



poetry,
consciousness
and community

CHRISTOPHER (KIT) KELEN

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The Scope of the Work

This book is about poetry, consciousness and community, about their reflexive relationships in process, and about how these relationships matter to the world today and to worlds to come.

The process of poetry has importantly intuitive aspects and poetry would appear to embody an ambivalence towards consciousness and towards those activities of thought in which it is constituted. It was ability to favour doubt over the productions of the rational mind and its determinations that led Keats to associate poetry with his 'negative capability'. In *Tropics of Discourse* Hayden White connects poetry with lapses into the prelogical, lapses in the interest of bringing logical thinking into question. White draws our attention to Hegel's definition of poetry as use of metaphor that is conscious and has the effect of releasing us from the conceptual tyranny of over-determinations (1978: 10).

This present volume is interested in the nature of poetic, as opposed to other, thought (for instance in the relationship between the types of thought Julia Kristeva describes as ambivalent and bivalent). It is interested in the critical application of these forms of thought to each others' productions, and in how poetic thought might or might not be subject to its own regime. 'Thought' here is taken (after Bakhtin and others) to be an essentially dialogic process, one therefore suggestive of continuities and breaks in the meeting of minds and of (at least the prospect of) community.

Throughout the work, poetic texts and the canon of texts about poetry and poetics (from the most ancient) are used to interrogate the issues outlined above. For instance, the expulsion of the poets from Plato's ideal polity (and the various invited 'Defences of Poetry') are read in our present epochal conditions: those in which the post-modern, post-colonial, avowedly reflexive subject is engaged with the question of its own identity, its complicities, its exclusions. The business and direction (or lack thereof) of poetry is engaged with the ethical problems acts of reading and writing imply.

Key terms of the work are poetry, consciousness and community. Brief working definitions of these are introduced here, together with their role in the argument.

Poetry

Does it matter what poetry is? Considerable time and effort have been spent on attempting to resolve the question, and while this has been entertaining (and often poetic), one is left with the impression that poetry is something of a floating signifier, or one might say it has been all things to all poets, critics, innocent bystanders. Complacency with regard to the insistent assumption of poetry's universal properties ought to lead us to doubt whether these constitute the imposition of one culture's (and/or epoch's) construct on others. Many definitions of poetry have been evasive. A favourite is that of A.E. Housman, who wrote, 'I received from America a request that I would define poetry. I replied that I could no more define poetry than a terrier can define a rat, but I thought we both recognised the object by the symptoms it provokes in us' (1971: 369). In general terms perhaps that should suffice; for the particular purposes of this work, some more specific framing of poetry is required.

From the synoptic point of view, poetry – as extant text – is defined by the company it keeps and does not keep. Distinguished as other than particular non-poetry genres, out of long dis/continuities 'poetry' deemed worth preserving has become an evasion of (addition to, subtraction from) what the canon already contains in the way of poetry. What should therefore serve as (or in lieu of) definition, is this formula – that poetry is the continuity of efforts gone on under the name of poetry; that the most characteristic of these, in the modernist and postmodernist sense, have been those paradoxical attempts to produce the text deserving of canonization by virtue of being what could not before have been poetry.

From the dynamic point of view, poetry – as art practice – is not merely the business of creating the text fresh enough to be

canonised ‘poetry’; it is world changing work¹. If, as Wittgenstein claims, the limits of my language are the limits of my world, then we can say that poetry is the practice of testing of those limits. Or – if the linguist and philosopher of language have in common a desire to understand how language works, then the poet’s concern is with making language work and with testing the workings of language. An important question then will be how self-aware any such process can be. Similar reflexive questions apply to the linguist and the philosopher, but in the case of poetry more is at stake, because, as Roman Jakobson tells us, poetry’s functional focus is on the message itself.

Most of what concerns the practice of poetry in this book concerns more generally the processes of art. For this reason a definition of poetry (as distinct aesthetic process) is less essential than a definition of art as process. This is not to suggest that poetry as an activity is indistinct from other art forms. An important difference is in the lack of a line dividing talk about the verbal or literary arts from the substance of the work itself. Unlike music and visual arts, an art of words has the same substance as the language with which its practitioners must function in their everyday lives; likewise meta-awareness of verbal artistry takes place in the same language medium.

As with art more generally, poetry’s world changing work is not characterized by the propagandist’s sledgehammer or the preacher’s pleading. While acknowledging a danger of essentialism, it nevertheless seems reasonable to claim that the creative process of aesthetic production is a continuity definitive of existence as human, both through the ages and across cultures. These continuities can be contrasted with those of the (more recent) forms of thought considered critical or rational.

The creative process is work of re-visioning the world. It is difference making. As such, imaginative work is tropic (as opposed to iterative). As process, creativity is the opposite of alienation. Art

¹ The canonic as category may be applied to the low as much as to the high of art; it includes for instance those populist texts (like the anthem or the advertising jingle) resented for the way they stick in the head, possibly nagging us into submission.

represents and so explains the world – as it is, as it was, as it could be. This is a way in which humans make themselves at home, and in this sense, all art is anthropomorphism – a making sense so making ours, making human of the world. Creativity is the practice of the magic of making, and natural language – seamlessly evolving through use – is its paradigm instance. An art of words practices this magic on and with the magic power all words have to alter the world. The world altering power of words is a function of their mutability, their use as floating values-in-common. Alienation of the word comes where its creative potential is denied in favour of fixed values able to be endlessly reproduced (for instance mechanically). This occurs where words and their sum are reified, hypostasized, commodified. Paradigm cases of this are the dictionary and the canons of literature. In the context of popular capitalist culture today, the ever more impressive technologies with which the paying masses have their imagining done for them mask a struggle between the impulse to create and the desire to receive impressions of a desirable world. The contradiction here is that the apparent freedom to consume of culture's passive recipients depends on a cultural enslavement: it is the desires and the judgements of a culture-producing elite that hail the punters in what appear to be their own terms.

While this study is not focused on aesthetic judgement, it nevertheless acknowledges the fact that such judgement is perpetually taking place and that aesthetic productions only survive age to age to the extent and in the degree that they are judged worthy by those whose opinions count in such matters – those variously empowered to pass on to others their delight or disdain for particular works. The canon is, at any given moment, the collection and arrangement of works surviving such judgement (and other vicissitudes of time); the canon provides a synoptic view of art as finished product. From the point of view of art-as-practice the canon is an edifice, an already-built world of influence – an essential context – into or against which new works fit or misfit. Thus the canon of literary texts – of word works – exists in a dynamic relationship with the process of art, as the arrangement of words to which the breath returns. Although this work deals almost entirely with a particular notionally 'high-culture' product and process (poetry canonised or canonise-able), no essential high-low distinction is made with regard to the nature of art products

or processes or the consequent judgements allowing or disallowing their survival. The *Odyssey* may be understood in its original context as popular culture in the same sense that *The Simpsons* is read as popular culture today. The canonic status of particular episodes, characters, lines is, in either case, dependent on a particular history of reception, needing to be understood in terms of a context of reading. In either case, patterns of allusion in the text are suggestive of the canonic knowledge of the reader as relied upon by the author/s. A comparative study of the participatory (or interactive) aspects of reception of these texts over time would be enlightening, but it is beyond the scope of this book. Though attention to canonicity and reflexivity reveal a difficulty in separating production from reception, the focus of the present work will remain with the processes through which texts are created and so become products of literary art.

Is it merely wishful thinking to consider art practice as world-changing work? It was the revelation of eighteenth and nineteenth century philology that every unreflective instance of speech alters its language and – so it may be inferred – alters the sum of what words have meant thus far. This process is necessarily unnoticeable; art's process – as it relates to the prospect of survival – is by contrast frequently visible, leaves a trace to be noticed. To leave such traces is the intention of those who consciously avow themselves as practitioners of art. The point is not that every work of art alters the world, rather that this is the measure of art's effect – its presence to the here and now and its ongoing presence. That act of presence we call art is not about taking a jackhammer to the status quo or the powers that be. It is about shifting consciousness under its own steam.

Consciousness

For the purposes of this book, consciousness is considered from three perspectives; firstly as an alert state of mind in which a subject is aware of her self and circumstances; secondly (and importantly, a critique of the previous perspective is implied here), consciousness is the scale on which self-awareness and awareness of the world at large might be notionally measured; thirdly styles of consciousness are implied by different modes of thought and/or

feeling and for instance by different artforms and genres of literary work. In the first case, the 'light switch' metaphor is apposite (consciousness is off or on). In the second case, to shift (or to 'raise') consciousness is to move along that scale running from notional absolute non-awareness to notional complete knowledge. Contradictions between these absolute and relative notions of consciousness are rife in the automatised speech of everyday life and so provide a fertile ground for poetic process and observation. In the third case, point of view is foregrounded, as in for instance cultural or disciplinary differences. Modes of thought are likewise implied, so that we might for instance contrast a poetic with a rational style of consciousness.

Reflexivity and the (putative) self-knowledge of poets and poetry are key interests in the relationship between poetry and consciousness. Here again the generic contrast between reasoned and poetic thought is suggestive. An essay knows itself by way of an argument; it works or it does not work that way. A poem entails a different kind of self-knowledge. The anthropomorphism here points us though towards something these styles of mind have in common – that is, consciousness as what might be described as tropic motion. For the purposes of this work then a distinction will be made between tropology and rhetoric; tropology being the study of tropes from all contexts and without prejudice to subjective intentions, rhetoric implying the avowed self-consciousness of subjects choosing how to mean what they mean.

This book surveys three exemplars of consciousness-in-process, from the point of view of a poetic practice. These three are the oneiric, the tropic and the communal/interpersonal. Dream and community are poetic *topoi* – themes of avowed interest for the poet. The tropes – as structure for the practice of meaning in natural language – provide poetry with its most immediate source.

Community

Plato's parable of the poets' expulsion is a useful touchstone for imagining the relationship between poetry and community. The

association of poetry and its prospects with diasporic and exilic thought points to an affinity with the outside of (and with challenges to) civilization and rationality. Lao Tzu's mythic wish to flee the kingdom may be read as a similar motif in Chinese cultural history. In such imagery one witnesses an opposition between the state and those who refuse to sing its praises, between the governing impulse and an ironizing poetic impulse. We could call this latter the impulse to not have thought governed, to always think a new way. This impulse may be argued as something essential to thought in general, as in Michele Le Doeuff's formula: 'there is no thinking that does not wander'.

Community is a consequence of the intersubjective facts of language; it is what we consciously and unconsciously make of ourselves through the process of dialogue. As with language, and largely as defined by language, community's clearest characteristic is the line between the inside and the outside (belonging and not). Several key paradoxical formulations are relevant to contemporary poetry's exilic/cosmopolitan conception of community – these are, of community as unavowable, of the community of those who have nothing in common, the community of those who have no community. In our present cyber-age, the idea of anonymous community has purchase.

Is a community a participatory process or an edifice of civilization? In relation to art in general and to poetry in particular the canon is the key object in contention. Canon is what survives of art until now, it is that against which all future practices need to be measured. In a certain sense canon and community are opposites (the one dead, the other living). Their vital interdependence suggests though that they are different views of the one phenomenon; namely culture. In one case, art is read as trace of past practice, in the other art is a dialogic process in the here and now. Dialogue is possible because of the edifice of culture as it presently persists. Culture is possible because of the conversation that brought us thus far.

How real and how imaginary is community? The question is moot: however abstract they seem, structures of human community shape the world of the living. It is an urgent task of community to understand the stakes in the real crises the world now faces. These

crises principally concern the destruction of other-than-human species, the erosion of human diversity, sustainability and the work of saving the planet from what humans are doing to it. It is an urgent task to witness these problems and to imagine solutions. The world today is in the thrall of three great abstractions (ideologies in the self-concealing sense) – these are nation and capital and empire. Religion and myth – the old ideologies – are harnessed in their service. Buck passers, none of these (nation, capital, empire) is responsible for the problem, none of them can solve it. So there is an urgent imaginative need to create the kind of human community that could understand the stakes and propose solutions to the problem.

What can be done by means of poetry? We who participate in poetry's community exercise a potential in common – that we might wake up to ourselves and so see what is to be done. Various traditions of poetic practice converge in this hope. If exile is a problem for poetry then reflexive awareness of place and time is the solution poetry offers.

Against world-wrecking 'rationality', the liberating potential of a poetic practice. That form of reason (as critiqued by Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*) is best instanced in the clear and present danger to the globe posed today by growth economics. Against the gospel of growth, poetic play and the work of witness.

The specific kind of consciousness indicated here is eco-conscience – awareness of the here and now on the global/planetary scale. How will this 'cure' involve the forms or styles of thought thus far available? Read negatively, reason is the alienation of creative practice; creative practice is a kind of blindness. The Platonic ideal of the poets expelled removed from the city those who cast doubt in favour of those who styled themselves sternly and in terms of their own certitude. One notes that irony was the bond-in-common of the poets and those who first named themselves lovers of wisdom. Such a particular and elusive meeting of minds is one needing to be fostered.

An urgent necessity today is to balance rational and imaginative modes of thought.

The potential in play, in witness, in playing witness, in witnessing play, is to see how things really are in the here and now and to see a better way ahead. And because poetry is from somewhere and has destinations, poetry needs to witness itself, its play, its process, its presence. Myths of genius and of inspiration will no longer pass unanalyzed. So poetry – as practice of testing the limits of language – entails a reflexive goal: that of understanding the journey in words made possible for, and by, the poem. A key assumption of this work will be that poetic meaning and truth are revealed between languages (and likewise between genres, between texts, between subjects), that it is in this inter-subjective and inter-cultural space that the limits of language (and so of conceivable worlds) are found.

A methodological problem for this work concerns its form. Essentially this book is an essay and not a poem, a critical/theoretical work and not a creative work. Yet – to borrow Julia Kristeva's conception here – that bivalent (yes or no) version of the circumstances would seem to be solidly from the rational side. How can that bias do justice to the subject of poetic process? An ambivalent (yes and no) logic would allow productive play with imagined motions and continua – from waking to dreaming, between real and imagined worlds, between the as-is and the taken for granted and the various challenges a practice of art must pose for these. An aim of this book is to test the boundary between essay and poem and to build – or test the potential for the building of – a community in that borderzone.

Poetry and Consciousness: The Scope of Indirection

Before the first awakening of our consciousness language was echoing about us, ready to close around our first tender seed of thought and to accompany us inseparably through life, from the simple activities of everyday living to our most sublime and intimate moments – those moments from which we borrow warmth and strength for our daily life through that hold of memory that language itself gives us.

– Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*

Knowledge begins with reflection... Consciousness was there before it was known.

– Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*

Consciousness is – like poetry – a floating signifier, a term of wide reference, and with a range of implications in the various disciplinary contexts in which it finds currency. The approach to consciousness in this work is surely interdisciplinary, drawing on a number of relevant fields of study. So some caveats seem apt to begin. The aim of this work is not to discount modern psychological and psychoanalytic notions as these relate to the viability of the self and identity. It is necessary to acknowledge the persistent critique to which the idea of the individual consciousness has been subject in western thought since the nineteenth century. Certainly doubts as to the assumed unity of the individual consciousness have been to the fore in the mainstream of twentieth century English-language poetry, in the works of Yeats, Lawrence, Eliot and many others. The idea of consciousness as multiplicity has challenged the conventions of persona as they were prior to Modernism. As well I note two specific contributions which have shaped the contemporary significance of the abstraction ‘consciousness’ for poetry. The first is Marx’s recognition that social being determines consciousness and that – while the relationship is vitally reciprocal and reversible – the social deter-

mination of consciousness will be the starting point if the object is to change the world through the life of signs. (Contrast here is with Idealism's assumption of individual consciousness as a starting point.) The second key to current understanding is phenomenology's contribution in showing that consciousness is *of* something and that – whatever reciprocation may be suggested in this encounter – the object in question is essentially other than the subject which objectifies in being conscious of it.

Witness

Jean-François Lyotard believes that 'the activities of thought have a... vocation: that of bearing witness to *différends*'. An extraordinary claim: that thought could have some particular vocation to unify it and that in the New Testament habit or manner perhaps most famously kept alive by the Society of Friends (Quakers): bearing witness. What is it exactly that thought is to witness?

For Lyotard a *différend* is suggested in the observation that 'a universal rule of judgement between heterogeneous genres is lacking in general' (xi). Lyotard defines the *différend* as 'the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be put into phrases cannot yet be' (13). A *différend* lies between communities implied (but not necessarily noticed) in distinct modes of speech, each of which is intelligible to its participants. It is the manner of the barrier that makes others unintelligible to me. *Différends* are means of making others other, and the *différend* as a term is a means of accounting for misunderstanding that arises from the effort to translate between idioms. The term itself is an instance of witness. Lyotard claims that society is inhabited by *différends*. He writes that, 'there is a *différend* between two parties when the "settlement" of the conflict that opposes them appears in the idiom of one of them while the tort from which the other suffers cannot signify itself in the idiom' (9). That situation, I would argue, obtains wherever a law (and for example a grammar or a canon of works) is – consciously or unconsciously – the possession of particular parties.

For those who are pursuing the kind of vocation Lyotard recommends, the relationship between law and justice, or the circle in which these terms demand and deny each other, is such as to ensure that the question of ownership is kept open. The fact of the distance between *lects* of any sort, such as is illustrated in all forms of dialogue, could serve to demonstrate the absolute quality of alterity and the impossibility of minds meeting. If so then, as with Zeno's arrow not arriving, that quality is one contradicted by the evidence of the senses, in this case by the fact of communication in dialogue, by the fact that Saussure's 'spoken chain' unfolds from and enables the intersubjective conditions of dialogue. Yet they are, in varying degrees, different realities and truths possessed by the sides in a dispute. The idea of arbitration or judgement and the idea of bearing witness are radically different. Poetry, because it subjects its own language to the exigencies of a position between languages, plays a role akin to that of bearing witness to *différends*. If I claim that it does of its nature what Lyotard demands of thought, then might this claim not be extended to all self-conscious uses of language?

In his discussion of 'The Pathology of Language' in *Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language*, Merleau-Ponty canvasses the depersonalisation of 'the subject who no longer has the impression that he coincides with his own speech'. He writes that 'this is the germ of the illusion of a speech which is foreign to him' (1979: 67). This illusion might be equally if not more valid a version than 'the facts' of speech in general assumed but never agreed between us. The pathology Merleau-Ponty describes is a case of the loss of that faith (one which is everywhere at risk, within and beyond selves), between the self and others, on which language depends and which language makes possible: 'Other people are what deliver me from my own ambivalence: We are both, he and I, two variables of the same system' (67). The faith between subjects on which our assumptions depend is demonstrated by the paradox that:

the normal subject would be the one who would not really consent to becoming himself except in contact with other people, who would recognise the enrichment that comes from discussion. The abnormal subject would be the one who would refuse this dialectic of the self. He would persist in considering language only as a kind of abstract logic. While nevertheless

remaining conscious of this duality, he would feel restrained from placing one of the terms of the contradiction on an imaginary other. (69)

In *A Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari claim that language is fundamentally between those who do not speak the same tongue, that it is essentially for translation rather than communication (1987: 430). At stake in both these formulations is what I will call the process of *becoming foreign* – a process connecting the experience of poetry’s apprentice with that of the subject entering culture, and most especially with that of one learning to speak a foreign language. The language learners’ efforts are based on, what is from the general viewpoint of the language they are entering, a more or less severe restriction of resources and methods. At first nothing is automatic in the foreigner’s speech because there is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness of system. We use the expression ‘it goes without saying’ to indicate a pattern of assumption that keeps the wheels of sociality oiled. What goes without saying suggests a transcendence of language, of the kind words in common have heretofore allowed. For the foreigner though, to begin with, there are no safe assumptions. Everything has to be said but – as in the terms Lyotard has described with the *différend* – the means of expression are lacking.

To say, though, that foreignness resides exclusively in those subjectivities which occupy specific positions between cultures is to mistake the symptom for the substance. Language *is* the borderzone. All that is outside of the self, whatever prospect of interanimation it offers, insists that the self is foreign and so threatens the unity of consciousness. It is against this predicament that efforts such as home and community are building. Consciousness and unconsciousness of the imperial and the diasporatic, of feelings of foreignness and of community; these are all of potential interest to poetics. Poetics may be cast as eluding or as proliferating definition, nevertheless we may enlist them, among other discourses, in the role of a world-shifting work of witness. Along the lines of such a conception a key contention of this work is that poetry does to its own language what the foreigner cannot help but do to the language she is entering.

What definition then could yield poetry the kind of unity one might regard as constituting a vocation? If poetry has had a diasporatic posture, then poetry’s evasion of definition is the un-

remarkable result of the fact that, as language is, so poetry is becoming; it is a way with words self-constituted as *always on the way*. Conversation and witness may each be regarded as resistances of truth or meaning as finished; these are about the consciousness threatening prospect of allowing otherness. In this prospect lies the ‘scope of indirection’ – that range of the possible which intention cannot determine, because the truly open dialogue will not be gainsaid in its implications or effects. It is in this sense the meaning of poetry (as minimally negotiated between author and reader) lies open to the active consciousness, open as text to be read.

‘Bobók’: Traps of Consciousness

The etymology of the modern English word ‘consciousness’ and its cognates, points in the direction of a close tie to the notion of witness as poetry’s vocation. Our modern word ‘consciousness’ derives, as does ‘conscience’, from the Latin *conscientiae* meaning something along the lines of ‘shared knowledge’, and implying something like what we would today call ‘moral conscience’¹. Cicero uses the term with reference to witnessing the deeds of others. Without wishing to discount our modern sense of the word – suggestive of psychological notions of self and identity – the interest of this work, in relating poetic practice to consciousness, is to remain attuned to the resonances of conscience and witness in our use of terms like ‘consciousness’ and ‘awareness’ today. The hope is to

¹ In Chinese philosophy we may read a similar relationship attributed, since ancient times, to *xin* (heart/mind) and moral consciousness/conscience. In *Mencius*, we read, ‘Everyone has a heart of mercy...’ (1999: 101-2). Thus begins the homily on compassion which centres the famous dispute with Xunxi over the child falling in the well. For Mencius, compassion (and so innate goodness) is proved by the empathy anyone would feel on seeing the child in danger. In Zhang Dainian’s account Mencius’ ‘mind’ is also ‘moral awareness’: ‘By saying that there is a heart within the heart the text refers to self-consciousness’ (2005: 393). Zhang Dainian develops the conscience/consciousness link through reference to the philosophy of Xunxi, Zhang Zai, Zhu Xi and later thinkers. He accounts for Ming Dynasty philosopher, Wang Shouren’s view of conscience as ‘the subject’s own self-consciousness’: ‘That small conscience of yours is the norm governing your own house and the place of your own thoughts and concepts. When other things are ‘so’ it recognizes them as ‘so’; when things are ‘not-so’ it knows them as ‘not-so’ (414).

promote a dynamic concept of consciousness as an ethically motivated difference-making action in the world.

