

EDIT: A RESPONSE TO KEITH TUMA

In what might once have been “a given con-/dition such as now,” the “specific ironies” that Keith Tuma finds problematic in my *QUID* 9 editorial could hardly be taken any other way. I don’t now see how else to be specific, except problematically: the route out of critical vagueness is so easily and so *often* possible that it can now only be refuted *in specie* by vagueness itself. Does that sound like defeatism? It is a refusal. I can’t mark out “a new mode of poetic practice” in specific terms without the whole sanguinary injunction turning through some strange manner of foresaking into an escape clause. And the first imperative is not to escape. We may not in any loveable sense be *where we are*, but we’re sure as hell stuck in it. You might call this a “neglect of tactics in the name of criticality,” a kind of hypervigilance that baffles its own object. After all, it’s only the *route* out of pain and exasperation that’s made futile, never the “tactics” that coalesce on it, and Ron Silliman’s “sacrifice of principle to sentiment” has the *virtù* at least of a tactical result, a game-plan for the New Left laid out squarely in bulletpoints.

So that I do absolutely want to neglect tactics, though in the most positive and conscious manner only: to refuse them. The second imperative is not to make the refusal to escape itself tactical. The predicament that we’re stuck in is not such that we can creditably mirror the rationale of what keeps us there, “matching” the withheld object lessons of Capital point for point. Those lessons are by current definition precisely matchless. The rational *punctum* we might want negatively to reduplicate is a kind of stab-wound. So why not stab back? Because, as John Wieners wrote with respect to a barely different predicament, *it is senseless to try*.

Senselessness has never been the same as impossibility, nor even the same as *foolishness* running up the axis from Lear to Feste. These latter predicates of “trying” have a secure place in the poetry I value, including now and then the poetry I almost write. But my poetry can’t be senseless. It would be so at the cost (experienced as a bonus) of definite subordination to what I passionately hate. Injustice is the paramount flower of senselessness, the power of unfeeling in manifest Capital density throughout the planet. Its opposite has for a long time confidently been assumed to be “justice,” perhaps on account of a certain linguistic resemblance. It might once even have been worth insisting on that.

I fear that my response to the charge of ironized neglect is no less susceptible to that charge than what first occasioned it. I hope for and want almost insanely the redeemed “mode” about which Keith Tuma speculates, I can imagine it in unutterable love reaching out for me, including my life within itself, I do feel this and I can’t believe for a moment that I’m being at all ironic. Is negligence likewise a kind of senselessness? Can my neglect of “tactics” actually be that specific, and not entail negligence toward people also? I don’t know. Initially I think it depends on what we mean by “people.”

Impossibility may indeed be the opposite of most things, but it’s now most brilliantly the opposite of injustice. As you know, I can’t mean by “impossibility” only a mode or category of existence; it would be senseless to oppose one component abstraction from the Rationalists’ scheme of existence to *injustice itself*, that is, to the manifest and real state of life beyond that scheme and to which that scheme resorts in the blinkered search for a describable object. Injustice deserves greater respect than this. I oppose impossibility to injustice not as a mode of existence, but as the meaning and quality of what love makes precariously real. Impossible only because violently restricted, in interests (whose? etc.) too blatant to need repeating. Precariously because “for me alone.”

This will support no politics except materialist socialism. The true idealism, rescued from its detour into the official philosophical lexicon, is senseless until it's fully and avowedly materialist, fully and openly social. The great intellectual revolution in the early twentieth century, in which for the first time our *dreams* were revealed in their true and analysable suggestiveness by Lenin, must surely have set an agenda for poetry also. Just as for Lenin, this cannot in the first place be for us a question of tactics. It cannot, in the sense that it will not. An agenda is not a route, it is knowledge of necessity and what it should mean to us. What it does now mean to us as poets is for the time being, disastrously, a different question.

