

WHAT TO DO :

Please send rousing correspondence, bunches of flowers etc. to: Keston Sutherland, Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge CB2 1TA (UK). Also peer when free at www.barquepress.com. Barque has just published and can now sell you William Fuller's *Three Poems*.

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Letter to Dr Andrew George, c/o Penguin Books

1st August 1999

Dear Dr George,

I hope that it will not be too much trouble if I write to you concerning your recently published new translation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, together with the associated text materials and commentary which you have presented to the reader. I should like to congratulate you very warmly, on combining the virtues of detailed first-hand scholarship with the needs of a literary and literate translation for readers ignorant of the original languages involved and unfamiliar with the background and long historical tradition of this corpus. I took up your book in the expectation of reading it through quite rapidly, to gather a sense of this ancient poem which I had already encountered obliquely in other contexts; and I found myself engrossed in your presentation, reading with the fullest engagement and attention and aware of being close to a remarkable literary composition of the finest order.

Of course there are many frustrations involved in being a reader only at second or third hand, unable to judge for oneself the whole cultural and philological framework for the tradition of this poem, the linguistic features of its composition, and the specially acute problems of interpretation posed by the incomplete nature of our textual knowledge. But I must say that you have most honourably and effectively not patronised this kind of reader, indicating exactly the defects and lacunae, showing how faulty passages can sometimes be reconstructed and sometimes not, and presenting such a wealth of parallel and associated material serving as witness to the many strands in the transmission of this ancient body of story. Furthermore, what now emerges with great clarity and force is a poem of tremendous nobility and passion, evidently linked by many threads to the social structures of governance and adventure among men who still felt themselves close to the world of an elaborate pantheon of gods and supernatural agencies, but also displaying deep powers of psychological insight and human character and interaction. I found myself truly gripped by the inner development of this tale, its complex humanity as each stage unfolds into the next and converges upon a completeness of paramount artistry.

But against this background of admiration I should like, at risk of foolish eagerness for which I have no first-hand evidence at all beyond what you have supplied, to raise with you a number of points of interpretation. Please do not feel at all obliged to take up any of these points, still less in any kind of detail, since I write as much to clarify my own thoughts as to bother you with demands upon your time. The most substantial overall question concerns the primary character of this story, as so far we have it: the central emphasis of its development. Even with very full background information it must be hard for a reader to reconstruct the framework of beliefs and expectations making up the original horizon of reception for this tale, I mean, the way it might have been read by its historic readers (or indeed heard by

them, if the text was also part of a performance repertoire). Your very measured and open-minded discussion in your Introduction sets out a good deal of helpful guidance. But as I tracked back and forth in your text in course of reading it through to the conclusion I recurred constantly to your suggestion that 'the message of the Gilgamesh epic is the vanity of the hero's quest: the pursuit of immortality is folly, the proper duty of man is to accept the mortal life that is his lot and enjoy it to the full' (p. xxxvi). This suggestion takes support as you say from the moment in the Prologue (I.43-4) which emphasises how the hero 'restored the cultic life of the land' (p. 142; cf. p. xiv, etc) as an enduring legacy to his people; for the rest, 'it is significant that his [the poet's] concern is not just Gilgamesh's glorious deeds but also the suffering and misery that beset his hero as he pursues his hopeless quest' (p. xxxv).

Well, perhaps it is worth saying at this point, without dragging up too much pointless modern theory, that a complex epic story may well present ambivalent facets for interpretation, and not just in local detail but perhaps also in overall character and tendency. My own hesitant conclusion so far is that the view which you present sounds a little like the 'official view', the normative assertion that in long retrospect what emerges is this re-stabilising of the social and cultic order above all else. Contrary to this, though not inconsistent with it, I read another primary character or message to this tale: that beneath the official message there is a potent sub-text, proclaiming the glory and danger attending human courage sufficient to attempt brave and daring deeds, risking the defiance of gods and wise counsel in the pursuit of heroic renown, able to outlast even the doom of personal demise which after the Deluge will snatch all mortals but one. Indeed, such a sub-text may even tacitly be the principal theme itself, rather than a complicating undercurrent.

For I am struck by the tremendous pathos of failure and defeat in this story, expressed with the deepest force by the death of Enkidu and the subsequent distressed wanderings of Gilgamesh. The 'restless spirit' for which Ninsun reproaches Shamesh for having instilled into her son (III.46) shows constant flashes of boldness and ambition through all the early adventures: 'I will establish for ever a name eternal!' he proclaims at Y.187, echoed in various different but concordant ways at IV.253-8, V.188-9, IM 20-1 and specifically in Bo1 fragment (d) [p. 134, where your line numbering seems not to make sense?]. The defective text at II.236 takes me to Y.144-60, where fear of death is dismissed by Gilgamesh (with deep proleptic irony in view of IX.3-5 and all that follows from it) as no more than an obstruction to personal valour and readiness for dangerous combat. Enkidu's deepest lament in anticipation of going to his doom before his time (VII.89) is that he was not able to make his eternal name in a true heroic death, by falling in personal combat (VII.266-7). An ethos of fame through heroic deeds is thus powerfully suggested and reinforced, causing me to be tempted to reconstruct the defective line at IV.256 as '[Renown goes to the brave and not to] the careful man.'

These thoughts cause me in turn to ponder deeply the implications of the final stage of the narrative, and especially the abrupt return of Gilgamesh, escorted by Ur-shanabi, to his home city of Uruk. The claim put into Gilgamesh's mouth at XI.322-8 is of course repeated (seemingly word for word) from I.18-23, where it is uttered by the proemial narrator, who is there supplying a forward rationale for the outcome of the tale he is to tell. Is there not then at least some potential for another irony here, of a profoundly structural kind, that Gilgamesh is in his last individual action cheated of the 'Old Man Grown

Young' plant, which might have restored to him his youthfully fearless powers for the challenge of heroic deeds, by some mere passing reptile (XI.293-305 and esp. 299)? I am tempted to read XI.314-7 not as deep insight and resignation in the face of his own 'mortal inadequacy' (p. xlvi) but, at least as much if not more, as ironical chagrin and vexation at being blocked one more time. That structural irony is a deep and conscious feature in this poem surely cannot be doubted: for instance Enkidu is not the offspring of a bridal bed (cf. pp. xxxvii-viii) and he blocks Gilgamesh's claim to *droit de seigneur* (P.198-9), even though Gilgamesh had dreamed of Enkidu as a wife to be loved, caressed and embraced (I.271-2); later Gilgamesh mocks the offer of a bridal bed made by Ishtar (VI.32-5) thus precipitating the events that doom Enkidu to an early death, fulfilling Humbaba's curse and before any bridal bed for him can produce the consolations of offspring (cf. p. xlvi); and yet later it is Gilgamesh who chides the dying Enkidu for cursing Shamash who had given him the first comforts of such a bed and brought him into the company of his brother-in-arms (VII.134-8), and immediately thereafter it is Gilgamesh who must lay out his friend and brother on a magnificent last bed of departure from life (VII.139-43, VIII.84-7), covering his face 'like a bride' (VIII.59); thenceforth Gilgamesh denies himself even the rest that a bed might provide (X.254). Such interwoven features attest to the specific controlling skills of an accomplished poet rather than a redactor, and may give support to my identification of ironies in the entire final outcome of the narrative.