A key question for this investigation of poetry and consciousness will be whether to consider consciousness as state or process or both. The tack will in short be, while acknowledging conscious/unconscious ‘states’ of mind (likewise levels of un/consciousness), to consider as dynamic those instances where direction is entailed (as in the ‘raising of consciousness’/‘heightening of awareness’). The assumption here is that consciousness can and does become stuck (in the form of and described by what Pierre Bourdieu calls ‘habitus’), that in this sense we may conceive of ‘traps’ of consciousness, and that poetry has a role – along with other aesthetic practices – in keeping consciousness in motion, open as process.

A process might best be understood by understanding how it is motivated or commenced. Then where to find a beginning with consciousness in poetry? The answer is – we won’t. Better perhaps to start with a fantasy of its cessation. In Dostoyevsky’s story ‘Bobók’, the dead crave to live out their remaining months of consciousness without having to be ashamed. As the body nears decomposition only meaningless sounds, something like ‘bobók’, can be made out. The ‘last mercy’ is that in these two or three months they, the dead, come to know themselves for what they are. Unfortunately what they have to put up with from each other is a kind of moral stench, the stench of the soul. Their efforts in the direction of authenticity are frustrated by an unceasing moralising: they want to be themselves in the little time left to them, but what is under the affectation they express by way of language is something ineffable: a silence, an absence, a pile of bones (1943: 151-167). Such is the temporary community Dostoyevsky imagines for the dead, in which one loses self in the same measure as the materiality of a body is lost.

In the poem ‘He Who Finds a Horseshoe’ Osip Mandelstam writes:

the one who finds a horseshoe
blows the dust from it,
rubs it with wool till it shines,
and then

hangs it over the door
 to rest,
 not to be made to strike sparks from the flint again.
 Human lips
 that have no more to say
 keep the shape of the last word they said,
 and the hand goes on feeling the full weight
 even after the jug
 has splashed itself half empty
 on the way home.

What I'm saying now isn't said by me.
 It's dug out of the ground like grains of petrified wheat.
 Some portray
 a lion on their coins,
 others
 a head;
 all sorts of round bits of brass, gold, bronze
 lie in the earth sharing the same honor.
 The age tried to bite through them, leaving its teethmarks.
 Time gnawed at me like a coin,
 and there's not even enough of me left for myself. (1977: 73)

Mandelstam's shape kept on the lips of the last word spoken may stand as emblem for a trap of consciousness – of meaning automatised, frozen, finally decayed. In Mandelstam's poem the scope of indirection ('the one who finds a horseshoe') meets with intimations of the canonic ('What I'm saying now isn't said by me.'). Hindsight suggests for us here the survival of the words of one who will not survive; the words in the poem are there as the horseshoe hung for luck – something the *bricoleur* has found, has polished, has given to a task for which the object could not have been intended.

In Dostoevsky's story the decay of consciousness carried in those words becoming meaningless sounds provides a reverse analogy for the child's process of entering language. Words are the vehicle of conscience and awareness and coming into words one enters the collective consciousness (likewise the unconsciousness of collectivity) which is passed on in those words. In his poem 'Utterance' W.S. Merwin writes:

Sitting over words
 very late I have heard a kind of whispered sighing
 not far

like a wind in pines or like the sea in the dark
 the echo of everything that has ever
 been spoken
 still spinning its one syllable

between the earth and silence

(in Milosz, 1996: 198)

All utterance is overfull with words gone, which went in making our words now. So Vico and Bakhtin, among others, have observed. There is no metalanguage because there is no outside of our talking. No discourse refers except to itself, its making and to its others. There is, that is, nothing but metalanguage.

An Art of Words and Its Everyday Consciousness

Valéry tells us that the language of literary, as indeed other, word workers has the same materiality as that of the everyday ‘practical instrument... used for immediate needs and modified at every instant’ (in Block and Salinger, 1960: 27), and this fact has the consequence that there never can be in the verbal arts the hard and fast line which divides, in other forms of aesthetic expression, talk about aesthetic production from the substance of that work itself. A musician might not absolutely require a music reading ability in order to improvise, might naturalise the practice of making music to the extent of feeling that the instrument s/he plays is an extension of the body, but the skills of the hands in this practice are essentially different from those involved in other everyday tasks for which hands are equally essential.

Because language is partly a conscious and partly an unconscious activity and because the language of literary art has the same – partly conscious, partly unconscious – substance as everyday speech and as other (non-literary) forms of writing, we have no choice but to see these as contiguous parts of a single abstracted entity, as much formed by as forming the individual. Language shapes and is shaped by all of the potential individuals and their interaction entail. These are processes from which our attention is usually drawn.

If there is, beyond a purely formal orientation, anything learnable about the process of literary writing, then it must be sought in a consciousness of how meaning is made and unmade, deployed and deterred, hidden, revealed, transformed; not only in poetries but in their general sources and in their destinations in other than literary uses of language. Socrates set the tone for this conscious investigation with his now clichéd dictum in the Apology: ‘the unexamined life is not worth living’ (1952: 210). Nietzsche in *The Gay Science*, succinctly stresses the dangers of consciousness and its cult:

Consciousness is the last and latest development of the organic and consequently also the most unfinished and weakest part of it. From consciousness there proceed countless errors which cause an animal, a man, to perish earlier than necessary... If the preservative combination of the instincts were not incomparably stronger, if it did not in general act as a regulator, mankind must have perished through its perverse judgements and waking phantasies, its superficiality and credulity, in short through its consciousness. (1977: 158)

Anyone with a modicum of eco-consciousness can see that the human race today is bent on a short-sighted destructive course, justified by the mantras of growth ideology. If the world is on the wrong track then perhaps this is the story of human community and the failure of consciousness. The need to witness and to be woken to such realities is clear and present.

The prescience of Nietzschean approaches to postmodern problems is by now commonplace and it is not my intention here to trawl the ample recent literature which may or may not support Nietzsche’s contentions with regard to the history of consciousness. On the *Genealogy of Morals* presents consciousness as a consequence of *ressentiment*, and of guilty thinking. Free will is for Nietzsche a trap of consciousness, one which will lead the subject into self-blame. Nietzsche’s subject is a grammatical fiction, a convenient assumption, and consciousness a means of allowing bodies the self-hood entailed in responsibility, of just the kind that leads to juridical consequences for individuals like those met in Kafka’s ‘The Penal Colony’ (death by inscription of the law’s sentence).

However unstable or distracting the abstraction, it seems a reasonable hope that the reflexive effect of such musings would be to subject consciousness to its own regime/s. One notes the danger here – psychological, social – that witnessing consciousness becomes an endless process, or entails limitless regression. In *The Problem of Consciousness in Modern Poetry*, of Yeats' Irish airman, Hugh Underhill writes 'processes which uncover the suppressions of consciousness, enable for the reader recognitions within recognitions' (138). He notes that Coleridge was apt to see consciousness as an insufferable burden, as expressed in his 1797 letter to John Thelwall: 'I should much wish, like the Indian Vishnu, to float about along an infinite ocean cradled in the flower of the Lotos, & wake once in a million years for a few moments – just to know that I was going to sleep a million years more' (32).

Consciousness may be resented as a cage; this resentment does not imply that the cage is (or even can be) escaped. Amiri Baraka writes in his poem 'The New World':

Those who realize
 how fitful and indecent consciousness is
 stare solemnly out on the emptying street.
 The mourners and soft singers. The liars,
 and singers after ridiculous righteousness. All
 my doubles, and friends, whose mistakes cannot
 be duplicated by machines, and this is all of our
 arrogance.

(in Hoover: 261)

If we historicise, contextualise, problematise – then will we know ourselves, or obviate the need of knowing? Consciousness should be acknowledged as the kind of trap or treadmill not eluded through acts of recognition or self-recognition.

It should hardly bear mention that each of the word workers so far mentioned in this chapter belongs to the one complex tradition. It is the West which – through its often overlapping and contradicting strands of thought – has framed this abstraction we know as consciousness. Whether or not such an abstraction is now essential to the self-conception of other-than-western modes of thought, it is certain that the West only imagines those other conceptions by means

of reference to its own diverse efforts at reflection. Rather than track those historically, my interest here is to understand the manner of aesthetic play which self-conception along these lines has offered poetry, canonic and current. Of particular interest is the contrasting self-conception that has operated through the development of western philosophy, poetry's most obvious generic other. Each of these styles of conception may appear equally ill-informed from the point of view of serious psychology, notwithstanding that discipline's dependence on their development. At stake in this investigation then is a kind of high-brow folk consciousness of consciousness.

The rest of this chapter then presents a twofold interest of the work more generally – to understand the nature of that folk consciousness as it relates to the conception of poetry and poetry's self-image; likewise to understand how consciousness – dynamically conceived – relates to the process of poetry. The question thus asked will be: How does poetry understand its own process?

Poetry's Reflexive Problem

No way of knowing
when this song began.
Does the thief rustle to its tune?...
Does the prince of mosquitoes hum it?

O, if I could speak once more
about nothing at all,
blaze up like a struck match,
nudge night away with my shoulder,

heave up the smothering haystack,
the muffling hat of air,
shake out the stitches
of the sack of caraway seeds,

then the pink knot of blood,
the hushing of these dry grasses
would be here in their trance after
a century, a hayloft, a dream.

(Mandelstam, 1977: 66)

Mandelstam's poem/fragment (131) offers a concise account of poetry's epistemological ambivalence, expressed in the forward progression which goes on despite the 'no way of knowing', the 'nothing at all' of which the poet attempts, but fails, to speak. The ambivalence is likewise expressed in the fantasy of a trance in which the organic of nature ('these dry grasses') and of embodied experience ('the pink knot of blood') coalescing might persist in a century's time. Perhaps the passage of words, from lip to ear to lip, is conducted as just such a trance – characterised by the unconsciousness of the spoken chain, and of its canonic contents?

Consciousness presents as a problem for poetry, not because poetry requires a definition of it in order to function but because the question of consciousness in relation to poetry ultimately resolves as one of asking whether (and to what extent) poetry is entitled or able to know what it does or how it works. Khlebnikov writes in his essay 'On Poetry': 'Does the earth understand the writing of the seeds a farmer scatters on its surface? No. But the grain still ripens in the autumn, in response to those seeds' (1990: 153). The echo of Job is strong in efforts to assign sentience to the world as created:

'But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls
of the air and they shall tell thee:
Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the
sea shall declare unto thee.
Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath
wrought this?
In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of
all mankind.
Doth not the ear try words? and the mouth taste his meat?
With the ancient is wisdom and in length of days understanding.'
(Job 12:7-12)

Is the personification of the earth, of nature, an acknowledgement of the wisdom of unconsciousness, or of the beyond or before of consciousness²? Does it acknowledge the failure of consciousness to approach the domain of truth: the real that humans seek to apprehend by means of words? Does such personification open consciousness on the other hand to a beyond of the strictures of thought? Or is it merely

² Such as for instance might be suggested by Kristeva's pre-thetic state, that of the semiotic chora.

a case of symptomatising a divine consciousness in the perception of order or in the unity of perception? Merwin's 'one syllable between the earth and silence' implies a continuity between the world and speech for it (between sign and signified) which may be wholly imaginary and which yet enables speech and its echoes to participate in a community with the dark sea and the wind.

It is the Romantics who first promote an identity between the unselfconsciousness of nature – and likewise of childhood – and the recovered innocence with which poetry might centrally concern itself as process. Blake's innocence – an evanescent state – is about self-consciousness lacking; Blake's *oeuvre* more generally concerning 'contrary states' of mind, these the *sine qua non* of 'progression' in the Blake-ian sense. Innocence and experience together provide a picture of consciousness as dynamic.

Romantic and subsequent poetries have kept an openness to questions as to the relevance of self-awareness. Answers to those questions – along the lines of a scientific development – have the effect of foreclosing various co-existing possibilities, possibilities characteristic of the topography Freud maps for consciousness in 'Civilization and its Discontents'. In that essay Freud imagines the cities that were Rome superimposed, coexisting in time: all the buildings from every epoch piled on and into one another. The exercise of a particular consciousness in that circumstance is spectral, must involve some walking through walls. Rather than define consciousness one had better say then that poetry's ambivalence on the issue of consciousness – its own, those it harnesses, those to which it appeals – is definitive.

Poetry becomes itself by knowing and not knowing itself, what it is, how and for whom it becomes. Inside and out of the city's walls, poetry is both civilization and discontent. Nietzsche's dictum on truth as 'a mobile army of metaphors' (in 'On Truth and Falsehood in an Extra-Moral Sense') naturally condemns all forms and means of knowing to the status of Job's personification:

What therefore is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which became poetically and rhetorically intensified, metamorphosed, adorned and after

long usage seem to a nation fixed, canonic and binding; truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they are illusions; worn out metaphors which have become powerless to affect the senses; coins which have their obverse effaced and now are no longer of account as coins but merely as metal. (1974: 180)

Mallarmé writes similarly of language as a worn coin passed silently from hand to hand (368). The kind of relativism we read in Nietzsche's famous passage (the absolute kind) may be healthy in the self-conception of poetries which function to challenge accepted truths. One asks however, in the spirit of a poetry hoping to recover something in the way of naivety, what a poem is entitled to not know about itself. Thus in Ashbery's 'The Skaters':

I am not ready
To line phrases with the costly stuff of explanation, and shall not,
Will not do so for the moment. Except to say that the carnivorous
Way of these lines is to devour their own nature, leaving
Nothing but a bitter impression of absence, which as we know
involves presence, but still.
Nevertheless these are fundamental absences, struggling to
get up and be off by themselves.

(in Hoover, 1994: 176)

If poetry is entitled to questions as to the viability of its business with the business of writing, then those questions, though perhaps more generally avoidable, must be available to discourse and to thought in general. The patterns of assumption and intention in which these formulate each other involve contradictory investments: Mandelstam's 'no way of knowing' but equally, in Hayden White's terms (echoing Nietzsche and Kant's *aude sapere*), a will to know (1978: 20). Poetry's self-recognition can then be characterised as both reflexive awareness and as reflexive unconsciousness. This latter humility I would gloss as *knowing a little how little we know*; or as Mandelstam acknowledges: 'No way of knowing/when this song began'.

The High and Low and Inside and Out of Sentience

In an untitled 1964 poem, Joseph Brodsky writes:

...featherless bipeds
 reveal that they are worlds apart
 (much more than by their high-domed heads)
 from feathered bipeds and their art.

When we unclothe our beak-like shears
 in winter trees, we click and squeak;
 but we produce no arias.
 Are we not lower than these 'beasts'?

Taking the product of their nests,
 their brief lives and the way they sing
 in total self-forgetfulness –
 we can define our lesser range. (75)

The high and the low of consciousness and its assumed place haunts every anthropomorphism, every such scheme of metaphor, metonymy. In Brodsky's contrast of the feathered with the unfeathered bipeds, conscience and self-awareness meet in the recognition of human vanity. The lords of creation are overdetermined as thieves and murderers – of eggs, of birds, of song. At stake here is relationship between humans and the natural world in which they assert a place, or which they more commonly place themselves above. These relationships – in conception and in practice – are key to the question of what kinds of consciousness (and unconsciousness) ought to be promoted in/by poetry; likewise they are vitally entailed in the personae available to poetry's practitioners, their community or its lack (as considered in the final chapter of this volume).

'No way of knowing/when this song began.' We won't step out of our skins to see with every other animal's eyes, or how the song goes on. All tunes are thieved but no two instruments or instances the same. Art then arises in the failure to repeat, to return; it arises in our failures as thieves. Daring to make art, with words or otherwise, we go where we hadn't gone before, using tools never intended for the journey. Poetry's journey then, undertaken as if the road were still open, consists in the ambivalence of daring to know and not to know. Daring its way through contradictions without the logical necessity of

deciding, the quality of poetic truth is different from that of the everyday, likewise different from that of truths arrived at through argument.

I will forestall for the moment the reasonable doubt which ought to be cast on the assumption that consciousness or self-consciousness (or some higher order of sentience) is what distinguishes human life or mind from all the other forms found on the planet. The circularity of argument attending every concealed instance of anthropocentrism belies the acknowledgement of a simple fact – we humans speak as humans and whether or not we credit ourselves with the prestige of being the only ones to speak.

Out of complex negotiations of cultural specificity (which indeed have been challenged as determinist) Benjamin Lee Whorf established a relationship among the investments of language, thought and consciousness:

Actually, thinking is most mysterious, and by far the greatest light upon it that we have is thrown by the study of language. This study shows that the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematisations of his own language – shown readily enough by a candid comparison with other languages, especially those of a different linguistic family. His thinking itself is in a language – in English, in Sanskrit, in Chinese. And every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyses nature, notices or neglects types of relationship or phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness. (1956, 252)

Following Whorf we may say that the amorphousness of language is that of un/consciousness. From the point of view of verbal arts, consciousness is the medium wherein originality and collectivity shape each other. If consciousness as plurality entails all styles and degrees of awareness (and awareness lacking) then such a plurality presents as an immanence borne of and demanding transcendence: communication requires of those communicating the impossible position of being at once inside and out of consciousness. And because there is no access to the consciousness of others except in

language, and because there is no language outside of the immanent/transcendent loop of consciousness just described, we might wish to regard these two abstractions, language and consciousness, as the one river given different names, for the simple reason that we discover them from separate vantages.

Semantic change and the unconsciously tropic nature of everyday language both interest the shifts of consciousness with which poetries concern themselves. We know that language changes and is chosen in many respects and instances in conditions which could not be described as fully conscious. A linear model suggests consciousness and unconsciousness as more or less arbitrarily declared positions on a scale with no end points. This position underlies metaphorical schemata in which consciousness is usually considered. (We come to realise things, we reach understandings, we wake up.) There is a still simpler conception of consciousness which also retains a powerful idiomatic force. This is best expressed in the lightbulb metaphor, which draws the popular conception of un/consciousness very close to that of sleeping/waking: consciousness is off or on. Epiphany, satori, every instance and form of enlightenment, participates in this particular metaphoric of awareness. The scope of application of this apparent ineffable ought to be challenged however: the daylight view of the room is one in which the light bulb makes little difference.

If the object of consciousness is to achieve a totality of meaning, then this effort must always be frustrated because consciousness will always find itself beyond itself. This is how the history of science (perhaps the history of knowledge in the West) generally presents itself – as an uncompleted path in the direction of complete awareness (the Platonic ‘real’ the good reader trusts to reside outside of the cave). Experience of the supersession of theories may lead us to speculate on the manner of the demise we anticipate for them. Nevertheless, for the duration of their currency as best accounts, they appear to complete the thinking which enabled them. Their foreshadowed inadequacy suggests that the conditions for which they sought to account, have somehow receded from our grasp. So awareness is what incompletes itself. And whereas in science certainty is always about to be foiled and the scientist the one who will be

mistaken, modern poetry begins in the destabilisation of its own view, as an avowal of consciousness shifting.

Just as it is impossible to attain a totally self-aware speech so it is impossible also to be fully unconscious in any use of (production or reception of) language. *Différends* notwithstanding, some meaning is sent, some meaning received. The gap or lack between these, the mistakeness which inheres in such difference, may be taken as symptomatic of meaning's motions. Spivak asks the question: 'Can a strategy be unwitting?' To which she replies: 'Of course not fully so' (1988: 207). Semiosis takes place, even if it is as automatic, as apparently unconscious, as in the case of Malinowski's phatic communion: the keeping open of a channel (in Ogden and Richards, 1923: 315). Consciousness may transcend itself towards itself but, in its identity with language, it does not succeed in dispensing with itself. Consciousness is, for Spivak, not thought, 'but rather the subject's irreducible intendedness towards the object' (1988: 154). Meaning persists even in silence because silence is always between two signs and in this position is itself a sign.

Poetic Consciousness

If the problem of consciousness for poetry is one of meta-awareness, it is equally the case that poetic consciousness is thought to at least partly involve other than normative³ or everyday states of mind. Such a suggestion was the object of Freud's musings in his (1907) lecture 'Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming' (originally translated in English as 'The Relation of the Poet to Daydreaming'). In this work, the father of psychoanalysis divides writers into two camps. Freud believes we must distinguish 'writers who, like the ancient authors of epics and tragedies, take over their material ready-made, from writers who seem to originate their own material' (1959: 149). Freud tells us that the day-dreamer hides his phantasies because he is ashamed of them, that the disclosure of them would bring us no pleasure, but that 'when a creative writer presents his plays to us or tells us what we are inclined to take to be his personal daydreams, we

³ Note that for Bakhtin, poetry, through the epic, is easily associated with the monologic of *official consciousness*.

experience a great pleasure, and one which probably arises from the confluence of many sources' (153). For Freud, accomplishment of this is the writer's 'innermost secret'. The writer's '*ars poetica* lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and the others' (153). Freud goes on here to postulate that the enjoyment of literature 'proceeds from a liberation of tensions in our minds' and that this might be mainly brought about by 'the writer's enabling us thenceforward to enjoy our own daydreams without self-reproach or shame' (153).