Keston Sutherland
Gonville & Caius
Cambridge
CB2 1TA
kms20@hermes.cam.ac.uk

JORDAN DAVIS: POETRY AND CAPITAL

lights on! and chocolate milk
Defends the late triage of our distortions, kingdom
Bought with phlox. Oh stereo, retroverted girl
Only you understand the exchange rates of words ailing like
Chimney that has been shat down by pogroms of vinca,
The minstrels apoplectic with receipts,
Garlanding their Isis with poppies
As the sweet neologisms arrive from their apartments
Creaming on the sinning flourishes. Credit! I appeal
To your franking condoms of a certainty,
Will you ululate along these tumid friezes?
For canticles and previous shears you
Have reboomed and broached, peevish indeed,
But ghastly to the kinks of radio windowsill fame,
I'd rather not drink against the side of the building
With rehearsal and demonstrate my vacant treeline with cark
Maybe raining on dangerous evening cicadas
As it did one night, Genji admiring the tits
Of a merman debating policy in the fo'c'sle with an albatross
Which as you may know is the prim sycophant of
Our poltroon, always slavishly modulating the ancient vases
Into decanters of sweetest gin, ah, that Jehovah!
Sugar Ray something, as they doubted first this musk-ox
Then that doormaid's torso. Patrician frappes passed
Such as "Why don't you will her to make me an omelette?"
For three-thousand-six-hundred-fifty days, to be
Unwilling to breathe, this asiatic rubble on the bloodline
Bumpershoots, deflating the elegiasts by noticing
That wisdom is an elephantiasis xylophonists
Perpetuate by weathered numberings of health
And wattage, if not through sheer sex in brine,
Always an adagio in camphor plague-rat candor,
Marrying the wrong-way gymnast, the violet rose,
It's all love when a surface fails
And that great beautiful beast the beloved looks, leans over,
And pulls you out like a bell. It's all that sloping
Misty snowbrink that fidgets the lake-blank singer
Into hardcore gillyflower vedantisms, the travel without
Husband or daughters, the relenting foliage on the fringe,
Feeling like a scottish cookie in a Pennsylvania depot.
I can't decorate the quasars of well-meaning
Except as the carriage rises with the city lights
From gold to gold and back

**JEREMY HARDINGHAM: SHOCK PERFORMANCE for
the divine image of an immortal portion of light**

SHOCK PERFORMANCE

Exaggerated care, walks: I could buy a camera but I have no desire to buy a camera, there are photo stats, memorials of September 11th: each flash aches? breaks? reaches out and cries on you at the cinema in disbelief—a furtive work of joy crazed by the sunshine!

(2 MINUTES)

PALESTINE IS BEIGE: RUINOUS TATTER AT SUNSET WITH HOUMOUS AND CHIPS

essentially the strongest image has been wasted in the title, which leaves the rest of this poem for undermining that inflexion and blowing moon-lipped whistles at Extensions of febrile delimits potato-gun your home into a slice of rights and hungry pastiche. Hungry for revenge change. Call out perambulant inches you would like now to explore lets out joined-up thinking about boxes. Make you laugh while you move or slope out for another separated punctual space risk.

Pour us borders
Travel modality
Without too much need to directly
Invest in economics in which
Travelling seams
Are fleshed out in packeted wads
Of slender containment

