

EDITORS' NOTES

send books for review, notification of publication, poems prose criticism investigative journalism etc. to:

K Sutherland & A Brady, Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge CB2 1TA ENGLAND
<http://www.barquepress.com> or kms20@cam.ac.uk

BOOKS RECEIVED

Martin Corless-Smith. *of the Universe The way things are On the Nature of things The Nature of and being by Lucretius Incorporating Marginalia*. Phoenix, AZ: 811 Books, 1999. [see A. Brady's review]
Andrew Duncan. *Krakel Kake-Ugn*. Cambridge, UK: Barque Press, 1999.
Peter Gizzi. *Add This To The House*. Cambridge, UK: Equipage, 1999.
Trevor Joyce. *Without Asylum*. Bray, Eire: Wild Honey Press, 1998.
Peter Manson. *Birth Windows*. Cambridge, UK: Barque Press, 1999.
Kevin Nolan. *All Over Susan*. Cambridge, UK: Barque Press, 1999.
Keston Sutherland. *Scratchcard Sally-Ann*. Buffalo, NY: nominative press collective, 1999.
Catherine Wagner. *Fraction Anthems*. Phoenix, AZ: 811 Books, 1999. [see A. Brady's review]

Letter to Kent

7/12/99

Dear Kent,

I went to Library, Ltd. and read *The City in Which I Love You* by Li-Young Lee (Barns in Ignoble only had *A Rose*) and took some notes on it. First off, I want to say, before I even get to the poetry, as the inside of the back cover revealed, Lee is in no way NOT an academic poet (maybe you didn't say he wasn't, but others — like Richard Newman, editor of the St. Louis-based magazine *River Styx* — seem to use him as an example of non-academic poetry): studied at U. of Pittsburgh, U. of Arizona, and the State U. of NY at Brockport; taught at Northwestern and U. of Iowa; grants from Illinois Arts Council, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Council of the Arts, the NEA, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Mrs. Giles Whiting Foundation, NYU's Delmore Schwartz Memorial Poetry Award, and the Lamont Poetry Award from the Academy of American Poets. That he or his publisher must list all of these credentials should tell you something. The theory that second-generation immigrants (Lee was born in Indonesia to Chinese parents and moved to the U.S. when he was a child) are bound to produce a radical poetry because they must adapt to the foreignness of English (as Stein, Zukofsky, and Williams had to) is totally disproved by Lee's writing. Lee does everything right according to his contemporary academic models, all of which he undoubtedly picked up via the university workshop.

You should probably read my take on Walcott before this — it basically says what I will repeat here. Both Walcott and Lee write about being outsiders, aliens in a foreign land (the perfect, most handy paradigm for the poet in the modern world), about suffering from alienation. But their language does not live up to this truth and thus reeks of a certain pose and, yes, gimmickry. The result of such writing is that it reproduces the alienation, wallows in it, and does this precisely, I would argue, in order to extend the poetry. One moves not closer to the object, to the truth, but away from it (Jorie Graham is a master of this as are Ashbery and Stevens, though these latter two do something salvageable and extraordinary with the language). In a way Lee's poetry mimics that trajectory of immigration. Your theory about the epic drive of Lee's poetry and others is right — the poems become a quest for a meaning they already know they won't obtain and this is their meaning, a kind of negative capability gone awry. Like a lot of language poetry this kind of writing can give us nothing to hold onto — I just read Graham's *The End of Beauty* and you should count how many times she uses the words "hold" and "holding" — it's like someone writing about their (love for their) own writer's block, the space of the page filled with that search for what will fill it, which is maybe why people identify so much with it. Nothing escapes the author's impressionistic pathos in such writing; the author can't really decide what's happening in his or her world and yet remains implanted at its center solid as ever. If we have anything to hold onto it is often merely the fact that we know the author is attempting to describe some painfully true story.

The first poem in Lee's book, 'Furious Versions' is one such attempt to represent this world through the author's psyche and the self through the outside world. The poem is a boring recitation of

identity: "These days I waken in the used light / of someone's spent life, to discover / the birds have stripped my various names of meaning." The basic thrust of the poem is 'am I me?' (or just my father's, the towering and now dead minister's, son), a question he already knows the answer to, as in 'yes, I am myself, the writer of this poem' (there's the poem called 'Here I Am' in the book): "I wait / in a blue hour / and faraway noise of hammering / and on a page a poem begun something / about to be dispersed, / something about to come into being." A well-composed flow of shit and yet he can say midway with total honesty: "and I confuse / the details." But that's only part one. There's more of "I walk the halls as if the halls / of that other / mansion, my father's heart." A series of vague scenes with a door that jumps and the necessary romantic landscape where "dark poplars toss, insinuate the sea" and "something forbids me to speak / of them in this / upheaval of forms and / voices." Between the narcissism of this unrelenting self-referentiality (i.e. 'I can only say I can't say much else') and the equally obsessive investigation of language poetry into its own adorable mediumship and materiality, I don't know which makes me more nauseous: "It goes and it goes on, / the ceaseless inventing incessant / constructions and deconstructions/ of shadows over blank grass, / while, overhead, poplars / rock and nod"... it's a tie.