Freud's aesthete is, like the rhapsodist of Plato's *Ion*, one who is in touch with something s/he cannot hope to control or understand, let alone formulate judgement with. In the *Ion*:

Thus the composers of lyrical poetry create those admired songs of theirs in a state of divine insanity, like the Corybantes, who lose all control over their reason in the enthusiasm of the sacred dance; and, during this supernatural possession, are excited to the rhythm and harmony which they communicate to men. Like the Bacchantes, who, when possessed by the God, draw honey and milk from the rivers, in which, when they come to their senses, they find nothing but simple water. For the souls of the poets, as the poets tell us, have this peculiar ministration in the world. They tell us that these souls, flying like bees from flower to flower, and wandering over the gardens and the meadows, and the honey flowing fountains of the Muses, return to us laden with the sweetness of melody; and arrayed as they are in the plumes of rapid imagination, they speak truth. For a poet is indeed a thing ethereally light, winged and sacred, nor can he compose anything worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired, and, as it were, mad, or whilst any reason remains in him. (1910: 6-7)

It is a commonplace, and as such an idea that ought to be seriously interrogated, that poetry and other forms of literary art entail a heightening of awareness. This awareness must claim to be of how the past stands in our saying now and how we ourselves stand in relation to each other and the world. Through the work of the poet we may better understand circumstances and thus be less mired in them. Should we posit an everyday, or a specialised, poetic language needed to achieve this putative transcendence? In his essay, 'Language', Heidegger echoes the Formalists on the relationship between poetry and everyday language: 'Poetry proper is never merely a higher mode (*melos*) of everyday language. It is rather the reverse: everyday

language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer' (1971: 208).

Why should the desired position of poetic consciousness be assumed to be above that of the norms from which its measure must be taken? Certainly Wordsworth's interest in childhood consciousness suggests innocent or unconscious states – like those of Plato's Corybantes – as intimately connected with creative forces and so with the consciousness of the poet. Jung warns us against assuming that we should find the unconscious below consciousness⁴ but this is precisely the relationship in which both the popular conception and the Freudian topography place them. Heidegger, in 'What are poets for?', cites a letter from Rilke in which the poet perhaps radically reverses such a topography of consciousness:

However vast the 'outer space' may be, yet with all its siderial distances it hardly compares with the dimensions, with the depth dimensions of our inner being, which does not even need the spaciousness of the universe to be within itself almost unfathomable. Thus, if the dead, if those who are to come, need an abode, what refuge could be more agreeable and appointed

⁴ It should be noted here that psychoanalytic (and semiotic) theory offer a number of options for configuring the relationship between the *unconscious* and consciousness; particularly that Freud's third term, later abandoned, the *preconscious*, has been dealt with in various relations to the other two. For Freud this category refers to thoughts which, though unconscious at a given moment, are not repressed and are therefore able to become conscious. Kaja Silverman describes the relationship between the Freudian *preconscious* and *conscious* in the following terms:

The preconscious is the repository of cultural norms and prohibitions. It contains data which are capable of becoming conscious – memories which can be voluntarily recalled. Therefore, movement from the preconscious to the conscious is essentially fluid, although the conscious can accommodate only a finite amount of information at a given moment. Within this topography the conscious is no more than a kind of adjunct to the preconscious, a receiving room for internal and external – i.e., psychic and perceptual – stimuli. (1984: 56)

Subsequent to Freud there are a number of other arrangements of this topography. For Metz, in *Le Signifiant Imaginaire* the category *preconscious* is maintained as separate from the others. This is a middle position compared with those of Lyotard and Lacan. For Lyotard the *preconscious* and the *unconscious* are antagonistic categories but for Lacan the *preconscious* is conflated with the *unconscious*.

for them than this imaginary space? To me it seems more and more as though our customary consciousness lives on the tip of a pyramid whose base within us (and in a certain way beneath us) widens out so fully that the farther we find ourselves able to descend into it, the more generally we appear to be merged into those things that, independent of time and space, are given in our earthly, in the widest sense worldly, existence. (1971: 129)

Still, we should not underestimate the difficulty of avoiding the popular conception that ‘awakening’ is from a lower and less knowledgeable state. It is an ideological inversion *par excellence* for the discourse judging poetry to claim that poetic consciousness stands somehow above its own. The notion of poetry’s knowledge of itself suggests a shorthand for the knowledges of those who have invested in poetry. That consciousness privileged in relation to the process of poetry’s survival is waking, decisive and certainly, for all practical purposes, regards itself as superior to (at least able to stand above) those productions it sees itself as duty-bound to discriminate.

It could at this point easily be argued that this position above is the canonic view and that it is imposed on literature, by its mediators, as a kind of wishful thinking; these mediators hoping to glorify themselves by association with that clarity and elevation of view, to which poetic imagination is entitled. Nor may the straw dog return with any ease to its kennel; the makers of poetry are, when we come to identify them, too thoroughly entangled in the investments, if not the actual practice of this view, for there to be any practical separation. In practice the poet is one of an infinite cast recomposed from a handful of players, the leading one of whom, as subject, is likewise continuously recomposed and in the process of becoming numerous. Walt Whitman sees persona/e as such a multiplicity in his poem ‘Salut au Monde’:

What widens within you Walt Whitman?
 What waves and soils exuding?
 What climes? What persons and cities are here?
 Who are the infants, some playing, some slumbering?
 Who are the girls? who are the married women?
 Who are the groups of old men going slowly with their arms
 about each other’s necks
 What rivers are these? what forests and fruits are these?
 What are the mountains call’d that rise so high in the mists?
 What myriads of dwellings are they fill’d with dwellers?

(1975: 168)

Whitman's self as multiplicity suggests the cycle of immanence and transcendence implied in the conception of knowledge in Job. The world is what teaches. The ear tries words. The question as to the identity of selves is as uncontained as the question as to the provenance of truths, of words.

As has been attributed to the inventive aspect of the scientific mind, there is this *idiot savant* aspect to poetic consciousness: that it is capable of ignoring (or unseeing) the obvious in favour of making connections which the everyday world happens to miss, indeed must miss, in order to perform its functions. In Bronislaw Maj's poem 'An August Afternoon', a childhood is recalled in terms which, it is demonstrated, cannot have been those of childhood; so that the reader is made aware of the process of recollection as a distorting glass:

We look at the mountains,
 my mother and I. How clear the air is:
 every dark spruce on Mount Lubon
 is seen distinctly as if it grew in our garden.
 An astonishing phenomenon – it astonishes my mother
 and me. I am four and do not know
 what it means to be four. I am
 happy: I do not know what to be means
 or happiness. I know my mother
 sees and feels what I do. And I know
 that as always in the evening
 we will take a walk
 far, up to the woods, already before
 long.

(in Milosz, 1996: 158)

Drawing attention to the accompaniment in memory of that which cannot have been remembered provides an example of the witnessing of a poetic consciousness, this being a specific ongoing task focus for poets since Wordsworth's *The Prelude* – the epic form devoted, as suggested in the sub-title, to the 'growth of the poet's mind'⁵.

⁵ Certainly foreshadowed in Coleridge's 'The Aeolian Harp' of 1895:

And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
 Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
 Whilst thro' my half-clos'd eye-lids I behold

Styles of Awareness and the Staging of Poetic Consciousness

If at this point I restate the thesis that poetic composition entails an art of knowing and not, then the reader will be justified in asking ‘knowing what?’ and ‘not knowing what?’ How are those truths considered ‘poetic’ forged from the ambivalence here implied?

Stephen Spender’s famous (1955) essay ‘The Making of a Poem’ provides one approach to the question, in a contrast drawn between the ‘Beethoven’ and ‘Mozart’ methods of creative composition. Essentially these can be reduced to working from the details as opposed to working from the big picture; the poetic equivalent of the contrast in logic between inductive and deductive reasoning. Spender tells us how Beethoven worked from fragments to fashion a complete work, and in a manner which baffled researchers who uncovered his notes. Mozart, by contrast, routinely composed with an idea in mind for a complete work, filling in the detail as needed (*passim*).

The contrast in method presented here in an extreme or exaggerated form may nevertheless be essential. Possibly one cannot work at once on all the parts and the whole they compose. If however we consider the process of poetic composition as consisting of distinct (or indistinct) phases or stages then perhaps we can see a way in which these apparently contrary methods (and the differing styles of consciousness they imply) may be combined in the production of a single work.

The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquility;
Full many a thought uncall’d and undetain’d,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
As wild and various, as the random gales

That swell and flutter on this subject Lute !
(in Allison, 563)

In *The Poetic Image*, C. Day Lewis – with a little help from Dryden, Goethe, Wordsworth and Yeats – outlined such a procedure. Lewis commences with an exhortation on the necessity of deliberation on the poet's part:

If the poetic imagination were purely passive, it would be necessary for the poet, in order to write a poem, merely to record his sensations. He could bow to what Wordsworth called the 'storm of association' (for most of us though it is but a light and fitful wind) and let the poem write itself. But poems do not, more's the pity, write themselves. We may speak of the poetic imagination as the Holy Ghost brooding over chaos, but it is still chaos over which it broods, and will remain so unless the poet's concentration is intense enough to elicit what is latent there. (1966: 68)

The three phases Lewis imagines I would render in the following shorthand form: receiving, allowing, self-criticism.

Lewis's first phase is well represented by Keats's 'negative capability' and the ambivalent state of mind which it implies – that of 'being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after facts and reason.' This phase of active receptivity is followed by a second stage in composition in which the work is allowed to take shape in an environment protected from any kind of judgement or critical engagement. His second phase, Lewis attributes as follows:

W.B. Yeats witnessed to the second, when quoting Goethe's 'One must allow the images to form with all their associations before one criticizes', he went on to speak of the trance-like state in which 'images pass rapidly before you', and said that it is necessary 'to suspend will and intellect, to bring up from the subconscious anything you already possess a fragment of'. (1966: 69)

Lewis describes this process as a 'will-less' concentration, which 'by its very passivity' aids the 'natural process which brings the whole poem out into the light'; he calls this phase 'a suspension of intellect' (66). It also, I believe, entails a suspension of the world and time's normal progressions. It is in this phase of intense, but inward, concentration, the work of words becomes a world; and so becoming, achieves the potential to evoke a new world for its reader.

The second of Lewis's phases overlaps with the third, in which 'the poet's attention becomes more active... and the work of criticism begins, the selection or rejection of associated images in conformity with the now emerging pattern of the poem' (69). This is the process of 'forging' we might conveniently associate with Ben Jonson's well known demand that the poet must 'strike the second heat', as expressed in his 'To the Memory of My Belov'd, the Author Mr William Shakespeare: And What He Hath Left Us':

For though the poet's matter, nature be,
His art doth give the fashion. And, that he,
Who casts to write a living line, must sweat,
(Such as thine are) and strike the second heat
Upon the Muses' anvil: turn the same,
(And himself with it) that he thinks to frame;
Or for the laurel, he may gain a scorn,
For a good poet's made, as well as born. (289)

The 'second heat' is the 99% perspiration of which Creative Writing teachers speak. After the dreaminess of the first two phases in which images are selected and the bricolage of their arrangement is tried, comes the resolutely attentive work of finishing the poem – of forging it with hammer and tongs. Now the attention of the poet is outward again; rather it entails an effort at looking from the outside in. This is the symmetrical opposite of Keats's negative capability: this is not taking part in the existence of the sparrow outside the window, this is leafing through one's own work as if it were someone else's, as if it were unknown.

If we retain this shorthand form for three phases of poetic creation – receiving, allowing, self-criticism – we may now immediately draw two kinds of contrast. The allowing phase contrasts with what precedes and what follows it, in these terms. Allowing is the inward work which brings words into their own rhythm of breath, which lets them have their own life. One is mindful here of the 'hermetic vessel' in Jungian analysis – the symbolic place where the functions of consciousness may pass through introversion in order to facilitate the integration of the personality. The other contrast is between the first two phases and the last. The contrast here is between indirection and direction: between the art of not knowing what you are doing with words and with images and an art of and in knowing

precisely what you are doing; the contrast⁶ is between a conscious and an unconscious art.

C. Day Lewis sums up the doctrine I have embellished with Lucretius' image: 'moving the sleeping images of things towards the light', and with Dryden's description of the process, looking ahead from its outset: 'when Fancy was yet in its first work...(and the sleeping images were yet) 'to be distinguished, and then either chosen or rejected by the Judgement' (69). Lewis compares the side of the imagination he associated with impressionability with the 'the dove Noah sent out, returning with a leaf in its beak: that leaf is only a token of life; there is still the land to be won, and then the fire to light again, the house to build again, the old family quarrels to smooth over again' (68).

The effect of fashioning this new world from the 'tokens of life' is to recover the everyday in words which will outlive it, in words to which the breath will return. In other lungs, the life of signs goes on, as the spoken chain goes on – only between subjects constituted as such in language.

Keats's negative capability implies for the modern reader both receptivity and empathy; it implies that the moments in inspiration we have associated with epiphany or satori – with sudden breakthroughs in consciousness – depend on an openness to the consciousness and unconsciousness of others which amounts to the losing of selfhood and the losing of certainty. C. Day Lewis's third phase of composition – the self-critical – implies an homologous distance – standing away from oneself and one's creation in order to see how that creation will be seen. If in the first phase of composition the un/consciousness required is that of becoming object (i.e. of having the objects of one's interest become subjectivities in one's work) then the third phase consists in making one's work the object of an other's scrutiny and judgement, in short this means becoming a reader, so as to see how to represent oneself fairly and well. With no apologies for the clear cultural specificity of the very western and very masculine model here described, we may sum up by saying that the ego-work of making the

⁶ Akin to that drawn by Jacques Maritain between the systolic and diastolic phases of the creative process (1954: *passim*).

object (which is one's own) comes between losing consciousness of self in order to allow the mysteries their reign and losing consciousness of self in order to work more objectively with one's own creation.

Perhaps the dynamism here is more important than any specificity of styles or degrees of awareness. What is important to the process of aesthetic production is that consciousness remain in motion, that it not be stuck. To return to Spender's Mozart and Beethoven models for poetic process, the giddiness brought on by a concerted effort to work from whole to parts and parts to whole might or might not be productive for a particular individual; the key is the *a* to *b* motion between ways of seeing the problem of composition.

As noted with the idea of negative capability, the transformative aspect of what we might think of as poetic consciousness has a natural affinity for empathic states because it entails seeing and understanding in a different way. The global/local issues raised by Spender's contrast seem pertinent at various levels to an understanding of poetic composition.

The Everyday Recovered

Witnessing poetic consciousness means accounting for an art of witness, and in particular it means accounting for an art of witnessing consciousness. In this light, one needs to distinguish sharply between the function and effect of poetic discourse and those discourses (hermeneutic, exegetic, critical) which account for it. I suggest that poetry offers a way out of 'traps of consciousness'; discourses above and about poetry may, by contrast, furnish us with fresh nets. To complicate matters further, it needs to be acknowledged that poetry itself is never far from realising the reflexive potential of becoming a discourse over and/or about itself; Pope's (1711) 'Essay on Criticism' being merely the most obvious example of a tendency by no means confined to a single sub-genre of poetry. Yet, if this hall of mirrors engenders some claustrophobic feelings then it is worth noting that poetry's value for its reader has through the ages largely

been in the witnessing – and in the transformation – of everyday consciousness.

In poetry, the everyday is recovered by textual means to which the everyday need have no means of resort. In *The Prose of the World* Merleau-Ponty writes ‘the perfection of language lies in its capacity to pass unnoticed’ (1974: 10). Whatever shifts of consciousness poetics entail, however poetics draw attention to themselves, poetry does not elude this perfection of language, concomitant with its role as ‘everyday instrument’. Then poetics’ stumbling on or over or along with the truth hardly need be constitutive of a view over anything. It is difficult, in this light, not to regard the heightening of awareness expected of poetry as involving it in an impossible movement towards the critical vantage point; a movement, which, because it cannot be completed, serves to reinforce the value of that consciousness which awards itself the privilege of judging poetry.

In ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ T.S. Eliot writes ‘the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious and conscious where he ought to be unconscious’ (1976: 21-2). For Eliot these are both errors that serve to make the bad poet personal. They are errors because poetry ‘is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality’. The emotion of art is impersonal, its haunting resolved in the poet who lives ‘in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past’, something of which he (sic) is unlikely to know ‘unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living’ (21-2). Few would now seek to promote a poetry which – along the lines suggested in Plato’s *Ion* – can only be composed by one who – in the enthusiasm of inspiration – has lost all control over her/his reason. We might however accept a poetry which arrived at the position of disavowing certain knowledge as a result of a process of negotiations available to the reader. A poem such as Wislawa Szymborska’s ‘View with a grain of sand’ avows what it cannot know by arranging the poem among those objects which cannot know themselves:

The window has a wonderful view of the lake
but the view doesn’t view itself.

It exists in this world
colorless, shapeless,
soundless, odorless and painless.

The lake's floor exists floorlessly
and its shore exists shorelessly.
Its water feels itself neither wet nor dry
and its waves to themselves are neither singular nor plural.
They splash deaf to their own noise
on pebbles neither large nor small.

And all this beneath a sky by nature skyless
in which the sun sets without setting at all
and hides without hiding behind an unminding cloud.
The wind ruffles it, its only reason being
that it blows.

A second passes.
A second second.
A third.
But they're three seconds only for us.

Time has passed like a courier with urgent news.
But that's just our simile.
The character's invented, his haste is make-believe,
his news inhuman.

(in Milosz, 1996: 68)

As for Eliot's idea that the bad poet is personal, David Antin devotes his work 'a private occasion in a public place' to a problematic of self-consciousness which draw us from such a conclusion:

 in doing what poets have done for a
long time they've talked out of a private sense sometimes
from a private need but they've talked about it in a rather peculiar
context for anybody to eavesdrop

(in Hoover, 1994: 232)

If we discard both the intentionalist fallacy and the view over poetry which canonic criticism cannot but claim; if we sacrifice, that is, the prospect of definitive judgement for its turns with ambivalence, what choice have we got but to commit the ontological sin of regarding poetry as constituting a consciousness in its own right? Rather than make the abstraction we know as poetry a mere systemic reification of a certain form of speech, we may regard it as a corpus of

instants of thought and expression, identical perhaps with what the canon contains, which in themselves as a unity constitute a sentience that outlives, for the reader's response, both the makers and the judges of poetry. At the risk of invoking the pathetic fallacy, my claim is that poetry's is the collective sentience on which these personae depend. Our mission, in apprehending poetry, is to work at connecting this consciousness, outside of our own and on which ours already depends, with what we ourselves are able to make. That task in turn depends on a risky kind of resurrection: of words from one context to another. It depends, as in Denise Levertov's poem 'Witness', on a vigilance which cannot maintain itself:

Sometimes the mountain
is hidden from me in veils
of cloud, sometimes
I am hidden from the mountain
in veils of inattention, apathy, fatigue,
when I forget or refuse to go
down to the shore or a few yards
up the road, on a clear day,
to reconfirm
that witnessing presence.

(in Milosz, 1996: 72)

Nor need the trace of consciousness surviving as presence witness clear days; it might perhaps be more of the nature of Mandelstam's exhortation to Anna Akhmatova:

Keep my words forever for their aftertaste of misfortune and smoke,
their tar of mutual tolerance, honest tar of work. (1977: 89)

In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth writes that our thoughts are the representatives of all of our past feelings. Just as our words are alive in and to the fact of being ours, so poetry in its survival lives, and responds to us, anticipates us, as what we may regard as accumulative consciousness. Generically unconstrained, modern poetry like language itself (or like its shadow) behaves as a vast and evolving game in which each move alters imperceptibly, but nevertheless unflinching, not necessarily the nature of the game but certainly the system in which it is constituted. Eliot acknowledges as

much for the canon in claiming ‘the existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new work among them’ (1976: 15). What Eliot fails to acknowledge is that the ideal order behaves like this because this is how language behaves; because, we might say, a lexicon, as a canon, reveals a snapshot of what language has come to contain. In structuralist terms one could say the canon is to its contents as *langue* is to *parole*.

Carnival of Words under Words

What readers expect of poetry under modern and postmodern conditions is that it show the workings, or at least enough of them, to reveal the exercise of consciousness necessary to its work. Of the poem it is demanded not merely that it demonstrate a movement of consciousness (as for instance implied in William James’ stream of consciousness), but that it should do this in order that it shift our state of mind as readers or listeners.

There is a highly self-conscious process of patterning involved in the making of many modern poems – by highly conscious I mean not fully aware, but deliberately investing in self-awareness. This modern and later tendency is representative of a poetry that works or fails on the basis of judgements that must include the assumption that aesthetic practice involves consciousness of its own activity. A poetry of uncovering patterns and bringing words to pattern runs the risk of trying too hard at a task that cannot be completed. The overly self-conscious work risks, in referring too subtly, referring to nothing its reader can know. Those most reflexive, most meta-aware texts, those most concerned with their own textuality (and the seamlessness or otherwise of their contextual connections) may also run the risk of being indistinguishable from the rest of the wallpaper of context locating them.

By contrast, in dealing with artefacts interested in erasing the signs of their making (ideological artefacts to this extent) care needs to be taken in assigning them to any investment or position. Wordsworth’s diction in *The Prelude* may have altered the possible range of poetry but it is writing nevertheless of (from and to) a class

and place and gender (rather than of rocks and streams and rustic musings). If the canon shifted with it we also note that it was the canon which allowed it because it made sufficient sense in terms of what went before. (By the same token the canon continues to allow it on the basis that it makes sufficient sense with and of what has come after.) The same is easily said of another extreme: what might be perceived as the shift to a highly self-conscious poetry in a modernist classic such as Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with its display of derivativeness and drive to place and displace itself.

The work of Julia Kristeva is suggestive of ontogenetic and phylogenetic motions in consciousness, of subjectivity notionally anterior to that of the symbolic order associated with the Lacanian Law of the Father. Kristeva's subject-in-process is one of flows and charges, of *jouissance* – a pre-thetic subject – associated with the unrepresentable space of the semiotic *chora* and one to be contrasted with a symbolic subject (1984: 68-9).