for the divine image of an immortal portion of light we prepare to remove each hair from our mouths as the reach of our forms erupts into one another's listless imprint. as you dream jelly folds you over into a nearer dispossession of yourself as a ruptured body smears on the smell of a plate, you renegotiate light, light recasts a smaller you in the indentations of foam in which you long ago lied. make an object from $\frac{1}{2}$ the rubbish you produce in day; add this composite imagined object to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the words which form holes in your mouth. imagine a hair growing from the centre of your dilating pupil. this hair comes, compacting through fission any impositions of punctuation exerted by the processes of translating an experience you have learnt to call not describing yourself. words are time impressed upon only your image of this, relentlessly filled and refilled with the impetus with which they are riven. droplets form on a window pane, in each droplet as the light refracts to the centre of your eye you discern a hair: $\frac{1}{1000}$ of a second flash in which this image magnifies dangerously close to your sleeping head and you see in the hair in the droplet, faces. you desperately desire to see for longer these faces. organising yourself comfortably on your composite imagined object, close to a tiny piece of shit insinuated into the neck filaments of a fleshy insect, you desperately desire to see for longer these faces. half-formed words in your mouth have nowhere to go, you wipe the window-pane gently with your already wet hair. each hair growing from each eyeball engorges and the pulp of your eyelids swells as your wet mouth rasps the sill. no branch raps the window. it is the time in which to get dressed, before awakening your mouth in the cold dawn gloom. open, awakening your mouth the cold dawn gloom, puncture a foil seal, swim your hand through 0.5 litres of rainwater settled on the ledge. its smack as it hits the concrete plating eradicates a constant humming which has not for quite all of this time resonated in your body.

PETER MIDDLETON: THE LINE BREAK IN EVERYDAY LIFE

What
poetry do meanings
experience readers
This break line the in
symmetry and order of estrangement
out find and try to experiment an of part is
most is What
much how is visible immediately
the in occurs meaning
syntax backward
Do break line the of influence the under acting
breaks line
backward words of dream
see to way better What
to than
and world verse familiar the invert
the of practices poetic contemporary all of radical most the study
stop line
(BILE) Ending Line Idiophonic British The
practice distinguishing a is
rush broadband whose poets of
idioms dissonant and, metrics, homophones, allusions, concepts, registers of
cognition vertiginous its concentrates
break line every at
you remind already may this Reading
is usually it invisible how just of
catches BILE how and
out you
labour is this Reading
uncertainty semantic new induces ending line Each
suprasegmental this of modality predictable No
verse free most in as poem single a of words the codes entry
interrogative an is break Every
column or block visual a create to ended line the Has
words of unit distinct rhythmically a mark it Does
quasi-sentence a line the Is
altogether ignored be left to right from drop and scurry the Should
enjambement called familiarly and
intake breath's and pause thought's of analogy corporeal mimetic a Is
line-breaks Creeley's Robert in be to seems there as work at
for stands line metrical the that all to allusion an to emphasis lends uncertainty
Perhaps
to mistake a it is Or
BILE this read
all at interpretation for demand renewed repeatedly a as
poetry UK of metabolism the of part been has BILE The
now decades two than more for

noted barely yet
 acronym appropriate an is BILE
 injustice at anger because
 poems these of argument and form the motivates
 The ear the to discordant and bitter intellectually poetry this find Traditionalists
 BILE of semantics complex
cholera beyond far extend
 humours four the of one was which
 (perhaps poetry *bad*-humoured a of think)
 deconstructive be may role biochemical bile's medicine modern In
 cell-construction to preliminary a as only but
 liver the by produced cocktail digestion This
 action detergent whose acids cholic esterified includes
 vitamins some and cholesterol fats digest helps
 androgens and steroids contains also Bile
 or fats Digested
 lipids
 ATP of production the for reservoir essential the are
 triphosphate 5' adenosine
 organisms in energy of source main the
 phospholipids of form the in membranes cell of and
 proteins and lipids of consisting LDLs or lipoproteins density Low
 bloodstream the in body the around cholesterol take
 throughway the jam traffic don't they as long as well goes all and
 long too for diet rich a eaten has consumer the because
 intima the in parked up end they Then
 artery the of wall cell
 there trapped and squashed
 travelers fat these of suspicious become macrophages so
 tissue fat spongy into turn themselves then and them absorb and attack
 artery the of outside the overstretches that
 If too pipeline the of inside the on membrane the weakens and
 and clot mix fat and blood tears this
 attack heart with consumer the kill
 poetics oppositional an for metaphor extended an like sounds this If
 accident no is this
 science's Contemporary
 plasm political and social with glints often rhetoric
 diverges BILE
 break line of types familiar two from
 inspiration of enactment mimetic the and stave metrical the
 "Wind" Fenton's James of stanza first the In
 Each caps initial the by reinforced is break line the instance for
 end-stops line