This leads me back to your comment on p. xxxiv that Gilgamesh in his final moment within the poem 'proudly' shows his companion the monument for which he became famous. This word 'proudly' has to seem to me somewhat misplaced. There is a kind of rueful admission here that the speaker of the prologue had the doom of the hero within his god-like disposition, that Gilgamesh must fall into line and claim bricks and culms rather than undying personal fame; and it seems in my reading that the hero's repute in retrospect as the rebuilder of his city is a fall-back option, safer and more respectable and even more durable than personal renown and the achievement of great heroic deeds bringing their own god-like immortality, but less resplendent with heroic prestige and culmination; an old man's compensation for a younger man's disappointment. Thus defeat and bitter disappointment, themselves truly noble and moving and bearing their own mortifying wisdom, are averted by a manoeuvre which reclaims this poem for the message which you have found in it. If the ideal for a royal prince is to combine the knowledge of wisdom with manly hardness and matchless strength (p. xxii) it must be tempting to interpret this epic story as a long and hard journey from the latter to the former; but I read the irony of defeat and the fear of a solitary and pointless end as a wisdom at least no less deep than cultic correctness (contrast your p. xlii). Perhaps I merely repeat Rilke's mistaken emphasis.

For myself I do not judge these two readings to be mutually excluding; on the contrary, each seems to me to enrich and complicate the other, giving this poem the kind of depth and resonance which I associate with the high powers of literary composition: there are aspects of the Homeric epics and Greek tragedies which can be read like this, certain moments in many of Shakespeare's plays which set the personal and the historical or social into structural conflict, and most especially in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*, where the aged King Hrothgar counsels the bold and perhaps too self-reliant hero to recognise that prowess is no match for fate and honour to his creator but whose advice is mostly ignored by the hero in his determined quest for renown (1698-1768).

Finally, of course, the defective state of the surviving text makes all such speculation subject to especial jeopardy; although the lacunae in Tablet IX, for example, have a suggestive eloquence all of their own. Several narrative moments crucial to the overall development seem to me especially confounded by textual insufficiency. Two instances must suffice. First is the outburst of tears by Enkidu at II.179-81, which you acknowledge as a puzzle in your headnote on p. 107. Tentatively I reconstruct this context as follows. Enkidu, born in the wild of no human parents and with no social status, is specifically without any brother-in-arms with whom a career of heroic adventure might be possible. After their initial fight (II.111-P.230), in which Enkidu's strength and courage must be evident, they embrace and become friends, in a moment of deep emotional power (Y.18). My own conjectural reconstruction of Y.14-17 would run along these lines: 'Why do you desire to do this thing? / You who can have anything, why this do you want so much? / Let me join forces with you, to do something unique, / a feat that never was done in the land.' Enkidu's tears, ironically looking forward to Gilgamesh's weeping over the bier of his dead companion, may thus express his overpowering joy at finding, and being accepted by, a brother, together with his fear that this acceptance will not be socially secure and may slide away almost as soon as glimpsed. This in turn gives deep force to Ninsun's rite of formal adoption (III.120-9), confirming her previous interpretation of her son's dream by making a new mighty comrade to be her son's equal (I.266-8, 290). I take this passionate brotherhood to be a major binding theme of the whole story; in his mortal delirium Enkidu cries out in lamentation for his 'dear brother' (p. 55) and only thereafter does Gilgamesh refer to him as 'brother' out loud in his presence for the first time (VII.139). Such themes of inseparable boon companions, and a narrative in which the lesser of the two dies and is mourned by the other, have many precedents, epic and biblical; but here the intensity of Gilgamesh's loss of heroic nerve after this death is surely exceptional in complexity and depth of feeling. Losing his other half deprives Gilgamesh of the opportunity to trade and swap temporary moments of fear from one to the other, losing thus also the context of vaunting and boasting and mutual exhortation to risk and defiance. Loneliness brings the sorrow and fear attendant on being alone, a solitary survivor (cf. VII.75-6); the description of Gilgamesh as 'a man happy and carefree' (I.234) is permanently displaced after the protracted and magnificently bitter funerary lament of Tablet VIII, unremittingly varied and repeated again and again in the following tablets, so that I take the recurrence of the old formula at X.265 as replete with irony and chagrin at the attempt to stave off fresh misery, rather than a conventional expression of consolation; and I believe that Uta-napishti's reply (X.266-9) suggests that he takes it in the same way, as an extension of sorrow rather than a turning away from it.

A second narrative moment made deeply problematic by textual insufficiency is one that would perhaps be hard to grasp correctly even if we had a full and exact text: I refer to the late Hittite paraphrase of the discourse of the gods in assembly, decreeing the doom of Enkidu, set out on your p. 55. I note that you have had to turn to the linguistic expertise of another translator here (p. x), so that you too must no doubt experience a measure of frustration at the obliquity of the evidence for this crucial scene. I have read it over many times, by prospect and retrospect from many stages of the text coming before and after. I take the just force of your general comment that the gods become exasperated by 'repeated violation of their order' (p. xlviii); but Shamash seems to be both aid and protection to

Gilgamesh, whose mother has made due offering and supplication to the sun-god (III.37-108) and to whom the slain bull of heaven was duly dedicated (VI.146-50); indeed, at the start Gilgamesh seems to be especially favoured by Shamash, prompting Shamash to remind Enkidu that he cannot rival the King of Uruk in that regard (I.240-1). But by the stage of the assembly dreamed of by Enkidu all this seems to have changed: Shamash intercedes for 'innocent Enkidu' but is slapped down by Enlil for abetting the reckless boldness of the pair. Anu seems not to care much which one dies, so long as an example is made and the pair divided; this is Anu who has been rather scrupulous when Ishtar attempts to set him up against Gilgamesh (VI.84-91) and who himself provoked Aruru (significantly not present at this assembly) to create Enkidu in the first place (MB Ni), even if only thereby to gain respite for Uruk from Gilgamesh's domineering hyperactivity.

Maybe these gods are just minor squabbling and indifferent appendages to the narrative, and I recognise the force of your comment to this effect (p. xxxiii). And yet the proper duties of men and kings are to 'do the will of the gods, fulfil your function as they intended' (p. xxxvii); the dream of this assembly occupies such a pivotal point, just as the secret narrative of the Deluge in Tablet XI seems also to do, that the affairs of the gods do seem to have weight and meaning after all. I think the moral of this extended pondering of your p. 55 is that I just wish we had a reliable and complete and contemporary text of this episode, so that we could see more clearly how much and in what ways this scene is structurally important. One reading of the narrative as a whole has to be, for example, that when Gilgamesh returns in heroic triumph after the conquest of Humbaba and vaunts himself in all his kingly glory, his superbia fatally attracts the sexual appetite of Ishtar, and his scorn for her charms (incidentally, a mistake which it seems Sargon avoided) sets off the whole chain of events which bring the gods out against him and Enkidu and seal Enkidu's fate, leaving the survivor with an unsupportable burden of remorse and isolation and sorrow. Yet a turning-point or fulcrum in such a narrative could be an accident of its formal structure rather than part of its deep causal mechanism; which again casts my thoughts back to the enigmatic Hittite fragment.