In *Revolution in Poetic Language* (and elsewhere) Kristeva is interested in a transgressive poetry, one that, following Saussure's anagrams, concerns itself with words under words, text in text, a poetry that pushes in a plural and horizontal direction (in the direction of a text like *Finnegan's Wake*), a poetry that stresses the dual nature of the poet as creator and created and the fact of language's being doubly constituted as text and as communication.

From Bakhtin, Kristeva borrows the true *and* false logic of carnival ambivalence and contrasts this with the true *or* false logic of identity. Kristeva's ambivalence entails the contradictory nature of a poetic language that includes always its own negation: speech and non-speech, real and non-real, norm and transgression⁷ (1984: 116-126). A result of this position, whereby a poetic language refuses to obey the (thetic) rules by which language generally or normally proceeds is that it is virtually impossible to speak fairly of poetry (70);

⁷ Bachelard gives ambivalence the status of 'a basic law of the imagination', writing: 'a matter to which the imagination cannot give twofold life cannot play the psychological role of a fundamental substance' (1971: 83).

that is, in a way that accommodates the terms of its different, ambivalent logic. Thus the conflict between the poets and the academy judging poetry may be read as a conflict between ambivalent and bi-valent logic. We note here, in Heidegger's formulation, the naturalness of this conflict: 'Every decision... bases itself on something not mastered, something concealed, confusing; else it would never be a decision' (1971: 55).

For Kristeva the carnival in poetic language is invisible, unobservable because it is the movement of language itself and unable to be contained by the conventional logic of language (1984: 16). Kristeva coins the term orthocomplementarity to make more subtle the difference between true and false which a poetry need not accept as finality. Kristeva is interested in a truth which 'consists in the ability to participate in the process of contradiction which, logically and historically, both includes and goes beyond' (222). This truth-as-process entails a witnessing dynamism for poetry and so promotes poetic consciousness as an ethically motivated difference-making action.

If we are able to claim poetry as an indirection of consciousness then the meta-awareness it demands cannot help but be a consciousness of that indirection. Far from being, as it is popularly conceived, a dwelling high above consciousness and its everyday productions, poetry labours consciousness with what may appear to be erratic motions. Perhaps we can locate it where Ashbery ends the first section of his poem 'The Skaters':

Placed squarely in front of his dilemma, on all fours before the
lamentable spectacle of the unknown.
Yet knowing where men are coming from. It is this, to hold the
candle up to the album.

(in Hoover, 1994: 177)

Perhaps what is most unsettling in poetry's potential is its role in keeping questions open, in unresolving, in (to reverse Kant's *aude sapere* maxim) daring *not* to know. Nietzsche exhorts 'we must not pester a poet with subtle interpretations, but should take pleasure in the uncertainty of his horizon, as if the road to various other thoughts were still open' (1994: 125). As if the road were still open...poetry, as

witness of and as exercise of consciousness in the practice of betweenness, is in a position to make a critical intervention in reality, which itself becomes of what we share. The question formulated in these terms is then not about what poetry is but rather about what we make of it; how, that is, we make it mean, how we make meaning with it.

As with philosophy, we may say that there is nothing poetry won't interrogate. There are no means of language or of consciousness beyond poetry's resort. Its vocation is with the Heideggerian/Derridean 'under erasure': with ambivalence and doubts as to adequacy borne of the best informed not knowing. At variance with Bakhtin's association of poetry with the epic and the monologic, today poetry's thought – if we can call it that – should be associated with the interregnum of the carnival – a space in mind and out of mind, as wild as words will go. If anything is sacred to poetry then perhaps it is in the manner of Lucian Blaga's poem, 'I will not crush the world's corolla of wonders':

I will not crush the world's corolla of wonders
 and I will not kill
 with reason
 the mysteries I meet along the way
 in flowers, eyes, lips, and graves.
 The light of others
 drowns the deep magic hidden
 in the profound darkness.
 I increase the world's enigma
 with my light
 much as the moon with its white beams
 does not diminish but increases
 the shimmering mystery of night –
 I enrich the darkening horizon
 with chills of the great secret.
 All that is hard to know
 becomes a greater riddle
 under my very eyes
 because I love alike
 flowers, lips, eyes, and graves.

(in Rothenberg and Joris, 1995: 435)

The reflexive practice with which this book is concerned opens onto an ethics of writing as presence. Poetry is a form of indirection offering a way out of traps of consciousness. Poetry offers that path of flight by daring not to know. Poetry, that form of words which seems in and of itself least likely to lead anywhere, offers through its powers means of indirection, which provide us not with a beyond or an outside of thought, but with movements through consciousness, different from those reasoned writing or turns in speech conventionally allow. Poetry's may be the inside-out thinking required to set right an upside down world; to find that lack of identity of the present, or of the self, with itself. In poetry, witness the play of ambivalence against the permanence judgement arrogates to itself; in poetry a future as choice and not merely as given. Poetry's *dao* is thus:

we haven't worked out
which way to go
but with a little luck
you know
we'll work it out
on the way

Over the Border: The Everyday Lapse

In dreams foreignness is absolutely pure, and this is the best thing for writing. Foreignness becomes a fantastic nationality.

– Cixous

the world that's dreamt
absents the dreamer
time's on credit there
all familiar things
are forsaken
in favour of that faithful leap
into the too well known

Human – perhaps all mammalian – life is arranged around a diurnal shift between two states of consciousness: waking and dreaming. That shift is as taken for granted as anything else that happens in the normal course of every day. Following each other in an endless round, however far from each other in their ways or means, waking and dreaming worlds inter-animate.

Fiction in particular (and perhaps imaginative work in general) has a strong affinity with dream worlds. In various ways the story – whether in the form of a novel or a film or fanciful narration – appears modeled on the activity of dreaming. Both dream and story take elements of the real and the known, of the past and the present, and furnish from these hypothetical situations and events, things not quite – or not yet – possible.

Falling into the dreamstate – the subject of this chapter – is a loss of attention, a kind of failure of the moment, a failure of thought to sustain itself on a path one could call conscious; a failure, that is, to remain with reality. And yet, when dreaming, the dream *is* present as reality – the dreamer has nowhere else – and no one else – to be. This

sense of a way lost and of a self thus found finds eloquent expression in Edward Thomas's First World War poem, 'Lights Out':

I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest where all must lose
Their way, however straight,
Or winding, soon or late;
They cannot choose.

Many a road and track
That, since the dawn's first crack,
Up to the forest brink,
Deceived the travelers,
Suddenly now blurs
And in they sink.

Here love ends,
Despair, ambition ends;
All pleasure and all trouble,
Although most sweet or bitter,
Here ends in sleep that is sweeter
Than tasks most noble.

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would turn from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter and leave, alone,
I know not how.

The tall forest towers;
Its cloudy foliage lowers
Ahead, shelf above shelf;
Its silence I hear and obey
That I may lose my way
And myself.

(in Washburn and Major 1998: 1175)

Dreaming is something like a disappearance *into* the moment. When you are dreaming the distractions of the real world are by and large irrelevant. You may dream about your schedule or a missed appointment but you cannot do much about these in your dream. Nor is that disappearance singular or finite; one may slip further and further into distraction, perhaps by means the waking mind would read as metonymic. A dream may be seen in this way as a chain of

distractions. Each distraction has – before it loses – your full attention. The dream’s imagery is the outward semblance of where you are when your attention is entirely – and unknowingly – within. There is a striking (and hardly coincidental) affinity of this world within for that of the story or the poem.

Moment of Falling

How do you fall asleep? How do you start dreaming? The moment of the shift is one of the most durable of human (and animal) mysteries. Take the case of involuntary entry. In the 1944 film adaptation of Raymond Chandler’s *Farewell My Lovely (Murder, My Sweet)*, we have Philip Marlowe’s recollection: ‘I caught the blackjack right behind my ear. And a black pool opened up at my feet again, and I dived in. It had no bottom. It felt good. Just like an amputated leg. Next thing I remember I was going somewhere. It was not my idea. The rest of it was a crazy, cooked up dream. I had never been there before.’

Loss of conscious control of the mind’s imagery may furnish a frightening view, as for instance in de Quincey’s account of what one might consider the oneiric sublime:

as the creative state of the eye increased, a sympathy seemed to arise between the waking and the dreaming states of the brain in one point – that whatsoever I happened to call up and to trace by a voluntary act upon the darkness was very apt to transfer itself to my dreams; so that I feared to exercise this faculty; for, as Midas turned all things to gold, that yet baffled his hopes and defrauded his human desires, so whatsoever things capable of being visually represented I did but think of in the darkness, immediately shaped themselves into phantoms of the eye; and, by a process apparently no less inevitable, when thus once traced in faint and visionary colours, like writings in sympathetic ink, they were drawn out by the fierce chemistry of my dreams, into insufferable splendour that fretted my heart. (1995: 40)

We live in an age where all technologies of the image – only ever emerging – take on just this provisionality; in which the practices of desire must improvise beyond their subjects’ control. In the last century aesthetic technologies have fully exercised the Cartesian split:

shifting between disembodiment (in radio) and super-embodiment (in film and television).

It is from waking to dreaming that we evolve that (unjustifiably) superior attitude to which fictions and lies – to which all ‘other’ discourses – are subjected by the *rational* (that faculty which is always disconcerted by the discontinuities these necessary lapses of sleep entail).

In his ‘Poems in the Rough’ Valéry asks:

How dares one sleep? Such trust in the loyalty of my body, in the still night, such faith in the order and constancy of the universe!... Tonight, absence you will return! Once again you will resume your few hours’ throne, mysterious frightening impotence, quintessential weakness, unbreakable spell that chains the closed eyes to their images... One cannot turn round, held fast in the soft ore of sleep, to catch him in the act – the Monkey that shows the slides of the Dream. (1977: 175-6)

To sleep we fall (or are pushed) through a tear in the net of attention that otherwise holds us. Daydreaming, one might argue, is a simulation of this state. The insomniac’s paradox is that s/he cannot fall asleep because s/he is too focused on falling asleep; s/he is trying too hard. In James Wright’s translation of Jorge Guillén’s ‘I want to sleep’, the reader is offered a glimpse into this phenomenon.

I shall be still stronger,
Still clearer, purer, so let
The sweet invasion of oblivion come on.
I want to sleep.

If I could forget myself, if I were only
A tranquil tree,
Branches to spread out the silence,
Trunk of mercy.

The great darkness, grown motherly,
Deepens little by little,
Brooding over this body that the soul –
After a pause – surrenders.

It may even embark from the endless world,
From its accidents,
And scattering into stars at the last,
The soul will be daybreak.

Abandoning myself to my accomplice,
My boat,
I shall reach on my ripples and mists
Into the dawn.

The poem ends with the exhortation:

Earth, with your darker burdens,
Drag me back down,
Sink my being into my being:
Sleep, sleep.

(in Washburn and Major 1998: 1001-2)

This sinking of ‘my being into my being’ is suggestive of a little postmodern *angst* and likewise of certain longstanding philosophic doubts as to the authenticity or unity of subject-hood. Yet there is something quite directed in the distractions with which we travel to the other side of waking. Nodding off is finally like shutting a story down to one scene, like following a glimmer of light through a crack in the wall into another world. Perhaps it is always the same way we go. But we lack the means of remembering how we went. Recalling it later, with Phillip Marlowe we will say, ‘I had never been there before.’

When dreaming, the mind is not attending to the physical situation of the body. One can still respond to stimuli. External stimuli can affect what we dream but the effects are indirect. One is not responding as one would with eyes and ears wide open, attending to the world as when awake. The dreamer is in the world of images. In that world, the mind and the imagination have their own here-and-now, their own forms of attention. This is primeval business, connecting the dreamer in vast temporal continuities. Images and imagination are not some modern – or even ancient – invention by writers or artists; these are older than words or signs, older than humans as a species.

When dreaming, it is as if the senses had attention to themselves, as innate capacities or means of foreknowledge. The waking mind recognises as pure this other state, as something the sensate world – the world of eyes wide open – cannot touch. This is perhaps the model of the ideal in philosophy, likewise of death as an idealised undiscovered place, of the kind guessed at by Hamlet in his soliloquy. The Sufi poet, Rumi, wrote that when we fall asleep we go from our own presence into our own presence, that in dreams we tell ourselves secrets we think are told by others. Dreams, Rumi says, point out to us that:

O good friend, thou art not a single 'thou': thou art the
 sky and the deep sea.
 Thy mighty infinite 'Thou' is the ocean wherein myriads
 of 'thou's' are sunken.

Rumi's advice in this situation:

Do not speak, so that thou mayst hear from the Speakers
 what cannot be uttered or described.
 Do not speak, so that the spirit may speak for thee: in the
 ark of Noah leave off swimming. (1995: 190)

The inner world we carry with us waking, in dreaming becomes *the* only world. In Thomas Traherne's seventeenth century poem, 'Shadows in the Water', we find an interest in mistakes which 'seeming somewhat more than view'

...doth instruct the mind
 In things that lie behind,
 And many secrets to us show
 Which afterwards we come to know.

Traherne's persona in 'Shadows in the Water' imagines a drowned world – of people moving freely in spacious regions 'with another heaven crowned'. The persona sees the faces of the drowned and feels his affinity for them – 'Eyes, hands and feet they had like mine;/Another sun did with them shine.

'Twas strange that people there should walk
 And yet I could not hear them talk';
 That through a little watery chink
 Which one dry horse or ox might drink

We other worlds should see,
 Yet not admitted be;
 And other confines there behold
 Of light and darkness, heat and cold.
 (in Washburn and Major 1998: 626-7)

Sometimes waking it can seem that that inner world was more real or better or at least more original than the outer world of light. Hence perhaps Socrates' and Plato's notion of a realm of pure ideas (their *real*) in the mind of God, of which what we regard as the everyday *real* was for them an imitation. Reading a novel, watching a film, tuning into the tale: these activities each require the entering of another world. This is something the dreamer already knows how to do (or does without knowing). Who is this stranger to himself? Bergson, in *Le Rire*, writes of this character:

He is himself, and not himself. He hears himself speak and he sees himself act, but he feels that some other 'he' has borrowed his body and stolen his voice. Or perhaps he is conscious of speaking and acting as usual, but he speaks of himself as a stranger with whom he has nothing in common; he has stepped out of his own self. (1956: 184)

In dreams the *suspension of disbelief* and the *in media res* are strong. The facility for forgetting, so essential to second readings, is highly attuned; it is a natural part of the machinery, which explains why some people are troubled by recurring nightmares. That such nightmares seem compellingly real has led people from many epochs and cultures to doubt whether (what we usually think of as) reality might not be an illusion. The Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi has a character named Zhuang Zhou, who wonders whether he is a butterfly dreaming himself a human or vice versa. Descartes' *Meditations* kick off with a man seriously in doubt as to whether he is awake or asleep, whether he might be being misled by some demon into thinking himself awake, when really he is dreaming. In poetry, we are familiar with the problem, from Keats' doubt – 'do I wake or sleep?' – in 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Thinking about dreams has led people from many cultures into doubts as to their assumed reality. The ancestral past of Australian Aborigines is thought of as a *dreamtime*. Everything 'before trousers' (as some Aborigines have described the pre-European times) in the present day reality arises from that kind of creative dreaming – the ancestral business we literates have named mythology.

It is easy to problematise the idea that the world in a fiction (or a dream or God's head) is more real than the everyday real we know as such. The material of dreams comes from the waking world obviously enough. The people met and the places seen in a dream are certainly works of imagination and the products of imagination have raw material – potentially – in the form of everything else experienced up until those products of imagination appeared. Naturally that *everything else you've experienced up until now* includes the experience of other dreams. Here is a contrast with fictions proper. In fiction one meets the product of someone else's imagination. True enough, it is for the reader's imagination to bring character to life, but a character in a novel is nevertheless someone else's creation. Dream characters are all our own work; even though they can seem as unfamiliar as those of someone else's devising.

If fictions of the waking world have their model in dreamstates, in things we have dreamed, then it is equally true that dreamstates get their material from waking experience. There is a sustaining reciprocity between waking and dreaming worlds, along these lines. Daydreams are another story. They are one of the half-way states available to some of us in which features of dreaming and waking realities are able to co-exist. The other two notable states in this category are the hypnagogic state (where in moments before proper dream-sleep the subject can be conscious of dream imagery) and lucid dreaming (where through prior planning one can intervene in the plot of the dream as it unfolds, i.e. decide to dream a certain way). The attraction of daydreams is that they are an escape from the oppressive fabric of the day. To daydream one borrows resources of the unconscious mind and allows those techniques momentary sway over the rational daylight business otherwise going on.

These transitional or half-way states are important to poetry and to every kind of art practice, because if it is true that the work of the imagination has a close affinity with the work of the dreaming mind then it is also true that – Coleridge-style flashes of inspiration aside perhaps – works of art are actually made by people who are awake at the time they make them. So all kinds of aesthetic production may in fact be regarded as products of 'the crossing' – as the result of shifts in consciousness. Much of what has gone under the aegis of

inspiration – epiphany, satori, etc. – springs from this kind of mind motion.

In the foregoing discussion I assume that ‘dream’ refers to a kind of mental activity that happens while asleep, that daydreams are a kind of imitation of that activity, that the hypnagogic state is a semi-conscious glimpse over the edge of the crater into the secret world of dreams, perhaps of the kind suggested in the Jorge Guillén poem previously cited: ‘If I could forget myself, if I were only/A tranquil tree,/Branches to spread out the silence,/Trunk of mercy.’ But there are other ways to conceive the motions in and out of time, between states. Dreaming and waking may be like cross-currents, flowing back and forth in the mind of the subject who could go either way, could go both ways at once. Then the borders themselves are in motion. Between-states challenge the either/or dualism of un/consciousness and suggest the ambivalent logic – and likewise the metonymic progression – which poetic and oneiric experience share.

But the word ‘dream’ has another meaning in English, a meaning to do with wishes or hopes or desires for the future: *what’s your dream?* The overlap of those definitions fits nicely with Freud’s broad conception of dreams as wish fulfilments. To combine the two definitions: a dream is a kind of ‘dream’ come true. Freud’s version of the function of dreams and the ‘other’ meaning of the word also combine nicely to explain why it is that dreams have traditionally been thought to foretell the future. Prophetic ‘superstitions’ with regard to dreams persist among rational people in the West today.

So do dreams foretell the future? There is a good argument that they do. If the future is built from the possibilities of the past then the fictional version of experience we read or see in a dream – in requiring interpretation – directs our attention to choices: the choices we face in deciding how and who to be; in deciding that is, what *can be* ahead of us. Then dreams tell the future in precisely the sense that the *I Ching* can be thought to do so: with regard to decisions needing made, they offer images and advice of a cryptic or coded kind, the kind that require interpretation. To the extent that poetry partakes of

this kind of witness (of the unknowable), we come close here to Shelley's claim about the poets being unacknowledged legislators.

Lost Crossing

There is a glimmer, a crack, the subject follows from waking into borderlands, into the self-scape where she is but is not herself; she is no longer the subject waking. Rather she is now both other than her present self and other than the self she will be. As prose lost to poetry, her thoughts turn from the frame and the form as these were given. Eyes turned from the star, it brightens; eyes drawn through mazes of the work. Pure land it is that is self-created.

Once through this needle's eye, old horizons are lost. Are there horizons at all? We travel by association. If certainties are gone then doubt has lost all relevance – everything is credible, the work is all my own. In that light shines within – in the dark fire glow of Hades – I see...

In my dream at night I climb with the mountain, alone bent to the straight staff I have whittled. In my dream the city comes faltering after me, people are running in all directions. I gather them in my cloak. It is an ark of nesting angels, my dream. And I of course am with them; I was already there.

When you think about dreams you dream more, remember more. More between worlds, there are more worlds in you.

Am I king or god in these worlds within? Consider the dream of Li Yu¹ – exiled last emperor – emperor poet – of the Southern Tang.

in my dream
I return to my country
not to war

¹ As extrapolated by the author.

not to rule
not to be king again

will you mount
to the tower
with me
just this once more?

there never was finer
than this autumn day

Are worlds dreamt full of deities? And if so, whose gods? Mine that I dream them? Are dreamt worlds worlds already known? They depend on the story before, behind them. Do they have life otherwise? The story is always older than – bigger than – us.

First paradoxes for the dreamer then – to be alone in this company of signs already known, to make one's own way into a future composed entirely of where one has been, of what one has seen. There is, in this sense, no dreaming alone and yet we are alone when we dream. The dream is my own work made from materials leant – a *bricolage* – of parts of day, and parts of all the days and works and words till now. Dreaming is not an art; rather it is mind motion made from artlessly knowing and not. For the artist then dreaming is a pure state because it provides conditions in which the intuitions of the waking world come unsupervised into play. The dream lends certainty to the unknown. Nothing wondrous in dreams or everything wondrous is taken as read.

The doubleness entailed in these paradoxes is of the nature of dreaming – the state in which one is lost to the otherness acknowledged in waking. There is something Jekyll and Hyde here, something of the bright/dark opposition we read in Milton's paired poems, 'L'allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'. A place dreamt may enjoy the idealised oneiric other-world status found in a poem like Ezra Pound's 'Doria':

Be in me as the eternal moods
of the bleak wind, and not
As transient things are –
gaiety of flowers.
Have in me the strong loneliness

of sunless cliffs
 And of grey waters.
 Let the gods speak softly of us
 In days hereafter,
 The shadowy flowers of Orcus
 Remember Thee. (in Blaisdell 1999: 98)

Hélène Cixous observes that ‘the light that bathes the Bible has the same crude and shameless colour as the light that reigns over the unconscious’ (1993: 67). As the epic to the novelistic, as speech is to writing – so the dreaming is to the waking way with the world. Recognition of the dualism or doubleness seems to be prerogative of the waking side. How much does Mr Hyde know of Dr Jeckyll? Answer: Enough, in the end to want to kill him. We can see the doubleness entailed in reflexive self-recognition as a torment in the ‘Double-faced’ section of Sándor Weöres’ poem ‘Internus’:

Myself: though this perpetual guest
 is hardly boring company,
 he’s a tick to bite my privacy,
 without him I’d have quiet and rest.
 Because he’s attentive to my demon
 And shapes its early hints in words
 I put up with his earthy being
 Till evening ends, not afterwards. (1970: 60)

A dream is a line, not quite of thought. Still rolling forward, broken, blurring from focus. The line of a dream is like a plot, a vision of motion. A storyline. But one untested. The mind storms forward for the first time here.