This is the wind, the wind in a field of corn.
 Great crowds are fleeing from a major disaster
 Down the long valleys, the green swaying wadis,
 Down through the beautiful catastrophe of wind.

poem the of half second the in cæsure the of side either repetition Rhythmic
 syntax the of voicing everyday pressurizes
 the calls Wesling Donald what creating

"scissoring of grammar and metre."
 "catastrophe" with conclude to tries Syntax
 pattern the complete to iamb more one on insists metre whereas
 of consideration the in up set is tension a so and
 be might catastrophe a what
 plot poetic this in
 An
 affairs of states existing to end absolute
 construction odd the through or
 "of wind"
 a than more no as interpretable
 back dying of cycle seasonal
 periodicity the repeats poem this in ending line Every
 conclusion sentential potential of
 The doing be might sentence extending the whatever
 line-break first poet's
 sentence the of force propositional the to adds further
 syntax and stop full of combination authoritative already the reinforcing
 two line in stop full no is there Although
 of sentence end-stopped an be to it allows syntax the
 compared two force
 line opening the in break line three force the with
 endings line his of modality single The
 word citizen each of monoculture the advertises
 "dish of hellos" a as heard be to meant apparently not is "A dish of aloes"
 "sentimental trash" as "corn" nor noun a as "rose" verb the nor
 "beautiful" in idiom sales fashion nor
 "wadis" in hiding squaddies or wads nor "sword" in sward nor
 unavoidable pun a makes compression poetic When
 some or ending line the
 up lights sign neon other
 "Like chaff we were borne/ In the wind"
 nation one—be words shall so ends line the As
 nations colonised formerly of histories the imagining of capable
 nature of control own our in implicit destinies as
 authority propositional a assume also breaks line skilful Fenton's
 irony self-inflicted a against off played is which
 "I saw a thousand years pass in two seconds
 Land was lost, languages rose and divided."
 poet's fanciful the at directed is Irony
 see can that eye
 the of history the
 field farmer's a in Mediterranean
 idea the of assertability the at not
 writer this by said and said be can it that
 "lost" was "land" that
 riven languages.
 Indeed,
 sentence the to opposed as line the of force propositional the
 claims knowledge of policing institutional evades
 a only be to appearing by
 certainty such of simulation
 judgements such make to authority poetic Fenton's

the by supported also is
 the of tone emotional standard
 break line
 verse recent other much in than here evidence in less is it although
 performance in especially
 verse contemporary of writers Most
 aloud read
 catalexis aural special a with
 Longley's Michael In
The Ghost Orchid of recording
 pitch and volume of alteration without read are lines enjambed of ends
 muttered almost are lines end-stopped but
 the produces that volume and pitch in fall the is such
 mix emotional
 sadness and longing awe regret of
 poetic as of think people
 "Autumn Lady's Tresses" of lines four last the are These

Or the aftermath of lit thistledown, peacock
 Butterflies above marram grass, lady's tresses
 That wind into their spirals of white flowers
 Cowrie shells for decorating your sand hair?

final The
 "flowers" of syllable
 disappears almost
 catalexis of form a it call I why is which
 The familiar be will reading of mode Longley's
 poets other many so and Longley and Fenton of line
 calls Jarvis Simon what produce to designed is
 "a pattern of collectively preformed expectations"
 and are these what Just
 is them to rise gave politics and history what
 elicited are expectations those when understood easily most
 a of detergents the by emulsified then and
 androgens and steroids acids whose poetry
 a from secreted are
 break line similar seemingly
 sort the of nothing is that
 Wilkinson's John
 is *Torn off a Strip* from "Flowers of Nationhood"
 couplets nineteen in out set
 margin wall left the against neatly stacked
 right the on length word's long a about by varying irregularly
 couplets of series a like looks it Visually
 an in Longley or Fenton alongside appear might that
 verses minded like anthology's
 chapbook this in poems other the of Most
 way this arranged also are
 line a of end the at full-stop one only is there poem this In
 the is that and
 poem whole the in line last
 mid-line stop full a with end sentences some although