Lee's writing is full of explanation (remember we talked about this) and banal abstraction — as in the lifeless statement "my body is estrangement" (on page 50 I think) — and humorless hyperbole: "Blinded, I knew the day / of fierce judgement and rapture / had come. I thought / even the dooryard rose / touched by wind, trembling / in anticipation"... . This is not the same as Lorca's duende, it is more like the opposite of duende, that sweet geometry the duende cannot help but smash: "But there are neither maps nor exercises to help us find the duende. We only know that he burns the blood like a poultice of broken glass, that he exhausts, that he rejects all the sweet geometry we have learned, that he smashes styles, that he leans on human pain with no consolation" "the duende's arrival always means a radical change in forms"(In Search of Duende 51,53). More explanation on top of explanation: "But sea-sound differs from the sound of trees: / it owns a rhythm, almost / a meaning, but / no human story, / and so is like / the sound of trees, / tirelessly building / as wind builds, rising" "But I am a human story, / whose very telling / remarks loss." Lee would never smash his own speech or let it be smashed. (A good example of an alternative to Lee — work by an Asian-American immigrant that bears, literally, the mark of its own alienation or loss, rather than trying to make it into its muse — would be Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's Dictee: "Words cast by each to weather / avowed indisputably, to time. / If it should impress, make fossil trace of word, / residue of word, stand as ruin stands, / simply, as mark / having relinquished itself to time to distance"(177)).

Lorca and Lee may be writing about the same things but their poems are a world apart. Lee has to write "I'll tell once and for all / how someone lived" to remind or convince himself of his position as teller and writer. For Lorca this is unnecessary accoutrement, he's already in the midst of the telling, the living, the dying. Lee's poetry remains firmly on the side of the muse (read 'The Waiting' on page 61: "Now between your eyes / furrows shine"... "What, I wonder" does it mean?), the muse being his dead father (or some other relative), the supreme lost object which he must mourn in order to find himself in relation to the death that gives him his poetic life: "Here, I stand among my father's roses / and see that what punctures outnumbers what / consoles, the cruel and the tender never / make peace, though one climbs,

though one descends / petal by petal to the hidden ground / no one owns, I see that which is taken / away by violence or persuasion"(from 'Arise, Go Down'). Whatever "that" is he never shows or gives us, a delay which produces a modicum of mesmerizing (a word Helen Vendler used in her blurb on the back of Graham's beauty book — a "mesmerizing American voice") suspense for the reader, enough to sustain interest I guess: "it had something to do / with death ... it had something / to do with love."

In the majority of Lee's poems the poet becomes both voyeur and exhibitionist (not a bad thing in itself if it made the poetry more exciting, more of a risk to be taken — naked poetry stripped of its pose, the mind stripped of its rose), half-participating in the world he is writing and fleeing from and trying to mourn, a distressed observer describing others in order to only sketch for us his own pain. The poem becomes a theater for frustrated attempts at self-revelation (Vendler, again approvingly, makes comment of the "stage-set instructions" in Graham's verse): "the world's / beginnings are obscure to me, its outcomes / inaccessible. I don't understand / the source of starlight, or starlight's destinations." (Graham produces a similar statement: "it is the horror, Destination"(43) comparable to Lee's ontological stance: "that / tooth-ache, the actual"). Graham gives us a metaphysics (of errors, not unlike Joan Retallack's work) in love with itself; Lee an image of loss (partly a loss of metaphysics in the form of the religious figure of his father) in love with itself. Both make straining for some kind of meaning into their primary poetic effect and then strain toward some half-assed acceptance of this inability to mean: "Oh you will come to it, you two down there / where the vines begin, you will come to it, / the thing towards which you reason, the place where the flotsam / of the meanings is put down / and the shore / holds." (Can you guess which writer? Graham, *End of Beauty*, 9).

Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double* supplies an interesting angle by which to view and criticize poetry like Graham's and Lee's, a poetry which has become the kind of psychological, bourgeois theater Artaud so wanted to demolish. Let me set down some quotes from his book:

"An idea of theater has been lost. And as long as the theater limits itself to showing us intimate scenes from the lives of a few puppets, transforming the public into Peeping Toms, it is no wonder the elite abandon it and the great public look to movies, the music hall or the circus for violent satisfactions, whose intentions do not deceive them.

At the point of deterioration which our sensibility has reached, it is certain that we need above all a theater that wakes us up: nerve and heart (84).

"Admittedly or not, conscious or unconscious, the poetic state, a transcendent experience of life, is what the public is fundamentally seeking through love, crime, drugs, war, or insurrection (122).

"If our life lacks brimstone, i.e. constant magic, it is because we choose to observe our acts and lose ourselves in considerations of their imagined form instead of being impelled by their force (8).

"Our petrified idea of the theater is connected with our petrified idea of a culture without shadows, where, no matter which way it turns, our mind (esprit) encounters only emptiness, though space is full (12)."