Dreaming unravels the day in its vacuum of action. The day folds it in after. That folding in and out, of self in world and world in self, is a rhythm which makes us, makes us who we are.

I go through the door. But the glass stops me. I am through. I am stuck. In motion. Arrested.

Waking sees the logic of its lines as ink on the blank of the unwritten page, the proper writing. Waking binds into a unity all the

voices I am, their disagreements. Dreaming is all otherwise, dreaming collects blind turns that are known and couldn't have been. Dreaming blurs. What we remember might be unconnected scribble, voices lost to sense, voices to leave us wondering which of our selves has misunderstood which other. But whether the waking misunderstands the dreaming self, or whether the opposite is true, whatever mutual incomprehension divides and unites these selves of ours, they remain foreign to each other, uncannily so. The rhythm of crossings, the rhythm of this border between selves is a mystery – mystery of daily life, everyone's. Even Freud concedes to dreams a place which has to be left obscure, a blind spot, the place where the dream reaches down into the unknown. This he calls its *navel* (in Jay 1994: 334). Valéry writes of the similarity of poetic experience and the dream state:

Dream, when we return to it through memory, makes us understand that our consciousness can be awakened or filled, and satisfied, by a whole range of productions that differ noticeably in their laws from ordinary productions of perception. But this emotive world that we can know at times through dream can not be entered or left at will. *It is enclosed in us and we are enclosed in it*, which means that we have no way of acting on it in order to modify it and that, on the other hand, it cannot co-exist with our great power of action over the external world. (in Block and Salinger 1960: 24)

For Valéry, although the dreamstate is one which 'appears and disappears capriciously', poetic experience is a means of recreating and regaining this condition, 'of artificially developing these natural products of... sentient being' (in Block and Salinger 1960: 24).

Dreaming and waking: both sides distract us. It is the mystery of a door we never remember but go through every day. How pale the moon in our distraction; through it we see...

green banks
the mountain's blue
the river runs away

snowflakes
big as doormats fall

my floor is frost

the house dreams of me –
 warm body
 quilted in a song

after enough cups
 take down the stars
 otherwise
 the clouds will get them

one
 and one more
 and pour me another

then
 moonrise
 nerves egrets to air

House Dwelling in Me

I dream of a house. Every time different – a house I've never been in before. But it's my house. The key's in my pocket, I know where the light switch is or will be. The place is already known – it's my house I could not have built. I know it some other way – as of a misplaced childhood, inheritance I've come into. Something intended for me but lost. Ramshackle it runs around the lake, dips here and there in the lapping. Only later will waking show me the house is new – to me I mean. That the key was sleight of hand, light switches are always where they are. I was discovering rooms which knew me already. That's how it is.

The dreamer appears to life's waking side as a pure passivity but the spectatorial privileges on which the dreamer relies depend on the risks and desires of the waking mind. Charles Simic writes of an 'empire of dreams' and of a mask he is afraid to put on:

On the first page of my dreambook
 It's always evening
 In an occupied country.
 Hour before the curfew.
 A small provincial city.
 The houses all dark.
 The store-fronts gutted.

I am on a street corner
Where I shouldn't be.
Alone and coatless
I have gone out to look
For a black dog who answers to my whistle.
I have a kind of halloween mask
Which I am afraid to put on. (in Milosz 1996: 171)

To dream is to wish, is to risk, to command again at the expense of certain familiar controls. To fall into these worlds which make themselves, to fall asleep, we are taken by way of an irretrievable moment. A moment of throwing doors open, a coming and going. Once in, there was no world before that. I can only say this now, from here, from the side waking declares; it hails us as black ink on bright paper. And getting here, how was that? Where was it?

You were on a particular track. You lost attention. The track dissolves but faithful to it, carry on, past railings into vertiginous space. This is the unseen eyrie – view through clouds – and here we risk the unity of being. Regularly, rhythmically. That risk is the model of devotions. In dreams there is a mystery of wishes into which we commend the spirit. We go this way whenever when we go from light into dimness. Who can say I throw the switch myself? Everything is thrown. All that sense makes common is needful here and yet the carnival overthrows the reign of the known. So we accept the sighted blindness of the self. Heraclitus said:

A man in the night kindles a light for himself when his vision is extinguished. Living, he is in contact with the dead when asleep. And with the sleeper, when awake. (Kirk and Raven 1975: 207)

Falling asleep is that moment of forgetting from which we measure our lapses. It is the model of all of our failures to come to a beginning. In dreams we only are but we act. This entry into the unknown is ours and no one else's – a unique moment of emergence. Merleau-Ponty writes of this shift:

There is a moment when sleep 'comes', settling on this imitation of itself which I have been offering to it, and I succeed in becoming what I was trying to be: an unseeing and almost unthinking mass, riveted to a point in space and in the world henceforth only through the anonymous alertness of the senses. It is true that this last link makes waking up a possibility:

through these half-open doors things will return or the sleeper will come back into the world... The body's role is to ensure this metamorphosis. It transforms ideas into things and my mimicry of sleep into real sleep.

(1962: 164)

Dreaming in and of the body – there is no other way to do it. There is counting ourselves there. Counting breaths. You settle with one wish. You slip. Counting higher and higher. Conquest or the rights of a future. Counting the beasts. As under ether, losing count. Up over the hill and there in the grass where the sky takes aim... face up for it – wishing on, falling back... This loss, from light, reminds us... The dream is embodied and an essence of death is always on the horizon of thinking; more to the point, there is a dream essence which envelops me from within my waking. Waking we only act, we don't get to star. In dreams we are persona, protagonist, narrator, anonymous.

Falling asleep – now we dozily mention it – is approached by way of an inverted view which consciousness provides, as a kind of waking: to a strange self, to a half knowledge. We may speak too of falling awake. One never knows whether or where or how one wakes. Witness Po Chü-I's account, 'on horseback nodding'²:

A long ride, and still far from our lodging;
 My eyelids weighed; for a moment I drowsed.
 Under my right arm still the whip;
 In my left hand the reins ran slack.
 Then I was back and would have asked...
 But was told:
 'One hundred paces since you dozed off.'
 The body and soul had swapped for that while;
 What was slow, what was fast, had reversed.
 My horse had taken me through long ages.
 It's true when the wise men say
 'One hundred years: a moment of sleep.'

Falling asleep will not be remembered. There is no way back through the dream, once begun, yet the prose of the dream is always returning. Dreaming can be remembered and waking can be remembered. At least the waking side of waking – *I remember what woke me* –

² Author's translation.

remains available to the waking mind. This border is the mirror we face in finding irretrievable sources: a dreamtime or any before of ideas. Whose dream is it and who belongs to it? The paradox of the apparent passivity of the dreamer is in her omnipotence: she gets what she wants. Waking sees the lack of logic in this, but how can that lack mean for the dreamer?

My dream is two places, never the same. New to me but I was there. I am the question of how to be. Who? I go unasked through the natural causes, sources of illumination undisclosed.

The door is a wall. Is a door. Glass, brick, some poisonous light. Confusion of solidity, abstraction. On the other side: everything, nothing, more of the same. We wink at the unknowable. Site of a disappearance. The free world over there on the other side. The real but it's not. The cave and the shadows; the blinding, the light.

Once over and the door is gone. Or I forget to look for it. Forget I came, I'm here. Forget it. I see through the wall. I see myself knocking. A drift of snow. See nothing, the blinding. Down in the narrowing cone of the past the page yellows. Like the end of a tunnel, from a train receding, from the observation car. The celluloid turning to stain, to flame. Decay of the image and the eye after. In Cavafy's 'Voices':

Loved, idealized voices
of those who have died, or of those
lost for us like the dead.

Sometimes they speak to us in dreams;
sometimes deep in thought the mind hears them.

And, with their sound, for a moment return
sounds from our life's first poetry –
like distant music fading away at night. (1980: 19)

A Poem Buried with a Man

The depth of winter. The poem written in a death camp. By one whom the fascists have enslaved, tormented. Written in the dark because the guards have taken the light. How many poems composed this way, or lacking even the paper, committed merely to memory? In ‘Seventh Eclogue’, written in a concentration camp and found perhaps in the notebook buried with him in a mass grave, at Győr in Western Hungary, Miklos Radnoti writes of the moment when sleep comes to the prisoners: ‘In that moment the prison camp starts home’. He imagines each returning to the place from which the war has taken him. For each man dreaming there is a miracle in which the possibility is realised: that the bombs missed his house, that his family survived, that there is still a homeland to which to return.

Do you see? Evening falls, fringed with barbed-wire
 the hacked-out oak fence and barracks waver, sucked up by dusk.
 The framework of our captivity is undone by a hesitant gaze
 and the mind alone – the mind alone – knows the tautness of the wire.
 Do you see, dearest, imagination here can free itself only this way.
 By dreaming, that beautiful liberator, our broken bodies are unleashed,
 in that moment the prison camp starts home!
 In rags, heads shaved, snoring, the prisoners fly
 from Serbia’s blind heights to the hiding homelands.
 The *hiding* homelands? *O is* our home still there?
 Maybe no bomb touched it? Might it *be*, as when we were drafted?
 The one groaning on my right, the one sprawling on my left, will they
 return home?
 Tell me, *is* there still a homeland where this hexameter will be understood?

Without accent marks, feeling out line after line,
 here, in the dusk, I write this poem just as I live
 blindly, a caterpillar inching my way on the paper.
 Flashlight, book, everything taken away by the Lagar guards,
 and there’s no mail – only fog settles on our barracks.
 Among false rumors and worms, here in the mountains live
 Frenchmen, Poles, loud Italians, Serbian separatists, and brooding Jews,
 a chopped up, fevered body, still living *one* life,
 waiting for good news, woman’s beautiful word, free human fate,
 waiting for the end that drops into dense twilight, for the *miracle*.

I am lying on a plank, a captive animal among worms,
 the fleas’ assault starts up again, but the army of flies are at rest.
 It is night, one day shorter again, you see,
 and, one day shorter, life. The camp is sleeping. The landscape

lit by the moon. In its light, the wire is again taut.
One can see through the window, cast on the wall,
shadows of armed guards passing among the night sounds.

The camp is sleeping, do you see, dearest, dreams are rustling,
a startled man snorts, tosses about in his tight space,
already back to sleep, his face radiates. Only I sit up awake,
I feel a half-smoked cigarette in my mouth instead of the taste of your kiss,
and sleep, the comforter, does not come,
for I cannot die nor live without you anymore.

(in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 716-7)

The poem has to be prised out of the earth in everything. The frozen earth. How many poems like that? How few will ever come to the glory of the printed page, the backlit screen?

There is a logic of laughter, there is a logic of dreams: which word would be abused in asserting analogy here? Words themselves are abuse, are strings to tie imagination. A dream is authentic experience, of a world I myself inhabit, a world inhabiting me. In dreams we imagine that we are who we are precisely because in dreams we cease the deliberation of acting. There is no one to impress, no one but ourselves. But we're not there either. The mirror of the side-long glance is gone; we're in the mirror. Like a ripple spreading to the edges, until we are the mirror. The audience is only after the event. Except if the dream's within a dream – a dream of the exceptional, self-conscious kind.

No deliberate acting? Yet what can dreams be but acting, but fictional accounts, when they can only refer to, and not participate in, a real world? It is in this way that dreams model the relationship which exists between 'real' worlds and art in general. Dreams without a waking world to refer to – what would they be? Like fiction with no foothold. A waking which dreaming never interrupted, which never paused to take account (but in that way of not accounting which dreams have)? We must imagine madness there. Lying nearly still: in dreams we only are but act; waking, lit into action, we only act but are.

Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Lathe of Heaven* is a study of the hypothetical case of a subject whose dreaming is immediately effected in the external world. Everything he dreams comes true. As you would expect bad guys get hold of him and make him dream bad stuff. It all gets out of hand. The world is disastrously different every day.

It is because we forget the way things happen that stories are worth listening to. Dreaming is where we pick up that technique. It's a habit. You can watch dogs doing it... coming to that bone as if out of nowhere. When only yesterday we buried it there.

Every waking stuck with the shape of us. It is never the same thing you forget. It is the authentic acts of the dreamer which provide an interruption in the continuous burial of signs, the burial of images: those burials which enable speech. Lacan writes: 'metaphor occurs at the precise point at which sense emerges from nonsense' (1980: 158). Speech: the reduction of the incomprehensible to a form of negotiation. All things being equal we say what they are. We go on and on. As if we knew what we were talking about. When it is the talking and its derailments we come from. Talk is the leveler. Only through these idle ways with words we imagine the will of heaven, the eternal.

History – the official story of us – is this way: deep denial of, even while in, the process of rewriting itself. Is it the picture of a world in which the waking always run the risk, as Descartes did in the *Meditations*, of being caught dozing? So waking to a world unlike the one known, and in which selves are no longer themselves? Such is the world that Walter Wanger's 1956 horrorspoof *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* parodies: a moment's sleep is enough for the alien mind to get hold of you and there goes your soul. Your past, all the past, will have a different meaning then. You look the same, you know everything you knew before but you are not you. You do not feel anything because, in the manner of the dreamer, you are not quite in the world. The world as it was has succumbed to a spooky doubleness, a loss of uniqueness which is a loss of freedom. So Cold War paranoia of communism is given spectral shape – these unfeeling monsters will be us if the vigilance constituting freedom cannot be maintained. A moment's inattention, we slide. As Valéry suggested: there is no way

‘to catch him in the act – the Monkey that shows the slides of the Dream’.

Is it not this scenario with all zombies and wraiths, with ghosts in their dated paraphernalia? The long dream on a drip of the life-supported? Where we imagine a loop, an echo? Nothing new where the hands have nothing to make? Or hands which have yet to hold? Babies: their coming to the world, to act. How do they dream? How do they wake? We intuit what we can’t remember... Flash forward, flash back. Death’s door. What does the mind make of it?

In anger a voice is raised then steadily the dream goes about forgetting itself ... and I forget who I am – just this voice and these words forgetting... and that’s what words are for... as if writ on water...

Is there life in mind’s implosion? In life’s last inch where time upends, folds back? As if we were uploaded into a mainframe, capable of replication. As many of me as required. A whole geography in there of coasts got up and peopled, left. In my big smuggler’s coat every meal that I’ve had. And the fields folding out under each beast. Theirs are eyes too and the crops they take in, older still in each particular day. Taking in the sun, the rain, in every act more perfect than memory. Like a break in the skin and the drums get in. Crescendo. Glissando. Memory in only the corners. Memory is vanishing.

Memory makes it fast. But in there, there’s all the time in the world. We only hear from those who turn back. And if there’s something familiar smelling, won’t that be something we’ve learned? Maybe not the name of the place. But the idea of it. A little round of rest. Before the world begins again. With or without. If it doesn’t, it does.

The poet need not suffer the historian’s illusions as to which side of the border the daylight illuminates. What does the poet do with dreams? What relationship is there between dreaming and art work? Consider the relationship between the high and the low of art and the

dream and its creative waking counterparts in Yeats's poem, 'He wishes for the cloths of Heaven:

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
 Enwrought with golden and silver light,
 The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
 Of night and light and the half-light,
 I would spread the cloths under your feet:
 But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
 I have spread my dreams under your feet;
 Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

(1982: 53)

The work of art, like the dream, is fragile. What happens to the poet's or the dreamer's work then? The idea that the poor lack access to treasures of heaven, is from a Christian point of view, disingenuous. We might surmise that heaven is in fact a dreamstate.

Falling and Falling and No Hands to Catch

It is possible to hover in the moment where consciousness falls off, develop a facility for it, a sort of play. There is a state in which we can retain awareness while allowing the carnival to begin. True boundarywork we cannot direct. We are not in. We are as guests or as gate-crashers in our own bodies then. What we understand we have brought from the alien mind whose works are suspended. Self spectators. And as spectators we can but be credulous. These conditions model poetry's vocation for witness.

This is half-life: the evanescence of the forms of consciousness. It is as a slippage from which emergence is imminent, a state which cannot be maintained. Yet in remaining awake after the loss of volition we see the imagery of our other world. The pictures are formed by everything that forms our waking selves. Short circuit. What we see now is the parade of what is meant unstuck from its means. It goes on like an army of ants into its mountain, through mists in which it loses sight: of its way, of itself, of all that surrounds.

it is from here the text descends into fragments, episodes

...there was one convict left when the settlement failed. Left dozing under tree. The beard gets longer and longer. He comes by some wives. He forgets his own tongue. His skin goes dark with being there. But the bastards find him. Remind him of everything. They fix him up with a job. Give him purpose. No blame. He helps them. It's a kind of burial, this waking.

The crooked hat, the eyes cast in. From where do you see him? From branches over? From under the skin? Waking or dreaming? Hypnagogue riddles.

...there is a cave where they took themselves. The seven. The sky itself weighed on them. There is disagreement about their names. There was a persecution. The Emperor was Decius. Condemned them. They fell into last prayers. And they slept.

The cave was sealed. To save the trouble. Generations pass. Until the place is needed for a cattle stall. The Seven wake with a hunger. And now in the reign of Theodosius they try to buy bread with the old coin, coin with the persecutor's head.

I am weary later. From the day walking. Flat in the night. I read into sleep where my language begins. Still to be true the dream is. Stuck in some cruel calculation won't come to its sum.

Better to dream than to speak dreams waking. Plenty dulls the palate saying plenty. Sleep to dream and wake to play. That is my wearying chase of tail. In mountains and in mists.

The slamming behind me. Voice with my name. Calling me from my homes, my many birthplaces. To the sea, to the forest. On either side of the border a prayer.

I am always returning. I don't remember that I came. It is as if the man with the uniform lulls me from my wits into his eyes or the bruise on the page.

You want it to be a door. And beyond the oceans till you're drunk. And burnt. Turned half to weed. Imagine rotting into the ground. Till you're one and not. Or taking flame. All the kinds of dissolution turn out to be tricks of desire.

Behind closed eyes. I lie in a certain way – leaf curled – and hope that they will come. The cast, the others.

I make a dream. And dreaming makes me. I mean to get there unintending.

Only by the effort to pass beyond understanding. Only by discarding the effort. By means of lack of means. Only in this unnamings. Getting lost in the translation. Having to guess where words go. Does this place come to me.

The sea in its sleep turning and turning. And waking too.

In the other country... we know how things are. We don't. We know that the others are wrong. Know wrongly. We cannot be mistaken in this.

Coming to and from my senses. Can't be got back. This falling from the world. The border passes unofficially. I dissolve. The other journey begins.

Or I have a knack for that moment. Wings take me where I hang in the rafters. I watch in an alien mind. Can't say no. I am about to watch, about to listen. This is my evanescence. In and of a state cannot be maintained.

Remaining after the loss of volition. In the ground already but with last words to say. With no means of saying. I have a view over the rim of the crater. Price of the privilege?

Struck off. Failed at the effort. How does it remind me? The moment, that moment. Described, so gone. In favour of what? Letting go, letting... I give way to the story... telling me. In which I'm told.

Become foreign in myself. Not knowing what I wish or where to commend. Passive, pursued, possessed of what logic would abandon. Whatever I want shapes off, won't slough. The best you do is shift sideways, wish to wish till the light takes out wishes. This vigilance betrays itself.

Every thread takes up a colour. And the morning sun takes up each thread. Coming from the pure land then, where the murders were all unflinching, survived. Made me.

It is falling from a sky. And where a sky places.

In my world, in the world in me, how many? The mansion setting and these houses. I hear the hinges of the light. The years spun back. Anchor up. The fulcrum cast in.

Inside and hunting up the key to get out. Like a burglar double deadlocked in.

Sleep approaches us – a man with cheap tickets, wanting something I can't quite make out.

There is some part of the animal we cannot eat. The trains derail. When will we know? The laughter begins. And the groan of philosophy? Continuity of failures in the effort at staying awake.

Birds at my funeral singing for me as much as for today.

Enkidu dreams those who had been gods and those who had ruled the world now servants in a house of dust.

Always wake up rubbing the lamp. Memory shines in that flawless surface. More sunshine and hazards than I could delay.

Rubbing and rubbing, some fine mist will catch me: a net.

Nothing pours out but the speech I had lost. Nothing comes on but the day.

Eternal Returning – *Amor Fati* or the Endless Re-run

Following that glimmer, a crack. Into the borderlands. Like prayer abandoned to its host. Took up with the skin. Which has a way into itself.

Where? There's the Peach Blossom cave. Light at the end where the old ways persist. The people have forgotten nothing but the world. They live as they lived before they fell out. Whoever discovers them swears not to tell. Comes home and forgets the promise. Ah, but cannot find a way back, so will not be believed. Lives in that haunting. Grey with wandering. Gives a life to finding what won't be returned to. Through hollow lands and hilly lands.

When judgement stops and the light folds forward of its own – or ours, or whose? – accord... then we are on our way unknown. Where the heart in mind is always headed. Today as any other. Now as never before. As Po Chü-I imagines in his reverie³:

In my dream at night I climb a mountain
 alone with my straight holly staff.
 How many crags, how many valleys?
 I explored them all, my feet never tired.
 My step was as strong as ever.
 When the mind goes back
 does the body return to its old state?
 Can the body suffer, while the soul is still strong?
 Are these – soul and body – vanities?
 Which more unreal, dreaming or waking?
 In the day my aged feet totter,
 In the night they power over the hills.
 Day and night divide me into equal parts.
 There I pick up what here I lose.

So taking the sense from things, a moment places me, displaces. This place is mine. Knows me. Responds. I have handholds, ways blind forward. It is my time now. These my familiar signs. No going back and no leaving. I am tattooed into the quilt still making. Like Yeats's song made coat. In my folds sung forth a hillside spread. Dry with the wind and the sun cuts. In my many creviced cape the lines grow deeper with each step. The crew of selves crowds on. Knows me. Responds. To take the things away from sense. The place is mine. A moment places me, displaces. More enterprise in going naked.