letters capital and
 Wilkinson's .lines some of beginning the at sentences new introduce
 orderly visually appear breaks line
 different very are they syntactically and orally but
 to as varied so
 random first at seem
 stops full of force the have few A
 exclamations reinforce some words isolate some
 (gilly) morpheme a highlights one
 indefinable are some enjambement is one
 ending this of effect the is What
 "break them down, before they turn to ashes truly//
 skills no sensible disputes, the team as a whole's/ raring to get cracking"
 possible seem phrases the of dispositions linear Other
 phrases unsyntaxified of intrusion repeated the given which
 citational sound
 "This is a disclaimer masquerades as inevitability" line the In
 "This is a disclaimer" treat to is it read to way obvious an
 A marks quotation in were it if as
 the argue might prosodist hostile
 cannot poet
 all at break line the handle
 say to tempted be might readers Sympathetic
 tradition of trivia such to indifferent is poet the that
 mistake a be would This
 His .properly tradition hate does Wilkinson
 cognitive of self-consciousness and intensity the up scales so poem
 reaction emotional and
 break line the of device prosodic the to
 role its from change qualitative a undergoes significance its that
 Fenton's like poetry subservient metrically more in
 break line of type specific a of think to not important is It
 for quantity fixed a as be might meanings its complex however
 readers historied differently
 Wilkinson of Readers
 moods and dispositions ideas habits with begin
 outings poetry previous by formed
 difference the with familiar be will readers all Almost
 text unjustified and justified between
 variations local many lie this beyond but
 of publication BBC the in poems the from judge To
100 Popular Poems From the BBC Radio 4 Programme
More Poetry Please!
 endings line defined strongly
 resolution syntactical of degrees and completion metrical rhyme by marked
 familiar most the are
 childhood from them of many
 nostalgias compensatory and loss of senses desires the with associated and
 with drug memories childhood
 affects repeated few a to counterpart the are endings line These
 wonder beauty in delight existence at joy mortality of fear
 Wilkinson of readers sophisticated more Slightly
 experience such to added have will

Longley and Fenton by those like poems of readings
resolution emotional metre of scissors a offers line the where
and resignation enlightened in
The statement of authority reassuring a
Wilkinson of readers poetry read experienced most
a breath a is that line metaphysical the encountered also have will
its in away blows and endures emerges that thought
a moment separate and clear phenomenologically
The voice to language from back speaking
mode idiophonic the headline lines ten first
the that admit should I And
abreactions linguistic other and semantic of metonymic is phonic

Let's understand this body controls world athletics,
bale out, bring a near miss, revile a new manager

professes continuity, favours cold authentic choice
This is a disclaimer masquerades as inevitability

stage a ceremony to aid tripwire migrants; whomever,
definitively ID'ed, come to heel with that *the*

whose screeds of sweat perforate the immortal dolls,
on smooth desktops, families of rouged dolls nest,

statements snake out from their abdomen, "we have
been led to believe, we have been struck to stumble"

stimulate to bound is form Verse
regularity of expectations
read to trying be will they more the reader the sophisticated less the and
active scissors the make to metre for
to is effect one So
circles outer and inner separate
tradition verse of simulation Visual
rhythm of structures internal the of perception with interferes
syntax and repetition
Suprasegmentals
divisions segment the hide
the for assembled fully be can it before proposition every fracture that
four first the that so relined be could poetry
read instance for lines