Of course even the rather full display of reproachful wisdom which Uta-napishti preaches to Gilgamesh in Tablet X may be read as itself casting the Deluge narrative in an ironic light, at least for Gilgamesh, because all of Uta-napishti's remonstrance against sorrow and fear of death is all well and good from a man who just happens to be already immortal; Gilgamesh who was as ever looking for a fight (XI.5) skips all the consolatory pieties and goes straight to the point: 'How did you find the life eternal?' (XI.8). I can see how from one perspective Uta-Napishti is indeed presented as a direct conduit of right understanding for humanity, 'the role of the quintessentially wise man' (p. xlii), and probably the voice represented specifically in the prologue incorporates this view. And yet the reader who inclines to identify more with wayward Gilgamesh himself may hesitate, the more so because the direct evidence for Gilgamesh's deep acceptance of this 'wisdom' is so skimpy and ambiguous. Against all the preachment and taunting of Uta-napishti (whose wife shews more compassion than he does, at XI.272-4) I for my part read Gilgamesh's cry of misery at XI.242-5 as incomparably profound and desolate: the thief which robbed him of Enkidu (VIII.49) now has hold of his own flesh (XI.244). How could one not recall the contrast of this mighty king in his prime, as he joked with affectionate but scathing wit about the fear in

other men (III.300-3)? Majestic power, after so much to be brought to this! Barren fate, thereafter to be shuffled back to 'repair and maintenance of the gods' cult-centres' (p. xlii)!

Well, I am sorry to have extended these thoughts unduly, and taken up your time in this way. Without the full benefit of a knowledge of the wider cultural and literary context these thoughts must be more than vulnerable to imperfect insight. My remarks are really intended as tribute to your achievement in representing this epic story with such vividness and scruple, and as an expression of grateful thanks for your presenting it to a wider readership. And when some more fragments turn up, who knows which vital detail may transform a view or nullify a conjecture?

Yours sincerely,

J.H. Prynne

glitter galore

[bat up]

love and no empty labour, churn
a squat universe
continuous six or so
thousand miles close in
but still that far--the doorstep
velocity raking if
only would disrobe

one chick holding always
has in fact
holiday
without
palms the broadcast is greedy
and grey in erudition

I almost lost
how to link
Keston
chain stores want my pants & I refuse
to deal installed
dinner napkins
form a satchel
scoop the media up I give
to you LA:
or somewhere near there are no women
yet your book is more despite:
from the French, interpellate:
to lay down and to want

[rocket or racket]

two Dutch children jump and make
noise an airplane not knowing
about

Disposable

People
& who would I be
to wish them mannered
solemnity
always comes early

what
you said about throwing wholly
a body at a language
numbers

frighten or they lie, crimes
of entertainment fully
realized
offensive indoor
flowers scan me,
sadly
American
& serial
laden: trip or meat
he wrote *You Bet!* and *Something,
She's Dead*
we write to
drum in this decide:
to rock it or to rack it

[index [insert female fairy tale]]

Angelena glam and
carefree I think I pass
in specifics & in make-up
in a Hollywood
Mall + Internet
access I want but don't
set the start at every terminal
to antislavery.org

how was I more bright
of heart in Washington, DC,
or is it a factor of age:
to be less informed
& to be named

[often I am permitted to return to a rack
& this one]
likely
as my colour / not my sex

two notes

[1] Please read and share *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* by Kevin Bales (University of California Press, 1999; \$14.95).

[2] *You Bet!* and *Something, She's Dead* are book titles of Ted Greenwald's.

Nervous Breakdowns in Chris Emery's The Cutting Room

What Max Scheler called in 1926 "the *unity* of the psychophysical organism" has remained, within both the prose and verse products of Phenomenology, a summit and principal miniature of the idea of political unity. Without that first commitment to a total person, himself meaningful throughout each reflex and physical shift as well as in his thoughts, and so inherently *meant* to the point of being inalienably free from division in any part of himself; without this totality which I am, or which I am able satisfyingly both to *think and feel* that I am, phenomenological poesis in verse and prose would lack a starting point from which it could re-imagine what Olson and Prynne have both laboured to conceive: the completed polis, unscissored, itself the expanded groundswell of unified desire and sentiment. We are ourselves thoroughly metaphysical, in Merleau-Ponty's thinking (i.e. we are "the essence of positiveness"), and should therefore trust that "it is impossible to see what [the conception of this essence] could deprive us of": the idea of unity never involves the deleterious *loss* of plurality, but only ever the attainment of a condition in which there could be no reason for wishing to prefer plurality to unity. Ideally there should be no positive aspect to the erroneously conceived duality of the body and mind, or of the likewise repressive duality of subjectivity and history. These pairs are in fact united, insofar as we can convictively express them as such. In Merleau-Ponty's world, there should be no epiphenomena: the very idea is an unnecessary negation leading to false witness of the human inherence in political environments, and is in that way obliquely but surely conducive of tyrannous as well as quietistic political attitudes. On the contrary, in every move we make is attested "the common fate which men share and their oneness...", and by recognising (or perhaps just by thinking) this we should see how science and philosophy are similarly a unity of historic endeavour. This conviction has for Merleau-Ponty the significance of a kind of religious repentance (or rather, *atonement*); by seeing how we can believe in the "oneness" of humanity, we are to be "rescued from the ambiguities of a double life." (*Sense and Non-Sense* p.98) This oneness is something for which we can imagine that we feel an insuperable desire. Scheler called it "the great, invisible, mutual *solidarity of all beings* in total life": the idea of a future heroic solidarity in *love*, into whose "image" we could, in Prynne's words, "at long last" be born.

The dream of a better way should in any case expurgate the very possibility of alienation, recasting metaphysics itself entirely, delivering to man the power to think out abstractly without severance from any part of his own "nature". Alienation would be expurgated from the "total life". If this life does not yet exist, this is partly because alienation is currently so rampant everywhere; if it does exist, this is despite such monstrous alienation. Implicit to the hope for unity is the recognition of that fact. Yet the hoped-for unity is a consequence and outcome of that principal image, the image of the united person; or at least, it has been a strategy of phenomenology to insist, sometimes tacitly, upon that causal elision of united subject and united world. Does phenomenology, then, recognise not only the hindrance

of objective alienation (of the natural world from man, of commodities from producers, of person from person), but the hindrance also of physical-subjective alienation — my alienation from the possibility of my own “whole” or “total” person *even prior to abstract styles of the cogito* — the alienation which may be blatant in my orgasm, which colours my reflexes immanently?

