us, rather she writes about what it is like to read her, which is equivalent to saying that she writes about what it is to feel complicated in the face of art.

Carson's criticism is so fine because it is interested in the reality of her own reception, rather than in searching for an essential correctness with regard to the meaning of the text. In a book that is VERY different to Carson's classic, not least in its adoption of a very different range of methodologies, Dimitrios Yatromanolakis has produced what may nevertheless prove to be an equally powerful achievement in its

impact on the reception of Sappho's work; in *Sappho in the Making*, he sets about the work of ethnographic and anthropological reconstruction to attempt to recreate the context of Sappho's early reception, and also to understand how she herself was reconstructed in that process. Yatromanolakis is not interested in what has become a commonplace of Sappho Studies, the thorough reconstruction of her own performance, because it is nonsense to even attempt to do so. It is an impossible task unless you are in the double business of mythicization and simplification.

In the year 5000, a critic might set about pondering the significance of Elvis Presley not by regarding the remnants of the first verse of "Hound Dog" in isolation, but instead by looking at it along with a range of representations of him performing (commemorative plates from the Franklin Mint, an old VHS of the 1968 Comeback Special, a poster advertising a Sikh Elvis impersonator in Vegas). This will be a precarious business, but the best interpretative option, producing as many Elvises as there are reproductions of him. Similarly (kind of), Yatromanolakis puts together a version of Sappho not only from the shards of her poems, but also by exhaustive and forensic observation of the paintings on vases in late archaic, classical, and early Hellenistic culture that represented her and commemorated her after her death. These pots invariably contain images of performance, and sometimes show Sappho performing alone or accompanied; taken together, they confirm Sappho as a figure in dispute in antiquity, a product of the contrariness of renderings of her own historical context. Others have made a virtue of Sappho as a problem, but they tend to do so by representing her as an empty space, a blank page. Yatromanolakis instead shows us an early history crowded with images and perceptions of Sappho.

Sappho in the Making has acquired tremendous scholarly mass by the time it concludes, but on occasion this does rather forsake argumentative momentum, not least in the theoretical and self-reflexive repetitions of the opening three hundred pages. Chapter Two alone lasts one hundred and ten pages, which makes you think of how Henry James would have written if he had been an enthusiast for pots. But this should be taken as a compliment, because the high seriousness of Yatromanolakis is so persuasive, not least because it is so unrelenting. Sappho is less "fun" here than she has been in many other contemporary renderings, but she also enjoys tremendous gravity, and Yatromanolakis uses phrases that you know you will begin to use yourself when an occasion affords it (however unlikely): "performative trafficability", "textual plasticity", for example. Even as this book may appear forbidding to the non-classicist, its meticulous stitching together of various reception-cultures means that it provides a very radical rebuke to the cliché that Sappho is available for inscription by any old myth or innuendo; instead, it insists that "Sappho" is a highly complicated text, one that is both historical and mythical, with all the lively messiness which that implies. This becomes acutely and powerfully clear in the brief chapters that conclude the book. Very productively, too, Yatromanolakis exposes the shortcomings of other tendencies in Sappho scholarship, such as the effective consensus that persists about her mass popularity in antiquity and early Christianity, in both curriculum and symposium. The implication has been that if she is not established in our minds as a popular artist, then she will not enjoy any legitimacy with us; and so in recent reception, Sappho MUST have been a Madonna, or at least a Patti Smith or a Joni Mitchell, for her time. Yatromanolakis argues that this must not necessarily be so, and he also tactfully and tactically refuses to be

drawn into making any essentialistic claims about what she might be instead. In a particularly elegant formulation, he refers to this temptation: “Even today, the study of Greek antiquity remains haunted by the methodological Siren of intentional fallacy.”(33) In this intrepid enterprise moving from pot to pot, Yatromanolakis deafens himself to that call, immersing himself in the fragmentation inherent in the work of interpretation, and producing a restlessly profound book that never loses its appetite for reading Sappho as a problem.

michael hinds

forthcoming

Reviews are forthcoming in POST II and III of the following titles, amongst others:

Geoffrey Hill: Collected Critical Writings (OUP)

Philip Coleman and Philip McGowan (eds), *After Thirty Falls: Critical Essays on John Berryman* (Rodopi)

Philip Coleman (ed), *Literature and Science* (Four Courts Press)

Thayil, Jeet (ed), *The Bloodaxe of Contemporary Indian Poets*

Joan Shelley Rubin, *Songs of Ourselves* (Harvard)

Herbert F. Tucker, *Epic: Britain's Epic Muse 1790-1910* (OUP)

If you would like to offer your services as a reviewer for POST, please contact Michael Hinds, providing a short CV, at: michael.hinds@materdei.dcu.ie

notes on contributors

ana margarida abrantès studied German and English at the Universities of Aveiro, Essen and Innsbruck. MA in cognitive linguistics, PhD in German language and literature, special field of cognitive poetics (dissertation: *Meaning and Mind: A Cognitive Approach to Peter Weiss' Prose Work*.) As a post-doctoral scholar supported by the Portuguese research foundation FCT, she is currently visiting researcher at the Department of Cognitive Science of Case Western Reserve University, US.

aoileann ni eigeartaigh is a lecturer in the Department of Humanities, Dundalk Institute of Technology. Recent publications include *Rethinking Diasporas: Hidden Narratives and Imagined Borders* (with Kevin Howard and David Getty, eds.) GB: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007; and *Borders and Borderlands in Contemporary Culture* (with David Getty) GB: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2006. She is currently co-editing a volume entitled *Transcultural Personalities* (Frankfurt: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009.)

kit fryatt lectures in English at the Mater Dei Institute of Education. She has published work on Irish, British and American poetry and is currently working on a monograph on Austin Clarke.

michael hinds is Head of English and Humanities in Mater Dei Institute, Dublin, and is co-ordinator of the Irish Centre for Poetry Studies there.

john hobbes teaches modern Irish literature at Oberlin College in Ohio. He has published various articles on Irish poetry and fiction and directed five study abroad semesters in Dublin. A book on Joyce's use of dialogue is in the works.

maria johnston is a lecturer in Trinity College Dublin and Mater Dei Institute of Education. She is a regular reviewer of contemporary poetry for various magazines. *High Pop; The Irish Times Column of Stewart Parker*, which she co-edited with Gerald Dawe, was published by Lagan Press in 2008.

aine kelly studied English and Philosophy at Trinity College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast. Currently finishing her Ph.D. at the University of Nottingham, her thesis engages with the philosophical style of Wallace Stevens, Stanley Cavell and Richard Rorty. An unlikely trio to bring into dialogue, but they're great friends now.

candice lemaire teaches at the University of Toulouse, France. She is currently writing a PhD dissertation on Robert Frost, and more particularly on the notion of identity in his work.

ira lightman wanted to be a vicar. He is now a poet who makes Public Art, mainly in the north-East of England. View more of his work at www.iralightman.com. His most recent book is *Duet cetera* (2008).

maria proitsaki was born in Greece and received her B.A. from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, and is writing a thesis which examines the works of Nikki Giovanni and Rita Dove.

COMING SOON

POST II

POETRY AND EDUCATION

edited by Kit Fryatt

To be notified of all the activities of The Irish Centre for Poetry Studies
at Mater Dei, contact Michael Hinds to be placed on our electronic
mailing list: michael.hinds@materdei.dcu.ie

www.irishcentreforpoetrystudies.materdei.ie