Let's understand
this body controls world athletics
bale out
bring a near miss
revile a new manager
professes continuity
favours cold authentic choice
This is a disclaimer
masquerades as inevitability

the as much so nothing resembles it way this in out Set
 like books in used form verse
 Raworth's Tom
Eternal Sections
 a does What
 Instead BILE using by gain poet
 and clauses well-formed to line the linking of
 the disjunction and parataxis mark break line the letting then
 end line the at occasionally as well as lines inside occurs disjunction
 tends Poetry
 phrases recognisable stack to
 them with bricolage speculative invite to and columns in
 uncertainty with charged neither is ending line The
 force assertoric any if much have line the does nor
 authority no sentence No
 the and reaction of wariness the both keeps BILE
 active assertion of possibility

Unanswering Rational Shore poem recent J.H.Prynne's
 a in break line the practices
 manner similar

On the track the news radiates like a planet auction
 for the best rates hard to chew. If it seems too good,
 sucker, the pap is surely toxic, unless the glad
 hand goes your way, soft as velvet. The strokes
 of the palm not even touched, a waft of livid air
 gives the take its donation, sexual preening overtly
 lavish in symmetry; your flicker goes to mine and

verse stanzaic traditional be could this appearance visual In
 and frustration rouses therefore expectations such with Reading
 and disorientation even
 I Here with work to able be will poem the that emotions elicit can this
 detour a take to want
 the studies Katz Jack
 everyday through performed emotions
 rage road there for notorious are L.A. in Drivers interactions social
 automobile another by off cut when

Drivers usually do not *perceive* themselves being cut off *and then decide* to construct their anger; rather, it is in seeing themselves cut off that they first find themselves angry. What makes the self-conscious nature of emotions difficult to see is that the turn on the self is done sensually and aesthetically, through a kind of living poetry, and not in the form of discursive reason that commentaries about 'reflection' have traditionally evoked. How does becoming angry when driving bring previously tacit, transcendent dimensions of action into vivid corporeal awareness? First of all, driving is itself essentially a means of transcending space, of getting from here to there. When traffic or a "rude" driver cuts one off, the experience is of falling out of a flow and being stuck or held back...for each participant what is collectively treated as locally transpiring will have unshared, transcendent implications in the form of sensed relevancies for other encounters in some other time and place. The emotional meanings of everyday life are naturally and necessarily hidden because selves,

although they are always presented in forms that are tailored to a social time and place, are always produced by bodies, and what having a body most fundamentally means for a person is that he or she lives an ongoing continuity beyond the social situations passed through in everyday life.

induce reading and driving Both
the which in being of states
the world material the into out flows self
text of lines the road
forwards and backwards extends consciousness while
lines time extensive along
driving like skill learned a is prose justified Reading
and movement eye the of awareness conscious little so with done be can that
letters printed the of decipherment
interaction the from arising story ongoing an with merges self the that
line the than horizon longer much a has usually that narrative a with
by motivated are that cuts with poetry Reading
only that means voice or metric
and instability momentary produce will enjambement
reverie the on in cut to enough not usually
The again and again reader the on in cuts however BILE
is BILE possibilities two suggest would driving with analogy
unpredictable semantically and predictable visually
a as experienced is break line the that means which
the by off cut sudden
is which body reading phenomenological
and shape verse a to conformity visual inexorable the of awareness into startled
of interruption the at angered be to likely
line the reading of work perceptual the of transcendence self's the
text this with problem a be to likely not is That
to enough long not fortunately is that
of anaesthesia habit's create
labour eye's the
and BILE into initiated already those for that speculate would I
verse contemporary conservative at directed be will generated anger any
layout visual the by represented
denunciation ethical of subjects target the at and
desire of manipulation media's news the are these stanza Prynne's In
ends political and economic for
and anger direct well may poetries such with unfamiliar reader A
but poem the by offered direction the in not
themselves line-breaks unexpected these at
the of because anger powerful a
disorientation of intensity
it thinking into them tricked has what in
verse free everyday
this and poet the towards aimed annoyance and
poetry of school bilious
of iconic is form verse where culture a in arisen have only could BILE
of all above and authority tradition order
affects public legitimate
alter-soma fleshy its as complex as is BILE
responsibility ethical and skill poetic great requires