I dreamt of awakesness, how sleep wouldn't come. I dreamt:

There is a magic pillow
 better than any flying rug
 or lamp to rub for wishes.

A magic pillow
 which fits with any bed,
 lies under any head.

³ Author's translation.

The vehicle of what you will,
rug out from under will as well.

Every other world lies
unravelling from there,
like and unlike this.

Where you wish
the pillow takes.
What will be
your own crew makes.

Measured from here
the distances, heights.
Forgotten the hunter
whom prey chase from harm.
Suns ripen up alert to the soil.

And if you cannot kick the ball,
feet cannot quite connect
the lamp to rub, the contents
of the day, the rug,

no argument requires.
You go where the pillow
takes. Your mind's
made up to go.

The crowd folds into my cloak, the angels' ark. Every syllable falls in.
Unchallengeable authority. Each thing in itself, as it is. And there is
nothing but assumption: the clothes of the dream.

Ink Soaks Me Then Before the Light

We are lonely in our multiplicity asleep. We give up our
bodies, our way in the world. Undoing the damage done all day.

Dreams are thieving. They plagiarise. Dream characters as the
undead among us. We would give them our breath to speak their
names. But dreams proceed as if by rights. Lull us from causes,
effects.

Someone is calmly reading a death sentence, declaring a war, or a love. They are parleying in battle. They coo. The lovers are baying for blood, vivid. In my dream, here we are – I'm on foot and you're in your bright new sports car... I haven't the stomach for the encounter. And when our mutual friend sees me, jogging away, more and more strangely, further and further off, when he asks after me, you say 'it only looks like him, it isn't'. There's nothing to escape here. Nothing here can be escaped. Away off I hear you. In my dream tell me things I cannot believe. Where does authority come from? That beautiful complicity? Only in words which can't be heard, only so perfect in a dream. Only room for two in my shiny new sportscar.

First day of the book. Through all the pages everywhere – this distance I'm in. Things here that have always been. A forest loud with every breath. A city in footsteps. Each circle shown into, shown out. But the map is remaking me. Crossing me. Skin into skin. And deeper. Every day starting from scratch again. And buried my best premises. Something I can't help thinking resembles me; and isn't even thought.

Ink soaks me and I unfold the little I know. In that peculiar quality of words, however they're lost: that you cannot unsay them. Like oars across the wine, this dipping in, out. I read into sleep where my language begins.

Do we dream together? Are we dreamt? Side by side here on this shelf, untouched by the sirens. The dreamer requires this patching from suspended judgement; the exercise of faith in the materials, the legacy, faith in the doubt casts over these. This faith-in-doubt of the dreamer: subversion. Socrates' 'wild beast nature that peers out in sleep'. The dreamer likens dissimilar things. Ambivalence is what the state guards against. The wakeful dog keeps watch.

The house I dream of many mansions. Like the dying man's room for each day of the year. But we run out of colours. If all that God said were recorded then all the houses built could not hold the archive.

What have I got to believe by now? Faith by association is what the dreamer has to go on. All points turning. Waking, dreaming. I gather a home. The day will be for making one day. It will be nothing stolen from. How will I dream that way?

Or this is where I'm to falter? I'm the driven beast. And losing my lines through the field. Until the clothes of the dream dissolve.

The Tropic and the Iterative: of Haunting and of Laughter

But metaphor is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results.

– Derrida

Action depends on a veil of illusion.

– Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

Heraclitus and Parmenides have from the outset defined the parameters of tropology, as structure (potentially of radical disagreement) with which to represent and apprehend the world: these parameters are respectively that everything changes and that nothing changes¹.

¹ The attribution is clearer in the case of Heraclitus than in that of Parmenides. Heraclitus' reported fragments (mainly preserved through Plato and Aristotle) include the following which provide strong evidence for the position he is purported to have adopted: 'And some say not that existing things are moving, and not others, but that all things are in motion all the time, but that this escapes our perception.' 'Heraclitus somewhere says that all things are in process and that nothing stays still, and likening existing things to the stream of a river he says that you would not step twice into the same river' (Kirk and Raven 1975: 197). Note that Heraclitus' follower Cratylus made the stronger claim that one could not step into the same stream once. In the case of Parmenides the principal fragments suggestive of the idea attributed to him, that nothing changes, are as follows:

Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike; nor is there more here and less there, which would prevent it from cleaving together, but it is all full of what is. So it is all continuous; for what is clings close to what is...

Yet look at things which, though far off, are firmly present to thy mind; for thou shalt not cut off what is from clinging to what is, neither scattering itself everywhere in order nor crowding together. (Kirk and Raven 1975: 275)

In everyday life these positions often amount to unconscious and unanalysed assumptions of temperament. The contention of Heraclitus and Parmenides is replayed throughout the history of reflection on language, in Saussure's arbitrary and motivated divide and at the heart of postmodern doxa, where the world is equally doomed into difference and sameness (entropy and inertia). On the one hand are hyper-reality, hybridity and ever-increasing complexity marking the proliferation of the real; on the other, simulacra, tautology, banality and the silencing of opposition associated with the exclusivity of languages posited by Lyotard's *différend*.

The debate over *physis* and *nomos* (nature and convention) in the *Cratylus* signals the beginning of a debate about the great undecidables of signification:

Hermogenes. I should explain to you, Socrates, that our friend Cratylus here has been arguing about names; he says that they are natural and not conventional; not a portion of the human voice which men agree to use; but that there is a truth or correctness in them, which is the same for Hellenes as for barbarians. (1952: 85)

It is in the spirit of this debate that we readers of such dis/continuity witness the ongoing battle of counter-accusations between those who can see no reification in the conceptual world they inhabit and those who see themselves as dwellers in shifts of context – placeless moments which have constantly to be re-historicised, if only in order to take account of the fact of their being apprehended. For Paul Ricoeur, in *The Rule of Metaphor*, the *physis-nomos* relationship bears on another, of particular significance for poetics, the division between *mimêsis* and *mythos*. For Ricoeur, it is metaphor which, among the tropes, has the power to realise from the connection of *mythos* and *mimêsis*, a redescription of reality:

metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality. By linking fiction and redescription in this way we restore the full depth of meaning to Aristotle's discovery in the *Poetics*, which was that the *poesis* of language arises out of the connection between *muthos* and *mimêsis*. (1979: 7)

Ultimately metaphor and signification co-incide in (what appears to be) a characteristically human obsession with naming the

thing as other, with finding equivalence (and therefore difference). At the core of signification – and despite whatever conditions of motivation or of arbitrariness may obtain – there is a necessary (and always necessarily unstable, always threatened) assumption of equivalence; it is this which unites signifier and the signified in the sign. And at once there is an assumption of difference which sets signs beside, as well as against, each other. If this atomistic core is always insisting on the correspondence of words with the reality of things then this is a principle asserted over the chaotic myriad of relations which disrupt as much as they depend on the principle of representation. In the life of signs – as Empson and Burkhardt and a host of others have observed – words share meanings and meanings share words. Poets may find this state of affairs as unsatisfactory as anyone else, but it is through such ambiguity poetry discovers its place of play and the material it is to witness.

The needful investigation invoked by ‘poetic consciousness’ commences from the imbrication of sign with context. This investigation has significance not only for poetry but for a world of signs and for the subjectivity which commits reality by signs, thus for the prospects of human community. The fact that *différends* are possible proves that there must be a community aside of such gulfs. But community does not necessarily make itself possible. Blanchot writes in *The Unavowable Community* that ‘The community of lovers ... has as its ultimate goal the destruction of society’ (1983: 48). *Ecce Homo*: the sign is over someone’s dead body. Yet there are signs of life and of love.

Anyone who doubts the world altering power subsisting in tropic negotiations (and likewise in failures to negotiate) should pause to witness the *who is not with us is against us* rhetoric (and its converse) which has beset the world since September 11, 2001. Between these positions is what might ironically be named a monumental struggle between synecdoche and metonymy – between, that is, a power to include and so speak for others and a power to set others aside from one’s self and to taint them by association.

Poetries are often associated with the iterate qualities of language – specifically with its hauntedness in the shape of various

returns – especially in the patterning of sound, in rhythm and rhyme. That sense of ‘return’ I will associate with the *iterative*, by contrast with the *tropic*, quality of poetic experience – its tendency to alterity or alterity, for which laughter will stand as motif. In relation to the tropic then – the principal subject of this chapter – I wish from the outset to claim a difference between rhetoric and tropology in the following terms – that there need be no idealism in the latter. Rhetorics are manuals telling us what to do with tropes; tropologies are best accounts of what tropes do. The objective of this chapter is to engage poetry’s worldly material – its everyday means of meaning – through the practical analysis of tropes in particular.

Overlapping and besiderness of things are soils from which tropes spring. By *trope*, in these pages, I simply intend a superordinate term to include all rhetorical or figurative relations, those relations of which metaphor is often taken to be the normative example. By *tropic* I wish to suggest the differing or difference making tendency in signification, that tendency I would contrast with the iterative aspect or quality of language (that manner in which signs are already known).

Where tropic investment is concerned, at stake for poetry is the question of ends and means and of what is conscious or not in their exercise. If we can accept Wallace Stevens’ conclusion (in *The Necessary Angel*) that, in the long run, truth does not matter, then surely today that would be because we acknowledge the power and importance of the conversation in which truth is delivered; that is to say, it is a politics and not a theology that is at stake. Hence Stevens’ Kantian-styled notion of poets as thinkers without final thoughts. So the question of ethics here concerns both strategy and tactics. I mean that, in de Certeau’s sense, it concerns the institution’s process and means of perpetuating itself, so imposing its order; and it likewise concerns the necessity acted on by those pressed to take steps to make their place habitable, their lives liveable. The distinction suggested is something akin to Homi Bhabha’s ‘*langue* of the law’ as opposed to the ‘*parole* of the people’ (1990: 2).

In treading the sometimes fine line between obviousness and obscurity, poets in their process of composition exercise choices (consciously or otherwise) that concern the need to conform to rules, so as to speak/write what is intelligible; and the need to make difference so as to make a world and life liveable. In this way the tactics of poets consent with, and dissent from, the great (and the lesser) strategies in culture to which they, as all speaking others, are subject. There are no ultimate rights or wrongs in this picture, but power in the Foucauldian sense is vitally concerned. If there is a struggle to witness, by means of poetry, it is more than anything about the right to participate – and the means of participating – in the conversation through the power of which truth will be generated.

From a semantic point of view, poetry's means are mainly tropic. Its means of witness, of imaging, of making a way with and through signs – these are effected through connotative powers, those powers that can be considered rhetorical where they are conscious and deliberate – the result of the maker's focused self-awareness. Elsewhere and in the main, and in any case, they can be thought of simply as topological.

Imperial Trope

The *tropics* are everywhere because all things and all means of apprehension are becoming. Yet the everywhere-ness of things, of process, of all that is able to be apprehended and abstracted, indicates what must be taken for the facts of being. It is the fate of speech and of writing to live in the cleft and to live out the contradiction between being and becoming. Aristotle's metaphor, that which is to be avoided in plain speaking, but which in poetry is the most important thing, divides the world naturally into teachers and learners. Metaphor, part of the learning process, draws together the familiar and the unintelligible. It is claimed though that the process of metaphor itself cannot be learnt (1952: 694). This leaves a unidirectional flow, from the maker to the learner/listener/reader: a one-way heuristic, the operation of which is governed by a secret practice, metaphor. So metaphor is a supplement in the work of imitating imitation, the most important part of what for Plato was a second-hand hubris wracked

project: the key to the making of deceptions with words. Socrates in the *Cratylus* says that trusting names and the givers of names condemns us to ‘an unhealthy state of unreality’ (1952: 114).

It is now accepted that the most mundane and basic of discourses may be among the most densely tropic (Fernandez 1991: 26). Nevertheless the notional anteriority of a plain and purely denotative speech troubled various temperaments long after Plato. Vico and the Romantics wanted to have poetry as the first language and to have metaphor as the essence of that language. Likewise Rousseau, who in his *Essay on the Origin of Languages*, claims that the first language was both poetic and figurative. In the second chapter of that work Rousseau frames his original discourse in terms of a deviation from a plainer text:

The speech of the first men is represented to us as (if they had been) Geometers’ languages, whereas we can see they were Poets’ languages... Just as the first motives that moved man to speak were passions, his first expressions were Tropes. Figurative language arose first, proper (or literal) meaning was found last. Things were called by their true name only once they were seen in their true form. At first men spoke only poetry; only much later did it occur to anyone to reason. (1990: 245-6)

Rousseau does not succeed in extricating himself from the ontological tangle entailed in reordering norm and deviation; in placing, in the terms Derrida will develop (in *Of Grammatology*), the supplement at, or instead of, the source.

Insofar as it is the Romantics who realise a central function for the process of equivalence in the carrying across of meaning, their influence has never been fully escaped. Their Platonism, if Shelley is allowed to represent them, involves the assumption of a self-defeating organicism, the logical conclusion of which is their own banishment at the hands of philosophy: ‘Poetry is the record of the happiest moments of the best and happiest minds ...It is as it were the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own; but its footsteps are like those of a wind over the sea, which the coming calm erases, and whose traces remain only as on the wrinkled sand which paves it’ (1910: 355). Coleridge wishes to ‘destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things: elevating as it were Words into Things and living Things too’ (in

Hawkes 1972: 53). It is by means of metaphor that such an exaltation may take place.

Metaphor – the trope which equates – erases the signs of its process, says *this is* and never *consider this*, never *consider where you are, or what you're part of or what's next*. Metaphor is the solution for the organicist's problem of recovering from language's plurality the fused unity which takes the form of an image of nature. Under the Romantic aegis, metaphor serves as the embodiment of universalising experience; it becomes the imperialist's conscience quietening bedtime story – as borne out in Coleridge's lecture on *The Tempest*, which is claimed as a success because 'it addresses itself entirely to the imaginative faculty' and as 'independent of all historical facts and associations' (1987: 268).

The story of how the West won, has always already won, is the touchstone of post-colonial writing, from Aimé Césaire (*Une Tempête*) to the 1950's sci-fi film *Forbidden Planet*. Its positions remain inescapably those long reified by imperial culture, which is able to continue and complete the process of colonisation through consent today, even and especially after territorial sway is officially dismantled, even after colonial colours have been drained from the map. Metaphor, by virtue of its deft erasure of its own signs, is unrivalled in its potential to make contextless the truths on which imperialism depends. *The Tempest* we may see thus, in the terms of Coleridge's reading, as European imperialism's first apology. It is the defence of a certain sort of poetry: that of the universalising trope, that which makes (in a synecdochic move) the experience of the other a part of my experience.

You taught me language, and my profit on't
Is, I know how to curse: the red plague rid you,
For learning me your language!

'What ho! slave! Caliban! Thou earth, thou! Speak.' So Prospero demands and so commences the cursing competition between master and slave.

CALIBAN.
As wicked dew as e'er my mother brush'd
With raven's feather from unwholesome fen
Drop on you both! A south-west blow on ye,

And blister you all o'er!
 PROSPERO.
 For this, be sure, to-night thou shalt have cramps,
 Side-stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
 Shall forth at vast of night that they may work
 All exercise on thee: thou shalt be pinch'd
 As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
 Than bees that made them.

Prospero's cursing is performative and so the practical exercise of control; Caliban's cursing is a tactic for survival. Both are performed in Prospero's language and in the world its magic has made.

Metaphor makes the text inescapable, ensures that there is no outside. It establishes, as inevitable necessity, the anonymity of the colonial adventure of the last half millennium. It has served to assert that the world and its inhabitants are infinitely able to be possessed.

I.A. Richards begins *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* with the assumption that meanings are universally relative and absolutely context dependent. Like Vico and Coleridge, Richards assumes the centrality of metaphor's role in language. For Richards meaning is never fixed or stable but only ever acquired in use. Rather than dressing thought, as the Augustans had argued, language causes realities. It is by words we mean.

Richards derides the idea that words or ideas can ever have one true meaning, resorting to an illustration which follows on conveniently from the consequences of *The Tempest*: 'an idea or a notion when unencumbered and undisguised, is no easier to get hold of than one of those oiled and naked thieves who infest the railway carriages of India' (5). This presents a vivid image of the condition of (the) empire in the thirties, and one which should give subaltern and post-colonial approaches purchase. The radical context dependence Richards advocates, suggests not only the permanent inadequacy of the dictionary (a theme which Eco will take up in his comparison with the encyclopaedia in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*) but that through a process of transference, language and reality are in a constant and mutual state of self creation. Richards' 'interaction

theory' may thus be viewed as a formalisation of Coleridge's famous phrase defining poetry as the *interanimation of words*.

On this reading, metaphor extends language and therefore expands reality. But it needs to be asked: *whose language and whose reality?* Richards' language and reality of choice, though acknowledging the rascal, are not those of the oiled, naked and thieving Caliban or Indian. However little we know of it, the Indian's reality may be just the sort over which metaphoric truths expand. The question for the subaltern of this discourse is – How can such others begin the process of undoing the caricature they have been given of themselves? Lack of words for the task is the key to the problem. And if the words were there, were willing, with whom would such words deal? To whom would they be addressed? To whom but those subjects who first made a likeness where lacking words to cross a gulf. Lyotard writes:

In the *différend*, something cries out in respect to a name. Something demands to be put into phrases and suffers from the wrong of this impossibility. This affect comprises the silence, the feeling, that is an exclamation; but because it has to, it also makes an appeal, through its ellipses, to possible phrases. Humans who believe that they use language as an instrument of communication and decision learn, through the feeling of pain that accompanies the silence of interdiction, that they are conscripted into language. (1988: 13)

Lyotard argues that this 'conscription' entails the recognition that '...what remains to be phrased exceeds what they can presently phrase, and that they must be allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist' (13).

Copycat Virus

A brief excursion among its others reveals metaphor as the definite and dominant modality by which experience is related and reality imposed. Metaphor overlays a bi-polar map (and a bi-valent logic) on experience: the world it permits conceives everything in terms of an opposition between the literal and its other. This is the method by which it lays hold of change and turns it into a sign, or, as

Deleuze writes in his essay on 'Kafka: A Minor Literature', this is the sense in which 'Metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor' (1993: 158). Because of the affinity of metonymy for the forward unfolding of discourse, because of the next-to-ness of words in speech, even in the most mundane of instances, metaphor's regulation slips and breaks down; words never cease in the work of modifying meaning. This instability and the imagination of a denotative centre to the expression of reality are recognised in such everyday phrases such as 'almost literally', afterthoughts such as 'I meant that figuratively' or 'metaphorically speaking, that is'. One wishes to say 'this is the truth' or 'this is like the truth in certain respects'. How does belief in or consent to the metaphoric principle inform the practice of poetry in the modern sense? In Archibald Macleish's much anthologised 'Ars Poetica':

A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit,

Dumb
As old medallions to the thumb,

Silent as the sleeve worn stone
Of casement ledges where the moss has grown—

A poem should be wordless
As the flight of birds

*

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs,

Leaving as the moon releases
Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,
Memory by memory the mind—

A poem should be motionless in time
As the moon climbs.

*

A poem should be equal to:
Not true.

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love
The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea-

A poem should not mean
But be.

(in Allison et al, 1983: 1029-30)

This conception of what a poem *ought to be* plays with the reader's credulity, finally emphasising the stillness of *énoncé*: the poem as artefact at rest. What is prescribed here is the process of transcending process in favour of canonisation (the arrest of words in apotheosis). The paradox here is that of the impossible necessity of getting beyond words ('A poem should be wordless/ as the flight of birds'), of claiming the kind of stillness Zeno claims for his arrows ('A poem should be motionless in time/ As the moon climbs'). Macleish's poem ends as a celebration of equivalence, of the work of metaphor. ('A poem should be equal to/ ... A poem should not mean/ But be.')

Unveiled in all these confident 'shoulds' is the posture of the prescriptivist, the canonist – the one who tells what words *must* do in order to *be* a poem. The poem worthy of elevation to the status of classic (for instance Macleish's 'Ars Poetica') is, in this light, both a museum exhibit and an exemplar – it tells the other poems (those hopefuls on the way) how they ought to be arranged and what they ought to be about. C. Day Lewis expresses this Platonism nicely in *The Poetic Image*: 'For every new poem is, as Mr. Eliot has said, a new start; and at best it is but a tolerable substitute for the poem no one is ever great enough to write' (1965: 68).

The contradiction here – characteristic of the prescriptive posture – is between the the living work – of poetry as discursive event – as opposed to the dead artefact we think of as text (that artefact reading will bring back to life should text and reader remain sufficiently open to the possibility.) The paradox of those 'shoulds' is that they imply an eternity of how things must already be, but as well they imply doing yet to be done. Why else prescribe but to instruct, thus to anticipate action? The action anticipated will be fiercely competitive because only a tiny minority of poems currently in

composition will find their apotheosis in some Norton anthology yet to come. The unspoken model in operation here is that of a 'free market' of readers and writers supplying and demanding the needful next product of what it would be indelicate to call the poetry industry.

What gives prescriptivism in poetry the lie is that mistakenness is in the manner of language and its means: is the nature of language (whether from the point of view of the failure of representation or from that of a self-creating and containing circle). Poetry's role is, in that nature, to understand and make of it. And so mistakenness (for instance as formulated in Bloomean *misprision*) and uncertainty are essential to poetry if there is to be more of it.

At the core of signification, metaphor is what makes possible (as *langue*, as lexicon) that from which speech comes. If metaphor is the unavoidable enabler of speech then it is metaphor in which subjects are already spoken. In *Metaphors We Live By* Lakoff and Johnson assert, 'The most fundamental values in a culture will be coherent with the metaphorical structure of the most fundamental concepts in the culture'² (1980: 22).