Michel Henry, following the superb and neglected Maine de Biran, has written against this idea without however stating it explicitly:

We are in possession of our movements, we are never absent from them at any time while we perform them, we are constantly informed concerning them, with a knowledge whose originality and exceptional characteristic we have already shown, because we are one with these movements, because their being, phenomenologically determined according to the mode of this appearance, is that of internal transcendental experience, it is the very being of subjectivity...

(*Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body*, 54-55)

Here we are indivisible from each flare of our nerves, from every active move we make if not necessarily from our mere susceptibility. That we are so is a fact entirely immune to dialectics, which Henry in any case considers “never [to be] more than a vast tautology.” We are definitely this knowledge. I should like to claim that Chris Emery’s book *The Cutting Room* (Cambridge: Barque, 2000) is a startling contradiction of this surety, a xerox of the echoes of how bodily knowledge blurs in friction, bleeds into the surround-sound of the world and makes life cacophonous, and how we are amazed by our own fluency in the euphuism of caresses, blushes and winces: we are somehow *primarily* in an alienated flesh.

It is a poetry about which I could generalise only quite vaguely, since it avoids any culminant indication of purpose. This, perhaps, is itself one such vague generalisation and might not be unuseful, were it not also true (in a less interesting sense) of the great majority of current poetry. I could make several others: that Emery envisions states of sexual fixation and anxiety, often with the suggestion that the woman involved in the sex-act is a prostitute (from whom his body is alienated); that syntax in his poetry is dominated by the sonority of individual words, and that the choice of words is dominated in turn by the sonority of individual syllabic elements; that rhyme and assonance have in Emery’s work an equal value; that his poems are driven by tenacity into endings which never materialise. Perhaps I can make more particular sense of these ideas in looking at ‘transformer’, the poem which opens *The Cutting Room*.

First, the question of domination. Half way through the poem Emery writes

a heart-beast chomping
chopping under sweat
askance on gamine sewer
& rocking its tock
tock tock of teeth
poking all absolutes
in pimply flanks
& fiscal bedside
apparatus

The poems all drop without periods, so that we can measure their pace only without reference to the duration of any concluded sentence. They are driven into their endings line by line rather than clause by clause, so that the *continuation* of sequential utterance is more overt than its *structure*. This is not expressly a matter of imitating speech or breath patterns in Emery’s work (not panic in the face of speechlessness, or Beckett’s carry-on), though frequently we are tempted to affect breathlessness in reading it, since this would allow us to feel more intimately complicit in the poem than we can at first sight

of it. Emery seems to refuse that kind of suggestible mutuality, demanding instead that we should feel each blow of assonance separately and as a restraint of the breathing voice, as a snag or hitch to the tongue. He does this frequently by slipping from one word into another which either sounds very like it, or contains an identical syllable or vowel-consonant combination. These units demand to be cross-matched; the letter “k” invades the poem and infects it, becomes briefly a rash over the lines which in reading them we irritate and so prolong. That is to say, the sound elements in Emery’s work are very conspicuously the triggers of their own future distorted echoes (in another poem, ‘quoit’, Emery distorts “whole” into “whore”). We have, earlier in the poem, the spread of “gall” into consequent “gala” and then “gondola”; earlier still, “dunking” into “tank” which then irritates “stank”; here, “askance” into “rocking”, “tock” (repeated), “poking” and then “flanks”. The sound is atomised, splintered into protuberant radicals which arise accidentally and then become difficult to expel, as if with each line there is a frustrated desire to escape the previous noises — or equally, a frustrated desire to repeat them exactly. Syntax is dominated by these series of sound. The progress of any description is overdetermined by them; this overdetermination is overt and so itself thematic, much more entirely so than in (e.g.) Bunting’s poetry. Words bear these sound elements, and dominate the sentence. But words are themselves dominated by the elements they bear: Emery’s work is only secondarily made up of diction; its first loyalty, and that which results in such a striking diction, is to the noise of single syllables and even to single letters. This loyalty is fierce, and has the character of a demand fulfilled; monosyllabic sound elements tyrannise over the language, permitting the incorporative sentence only as a necessary concession. The text as a whole body is achieved under the duress of its monadic particles, its images are inflicted by them. This poetry is a kind of masochistic submission to the proliferated sound-element.

What is this compulsion to see syntax dominated by the noise of syllables? How could this express distortedly an impulse we might recognise? Emery does not throw out syntax altogether, but has it appear weakened and subject to quicker impulses. The poetry is addicted to particularities in sound, goes through periods of assonance which take over the function of the sentence and seem, illusively, to have the unity of a concluded utterance. But there is not any real unity in these poems, and it is precisely their most visceral demand which obstructs this. The noise elements are not abstract, nor could they be so; it is these signs for mere shifts in the tongue and jaw which dominate the lines, which root the poems in their own breakdown. It is Emery’s serious achievement that the effect of these elements (or particularities) is often to throw us into “the nerve warren” as he puts it, to make us wince and linger anxiously. With John Wilkinson’s ‘Pneumatic Drill’ Emery could say, “it’s mainly a business of nerve / Finding out the outline of the body / By an accident”, though each poet might wish to sound out the dialectic of *business* and *accident* differently. Poetry can be reduced to noise with the idea that this is a transgressive and portentous reduction, a style of resistance to logical discourse which has been compromised by capitalism and ought therefore to be considered perennially an object of fetishism. Emery’s work is not so complacent or sentimental. It follows no accusatory principle of reduction, but subjects syntax to the onset of irrational desires, and speaks then compulsively into the world dominated by “those deemed inviolate”, to whom the “i am” — alienated from the complete Cartesian formula — is “ancillary” (‘melatonin’, 11). Emery cuts out the hinge of that formula near the end of ‘transformer’,

beginning the final stanza "I think I am". It is a telling omission: there is neither world enough nor time to say "therefore", since the logical connector is denied sadistically to the submissive sentence. "I think I am". What is he? He is "commingling / with this equitable revolution / totemic river of / the million lice". "Commingling" is a Romantic word in origin and so stands out here, where the diction is largely colloquial though brightened by many flashes of verbal obscurity (which turn out often to be references to a violated body: "flensed neighbour", "gamine sewer"). The word — "commingling" — is a moment of exquisitely ironic hopefulness. He could be commingling with a world in uproar, swept on toward "equitable" redress and renewal like a river swept from its solitary spring into the whole and indivisible sea; he could be this, though the river turns out to be a mass of insects swarming along in meaningless yet "totemic" conturbation, so that "commingling" with this river would be more like drowning under the parasites of the head than like any echo of Romantic oneness with a natural exterior.