its of effects shear the if
verse of view exploded
readership off cut to simply not are
uneven is poetry BILE Although
texts subtle politically and brilliant some produced has it
emotional the and cognitive the both addressing of tactic its of because
line-break the of resources
national the on founded as
verse standard in encoded passions social and ideology
risky also is It
of remediation the towards anger elicited direct to needs it because
it of symbols convenient at not injustice
like causes eccentric into overflow to it allow to nor
revolutions prosodic grand
one uncomfortable an is acronym My
criticism or ridicule as read be could that
the as about talking am I what is risk that just but
itself poetry the of risk
a is It
still may poets risk
take to need

DREW MILNE: AFTER JENIN

after Jenin, what song of
songs seeps still through
the scrip and pearl till
dark breath fills on lung

and first is as a fist gone
to what dune it grounds
yet to die for in garlands
among smarts and staves

but one more cypress tiara
spelt down a wig or two
off some birdfoot crutch
some fiddle gone staff car

would what water and melon
bleed on in a strange land
trudge fallen on blistering
striking folds and defeat

before laying down to sleep
among ancient diseases
hawks upon willows who
cannot lay themselves to rest

BEN FRIEDLANDER: TRADITION AND POETRY¹

In 1987 I wrote a five-line poem called 'Penchant.' It reads as follows:

They levy taxes.
We're sold to Rome.
Beg a merry borrow,
scheme
ships to sail on home.

The poem is an example of my "stupid shit"—Jeff Gburek's phrase for writing propelled forward by wordplay and uninteresting, finally, apart from that play. I wrote many such poems the year Jeff and I became friends. It was a period of waiting. I was building up enough courage to ask my father to talk to me about his time at Auschwitz, and soon after I met Jeff I did in fact ask. The answer, given after long pause, was curtly affirmative. "Okay," he said, "we'll talk—but not now, not here." Something like six months passed before the conversation actually took place, and in the interim I became fixed on the idea that my father would kill himself. This is the same period when Ben Hollander and I became friends. Ben's parents aren't survivors per se; they left Germany for Palestine in the 1930s. Still, I learned that Ben had similar fixations, and several years later Ben's father did, at age 80 or so, kill himself. Anyway, this was the period when 'Penchant' was written.

The poem is a roster of names pronounced through wordplay. The point was to compress as many names as possible into a short space. More specifically, the poem includes the names of four writers who committed suicide—Primo Levi, Jean Améry, Tadeusz Borowski, Paul Celan. Thus the title, which I've always read silently as 'Pen Chant' (two words), a pun that led me to wonder if writing about the Holocaust weren't a dangerous intoxication, a means of exaggerating the penchant those writers already had, as survivors, for committing suicide.

The morbidity of 'Penchant' is a bit extreme; I wrote the poem so that if Elie Wiesel were to kill himself, the phrase "we're sold" could be changed to "we sell." Let me read the poem again:

PENCHANT

They levy taxes.
We're sold to Rome.
Beg a merry borrow,
scheme
ships to sail on home.

The "shit" gets stupider. Around this time I read that Emily Dickinson's father wrote "I hereby give myself to God" on a slip of paper, signed and dated the slip, then carried the contract secretly on his person for the rest of his life. The gesture

¹ N.Y.C. Poetry Talks, March 1996

impressed me, and in a sentimental way I had then, and still have, I copied the gesture. I typed and signed the poem, added a date, then carried the poem secretly in my wallet—or did until the phoniness sank in and I threw the paper away, embarrassed. The fact is, I only had a vague idea what my poem was about, and no inkling why 'Penchant' should recall Edward Dickinson's contract with God. Retrospectively, I think I can make sense of my action, but a margin of confusion remains. The key, to me, is the underlining, which highlights the words "They" and "We," though the constitution of this "they" and "we" remains a mystery. At the time of writing, I thought my poem was about the Holocaust; I see it now, instead, as a fumbling attempt to articulate a sense of group identity, to become part of some first-person plural, some "we." I'm still not sure, however, if this "we" includes Levi, Améry, Borowski and Celan, or if those figures are instead part of the poem's "they." Perhaps the encrypted names belong to a register that evades "they" and "we" equally. I don't know.