While one may disagree with the particularities of Artaud's argument (e.g. the mass spectacle of movies being just as bad as the theater or his simplistic call for a return to mythic forms and so forth), his desire to get rid of the dross of culture and get back to what is essential in life, in art, and to make out of this struggle the artwork itself, is indisputable. This impulse — the one which animates so many pages of that pagan book *Moby Dick* and perhaps provoked Olson to embark on a somewhat Ahabian quest for the primitive roots of language and poetry — is nowhere to be found in between the covers of Graham's and Lee's works. In fact, their poems seem to enact the death of that impulse over and over again by taking us farther away from life into foggier and foggier realms which are nonetheless mapped out as the author's selves: "I am that last, that / final thing, the body / in a white sheet listening, // the whole of me trained, / curled like one great ear on / a sound, a noise I know, a // woman talking / in another room, / the woman I love, and"... (from 'A Final Thing'). I don't think I've read a poem that takes its own debasement as anal-retentively as 'The City in Which I Love You.' Lines like "the inverted fountain in which I don't see me" and "stick in me the unaccountable fire, / bring on me the iron leaf, but tenderly" and "it's only because I'm famished / for meaning" and "your otherness is perfect as / my death" immediately remind me of Morrissey's masochistic spin moves minus the humor which allows him to mock his own (and other's) anxieties and desires (so that he can then fail beautifully at being a proper masochistic). As Marjorie Perloff remarks in *Wittgenstein's Ladder* in reference to Stein's satire of the Italian futurist Marinetti, "she does not, as the more familiar satirist would, belittle her subject by exposing his foibles or mocking his pretensions. Rather, she stages the subject's self-exposure"(105). In the same way, Morrissey parodies entirely without sarcasm, without distance and is thus able to sing from a variety of social positions. Contrarily, 'The Cleaving' repeats the same drawn-out epic 'am I me?' structure as the other poems and could not be written if the author did not see his resemblance in the face of the butcher or imagine himself as the animal that the butcher is slaughtering, all the while remaining separate: "Did the animal, after all, at the moment / its neck broke, / image the way his executioner / shrinks from his own death? / Is this how / I, too, recoil from my own day?" "Was it me in the Other / I prayed to when I prayed?"

If such lines were converted into dialogue for the theater we would see clearly how lame and unmoving they are and yet this passes for good poetry in our day. Despite its unprofessed desire not to, this kind of poetry speaks (only) for itself. If it does deliver any of the "violent satisfactions" Artaud mentions, it is perhaps by providing a site where we can partake in and witness ourselves, through the author's subjectivity, never attaining satisfaction, thereby reassuring ourselves that we are not alone in our own atomized helplessness and desire. But that's what rock n' roll songs are for, right?

Yours,

Dave

Lullaby

miraculous umbilical
dough emblem
a shudder
in the beset of hives
the gill infant still slick

& soufflé bone
appealingly
harmonised / toot toot
in the fecund ape
petunia agape / astir

in shunting house
or fluffer for smithies
as is all bothering
for quits in or nil on
flakes as licks in the seed

of all eyes raised ruin
having as eased an ill sense
inevitably lolling
all forage tuned
all forge in the burn ago

due to gall to pepper fuel
instead of lungs eschewing
blown mud eared
under wrinkles
& lemon rales / pancreatic

so huddled in circles still
as polish in the ridge
begins a nodule / a cell
for foam elects on spasm
in ice canker a shuck

it is sheer of some
as of old wishes / ripe to child
wishes in the wash as
stone upon stone / a care
caving in for the lip up

a reduction
leastwise veered off
in adorning blameless mud
slow perpetual sea
vermillion roost of scuds

KESTON SUTHERLAND'S MINCEMEAT SEESAW

A sing-song title double-stresses the to-and-fro which marks these poems' comings and goings; but their swaying is both more than hypnotic and less than reassuring. In fact, the more these poems are read, the more disparate they seem, and the more they too oscillate, between a lyrical purchase which is nothing short of sweet and a gazumping ambition which wishes to constantly renegotiate at higher levels of risk.

Tim Morris, in addressing *Mincemeat Seesaw*, noted approvingly the collection's 'defamiliarising shrug which lacks a strict theoretical foundation'. The shrug not only declares a lack of interest in dogmatism of any kind, but sloughs off all attempts to grab hold; one poem may declare,

I wanted to capture the whole world,
to be what will coerce

but the looseness of the address consistently rules out of play any neat nutshells, such as a bracketing with Olsonian process, or a wished-for catch-all poetry of totalities.

In fact, for a poetry of such dexterity, it is often surprisingly ready to allow moments of congealment and a more threatening concreteness to its various pronouns. The 'I' seems to gather more moss than we might expect it to in poetry of what we shall laughingly call this sort: it leaps out at us in moments of ridiculous candour, but not so ridiculous that we can simply chalk it up to irony, or a coquettish toying with lyric assets long since sold off:

I, Keston Sutherland, am from the royal dale...