It is important to distinguish this "dominance" of the monosyllabic noise-element from another view of language which has become popular among poets dissociated from the publishing presses that have national retail distribution. Ron Silliman has written of a loss in language, due vaguely to "a capitalist stage of development", which is a "transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word". This results in a negative trend, the "increasing transparency of language", which obscures deceptively "the connection established by the signifier between the object or signified and the perceiving subject." The proposition echoes Marx's idea, that within Capitalism money obscures the connection between a producer of commodities and the product of his labour, as well as the connection between the commodity chosen as money-form (e.g. gold, or, in Silliman's analogy, "tangible" language) and the concept of money as a universal expression of value (or "transparent" language: what Hume called "the oil which renders the motion of the wheels [of trade] more smooth and easy.") If a word, as that which establishes objectively a connection between object and subject, has a "perceived tangibility" which can be subject to "transformation", then surely the result of that transformation will be a change in the connection between subject and object so objectively established. This much follows, at least within the logic of Marxist politico-economic analogy; but Silliman transgresses that analogy when he attempts to convict popular uses of language, such as "the illusion of realism", as if the mysticism he imputes to them were categorical and not liable to be averted. Unlike money, particular language acts can never have a universal and identical relevance. The mysticism imputed to a whole "language", within which the chance for "expressive integrity" has been repressed, depends for its viability upon the imposition of a successive counterexample: words can only be said to fail when we are assured by that very utterance, when the announcement itself has its convenient effect without fail. Troilus, one moment "bereft of all words", is the next moment by rhetorical imperative truer than "what truth can speak truest". This successive confidence can of course be denied endlessly, but the necessity of denial is itself what Nietzsche called the perpetuation of our own enchantment, and this enchantment is merely the rhetorical imperative made to connote truth rather than overtly to claim it. Either way, we insist on the presence of a truer utterance as counterexample (for Silliman, the "tangible" signifier of certain current American poets), and in that way refute the original diagnosis of a language ruined by Capitalism, by relegating the contingent but presently inevitable ruination caused by Capitalist history into a merely imputed damage, which might be described

in various ways by a class of producer-readers keen to set up their counterexample by way of timely admonition.

There is a change in the objectively established connection between object and subject. But this connection always has, despite its objective *establishment*, a subjective *modality*: we can assert or deny it, and by that act of preference choose to assert or deny also any change in its appearance. This insistence on modality would be quite futile if Silliman's argument really focussed on the object itself, or even on the "perceived tangibility" of the word as an "objective" predicate. But he is writing about language, and so inevitably we must look first of all to the users of language, the producers of it. For any possible reader, who is both subject of and subject to language, the "transformation of the perceived tangibility of the word" will really be a difference in perception; that is to say, it is the perception of the "perceiving subject", and not the "tangibility" which she might (or might once have been able to) perceive, which has been altered. This is what she can possibly assert, and only insofar as she focuses thus upon her own perception can language itself also be an entity whose predicates are absolutely susceptible to assertion, just as they are to denial. The real object of Silliman's sentence is the adjective, the qualifier, "perceived", and not the grammatical object, "tangibility". Perhaps this grammatical mix-up could explain why Silliman believes that "the perceiving subject" has lost her grip on the linguistic connection with "the object or signified". It is necessary for him to imagine that subjectivity has been impaired by a hostile environment, but he does this by insisting that there are uses of language (such as "realism") which actually prohibit authentic acts of perception, and this without considering how the phenomenon of prohibited signification could itself be perceived within that hostile environment. This latter inquiry might have lead to a broader problem: that the experience, within perception, of abstract removal from the materiality of words (as "connectors" to an object), a feeling we might have when reading "plots", gains its true meaning only within a broader recognition of the alienation intrinsic to abstract thought of any kind; As Marx wrote,

The whole *history of the alienation process* and the whole *process of the retraction* of the alienation is therefore nothing but the *history of the production* of abstract (i.e. absolute) thought — of logical, speculative thought. The *estrangement*, which therefore forms the real interest of this alienation and of the transcendence of this alienation, is the opposition of *in itself and for itself*, of *consciousness* and *self-consciousness*, of *object* and *subject* — that is to say, it is the opposition, within thought itself, between abstract thinking and sensuous reality or real sensuousness.

There is no such thing as a "repressed signifier": there are only modalities of reaction to the process of signifying. The real objects of perception, including the real words on a page under the eye and hand, are never in or for themselves abstracted from a given material constitution; the style of thought is in principle identical to Peter Handke's when in a recent protest against the NATO airraids over Bosnia he commented that the first victim of war is language. It can be asserted that language presents indices of human suffering, just as it can be asserted that words are uninterestingly composed; but to assign to categories of language-use the *quality* of "transparency" or of having become remote from their true constitution, even if that constitution is qualified (though not *determined*) by the adjective "perceived", is to perpetuate abstraction exactly where abstraction is protested.

Chris Emery's protuberant noise-elements are not liberated signifiers, having regained their conspicuous materiality despite the difficulties of a capitalist environment. They are not in that sense the evident *products* of an intention to resist reification; instead they dominate the poetic language in which they participate, they are its most overt aspect and as such they irritate the reader into an erotic apprehension of how sentences have been restrained. The text itself is a labour of erotic resistance and restraint. It is poetic *antagonism* against reification, shot through with the distresses of bodily repulsion and scintillation: "a gall of tears", "an endocrine gala", a face trapped in "close habitable blush", all "taken for a smattering of care."

Elsewhere Marx wrote, "the less you express your own life, the greater is your *alienated* life." Since Marx, Merleau-Ponty and others have delineated through phenomenology a possible way of thinking about being-in-the-world which could make men and women totally capable of expressing their own lives, if only because (as Olson also, though more loosely, insisted) they would forever do so immanently: in each of their actions and movements would be an inherent "knowledge" (Henry) or "metaphysics" (Merleau-Ponty), making the body "expressive movement itself" (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 146). The passion to be convinced of this, really to imagine ourselves to feel that knowledge and expression within us and as what we are, is intimately related to that other and perhaps more original passion, to see the world as an achieved unity or oneness from which we could never be alienated, since we should always share without reservation in the way in which that world is expressed. For phenomenology, the body is once again the microcosm of the first great Humanist shift, or at least it is intelligibly the magnificent potential image of the world as oneness: not only Kant's "concept of body...as the rule for the cognition of outer appearances", but the body as a physical concept and rule for a *better reality*. Phenomenology might do well to consult Chris Emery's book. The idea of an insuperable desire is possible only because the fact of it is not. These poems reimagine excruciatingly the "double life" of the body itself, the life of nervous self-domination and subjection. The possibility of alienation is radically extended, in this work, similarly though in my opinion more interestingly than in the paintings of Francis Bacon, so that even the physical twitch and grimace can be involved in the "history of the production of abstract thought" by contributing, in revolt against the surety of any putative "first" philosophy, a primary surge and thrill of estrangement.