² The universality of this claim (albeit a claim of cultural relativity) has been challenged on several bases. Naomi Quinn in her paper 'The Cultural Basis of Metaphor' takes issue with the centrality which Lakoff and Johnson assert for metaphor and with the heuristic value they assign it: the idea that metaphor virtually constitutes understanding. Quinn challenges Lakoff and Johnson on conceptual as well as cultural grounds. While agreeing that metaphor does play a key role in the 'way we comprehend and draw inferences about abstract concepts' (Fernandez 1991: 64) and recognising the validity of an enquiry into the centrality of metaphor's role in language and thought, Quinn suggests that 'metaphors, far from constituting understanding, are ordinarily selected to fit a pre-existing and culturally shared model (60). In a difference of opinion which grows increasingly reminiscent of those over chickens and eggs, Quinn argues (and unlike Lakoff and Johnson, from a corpus of data she has collected rather than thought up as an ideal speaker/listener) that 'particular metaphors are selected by particular speakers, and are favoured by these speakers, just because they provide satisfying mappings onto already existing cultural understandings' (60). Leaving the ontological question as to the priority of metaphor or cultural models, one asks whether the dispute is not a consequence of the inadequacy of a reduction of all strategies of meaning to the operation of one process, one perhaps doomed to be escaped by whatever it is claimed to contain.

Lakoff and Johnson have been able to establish a catalogue of buried yet immanent assumptions in everyday language. They show how a metaphor such as ‘argument is war’ is able to structure experience and shape attitudes to polemics, this particular metaphor revealing a symptom of a reliance on aggression for getting things done intellectually: a reliance characteristic of English language parliaments, journalism and corporate structure. Lakoff and Johnson show that metaphors have the power to define reality and that ‘people in power get to impose their metaphors’ (157). Dehumanising metaphors such as ‘labour is a resource’ allow ‘the exploitation of human beings’, something which ‘is most obvious in countries which boast of “a virtually inexhaustible supply of cheap labour”’ (237). It is not only the exploitation of fellow language users/victims which is facilitated by metaphor. The development metaphors of growth economics, the bigger, brighter, better model of the world, are all facilitated and sustained by one simple metaphor of quantity: ‘more is better’, the best illustration of which is the sway of that one particular and ever increasing quantity, money. Unspoken assumption of the ‘growth is good’ metaphoric is the limitlessness of the planet as resource and as habitation: Earth’s capacity to provide for and to soak up the open-ended expansion of human needs and wishes. It is the metaphor as *doxa* which allows the assumption to go unchallenged because unspoken. Lakoff and Johnson suggest that metaphors deal with or mask contradictions:

Successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a constant shifting of metaphors. The use of many metaphors that are inconsistent with one another seems necessary for us if we are to comprehend the details of our daily existence... any consistent set of metaphors will most likely hide indefinitely many aspects of reality – aspects that can be highlighted only by other metaphors that are inconsistent with it. (1980: 221)

Metaphor is a motion in which reality is contested. The operation of metaphor is ideological in the sense that it serves to conceal the fact of the contest. If more generally it might be said that the tropes are in speech the play of cathexis or the means by which affect reasons with words, then the logic of equivalence, which makes itself absolute (in nowhere proclaiming itself) also makes itself unstable, collapses into degrees and into the arms of its others. A logic of equivalence falls into those gulfs, the *différends*, which it works to conceal.

Against such odds, metaphor conscripts its consent, holds no referendum, sends us all off to war. Whatever territory it appears to threaten it has always already invaded. Metaphor is a haunting which lies in all words, consciousness of which is dispelled in the forward unfolding of words in new meaning. Wherever we go in the worlds which words make we find this dormant spore of means, which hides its own ubiquity in that of words. Metaphor appears to open onto a field with no limits but what is limitless is its mediation and the making of equivalences. This trick of denotation turns on itself in the violence and mistakenness of naming, that which makes the world apprehendable in the process of making the world.

Under the sway of the universalising and reductive process of analogy there is a movement towards the limits of iteration. This is because metaphor depends on the invisibility of the already said in order to establish the naming plot at the heart of all saying. The apparently permanent ascendance of metaphor among the tropes (and particularly of that unidirectional version of it we associate with I.A. Richards and Max Black) is characteristic of the manner in which the world has come to be fully possessed.

The confusion of metaphor's rule is of limits repressed in favour of the same set of symptoms refusing to recognise themselves. Wallace Stevens tells us that there is no such thing as a metaphor of metaphor, but, if we accept with Paul Freidrich that 'our immediate situation is the whole field of tropes' (in Fernandez 1991: 26), then metaphor is the beginning of a *metabusiness*: cause and result of reflexion. Hence the desire to say what metaphor is is doomed to make more metaphor. In like manner any effort to critically engage metaphor as a trope among others may be undermined merely in the attempt at definition. Such is its viral action. As is the case with money, what metaphor touches, cannot be easily untainted. Ricoeur states the contradiction in which the symptom is manifest: 'The paradox is this: there is no discourse of metaphor that is not stated within a metaphorically engendered philosophical framework' (1979: 287). And this is a problem for tropology in general. A catalogue of tropes is an inventory, not merely of functions, but of equivalences: *a synecdoche is..., irony is...*

If metaphor stands where it has made itself invisible then who has the power to seek its symptoms, to see where a *différend* once was? One tempers Ricoeur's with Le Doeuff's assurance: 'there is no thinking which does not wander.' And indeed one might argue that it is through the spread of the metaphorical principle speech has fallen into the earth's most secret corners. The metaphoricity of speech is the virulence of humanity and it is humanity's most virulent strains which have carried their speech into those corners, wiping out other speech varieties in their way.

What haunts every prospect of signification is this extreme manifestation of possession, witnessed only to have this witness metonymically swept away. In what Didier Anzieu calls *a skin of words*, is apprehended an apparent stillness, that of the being of the sign, illusion which makes possible our speech of certain words. What this illusion of stillness ignores is that these signs are only ever between subjects, only ever becoming. It is in this betweenness that we ourselves become. It is where the body of foreigners inhabits the community of words.

Metonymic Tactics

The logic of equivalence collapses under the pressure of an ambivalent logic (that which has been associated with poeties from Plato to Kristeva) into degrees, modalities, acknowledged versions of the real. And as well the logic of equivalence slips away under the syntagmatic pressure metonymy implies because the spoken chain leaves equivalence behind, bringing only its haunting, as it unfolds the future. And so the sideways motion – the *glissement* – characteristic of metonymy may be an effective tactic for a poetry interested in witnessing where truth has got to.

In Robert Frost's poem 'Out, out' the world slides symptomatically into an abyss, finally of a death turned from, because it has others, and because, for those others, there is always a next thing (89-90). The poem commences with alienated labour absented from the action in favour of the action of the machine it enables.

The buzz saw snarled and rattled in the yard
 And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,
 Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.

Perception though (and so a subjective centre) creeps, as it were, back into the poem, courtesy of the worker's *perruque* (trope to which I shall turn shortly).

And from there those that lifted eyes could count
 Five mountain ranges one behind the other
 Under the sunset far into Vermont.

The boy-worker, failing to attend, loses his hand to the saw blade.
 And so he loses his life.

No one believed. They listened at his heart.
 Little—less—nothing!—and that ended it.
 No more to build on there. And they, since they
 Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

There is uncertainty built into the metonymic progression constituting the plot of the poem. The boy does not want the doctor to take off his hand, but the hand is already gone. All present to the accident believe that the boy will survive, but he does not. The truth requiring witness is something that exceeds belief, is something for which the saying of how things are will simply not do justice. The truth to be witnessed is something emerging, as one thing after another.

In Les Murray's poem, 'The Tin Wash Dish', the reader is given the clothes of poverty and so the effect of their being emptied of humanity, this via the absence of a subject as such (308).

Lank poverty, dank poverty,
 its pants wear through at fork and knee.

Still the consciousness of the poor-as-particular-sentience is pervasive, as indicated by the perversity of seeing a missing window as preferable to a snotty sleeve.

Rank poverty, lank poverty,
chafe in its crotch and sores in its hair,
still a window's clean if it's made of air,
not webby silver like a sleeve.

Despite the objectification, courtesy of the impersonal pronoun, we know that the subject is there, is the character for whom all the symptoms of lack are arrayed. Key symptom of poverty then is deprivation of humanity at the fundamental level of the pronoun; instead we have the education system's objectification of a perceived underclass – as a class of things:

Watch out if this does well at school
and has to leave and longs to leave:

Poverty personified 'disgusts us into fierce loyalty'. There is a theological dimension to this expedition, both because, 'It's never the fault of those you love:/Poverty comes down from above' and because 'Jesus Christ turned this over with his stick'. It turns out that the unnamed-able subject of the poem (represented by the attribute of poverty) is one who would 'astound the nation, rule the army'. In the end though:

still you wait for the day you'll be sent back
where books or toys on the floor are rubbish
and no one's allowed to come and play

And why?

because home calls itself a shack

Which goes to show how the process of naming and being named serves as a final cause of the class ontology related here. The sleight of hand that shows things naming themselves turns out to be one more nail in the coffin of the underclass's hopes for agency or volition. The reversal of the expected cliché (not the humble dwelling calling itself a home but the home declaring itself shack) might ungenerously be read as 'outing' the posturing of the piece. However we read, attention is drawn to the plot that is in naming and to the plight of the nameless. Metonymy might have led us back into the crushing arms of metaphor, were it not for the poem's last line, closing the circle with

the title and leaving us with an image which, while it won't quite equate, keeps the associative progression alive.

no one's allowed to come and play
because home calls itself a shack
and hot water crinkles in the tin wash dish

So the nameless poor will always be with us. Their clothes and their conditions will give them away.

An Art of Theft

In the first book of the *Republic*, Socrates suggests that the poets speak darkly of the nature of justice and he ridicules the contention he ascribes to Homer, that *justice is an art of theft* (299). The trail of precedent and principle, in which law, always after the event, seeks to reify itself, as the quasi-nature of things *ever-thus*, depends on the outside and the before of a canonic pattern. It depends on a boyish enthusiasm, such as might be attributed to gods, in which the signs by which we know rights and responsibilities are erased, as it were, just this once, and just so that they might be commenced. What kind of *hubris* would hold the gods responsible for the theft, murder, incest and cannibalism which makes them (and us) possible? By means of this legerdemain, declaring a beginning exempt from its rules, the law establishes the territory of its jurisdiction.

Where signs absent themselves all plot collapses to this unity: amnesia masking history's principal recurrences – of invasion, of theft. The past is the story of crime becoming law. History is in part the discursive activity of absenting signs; this done in the guise of passive apprehension. No habitable corner has been exempted from what seems mere description but is in fact the institution of events. We are here because of (and despite) crimes against humanity, crimes which allowed us to become who we are, crimes which allow us to continue being ourselves. The question of guilt relates, not to what we ourselves never did, but to our unavoidable life long complicity and collaboration against the truth, that collaboration which characterises lives lived in the absence of any intention to act so as to make things right. This question of bad faith is notwithstanding the fact that others

may have hearts as dark as ours. Freud, in 'Thoughts on War and Death' writes that:

the primitive history of mankind is filled with murder. Even today, the history of the world which our children learn in school is essentially a series of race-murders. The obscure sense of guilt which has been common to man since prehistoric times, and which in many religions has been condensed into the doctrine of original sin, is probably the outcome of a blood-guiltiness incurred by primitive man. (1952: 763)

To be situated by crimes past is an aspect of the human condition, the universal ethical *in media res*. This fact in itself demands witness and perhaps it is equally a part of the human condition to uncover, to reframe, to ironize these crimes, thus to subvert the law which seeks to cover the murder by which it is established. No one arrived at their present position through a lineage of exclusively pure volitions, consensually exercised in conditions of equal power and sentience. Consider the global approach to these circumstances, taken by Gary Snyder in his 1990 work *The Practice of the Wild*:

Everyone who ever lived took the lives of other animals, pulled plants, plucked fruit, and ate... There is no death that is not somebody's food, no life that is not somebody's death. Some would take this as a sign that the universe is fundamentally flawed. This leads to disgust with self, with humanity, and with nature. Otherworldly philosophies end up doing more damage to the planet (and human psyches) than the pain and suffering that is in the existential conditions they seek to transcend. (2000: 236)

Knowledge of our position may well be ethically immobilising. We have to wonder, as the Claudius of *Hamlet* wondered, whether he could find himself pardoned yet retaining the offence (i.e. the benefits of a premeditated murder, a secret coup). The immensity of the crime enabling our presence, the powerlessness of individuals in the face of it, the security of a collective amnesia (these in the forms of myth, religion, legislation) – all haunt the propensity to act.

To cast the postcolonial enterprise into a psychoanalytic (Lacanian-Kristevan) light, it could be claimed that the ironic moment is that necessarily subversive, necessarily repressed interval in which the Law and the murder enabling it are able to be uncovered. Irony, is among other things an opening for laughter in the face of the Law. Bakhtin writes of the form of irony that it is 'in general conditioned by

a social conflict: It is the encounter in one voice of two incarnate value judgements and their interference with each other' (1994: 172). For Bakhtin, carnival reveals the ironic spectacle of the life force at its own throat, of the body swallowing itself. And the a/logical corollary of this irony, ambivalence made trope, is laughter which in the case of Rabelais, comes as a *symphony* (215).

For Kristeva, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, the significance of laughter in relation to practice is located at the identical moment of ambivalence which we may regard as irony's habitation:

There is one inevitable moment in the movement (where neither true nor false, their truth consists in the ability to participate in the process of contradiction) that recognizes the symbolic prohibition and makes it dialectical: *laughter*. Practice, as we have defined it, posits prohibitions, the ego, 'meaning' etc., and makes them dialectical, and *laughter* is the operation that attests to this mechanism. (1984: 222)

Laughter's is the moment that cannot have been expected. In Tadeusz Różewicz' poem 'Laughter':

The cage stayed shut
until a bird was hatched inside

the bird remained mute
until the cage
rusting in the silence
opened

silence lasted until
behind black wires
we heard laughter

(95)

Cages rust but, with an opening (of the shell, of the cage), out of silence and invisibly, laughter comes. Irony arrives unexpectedly, because something has changed, because something could not have been known. This is the nature of laughter's release.

To throw the investigation back into the form of a Platonic/Aristotelian disagreement one could say that irony is no more

or less than the confounding of being with becoming – that proverbial pulling out of the rug which marks the action, not only of time, but of the play of tropes, upon the still figure of signification.

Stories told by automatised texts (for instance the story told in an anthem) tend, paradoxically, to promote amnesia; such stories (for instance of how we came and who we are) need to be revived and unravelled precisely because the words in which they consist are regularly disappeared, because where they are recalled they are emptied of meaning – sung as merely conventional phrases, as formulae the purpose of which is to include and exclude listeners, rather than to tell a story. As in cliché, as in dead metaphor, repetition buries meaning. The dialectic of irony consists in a reframing movement: the temporal unfolding of new truths from under prior truths, from truths which turn out to be plots concealing the truth. Irony so conceived is everywhere the other side of truths taken for granted³. Its ubiquity is as expressed by Anatole France – ‘the world without irony would be like a forest without birds’ (in Muecke, 1969: 235). Then

wasn't it the birds
taught us to sing?
poor pictures we make
of their gifts to us

³ Contrast this arrangement with the one Merleau-Ponty formulates in *The Visible and the Invisible*, where the relationship between irony and dialectic is asserted in the following terms:

Oh, Dialectic! says the philosopher, when he comes to recognize that perhaps the true philosophy flouts philosophy. Here the dialectic is almost like someone; like the irony of things, it is a spell cast over the world that turns our expectations into derision, a sly power behind our back that confounds us, and to top it all, has its own order and rationality; it is not only a risk of nonsense, therefore, but much worse: the assurance that things have *another sense* than that which we are in a position to recognise in them. Already we are on the way of the bad dialectic, that which, against its own principles, imposes an external law and framework upon the content and restores for its own uses the pre-dialectical thought. (1968: 93-4)

Are not the symptoms ironized here? The disappearance of the birds is a sign of the forest's vanishing.

smoke
 sings in the woods of laughter
 my head turns to stone
 and I sleep like a forest
 morning wakes me
 with invented birds
 when I will burn
 a sun or two
 all this to be alone
 now the rooster
 who resembles
 his dreams
 bends down
 for the first
 lit worm

So we make our own birds. Who can argue? Defining characteristic of metaphor, as 'imperial trope' is that it imposes a reality without going to the trouble of arguing for it. Metaphor places particular truths, particular ratios of the world as received, out of contention. In terms of the ethical criteria Lyotard develops in *The Différend*, metaphor is a means of papering over the *différends* which exist in the case of a 'conflict ...that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of a judgement applicable to both arguments'(1988: xi). Metaphor, the same-making essential to the process of signification, is both the means by which, in Lyotard's terms, we are 'allowed to institute idioms which do not yet exist' and by which as well humans 'are *conscripted* into language'(1988: 13).

Whether or not a *différend* requires a Lyotard to uncover it, its naming as such reveals a signification under contention: the asking of a question as to how a meaning is possible, as to what else it conceals, what other truth it renders unviable. Whether 'discovered' or not, the irreconcilable silence between idioms is surpassed in the ongoing process of signification.

Irony functions as such a discovery: in the moment of opening of one context onto another a contradiction is revealed. Does that make irony a kind of meta-trope, a higher order of reframing? Or is

irony not, like metaphor, an imperial trope, one claiming equivalences everywhere and everywhere covering its tracks (perhaps even better than metaphor does)? Metaphor elides the process of identification shown in simile, but irony does not even tell us which things are what/not what. To uncover irony we are forced to look at things sideways; we are obliged to assign a direction among the contexts through which particular words and particular texts make their way. In Ivan Elagin's poem 'Amnesty':

The man is still alive
Who shot my father
In Kiev in the summer of '38.

Probably, he's pensioned now,
Lives quietly,
And has given up his old job.

And if he has died,
Probably that one is still alive
Who just before the shooting
With a stout wire
Bound his arms
Behind his back.

Probably, he too is pensioned off.

And if he is dead,
Then probably
The one who questioned him still lives.
And that one no doubt
Has an extra good pension.

Perhaps the guard
Who took my father to be shot
Is still alive.

If I should want now
I could return to my native land.
For I have been told
That all these people
Have actually pardoned me.

(in Todd and Heyward 1994: 674-5)

The truth of the commissar is not the truth the commissar works to erase. But his ironized 'pardon' is 'understood' by the surviving

victim in a way the oppressor is incapable of understanding. Whoever can understand the meaning of one's forgiveness for the victims of one's truth no longer holds that truth. The dissenter's irony is in this sense beyond the complete world, all things being equal, which it serves to undermine. Its apprehension and the arrest of the ironizing dissident prove that a certain truth is surpassed. If irony is always there then it is there subversively as the dissent an imperial (or state) order ironically makes possible. Perhaps it is in this way a kind of anti-metaphor. Where metaphor de-historicises the contents of an analogy in order to paint a particular order as universal, in the case of irony things move in the opposite direction: truths are tagged with their particularity, shown the place where they no longer fit. Irony in this way obliges us to see between contexts. Gilles Deleuze writes of irony that it is:

itself a multiplicity – or rather the art of multiplicities: the art of grasping the Ideas and the problems they incarnate in things, and of grasping things as incarnations, as cases of solution for the problems of Ideas. (1994: 182)

For Linda Hutcheon, as for Deleuze, irony is a trope of multiplicity, involving 'an oscillating yet simultaneous perception of plural and different meanings' (1994: 66). So irony as the intersection or superimposition of frames reveals the moment in which it becomes acknowledged that a particular truth is to be dispensed with. Does it imply the borrowing of truths from one *weltanschauung* to another? Just as metaphor does not ask permission for the equivalence it imposes, neither does irony negotiate for what it takes. Its acts of appropriation are arbitrary, one-sided and irreversible in their epiphanic quality: what is revealed in an irony will not (at least not for the ironist) resume its pre-ironic force. Whatever is retrieved from irony has the taint of goods having been stolen. (Again, at least for the ironist. And for his/her victim/s?)

What kind of a theft is irony then? Deleuze calls it an art. Perhaps it is as those personal resistances which Michel de Certeau calls *perruques*, resistances which suggest a need to imbue desire with a creative personality:

La perruque is the worker's own work disguised as work for his employer. It differs from pilfering in that nothing of value is stolen. It differs from absenteeism in that the worker is officially on the job. *La perruque* may be

as simple a matter as a secretary's writing a love letter on 'company time' or as complex as a cabinet maker's 'borrowing' a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room. (1988: 25)

De Certeau's *perruque* diverts time 'from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit' (25). Its pleasure is in the cunning creation of gratuitous products, the purpose of which, in signifying the worker's capabilities, is to 'confirm his solidarity with other workers or his family.' 'With the complicity of other workers... he succeeds in "putting one over" on the established order on its home ground' (26). In de Certeau's estimation it is in popular tactics that order is 'tricked by art'. The *perruque* is work which is foreign, homeless, by virtue of having no dwelling but time stolen from official consciousness. It is likewise the ironist's (pseudo-)duty to effect a kind of theft of meaning. Is it like the theft the indigene perpetrates in taking a bottle of beer from the people who stole his/her continent? Is the genuine guilt of that, no doubt self-acknowledged, miscreant more or less doomed, more or less ironic a tactic than the passage through the hall of mirrors of the self-confessed ironist?

De Certeau's *perruque* is a species of *bricolage*. *Bricolage* for Lévi-Strauss in *The Savage Mind* is the use of odds and ends, a kind of making-do in material culture with what is at hand (1972: 22). This making-do is in the nature of the linguistic sign. Words are borrowed without complete consciousness of their provenance or resonance. Yet by using them we make them mean in such a way as to erode the resonances they had prior to our use and in such a way as to make irretrievable their provenance. This 'borrowing' for which permission can never be sought is one which conceals its enabling relations. One world seen stolen through another's eyes: the big issues of alterity and postcoloniality invest in such a problematic. And of the 'decolonised' world, of the postcolonial, the subaltern voices therein, should we not ask in what sense the world they inhabit has come under their jurisdiction?