The 'contentless anxiety' which is the poetry's frequent concern is first felt as the anxiety of an 'I' which has content, if not contentment; an 'I' kin, perhaps, to that of some of Drew Milne's earlier work, saving a moment of lyric directness to salve its pains 'I am aid pack, cash-crop and pearl mint tax heaven,' etc.).

Lyricism is precisely what flits in and out of this hived-off materiel, much of which is reassuringly demotic. Morris suggests that beautiful images here are 'usually encountered at the moment the poet bids them farewell,' but the putative kiss-off seems far away when the poetry stoops to conquer:

waved her fingers as he left
through to same pattern wanted too
much be casual she
whispered goodbye put
aside for an ambition
there was an appeal a precept a by credit-transfer it did
not fail
her life which
day speeds by most
gradually would you say by waved her emptied
fingers for the level
evening, it had run
as glue in acid his shadow speeds by and by

grades dissembles she
 stands alone, and in her door
 way is placated, waving
 bloke shut up nothing is not shattered
 less than less
 life down flat at hold fast as a spare rung
 set her
 eyes run over, as he sped by
 waving back and sighing

It is as much a question of what the poetry allows us here as what Morris earlier suggests it allows itself. Untypical perhaps, its bungs us the pleasurable pathos of a none-more-lyric moment almost intact –squint, and it could almost be a Movement poem. It solicits a reading, at least evanescently, which could run together form and content, perhaps pinned on ‘wanted too/much be casual’: like her farewell, the poem registering the strain of keeping up the jaunty motion. Waving fingers (note: not hand) are *prima facie* a felicitous lyric metaphor, playing off the inappropriateness of such a casual gesture against the self-conscious lack of a semaphore adequate to a real parting. (Is he going to jail, as ‘appeal... precept... bloke shut up’ might suggest?) That the poem does not rest in such common-currency bathos is perhaps what Morris means by his own notion of farewell, but where next?

Wherever it might be, the getting is clearly still good: what Keston says, goes. If these poems cannot be bracketed as interested in process *per Se*, there is nevertheless a play on the sense of ‘seesaw’ in the way that the present recedes into the past in a movement no more hyphenated or divisible than the word itself, as what is registered proves to be what is already redundant:

To evade cinereous ice which cut
 back repro were they set
 up for retraversing as
 if incomparably or mute her
 skips a beat, recall it were the attached
 remit-plaudition to faded
 trust to appear refreshed, her for
 skips back put allayed in
 stantial, should there ever be
 come back as a choice, now I adore
 her will not be remote fast to
 hide which cut
 remark that, age of my stray through honey
 suckle and flaring
 rayon to put undercut said probate retrans
 mission to sink
 a fortune, angelic edicts scattered and bent
 on a rise in fine
 mind and clemency set up put tract
 able to sigh scoured fire, wink
 out at her, grazing
 her wrists, on ice:

The last gesture is momentarily reassuring, all this heterogeneous speed and rebounding put ‘on ice’; but even this period is provisional, as the colon bleeds us into the next poem/stanza, so we are already

subject to revision. Re-vision being the very motion of the seesaw itself, a repetition and a restoration: a perpetual motion which is also an eternal recurrence, recorded, even in this first poem of the collection, by a prosody which 'skips back'. That revision suggests the possibility of agency and change too is the only thing that prevents motion sickness.

Mincemeat Seesaw is not new-ground in the way that it seeks to sick-up the pre-processed suffering of a world whose callousness is disguised by repetition of types (...register yet another / dying bootless nigger'). What differentiates it from other poetries of reified jargon is the really fierce lyrical moment, a poetry which takes all this personally, even if its full sense remains too fleet to be called polemic:

another light show and Israeli avocado
 in the morning my life
is a cunt how are you
 go Chirac go
off the boil as I do...

The 'contentless anxiety' has two implications: negatively, it suggests the fungibility –perhaps especially due to language's strained resources –of all the objective causes of such anxiety (whether 'a blustering, real famine it is', or 'our heavy our cruise our barrage') ;but it also suggests the residue of involvement, the sense that the farewell from the world at large is not final, that what is passing us by nevertheless concerns us urgently ('days speed by most / gradually would you say by...'). One fine poem seems particularly alive to the spectacle of 'real death':

 it is a robust world, and such
a robust earth and not afire, pivoted
 nowhere to stare
out magnificently, and with a roaring glaze
 at daylight which robustly
inward cannot fall, nor ever shall my heart,
 it is too robust were a face
off either to trap in to pincer by, yet my own great
 dread should not ever fail, I have far
too nerve for this, it is yet ever rancid default
 intransigence and to floods out
far to cheapen real death even laced
 in brain with piss coke-mash not a word breaks
near to even against this I ever will
 pivot to stare and collide
with nothing afire, we must never triumph,
 you must never either