GERMINATOR

ammonia forced down
seamlessly without gills
in a long time resurrection
just years and years
pale Judah leavened
on the bed of dollars nearby
chic and cheery miles
as each lewd bug works
established contrapuntal
charms busily beside the
mechanics of each town
holding tight those tubes
of brick and concrete
piled before the germinator
glassy esplanades dew wet
and choked with tsetse flies
or teeming bandages
hoicked up as though
blaring and blaring
beyond each sashaying
industrial hide

most nights the same
as tears smoke and fuss
like melting prawns
on the sidewalk here
stomp stomp
budgeting for Mombasa
dragging the globe
my eggs / my eyes
scudding the fickle loci
draped with skeins
of tantrum songs
wheezing waters cold
as the veins' continuous
creaking up their
cheesy hills of light
the gin puppets picking
wrecks from needless soap
all rigid toes alone inside
electing for the choppy sink
and yearning lurid paps

GENERATOR

its honky-tonk pistons
on the viscous tank

turning and rearing
a sodium skin

yeah yeah and seeding its signals
raiding talk of home so far awry

the piebald home / mutton love
in snotty tunes and one definite

parade before the generator
each fine Bethesda song should seem carnal

mingling with trilogies of the camp animals
to share each dowager's lips and hips

banal or asleep among
the cordoned peculiar herd

that soft lead time house
the locks all fused with knocking ice

just everything rang true
among the glottal ruins

perfection rinsing my legs
in a clay mirror

soft as a skull
whimpering for nightly gags

below the brick works
where frost strayed by one culinary tenant

farting in the commotion
bruised upon worn glissades

a crack among
cold biscuit crumbs

feeling true and voting
for headaches or the precious runt

slumped like a tiger
pouncing on one last

vestigial scar then breakfast
in our fattened land

ZERO START SCENARIO

outside the fracas
and tiny desert sit
dumb thorn fields
painted egalitarian
grey each singed
with forty thousand
vertebrae

and a mauve indefatigable
specimen yanked apart
(twisted elan)
perched over rissoles
bloating with love
trudging culs-de-sac
with crooked dolour

inside the little doors
our carbon senators'
pan-struck grins loosen
as spiralling martyrs
loiter under
cavernous block print
and mischievous beaks

come on my zeros
demons and waifs
parenting renting each
other all spasm in the
wherewithal of tired grainy
hair just scale the lessons
beyond reach

if only this outburst
frozen in a siege cage
lolling and bickering
there in an elemental
bruise of light upped
and left the sagging
creatures nearly kneeling

and all mental flames
picking fluorescent tongues
glided in numb taxonomy
raked the oven sauce
in intervals of memory
with dilapidated
amours

and all tiny vagrants
stiffened in the blast
puckered over dry
evisceration joking
like regal zeds lying
forked in the afterglow
of the devastating union band

install gut
install pins
install teeth
install egg
install tongue
install night
install beat

CALIFORNIA TONKING

Review: Clark Coolidge, *On the Nameways*, volume one (Great Barrington, MA: The Figures, 2000), pp. 128, \$12.50, 1-930589-02-6

Having recently moved to California after some thirty years in Massachusetts, *On the Nameways* suggests new notes and something of a reorientation. Interest is sharpened by invitations which seem at cross-purposes to the intentions and implied aesthetics of Coolidge's earlier work. Despite an established reputation, Coolidge's evident and principled suspicions regarding the uses of literary criticism are confirmed by the extent to which response to his work has principally taken the form of poems. Traces of Coolidge's work are to be found at the intersection of various poetic networks, but the qualitative interest that draws poets to aspects of his work has remained opaque in the blunter hands of prose commentators and manifesto-mongers. In part this is because Coolidge's work doesn't provide the kind of pegs on which critics like to hang their prose. Without being averse to occasional lush sonorities, his writing is indifferent to the history of English poetic diction. Nor does his work offer literary, historical or cognitive matrices through which to plough in secondary data. Abstracted and musical, the serial and improvised particularity of Coolidge's work hangs together without being programmatic. The work's resistance to its own potential for procedural predictability exemplifies an elusive poetic sensibility which has been particularly influential in American poetry over the last thirty years. Coolidge's influence reflects his work's capacity to embody this formation of taste and attitude with a sense of poetic pleasures independent of conventional critical priorities.

Insofar as it is nevertheless possible to discern some over-riding poetic concerns, the title of his Sun & Moon collection *Sound as Thought* provides as good a starting point as any. Coolidge's interest in music inevitably suggests analogies, but he also develops 'sound' as a visual text and with a curiosity for semantic identity which belies any apparent enthusiasm for the arbitrariness of the signifier. Indeed, there is a persistent interest in possible affinities between phonetic form and meaning. Even in the works that come closer to a poetics of prose, Coolidge's stylistic signature is evident in a focus on smaller linguistic units. At the local level of idiom shifts – such as titles, non sequiturs, dead metaphors, inverted idioms, quasi-fictional names and proper nouns – Coolidge rings changes which point beyond merely formal play. His modulations remain crisply indeterminate, hinting at the less localised social energies animating the qualitative charge captured in distorted but still familiar idioms. If this suggests a forensics of idiom out of the Wittgenstein meets Beckett stable, Coolidge's work is nevertheless affirmative and energetic, extending outward without seeming overly troubled by self-defeating negativity or scepticism.

Given Coolidge's ability to make an intriguing music out of small scale poetic textures, the critical question is how far this sensitivity can sustain the larger scale and range of Coolidge's extensive oeuvre. Put differently, what motivates Coolidge's technical skill as an articulation of social being? The capacity to

judge the appropriate balance between semantic expression and musical abstraction – or between suggestion and formally explicit framing – is a capacity whose wit and taste are socially grounded. The analytic moment in Coolidge's poetic technique appears simultaneously idiosyncratic and quasi-transcendental. As such, this new collection prompts questions regarding differences between positive and negative conceptions of freedom, between the chancier operations of a neo-liberal sensibility and resistance to those forces of law and order otherwise impeding liberty. Such questions invite judgment at the level of poetic detail and within Coolidge's oeuvre as a whole.

Beyond the recent books *Now It's Jazz*, *Bomb* and *Alien Tatters*, Coolidge's previous publications are numerous and diverse, ranging from relatively austere texts to the dubious 'eroticism' of texts such as *Mesh* (1988) and *The Book of During* (1991). Along with a number of books published by The Figures, Sun & Moon have produced substantial collections, perhaps most notably *Sound as Thought: Poems 1982-1984* (1990). The seminal early work is *Space* (1970). Also notable is *Polaroid* (1975), which has a syntactical asperity that belies the impression of snap-shot serendipity. Collaborations with Ron Padgett (*Supernatural Overtones* (1990)) and Philip Guston (*Baffling Means* (1991)) suggest some of Coolidge's affinities. Many of the earlier books from the 1970s have a crystalline quality, lightly sculptured and yet with a raffish air that avoids the perils of dandyish theatricality or minimalist respectability. The difficulty of sustaining this mode is evident in the more conventional, but still distinctive short poems of *Own Face* (1978), and in the books of prose poetry more evidently based on narrative structures of personal experience. Sometimes read as a precursor and protagonist of Language poetry, his work can perhaps more readily be contextualised through improvised music and the aftermaths of John Cage, Beat sensibilities and New York schools of art, poetry and music. Some of his texts from the 1980s are perhaps over-extended and more indulgent, with here and there a hint too far of the spiritual diary or process for its own sake. There are nevertheless persistent traces of an ear for idiom akin to Beckett, Creeley or Jonas's *Exercises for Ear*. But such impressionistic analogues only reveal Coolidge's resistance to existing categories. Perhaps most distinctively in his early work, Coolidge's writing can appear curiously funky, untimely or ripe for a remix, especially when read against the grain of Coolidge's oeuvre and field of intentionality.