In any case, to bring these remarks round about to the topic at hand, I haven't much use for the concept of "tradition," which implies, as I see it, a past that is easily known, easily told, implying also an uncomplicated sense of belonging, a group identity definable enough to be passed down from parent to child, teacher to student, from generation to generation. My own experience has been otherwise, and as a consequence I'm drawn to writers whose experience of the past is occluded, difficult, whose writing of the past manages to escape both traditional definitions of history and traditional habits of writing. Speaking only for myself, I would say that connection to the past, far from being easily known or possessed, must continually be sought after, claimed, constructed, invented; so too our responsibilities to the past—and this is so despite much hard-won information and many inherited obligations. Isn't that where poetry becomes necessary? Clarifying the difference between information and knowledge, obligation and responsibility, our explorations require a less respectful view of history than the concept of "tradition" usually allows—and here language comes awkwardly to hand, eager to assist us in our questioning, even when we misunderstand the answers, or hide them from ourselves in sentimental gestures. We slangily call our most cherished possessions our "shit." For me, history is the stupidest shit of all, and poetry—aptly or not—my most cherished means of establishing or protecting the claim.

MARJORIE WELISH: SUNG CONSTRUCTION

to be read less through utterance and more through artifice, thanks in part to the belated transmission of

“This is a poem”

“Out!”

mutinous aftermath.

“The poets succeed by simplifying; practically everything left out”

may come to be read less through utterance and more

announced.

Very roughly put,

languages.

Thanks.

Put inquietude

in *Parsifal*, whence dubbing.

“I thought that if I could put it all

down”

in sung song, a bass-baritone

through the voice of Hagen Hakegard would be one way.

“And then the thought”

that is, cultivating voice as inventory would bring about Hagen Hakegard's appearing together with Edith, whose voice however

untrained of larynx—and whereas

so to speak

yet of

“I” who ate.

A speech in incremental

mouthings.

He went. She told you that he went.

The “how” of the “what”

emitting vicinity.

“Yes? Speaking. How are

you?”

Hairsplitting

indelibly speaking

and with thief

mouthed her mouth even as he sings, even as he sings acquired languages through
which his sung concomitance, it has been said,

is identifiably that of lyric, dramatic lyric and, as with this opera,

an earful

so accreted in

heterotopia

mustered ourselves

in whose era

in whose ear the voice of Marni Nixon may be heard again in duet with the mouth of

Edith, to augment

“incommensurable diversity from within” we hear as little

shipments

these vocal

remarks, together with

children's

in virtue of their being untrained, or made to seem so.

Or loops

succinctly

stand clear.

A delicious blend of rescue in the graph. The specialist halted.

Please!

Stout branch announced.

Very roughly put,

languages.

Languages in song through rephrasing would be one way.

“And then the thought”

that is his operatic pastiche would be predicated on Hagen Hakegard's appearing together with Edith,

so to speak

incipient of body–

like trout

mouthings

opera

By mouthing, yet mouthing in her native language (his acquired language), she would be another way. The child's practice heard in the enunciative field meanwhile, still another way.

Training through which his sung voice, it has been said, it has been asserted,

is identifiably that of

coaxed Parsifal.

The New York School may come to be read less through utterance and more through

construction

sung.

Construction sung

through the voice of Hagen Hakegard would be one way.

“And then the thought”

that is, a voice trained to bring about the untrained, albeit dubbed

Edith,

whose voice, however, is exempt from speaking.

Tantalizingly “come forth from her closet”

“by a rushing stream.”