The first lines seem to reference *The Day The Earth Caught Fire*, in which a nuclear test throws the earth off its axis, only to note that for this 'robust' earth no such apocalypse seems likely: rather than the world's fate and ours conjoining, fate seems to be setting us apart. What is 'pivoted/nowhere' is equally the subject estranged from his putative place in the Heideggerean 'world' and Hoelderlin-derived 'earth'; the 'roaring glaze', as in so many of these poems, marks out a productive disgust behind the veneer of eyes glazed with ennui a glaze which perhaps slips to 'glares', to accommodate 'at daylight which robustly /

inward cannot fall'. Rage stares impotently out, rootless, at the home it cannot find, not even shining forth in the daylight of Being. Yet the 'heart' too cannot slip 'inward', tied to this exoteric robustness it cannot yet touch. Falling back on 'yet ever rancid default / intransigence', the ineffable 'contentless' state which is nevertheless oriented towards what tries to move it, the poem edges toward a kind of fatalism which the collection as a whole skirts: 'not a word breaks / near to even against this...

If inlay never quite catches up with outlay, however, the poem's recognition of its negative moral equity may colour its striking final lines: the 'we' and the 'you' look like cast-offs from more formal categorical imperatives, a warning that this is no rallying cry. The words, however, continue to break like surf against the rocks of ideology. These poems are, as one of them puts it, 'timing a gag in the dark' – and, as Drew Milne noted in these very pages, 'a good laugh means never having to say get it?'

I laughed a little, I'm not sure I got it, but enough to be getting on with; and, although what made my heart sing a little seems to have come to pieces in my waving fingers, it will come back to me:

 must
set make the whole
 stop must I hurt get
world captive with your option but have not turned
 in time...

As wags have long observed: there's no saying stop I want to get off.

new forest

Come the underlight a truth
fall ashen on
quartz and logging road

alchemical derrivants pulp
not blueblack not trauerspiel
to graft to call establish

give while blood
aspects of this repeat
and draw in charges.

THREE REVIEWS ♦ Wagner ♦ Corless-Smith ♦ Morris

Cathy Wagner's *Fraction Anthems* and Martin Corless-Smith's *of the Universe...* have recently been published by 811 Books' new poetry series in Phoenix, AZ. Though the books with their midnight-blue banners arrived together, as their authors probably would, the enclosed texts are ambitiously different. Both are available from Joshua Beckman, YMCA (Writer's Voice), 350 North First Avenue, Phoenix AZ 85003 USA or at joshuabeckmann@mindspring.com. Tim Morris's *Diagnostic*, of which Clinical Events is the first nine poems, is (let's declare at the outset) a Barque production. We chose it because we liked it, but I hope never to have liked it only because we chose it.

I. FRACTION ANTHEMS. CATHY WAGNER (811 BOOKS 1999)

There are twenty-one Fraction Anthems with twenty-one notes 'constructed by passing my social security number through Fraction Anthems'. The notes are fractional representations of the Anthems, representing the poet at two removes both as her identifying number and her identifying written mark. Each diminutive poem takes up no more than an 18 cm page and a half, the shortest (number 12) being only three lines long. The texture Wagner constructs within this small but ample space resembles not the homogeneity of mosaic fractions, but the childish ingenuity of scrapbooks, fingerpaint, and the grown-up collage of Rauschenberg.

Each of the 21 poems is a fraction, and its lines are fractions. The total sequence is a parade of scraps and inedibles torn up, as if in the aftermath of a big Wagnerian stomper, whose low notes and dirges have been lost in Cathy's unsinkable glee. Individual lines scatter the fractional sentiments around the page, sometimes going queasy as in no. 11:

	crotch here		crotch here
front	front	front	front
down (feet)	down	down (feet)	down
back	back	back	back

The poet tumbles around in a state of lyric intoxication, or in the delirium of knock-kneed infancy. For the happy incoherences which are the poems' constitutive principle resemble the linguistic experiments of a baby just beginning to master tonics and diction. Wagner uses the forgettable adjectives which dribble throughout our common speech – 'nice' 'fun' 'good' 'funny' – with a delectation which more or less restores their capacity to record delight. Rhymey cadences croon to and charm her: 'Still asleep in it, honey, | asleep in the bunny.' She mucks up her verbal agreements, and uses the basic imperatives with which an adult speaker might secure a child's cooperation: 'Then Martin sit in the car with Chris'. Her simple phrases are freshened by the possibility of immediate notice and relation, as if no ordering mental grammar organises necessary facts into proper speech. The *Anthems* honour those miniature adventures which constitute the everyday, without lapsing into a petty and plaguey domesticity: no. 12 tells

Got out of the car and sang my tendons out, licky happy
Laughed at my own joke and got a bloody nose
Pimply and shiny from work

Many of the adventures are erotic – ‘under blanket lovegrubb | nice girl,’ or ‘I lift your little skirt but you have leggings on’ (4) or her urging the child to masturbate in number 13 –

veer toward homosexuality which maintains
air of naughtiness also toward
children touch child
touch your own bud wrongly

But the trace of the childlike in these adult moments is not accidental. By their renewable innocence the *Fraction Anthems* celebrate sex’s ability to surprise. This isn’t vamp sex, or dirty sex, but homely and lovely sex for someone whose

Big ol chest, mine, sit by refrigerator,
sleep mouth open, funny. Here minus.
Here he mine come smile.