Given the quantity of writing by Coolidge and the evident hopelessness of making an appropriate selection of highlights, it is difficult to do more than glimpse the reception this work has generated. It remains hard to distinguish between discovering what for others has long been an open secret and what has been neglected by localized reading practices or simply left unread. Either way, the relatively informal quality of *On the Nameways* engages new kinds of reading. The pressure of Coolidge's oeuvre also suggests the need to surprise established readerships. The preface to *On the Nameways* provides an apt antidote for the daunted reader and is worth quoting in full:

I began writing these poems in an empty moment when I thought maybe I'd run out and had no more to do. Snap. I found lines coming to me on waking in the morning, insisting I follow them into odd short poems, strange to see, indicating what I knew not. Eventually I began writing them while watching movies (from Hopalong Cassidy Enters to Last Year at Marienbad) on satellite TV, a practice reminding me of DeKooning drawing with his left hand, Guston pen in hand watching the Watergate coverage, and of course Kerouac scribing

his Blues. The point? Freedom. An overcoming of the obstacles erected by *any* conception of the poem. A glee here I hadn't felt since writing the first poems of my own (1965). A casting off into the day's winds, feeling light and lit, knowing I still have a long way to go, a lot more to lose.

The rhetoric of inspiration has fallen on hard times. Casual remarks about one's TV pencil-sharpener have become the modesty topos of the seasoned and wily poet who knows the pain inflicted by the academic blurb. This said, these are helpful hints, not least the relation between freedom and glee, amid the difficulty of conceiving poems while overcoming fixed ideas of form.

This collection does not, however, take freedom to mean taking liberties with the very idea of the poem. Indeed, the 114 short poems conform to a pattern. A capitalised title suspends what appear to be moments of cited but punningly amended idiom – such as THE DELIRIUM TREE MEN or THE SHOTTING HILL BURDEN – over mostly short, irregular lines. Witty nudges in these titles are rarely spelt out in the poems themselves. Punctuation does not extend much beyond occasional capitals and the light shone on rhythm by a subtle use of the line-ending. Syntax, though often paratactic, is rarely difficult to co-ordinate. As such, the theme and variation pattern of this collection becomes its own convention, almost too conventional to sustain such a long sequence without affirming a generalised conception of the kind of poem repeatedly remade. The poems appear to have been selected from a greater volume but the risk is that the quantity here already over-works the structural conceit and makes the playful sense of occasion seem too monumental, too confident in the ability of its slightness to take on all occasions.

At one level, then, it is possible to project onto the collection a conception of the poem as a kind of occasional formalism, playing somewhat obliquely with the day's residues, as Coolidge's preface suggests. Working within a matrix of the everyday, the poems succeed in clutching straws of beauty from banality, supplying an impersonal, almost narrated observation of contemporary idiom. The following poem might be taken to exemplify the limits of this mode:

THEORY OF HEADLINES

Robert Thought escorted himself past the
math room, then dropped all pretense. He
had a point. Muriatic health between the
eyes. Anything neighboring seemed made of
the calls between worlds. A phone would
never do. He approached the box. It had
been yet another thronelike night. Music
as usual held up all the answers.

(p. 34)

This indicates some of the function of proper names as 'nameways' in the volume. The name serves as a grammatical ground for semantic variations rather than providing an over-arching narrative sensibility for the book. The risk of a one-way deflection of literal-mindedness is evident, but as the attempt to supply narrative explanation begins to bite on the material provided, there is a characteristically engaging enigma in the expression 'another thronelike night'. This poem suggests how such amused confections lean on the context supplied by the collection as a whole, not least because it seems almost too obvious for inclusion within this larger context.

Elsewhere, the use of quasi-fictional names mixes with more recognisable proper names:

PLAIN FINE MEAL

A slant woven tower comes into your plans
made from a show of hands
wear those special goggles
I gave you in thickets
be a noble stirrer of the sky nights
keep an eye out for tonic slips
watch for rock ships
take the face of Dürer

(p. 38)

More often than acting referentially, names suggest detached commentary on loosely diffused associations. Here the evidence of sound patterns, word deformation and phrasal inversion suggests a texture loosely balanced between gleeful whimsy and a more analytic projection of juxtaposed meanings. Each name or proper noun allows such associations to open up without reaffirming authorial attitude or an existentially projected concern. Thus ethical and political concerns are deflected rather than engaged, while the pressure felt from such concerns prevents quizzical lightness from descending into lyrical self-congratulation. Repeated resistance to any recentering around authorial voice or interest comes to seem like louche authorial indifference rather than objective disinterestedness. At another level, reluctance to recognise the seriousness of implied correlations marks out the relative freedom each poem gambles with. The sense of glee defeats any attempt to discern the potentials for actualising glee as a socialised freedom, while formalised indifference to the regularity of individual poems nevertheless makes each new page a surprise.

This begins to sound like reinventing the wheel. What else is a collection of short poems supposed to achieve? There is, however, a pressure specific to Coolidge's oeuvre. For the scope of the particular to be improvised, the willingness to be loose and occasional has to override the desire to over-extend formalist processing. Put differently, these poems are all the more surprising when they appear to reinvent the spirit of Coolidge's oeuvre. There is an unusually cheerful confidence about the fragile tension between form and occasion, closer to some of Bob Perelman's conversational poems of cultural citation, and reminiscent of the breezier parts of Charles Bernstein's *Islets / Irritations*. As Coolidge's preface suggests, the willingness to mix things up harks back to the still surprising combination of chance and determinism in collections such as *Space* and *Polaroid*. Allowing for the problem of such an abstract description of the pressures engaged and resisted, *On the Nameways* pitches at targets which somehow include the subjective occasionalism of formally 'cool' New York school poetry, while retaining the extra frostiness of the resistances to personism or naive citation which mark out the best of Language poetry.

As with most poetry worth reading, the poems render such frames otiose. There are some damp squibs, but the occasional clunky joke alleviates any sense of a conspiracy of hermetic coherence. There is instead a renewable brightness in particular poems, a combination of surreal humour and language gaming providing scant data for those who like their close readings to reveal information:

THE BASELESS CONFUSION OF A SUZY WITH A SUE

A watermelon in bed
the bladder factory is upped
and the shrimpers come lacking
in everything sane
'cept for Brown Gorge Benny
salvage wizard and sponge
classically elfin in intent
he heats up and then we all lodge
our whiskery uniforms in
uniform beats
you grasp?
born Palookas intriguing everywhere

(p. 123)

As John Ashberry's work too often suggests, it is difficult to sustain this level of whimsy without seeming too tasteful or too arch to be genuinely light-hearted. The ability to grasp 'it' – to 'get' the relevant conjunction of idioms without being heavy-handed in the act of apprehending the usual suspects – is nevertheless an acquired taste. If the comic ability to get out of all tight corners makes things too easy for itself, then the freedom claimed becomes the freedom to run off with the ball.