Similarly, the reappearance of friends occasions a jubilation and forgetfulness like Freud’s tiny patient when the spool rolled back in his *fort-da* game: in no. 7 baby at the window watches

Lady, gets on the bus
red away

while no. 8 sees the return past

paint mucked all round the window edges,
bus gone by
no Martin. 2 tiny red bugs
cross the white swoosh. Martin!

Futurity is fractioned by patience and expectation, but the fractions which survive the totality of the past are those of partial memory. Wagner worries about forgetting her dinner customer’s orders – ‘I’m sure I forgot somebody’s water | I forgot that old man’s side of thousand’ [island salad dressing] (6) or ‘I clench my cupful I forgot about my cupful’ - because non-selective, unpleasant memory is the responsibility of adult reason. It is not surprising therefore that she commemorates those fractions of childish memory as in number 16:

I was how old I was

exiting theater fear throng

man alone next me

the striped one stinky under arms

what he want

so dumb movie alone

This approached woman

I tonally split

Here we see how repetitive play attempts to control danger (as in the fort-da game). The woman's defensive instinct (on leaving the theatre, the play-house of fiction) must split tonally from the child's excited curiosity. Paradoxically, the child's vulnerability, and the ignorance that ornaments her charmingly naïve observations, require the protection of adult physical power and rationality against some of the elements of her inquiry: the bad man, 'a massive doghead poked in the ajar' or in 4

Little shine, you are grown
I don't know what you are, significance, bled hand
In Idaho, dumpling in the dark, frisson, we fought.

The mysterious 'shine,' grown into unidentifiability, both has and lacks significance; it has both the cute weight of a dumpling, and the dark symbolism of a bleeding hand consequent perhaps to a fight.

While a fraction is a portion whose mathematical properties the child must learn to manipulate in concert with other such portions, it is also a breakage, damaging the whole. In the *Anthems*, that breakage separates the self from the preconditions of knowledge and perceptibility – as well as the separating the self from others. 'I am a tells lies | Head chopped off' Wagner writes in Anthem 13 with a vague reference to Joyce's developing literary consciousness in the *Portrait*. Wagner associates the fictive impulse with punitive threats. She internalises the incrimination directly; grammatically the verbal phrase becomes a predicate nominative, or handsome is as handsome does.

Thus, while *Fraction Anthems* glitters with mild and often callow play, it does not miss the hazards which play strives to master by repetition and proportion. This is not to say that Wagner's poems are perfect cuties. If read in the wrong mood – that is without a desire to pamper the poet's swell worldlet – they could seem more annoying than artful. But her carefree cadence is achieved in a state of risk which is too often missing from the bland consonance of other notable divas of playfulness.

II. A BRIEF CRITIQUE OF THE UNIVERSE THE WAY THINGS ARE ON THE NATURE OF AND BEING BY LUCRETIOUS INCORPORATING MARGINALIA BY MARTIN CORLESS-SMITH (811 BOOKS 1999)

[NB: This review, having been prepared in bad haste, will refer to Lucy Hutchinson's flawed translation of a highly corrupt manuscript of *De Rerum Natura* (it's what we had at home), ed. Hugh de Quehen, London: Duckworth, 1996, rather than the translation, presumably also early modern, from which Corless-Smith excerpted his poem.]

Corless-Smith's fragmentation of Lucretius has very different aims from Wagner's fractions. These poems work to unearth in a conventionally 'lyrical' language the talismans of a poetics of estrangement. Unlike Wagner's clever grabs for bits of contemporary idiom, Corless-Smith endorses the distance of his source text with a deliberately, if only occasionally, antiquated translation: 'sea water bitter brine | robes the Orient,' one tosses 'under figured counterpanes,' 'It raves on atide,' while frost is not 'begotten' in fire. That estrangement in some ways validates Lucretius, who dresses his speculations in epic and mythic ornaments to certify their revelatory truth. It is notable that Corless-Smith primarily appropriates the text's metaphors. These quotations do call attention to the lyric excellences and eccentricities of Lucretius's poem – skip the weird ontological excursions, here are the highlights and the lovely language. They also abide by the thesis of the first two books of the DRN – that generative principles obtain in all things, that nothing comes of nothing. Hutchinson translates that

God never anything of nothing made;
But soe are mortall men restreind with dread,
As seing severall works in heaven and earth,
And ignorant of the cause that gives them birth,
They think a power devine brings forth those things. (I.153-7)

Just as phenomena are derived from causes, not from divine intercession, so the poet's labours reproduce from existent materials and not from an idealised inspiration. Nonetheless, especially in Books III and V, Corless-Smith distils from Lucretius the exotic manifestations of reproductive continuity or terrestrial phenomena (as in this example from Book II):

Calf falls
from its throat
gushes green glades

His text apparently intends not to elucidate the poem's scientific and philosophic inquiries (not that such a task would necessarily prove especially fruitful to poetic labour), but to emphasise the occult population of Lucretius' universe:

hermaphrodites creatures bereft of feet dispossessed of hands
guiding the curved plow
No one knew how

or choice pears
panic-stricken
at the sight
of his living flesh
entombed in a living sepulchre till life was wrenched from them
by racking spasms the seaward rise

Corless-Smith does include some of the markers of Lucretius' scientific methodology: 'I have explained the process,' 'Here is another line of reasoning,' '(Now is the place to insert a demonstration).' But he thereby introduces an interesting paradox: while Epicurean philosophy represented a demystification of a Greek cosmos which must look to our own technological age more poetic than natural-scientific, *of the Universe...* drives the curious and the supernatural back into poetry in order to remystify an unpoetic world.

I'm also reminded of Carew's sharp digression in his 'Elegie upon the Death of the Deane of Pauls, Dr. John Donne': now, he laments, Donne's 'strict lawes' will be

Too hard for Libertines in Poetrie.
They will repeale the goodly exil'd traine
Of gods and goddesses, which in thy just raigne
Were banish'd nobler Poems, now, with these
The silenc'd tales o'th'Metamorphoses
Shall stufte their lines, and swell the windy Page.

Of course, by 1999 the exiled gods have been *personae non gratae* from poetry for quite a while. Corless-Smith operates within an obvious Modernist paradigm: this is, scaled considerably down, a Poundean exercise in mistranslation (the *DRN* is of course itself a translation of a kind) intended to make bright a text in the spirit of the ancient. The text represents the cancellation of multiple agencies: those of Corless-Smith, the translator, the transcriber of the manuscripts, Lucretius, Epicurus. I did feel that this particular strategy of estrangement has been sufficiently practised and improved. This feels like an (ironically) now-traditional high Modernist book, and so for me, couldn't generate much more than the wandering admiration I feel on a rainy museum Saturday among miniature Etruscan implements. The poetic taste which underwrites these quotations, or the *DRN* itself, seems mild and self-aware. Many images surge forward to claim my attention temporarily, but this seems a tribute to Corless-Smith's discretion, first and foremost. However, the resulting pastiche does little to ironize, violate, beautify or elevate these images together. At best, the language alienated me with its polite archaisms, its *préciosité* pinched by quaint severities against an excluded source text. In the process of cancellation *De rerum natura* has been transformed from a mad discourse on the universe intended for the enlightenment of its readers to a hermetic document of mannerly privacy.

III. MARGINALIA TO CLINICAL EVENTS BY TIM MORRIS (BARQUE 1999)

1

From the mark lofted in the blue yonder between marks of fixed immutable religious destinies, to the scribal mark approached by the deliberate and chronological motion of the pen, the arrows of attempt are drawn and fired. Loose copulatives and 'rhythmic consistency' tease the mind into a borrowing dialectic of micro- and macro-history, by which the personal is made delirious and inappropriate – an invasive fragment of strangeness – and the public is made acute, local, witnessed. This revision of naturalism works painfully on the consideration of union, the whole marked with cleavage; and poignantly the first of the medical exempla remarks on holding (together) as recuperative restraint. National unity is projected onto the contestations of a perpetual theatre of war.

2

From the painful civilities of an entranced artique we arrive at an allegation of triviality as the smallest resistance. The dull pieties of this catalogue of differences between artistes mondaines – each treated to the same cute tone – may represent the 'dishonouring flourish' of reassembled memory, but they are also fragments of the impulse to mimesis of singer impersonating blackbird, by which the performance of the self ('honour') becomes implicated in the relation of the self to the lover. Again we revisit the war as an item of nostalgia and a speculum in a dirty book – judgement is spared as 'we cannot go back and diagnose,' restricting our knowledge from that species of knowing as thorough knowing and as knowing that cleaves, the arrow of attempt falls away from the mark so that the past is not endangered by investigation.

3

Flippancies of 2 come fully into their own, the possible ameliorative ambiguities of mundane representation perish in winter freeze. Logo, sales pitch, campaign summary, working language become ugly, authoritarian: the depiction of this 'long, drawn-out operation' within the restraints of that language alerts us to its capabilities in pre-supposing community based on reification, in phrases surgically invasive because so normalising. Il Duce recommends a holiday resort. For the first time the peeps of a repressed linguistic vengeance ('Just twat it' and 'Is it just full of pigshit and inbreds') surface in the vicinity of tamed sexuality. The hopes of a melodic union refer to a set of discovered rules or conventions: possible perhaps for the secondary existence of music, but not discernible in the body or the world – making these artefacts of the performance of the world more terrifying as signs or symptoms of a clearly perverse rule.