Read against the evasive drift, it remains a pleasure to observe Coolidge's distinctive ability to come up with pleasingly dissonant nonce expressions that nevertheless seem like lost friends, the kind of thing often promised but rarely achieved by Oulipo techniques:

SHAKE YOUR TONK AND THE TIME WILL FOLLOW

Pax vobiscum
lost in burst
despite all toast and the need to fuck
the storm will pale as
Mother Carry lights the lights
we pick it all out in bushel
do the Hucklebuck
and turn on lemmings
their battle rafters
it's so
as if the traffic and the art
of pale blue whiffs
a Trojan in Lemuria

(p. 69)

The quality of particulars here is difficult to 'explain'. The skipping focus undermines explanations as to why particular features are indeed 'poetic' – notably the title – while the poem's brisk inexhaustibility nevertheless falls short of articulating its disconcerting play with composites. Recognition depends in part on seeing how such textures move beyond surreal juxtaposition or random sampling without falling back on merely prosodic or stylistic conspiracy theories.

Many readers are irritated by the lightness of cognitive attention needed to sustain this level of playful knowingness. There is perhaps something a little chilling about the ability to throw off the weight of gravity and the winds of reality. Even if such tensions mean that many individual poems seem too light, the sustaining quality of the collection as a whole is the variety of sharp-eyed witticisms, an elegance

perhaps easiest to see in the resourceful diversity of titles. Given the occasional longueurs and mannered forays that make Coolidge's oeuvre as a whole difficult to grasp, such moments of resourcefulness are perhaps the most rewarding feature of Coolidge's work. These moments provide both a palate and a sounding board for readers and writers who might otherwise find themselves at odds with Coolidge's ulterior motives. Perhaps the most interesting questions generated by these poems concern their superficial resemblances to poems developed and articulated by different means and with different purposes. Such questions suggest the pleasure of reading against the improvised texture of Coolidge's work for its many occasional and more crystalline delights. One way or another, this book has much to attract and reward new readers of Coolidge's work, while providing a refreshing retrospective insight into Coolidge's work as a whole.

New Year 0a

The half-closed eye of envy shines with no
recklessness on naked Marrakech.

Brothers see the drug and to each
other wipes his face.

We can no longer be
robbed, so check another
trick to sack this exchange.

Whatever coaxes a smile from infants
cannot be so bad as this lidded penny
drowning on purpose
in spice.

Is it chewing gum? A lift that bribes? A
dram of guile, we take off for other models
hold up a bill to change and charge
a new accord.

How else can we puncture this bongo
of proto-mercantilism the laden stalls near
humming ateliers are heaven to us,
both dressed and undressed, become
many with sanctity of one,
give away the ability to plug any minor gap?

There is no doubt the ligation of man to man
stretches from fast days over grubby tables,
over sonic brews that intoxicate children of the air-raid
and brief members of the great houses
how they work the seasons here.

'Every boy that smokes will not partake;
forswears the communal drug of food,
no matter what else he may take,
finding this fellowship in his gut.'

We hope we see something made and shared
that we can take back to something marked equal
but plain – our town, empathy, clairvoyance,
vanity, the loss of the agora
unplugging so many sink estates.

To fast is to contract with the poor, who show
a badge from the king requiring service
on the night when the word
transmitted in dream we are won
over by charity and the rattle of Allah.

Though we've been eating at all hours
and rumoured to keep our secrets
with our belted dirhams close to vest

we quickly come upon new facts:
That the body is the treasury of the kingdom of sentiments,
and as such is raided with substances for extra heat,
vision, maps and spears for the perpetual wars
that mangle the body of knowledge living beyond seas.

So we sacrifice our bodies, the new
 'America my new-
 found land' which
we can handle as a rapturous
continent enfolding
 such smoking pools
gold and panting hills of peat that our brains

reel into action. The need
to eat is coupled with this
need to discover, populate with children of thought
straight as forests of pine, straight from the ground
we call up hunger like a militia to pike the native
truthfulness and draw the border newly. Here
 a royaume unit, the mysterious
 progress into white
 light under the vaults
of our flickering eyes. I seal my information
with a white capsulate stamp. Accede
the governors who run by heart,
 the motorised ducks
 that broke faith have been
ejected by a band of ragged local heroes
who could starve and whose own *baraka* bubbles over.

In the hammam even their bodies are
transparent, another community of flesh
enfolding girls and women who bear it.
 Les trois suisses
 Les belles gazelles
are decorated here, served by a ritual
cleaning to come out to get more dirt.
 What drug
complains against smoke of roasting
meat light and pressed orange? Or dances up
above this to enchant itself with something
 that glows and does
 no harm to the drug
 desire to fear routes taken
 safely by daylight.

But our secret is broadcast as the eye trips:
a talent for seeing beauty in craft,
hope in charity, providence in labour like
poems in our eyes. Ecstasy floods the souks
 with need for good
 to convert into real gain.
And opens front panels of mud flats.
Information sounds like love when traded
in every alley, thrumming with living blood.

By Porchlight

On the street see: further commerce in hatred
of the waning edge, so they slide
over and grip output slides up nobody has
to do what they don't, want
 you to make this plain as day,
were that just window wishing. Plain
as nights also scissor, and centrally our bleeps ping
all switch the mute on, edge out
fashioned by zeroes. It's easy as this: get out while
 you can radishes
in the egg slots, chaos. The edge can
just be obsolete and not waning and why
not. My retro centrepiece. Only a long, hard stare
she said will pop this zip, switch the finical
 massacre to gray don't
gape you seem retarded. As the news seems
at the edge of my government,
Nigerian pipeline outburst, rain here flushed
slick grimaces away, and every window
 sill was runny and shines.

TEN PAST NINE

In my speech shines a radiant energy,
I can destroy hype, the wind flashes with its end,
fury and barriers become smashed
out, the music chars hype
broke out from me. I sing and the serrated horizon
tilts, dirt splashes become zero each. We are
okay. I am not even a fucking person any more.

Without the bloom
of flowers set to crash, and without day after day,
antique throats would char. I am not even
despite fire victimized but am okay. The

grainy void over my speech flares and yellows,
day after day remains, ashen, vital. The things I
do say distort hype, which may become over,
destroyed that

is to say our worst speech. A face at
my window faces that. Without extrapolation
on me what could become smashed,

you cut
deep into her tongue with broken glass,
with your fist you strike out. I am ready
today, I can reduce the significance of love.