4

This alienation from a discoverable radix crystallizes in the third person plural pronouns, not as objects of scorn (the bourgeois neighbours) but somehow arrayed in respect by the first person's self-revelation for the first time in their presence. The first person reveals that s/he exists to suppose and to

demonstrate – cognitively to enforce the expression of certain object-realities (like the supervention of hallucination on the presence of the rat, as lab specimen or hallucinatory trigger to a drug-damaged consciousness). ‘Their’ high endeavour is a consistent stoicism, recognising that expression influences reality (as it fixes the seductive potential of her smiles). It is safer to retreat to the analysis of logical and linguistic structures as primary data and their asymmetries as telemetric addresses of happiness and satisfaction, than to project the marked possibilities of expression as asymmetrical to these realities, however. A recognition which halts the work, and an allowance of its possible damage as pain in the writer’s physical body.

5

That halt, caused by physical discomfort, resurfaces in the self-deprecatory ‘ardour of his mania’. As patient, the writer loses control over diagnostics, as the ‘one-way transactions’ by which objective history and phenomena are converted into interpretable cultural meanings (‘accounts of youth and sexuality’). He becomes more like the experimental guinea-pig of dispute, subjected to procedures in exchange for a consensual remittance to his trainers. Stoicism then can result from physical afflictions and impersonate an inactive heroic virtue. That the opportunity to interpret or diagnose might arise when the writer is damaged beyond commission is the fear of elimination signified by the final line.

6

So interpretive difference becomes a real division in the manifestations of illness, although even as an interpretation of symptoms this crucial ‘difference of opinion’ is treated cavalierly by authority. This light and fast playing with danger by understatement, or by the ludicrous death of a Queen, sneaks forward in auxiliary words like ‘certainly’: the notes of a polite society drawing a close, concerned in writerly fashion with appropriate tone when describing a severe disturbance or the danger of accident. Recognition of these accidentals appends to the relaxation of Stoicism and the injection of passion into the performance of the self, entailing the sacrifice of clarity and the calming impression of regularity. Even this recognition can be modified by the subsuming dialectic of normal speech and its normalizing query, ‘Was it not?’ The possibility of a nature or subjectivity which can resist subsumption and is the holistic dialectic of expression and the undiscoverable rule is left too vague to say for sure.

7

Life as response rather than action depends on the independent existence of cultural meaning, finally, to which personal characteristics may ‘apply’ – the preciousities of a nineteen-year-old girl proving an acceptable exception. The applicant warned against expressing danger verges on this coercive meaning-set which might culminate, finally, in industrial/military accomplishments and primitivism and their required tongue. Certain advices will help you along the way: ‘Never trust to luck and always check the small print’. This language thus certifies its own lacks as an evolutionary selectivity which cordons off certain developments, amassments not possible in Irish. That authorship verges on splitting this language by marking out its hot-spots begs the question, which party receives his evidence, and for what purpose:

even if this particular 'example' maintains a more profound than simply vocalic differentiation between its terms, and claims an absorptive faculty in an airport-novel jacket-blurb. The choice of 'loves' when language itself cannot be chosen becomes parodic, a place where moral falters into airport-novel morality: so we get Princess Caetani and the belle monde. Like a high-density electrical emission, love may clog or blow out the receptors but its possibly multiple, non-unique sources can still be determined by a withdrawn observer. This observer, the 'I' who wants only to help by proffering speculative diagnoses, is here collided with 'they', now seemingly the lovers themselves who have spoken above. The final imperative, 'You must either destroy me...', confirms this – or at least returns to subjectivity the anticipated speculation, the divergence from care for the other's frailty which previously marked their affair. Veering close to a 'visible articulation', the narrative returns to the public way, to games and gambling and the cool dryness of lark song or scientific display.

8

These exposures are shuffled out into game-playing as weekly exposure of honour to loss, repetitive contrition. The chemist whose scientific examinations, in the surface of an utterly mobile host, inflict damage on a specimen is approached for qualifying responses; but the text must return to axiomatic reflection, generous enough to allow its possible adjustment while supporting its immunities with a tone of good credit. The poem as display, expression as delay, neither able to achieve the conclusiveness which would deliver axiom and obviate forms of future research and its accidents.

9

Thus I reduce and collect, diagnosing and splitting to make my own mark, fulfilling that prediction: that positive beauty remains behind-doors, guarded, restive, despite invitations to attend public tragedy as all such are. To participate in the festive tragedy is to subscribe to a critiqued linguistic community, alternating powerlessly between desire – speculation on inheritance and a whole estate – and declared intent. Desire modulates over the its object and expects that object to modulate, strip and re-form, bratty and recalcitrant having come to expect that expression is a limitless variety of 'tenable moulds' by which experience is abated. No locus amoenus for this incessant, and incessantly reclusive, desire, is provided by these poems; the patient has disintegrated into a series of clinical events, none particularly indicative of his or her resting state. To wish for a borrowed proclivity to impose more than momentarily on the series, or as above on the dialectic of personal and public factoids, is to contravene the arresting diagnosis of this work: that such a proclivity is a figment of communal will, as pertinent to the debased language of slogan and authoritarianism as to the recuperation or cure of a fatigued isolation. The centre shifts with immense pain, the toil is laughable and horrid, the manners of redemption made to seem particular and gross by a forest of banners of hard recall.