Perhaps *perruque* is to *bricolage* as irony is to metaphor, or even the whole field of tropes, a theft among all of the means of exchange. If such is its status, then does it not ironize the domain of tropic relations as a thieves' paradise? The ironist's motivation (in lieu

of a duty) is a kind of *perruque*: the theft and redeployment of meaning from its everyday homes. The victim of an irony still has the words begun with, somewhere else they are changed but they are only changed for the ironist and whoever understands an irony is to this extent no longer its victim. Just in this way, the ironist is guiltless with regard to the words of the victim (Look for them. You will find that none are missing.), neither is s/he responsible for where an irony ends up. Ironies ricochet off the mirrored walls of context, off the mirror clad subjects who infest these. It's in such a forest – is it of one's own making (?)– we find the poet

hunting wild nexus

something stolen from the thieves
this is

seasickness of the soul
righting self
in all that it cannot compass

this is the voice hails itself
will not come

not a hat
but the sun burns on
not a story
but the credulous framed for constancy

Because ironies do have effects and ones which cannot be pre-determined, which cannot be absolutely deliberate, they are certainly acts of *bricolage*. So ironies are thefts, never fully intended; their victims are ambiguously so, always able to join their tormentors, to give the truth they hold away, perhaps in the moment they first acknowledge it, perhaps in the moment of laughter. Thefts are by definition unofficial acts but an irony, in establishing the dissonance of contexts available to an utterance, gives rise to a new and unofficial truth: the kind of truth often as not suppressed as subversion. Is this voice of another too close to mine, another's inside of my words? Or is it my words in another's voice? Which of these is it I cannot tolerate?

this is the upside down
for a dare

meek earth
whom all loves abandon
personable proud
kicked into dawn

old blare fate
of the done to done for

the gathering of seams to fray

I fill the cup with this – it does good

myself am
the mind's dripping tap

Ultimate Trope

To revive the Jakobsonian dichotomy between two axes of signification; irony is a specific result of interaction between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic. It is the point at which the ceaseless shifting forward of context is perceived as revealing the truth as a lie. What is the truth but that moment of reification of the conventional upon which signification depends? Irony, for Vico, is 'fashioned of falsehood by dint of a reflection which wears the face of truth' (1984: 131). For Vico there is something more definitively in the way of truth beyond the tropic, something yet unattained. Foreshadowing a critique of the pathetic fallacy, for Vico metaphors are fables which give passion to insensate things and it is in ignorance that man makes himself the rule of the universe (129). It is by the authentic exercise of the tropes and not by understanding of them that man anthropomorphises and takes on his environment. In chapter II of the Book on 'Poetic Wisdom' Vico writes:

this imaginative metaphysics shows that man becomes all things by *not* understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*)... for when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them. (1984: 130)

Vico sees poetry as the first language to succeed the graphic and the gestural – the language, that is, of barbarism. Vico's poetic logic reveals history as a progression through the tropes: ages of metonymy (the gods), of synecdoche (heroes), of metaphor (men) and in the age to succeed these (the age of philosophy) a movement towards the literal. Is this the kind of destination to which Zeno's arrow points? Surely any progression through tropes reveals a truth of some kind giving way to another. Note that in the ontogenesis of child language development, irony is the last trope of Piaget's series. If irony is beyond metaphor and always to succeed metaphor then equally it is always yet to be succeeded by a fresh reification: in the manner of the world as reordered at the end of a tragedy.

Eyes on the tragedy, its causes, effects; does the ironist then have any claim to an ethical superiority? B. Austin-Smith writes irony has 'replaced patriotism as the last refuge of scoundrels, for it means never having to say you meant it' (in Hutcheon 1994: 176). Yet irony does depend on the value of truth to undermine what is possessed of this status. Irony depends on the kind of truth Lear's Fool declares: 'Truth's a dog must to kennel; he must be whipped out' (I,iv, 1983: 914). Truth is a servant of purposes, something alive between participants in society. It only matters when it is somewhere, is only known where it is contested and otherwise lies in the realm of sense which is common by virtue of lying unchallenged. Shakespeare's transgression of the fixity of truths is one which prefigures the cultural relativism of Vico. It prefigures as well the demands of the heteroglot novel which Bakhtin will spell out in Dostoevsky's case as illustrated by the fact that 'two thoughts are already two people, for there are no thoughts belonging to no one and every thought represents an entire person' (1994: 102). Inevitable irony: inevitable its supersession. The *eirōn* is the underdog, one like that to which Lear's fool alludes, 'one whipped to kennel'. For J.H. Miller irony betrays the intentions of those who deploy it: 'Irony is the mode of language which cannot be mastered. It cannot be used as an instrument of mastery. It always masters the one who tries to master it or to take power with it' (1982: 106). Does that make it, in Deleuzian terms, the minoritarian trope?⁴

⁴ The trope which would answer (if not *conform* to) the ensemble of tactics perhaps best summarised by Foucault's formulation, in the preface to *The Anti-Oedipus*, to

Irony, bivalent as metaphor, entails judgement and also its concealment (perhaps the last laugh), and is therefore a mirror of the ideological, which depends on the same process (judging and hiding the judgement). In this way the edge irony presents is always a boundary shifting in struggle between what Bakhtin calls evaluative accents. Laughter falls on one side or the other, is never merely even handed because the joke always has the quality of an uncovering. Laughter is always at someone's expense. So

we laugh at
 the clown falling over
 the tripping hag
 the great man felled
 the mother crone
 martyr saint
 we laugh at them – fools
 see them all at their laughable worst
 spat on, beaten, weeping,
 just done, braced for the next blow
 what a grimace, what a laugh
 we laugh at dumb creatures humbled
 laugh at the sun with arrows downed
 laugh with gods' laughter
 for all weak creatures
 for all the weakness of creation
 we kick a dog out of this world
 and we laugh
 we're not laughing at death
 we're laughing with

Even when laughter masks fear or oppression it does so by releasing a little knowledge of these into the world.

As the trope which encompasses carnival ambivalence, irony is the only escape from the tyranny by which metaphor continuously stalls the metonymic progression of the play of tropes. It is metaphor turned, soured, it is the under-trope⁵. If justice is, as for the Socratic

prefer whatever is multiple, whatever is different, whatever flows, whatever is mobile, whatever is nomadic (in Deleuze and Guattari 1983: xiii).

⁵ In a classic study, *The Compass of Irony*, Douglas Muecke concludes:

Homer, an art of theft then which discourse or discursive strategy escapes the ascription of this motive? Post-romantic poetry demands a reflexive awareness of its sources and tools, its *bricolage* is indeed a species of appropriation, one which depends on at least a partial consciousness of reframing. And it is the reflexive turn of postmodern discourse which tempts one toward the hypothesis that irony is in this sense too the ultimate trope. Whatever metaphor reifies an irony will destabilise. And irony's work is never done. There is never a last frame into which it retreats for good. Such frames belong to metaphor, they are where metaphors die.

Perruque is a theft by which a *différend* is surpassed – a theft from one language to another of tools and methods which cannot have been intended for the task. *Perruque* is a subversive tactic which works because it is invisible, anonymous, perhaps half intended or unintended. It is the means in which mistakenness – forgetting what things mean, what things are for – succeeds in effecting a new order: that accident known as the future.

What of poetry's role and position then – of the poets among the rhetors and the means of this particular *bricolage* among the tropic array of means? Duties to witness and to the examined life insist that the poet in postmodernity is a species of ironist. The world changing work of words and poetry's paths of flight point to an indirection in

We live in a world which imposes on us many contradictory pressures. Stability is a deep human need, but in seeking stability we run the risk of being imprisoned in the rigidity of a closed system, political, moral or intellectual. We need the reinvigoration that change brings but not a drifting from one novelty to another. We cannot wish never to feel or always to be swept by emotions. We wish to be objective but we cannot treat men as objects. We behave instinctively when we should be rational and rationally when instinct would serve us better. Those who close their eyes to the ambivalences of the human condition – the proponents and adherents of systems, the sentimental idealists, the hard-headed realists, the panacea-mongering technologists – will naturally find an enemy in the ironist and accuse him of flippancy, nihilism or sitting on the fence. (1969: 247)

Muecke claims that although some ironists may be guilty of such faults 'the ironist's virtue is mental alertness and agility. His business is to make life unbearable for troglodytes, to keep open house for ideas, and to go on asking questions' (247).

the hypnagogic sense. Poetry's daring not to know is suggested in the reverie of Yannis Ritsos' lines:

And I have something to tell you
which not even I must hear. (4)

A grammar holds together its world of speakers, allows them the freedom of movement to be – to make themselves – as they will become. How do the contingent mechanics of this accidental future stand? What covers irony, satori, epiphany, any moment of realisation, the unravelling of truth, is new metaphor: fresh glue, fresh paper slapped over the cracks. What reveals the lie of a metaphor but a fresh irony? Whether such moments are metadiscursive or merely inevitable is a moot point. For Vico it the exercise of the tropes and not the understanding of them which allows man to become all things, to make them from himself, to transform himself into them⁶ (1984: 130). But perhaps the exercise and understanding of the tropes are indistinguishable processes or at least implied in some continuum of consciousness. Avowing my *metabusiness* here, the ratio I wish to postulate between metaphor and irony, between *différend* and *perruque*, is from the irreconcilable to the theft enabling it. Ironic that a theft should bear the burden of revealing thefts?

Let that postulate lie under this interrogation: is metaphor itself a theft, representing as it does a kind of erasure – the writing of one signification over another? And conversely is irony a kind of *différend* – does the laughter in which it is invested indicate an irremediable freezing – a place beyond which there is no passage?

⁶ Frederic Jameson writes that Schlegel's broad concept of irony:

involves the gradual obliteration of Vico's distinction between history (which man, having made, can understand) and nature (which, as the result of God's creation, is utterly alien to us; the gradual feeling that we share in the non-human as well, or rather that the I and the not-I are subsumed together under some greater all-encompassing entity on the order of a transcendental ego or an absolute spirit; that human consciousness therefore rediscovers seeds of itself in everything it contemplates. Of this metaphysical idealism, then, the work of art clearly becomes the tangible symbol... (1974: 80)

Laughter dissolves the demands of equivalence but there are always words after laughter. Laughter, itself a repetition, dissolves, as the dream to waking. So waking and the daylight power of equivalence dissolves to sleep to dream.

If there is no thinking that does not wander, then what position or trajectory does poetry occupy in or on the field of tropes? Haunting is embodied in those iterative processes (or trope traps) in which identities are indicated as unconscious and confirmed as already known; laughter, by contrast, is realised by means of a metonymic trajectory through the tropes. I call this the trope trip – a way through the place because and despite of us.

Witness and Habitation: Waking up to Ourselves

The heart luxuriates with indifferent things,
Wasting its kindness on stocks and stones,
And on the vacant air.

– Wordsworth

What disregards people does people good.

– William Stafford

Wilderness is above all an opportunity to heighten one's awareness, to locate the self against the nonself. It is a springboard for introspection. And the greatest words, those which illumine life as it is centrally lived and felt, intensify that process.

– Bruce Berger

It must be demonstrated ceaselessly that a continually 'growing economy' is no longer healthy, but a cancer.

– Gary Snyder

We live in an infinite universe and are destined to disappear forever.

– Octavio Paz

We count ourselves out of waking. Numbers higher and higher, until we tumble. The net falls with us. The memory of that moment gone before the way can be named; but the other of that instant? Much of poetry's witnessing relates to the action of waking. Witness of 'waking' rubs off metonymically on every kind of awareness aroused. Witness itself is a kind of waking, just as culture is a dreaming together (so collectivity of the unconscious) – fiction (especially filmic fiction) the most obvious example. 'Criticism' and 'theory' witness that dreaming from the waking side, poetry from both sides. Poetry witnesses both the collective state and the action in which individuals and collectivities wake from it – so become aware

of what was previously hidden, of what previously lay or fell below the threshold of consciousness.

Of course there is a wakefulness – an everyday kind – in which these metaphors need not apply. This is the drudge wakefulness of complicity, life on one's knees, the half-life Plato imagined in his cave. This is the kind of waking from which one might wake, for instance to the purity of a dreamstate, of any effort at fancy. The parable of the boiling frog is apposite here. Dropped into the boiling pot, the frog jumps out and saves itself, but where the temperature is notched up gradually the animal is lulled to sleep, to death. The flash of recognition – the moment of witness – lacking, the will lapses; there is no standing up. That was the frog as victim; another frog of fable is also apposite here – the one which puffs itself bigger and rounder until it bursts.

Death is always within the human horizon, hailing us in these ways. Humans blow themselves and each other up; humans do the boiling, but humans are not the only frogs. The real frogs are often a good indication of the health of an eco-system. The frogs are in decline worldwide, the temperatures are rising. Whether science can or cannot connect these neat metaphors for our present dangers, there is an urgent need for wakefulness, a need to witness waking, to see how we were hailed unwitting.

Coming from the dream then, witness the myth light, the crude light of the Bible. Consider how the imagery is lit in Judith Wright's poem, 'Legend'.

The blacksmith's boy went out with a rifle
and a black dog running behind.
Cobwebs snatched at his feet,
rivers hindered him,
thorn-branches caught at his eyes to make him blind
and the sky turned into an unlucky opal,
but he didn't mind,
I can break branches, I can swim rivers, I can stare out any
spider I meet,
said he to his dog and his rifle.

(1970: 56)

The landscape of volitions here provides us with the range of thematics with which this chapter is concerned; these include the poet's relationship with the natural world and the duties of witness or intercession here implied.

The Pathetic Fallacy and Fairytale Thinking

In her essay on 'Landscape, History and Pueblo Imagination', Leslie Marmon Silko writes that, 'so long as the human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs and the plants, clouds, and sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading'. Silko goes on to say that "'A portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view" does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings'. For Silko, assumed here is the idea that 'the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory he or she surveys'. 'Viewers', Silko believes, 'are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand on' (in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996: 265-6).

At stake here is *inter alia* the 'pathetic fallacy' as coined by Ruskin mid-nineteenth century and as practised most conspicuously by Wordsworth somewhat earlier. The pathetic fallacy consists in the affective rendering of nature – i.e. in the giving of human emotions and sympathies to the natural world, as in Wordsworth's daffodils, considered by the poet as a crowd and as a host:

A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretch'd in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

(in Alison et al 1983: 557)

Ruskin was particularly concerned at the unwarranted poetic capital he saw as being attributed to tricks he associated with an unhinged mind:

The temperament which admits the pathetic fallacy, is... that of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them; borne away, or over-clouded, or over-dazzled by emotion; and it is a more or less noble state, according to the force of the emotion which has induced it.

(<http://www.ourcivilisation.com/smartboard/shop/ruskinj/>)

Ruskin went on to distinguish four attitudes to natural phenomena, useful for telling poets from others and from each other.

So, then, we have the three ranks: the man who perceives rightly, because he does not feel, and to whom the primrose is very accurately the primrose, because he does not love it. Then, secondly, the man who perceives wrongly, because he feels, and to whom the primrose is anything else than a primrose: a star, or a sun, or a fairy's shield, or a forsaken maiden. And then, lastly, there is the man who perceives rightly in spite of his feelings, and to whom the primrose is for ever nothing else than itself—a little flower, apprehended in the very plain and leafy fact of it, whatever and how many soever the associations and passions may be, that crowd around it. And, in general, these three classes may be rated in comparative order, as the men who are not poets at all, and the poets of the second order, and the poets of the first.

Still Ruskin thought there were 'some subjects which *ought* to throw (the poet) off his balance; some, by which his poor human capacity of thought should be conquered'. Hence a fourth category, which he described as 'the usual condition of prophetic inspiration'.

However misplaced or misguided the pathos may be, a traditional role of poetry in many cultures has been to provide mediation between natural and social worlds. Along these lines poetry may function to reconcile the inner and outer of experience and the immanent and transcendent of consciousness. In Chinese poetry over the *longue durée* the idea of *dao* can be seen as embodiment of a conviction that human culture and its natural environment are

manifestations of principles or patterns in common. Much religious thought elsewhere takes similar assumptions as read.

Entailed in such negotiations is the relationship between anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism, between, that is, the tendency of humans to centre consciousness of the world in things human and the tendency of the humans to represent the world as human, in human terms.

Consider the frogs depicted earlier – the late lamented victims of pride or wilfulness, excess or cruel human agency; then the canny frog of the happy ending, the one who jumps out in time to save him/herself. The effort to have these frogs merely frogs is doomed. Some degree of anthropomorphism is inevitable in the representation of animals, even when the animals do not talk. Nor is it only poetry which faces the contradictions inherent in the representation of others, sentient or otherwise.

Nature and culture meet early in the life of the individual and contradictions between these are faced and resolved from an early age. Fables and fairytales show children how to relate to the world and the people around them. They teach children how characters face life crises and so they teach children about decision making. The fairytale, as a story for children, can make its moral teaching obvious. Characters are simply good or simply evil. The child hearing the story can easily see which characters are which.

Is it the case therefore that the fairytale teaches children to recognize the difference between good and evil? More fundamentally, the fairytale teaches the child to recognize that there is such a difference. It teaches the child that the advice of her parents, on matters of whom to trust and where to go, is vital, because the child may lack the skill to recognize a wolf in sheep's clothing, or a wolf dressed up as a grandmother. In much the same way, teaching children a fear of the dark is an effective way of keeping them indoors and under supervision. These kinds of teaching are not necessarily bad; they are though easily put to bad purposes, for instance teaching that certain types of creatures or people, different from your type, are evil or not to be trusted. In the ancient and medieval worlds, perhaps this was necessary, if not friendly, advice: the world outside of one's

kingdom or even outside of one's village may well have been hostile. Children had to be warned about dangerous outsiders. Hostility is self-perpetuating however. Worldwide today, most violence against children is committed by people well known to the children in question; so how useful in general are lessons about 'stranger danger'?

To return to the wolf with the grandmother's voice: the animals speak because they *are* the humans in the story. *We* are the wolves in sheep's clothing and we are also the sheep in sheep's clothing. In the fable and the fairytale we humans are very often not in our own garb. So, why dress humans up as animals, when you could have humans speaking for themselves? *We* talk and *animals* do not. The fantasy world of the story defines itself, as such, by breaking the obvious real world rule. What does it mean to endow animals with the one power we specifically have, and they specifically do not have? Clearly, it establishes fantasy for the child as a means of getting through the invisible barrier between what is real and what is not, what can be and what cannot be. This endowment of human speech breaks down the barrier between the human world and the animal world. Or one might say, it breaks down the barrier between the world of nature and the social world.

Now it should be noted that neither the fairy tale nor the telling/writing of stories for children need be a politically conservative activity. The foregoing remarks are not about genre *per se*; they are about a style of thought, which, while by no means permanent or 'of the human condition', nevertheless has had currency in very many contexts. The liberatory power of the fairy tale (as opposed to the folk tale) has been amply demonstrated by Jack Zipes and others. This is a distinction largely based on mode of delivery; i.e. the folk tale is an oral form passed down through tradition, the fairy tale is associated with the rise of print culture, with the writing of the Romantic period and its valorising of the imagination. The political difference, as expressed by Zipes, is more or less that the folk tale privileges the idea that might makes right, whereas the fairy tale privileges imagination and self-realisation¹ (102). For the purposes of this argument though,

¹ In *Breaking the Magic Spell – Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*, Zipes makes the contrast in the following terms: 'Imagination and self-realization are celebrated as activities in contrast to the celebration of power, i.e. "might makes

what is at stake is the didactic anthropomorphism central to both genres.

Fairytales teach children how to deal with fear and danger. But they also commonly teach children to be fearful and suspicious of nature and to assert their superiority over it. Goldilocks gets away from those three bears after eating their breakfast and breaking their furniture and sleeping on their beds. She can get away with all this bad behaviour because she is only doing it to animals and animals have no recourse. But it is the human situation of these creatures that allows us to develop the empathy with the bears we finally dismiss in favour of our empathy for the scared little girl running all the way home.

Those bears fit another category – the ambiguous not-us (as we see ourselves as human) and not-animal-either category. That is the category in which humans have traditionally slotted human others not of their tribe or outside of their civilization: somewhere in between human and animal. In a sense all foreigners are able to conform to that category: they can speak but we cannot understand them. In the fairytale they can speak and we can understand them. But that is because we have chosen which of them can speak and we have given them the words which they can speak; we have given them the script. They are not us – they are different from us – but we only know them as we represent them.

It is very easy for those (human, animal, in whatever combination) allowed to speak in that category to slip into the good camp or the evil camp. They are like us and they are not like us, they could be on our side and they could be against us. This ambiguous position is convenient for a society on a war footing, for a society that never knows from where or from whom its next attack will come, or conversely whom or where it must next attack in order to protect or to further its own interests (this being a fine distinction).

right”, in the folk tale. The protagonist in the fairy tale does not want to rule over other people but over the dualities in his or her own life’ (102). The nub of Zipes’ argument as to liberatory power concerns what he describes as a ‘continual attraction’ of both tale types: ‘breaking the magic spell in fairy realms means breaking the magic hold which oppressors and machines seem to have over us in our everyday reality’ (46).

It is easy to dismiss certain forms of *human* behaviour as too tricky or clever or novel or more to the point, unnatural. The behaviour of strangers has often been painted in that way. The behaviour of animals is surely, by contrast, 'natural'. Animals do what they do because that is what animals do. Turn humans into animals in the once-upon-a-time-past – that is, the past you cannot put your finger on – and you have succeeded in making their human actions seem natural. The characters you now have, after this transformation, are – as animals – only doing what animals do. By turning humans into animals you are giving animals powers of awareness and self-awareness. And why? Could it be so as to suggest that humans behave without reflecting on or thinking about their behaviour? That would be a possible motive. Or there could be an almost opposite motive.

Making the whole of the world subject to what appear to be the rules of nature – the rules which apply to every and any animal – actually has the effect of making the world of humans *seem* as if it were natural. This reification has the effect of showing what happens in the human world as for reasons of necessity, rather than because of the choices of humans. There are indeed many necessary and also arbitrary events in human affairs. Chance plays a role. But the fairytale makes highly motivated social and familial arrangements (e.g. the relationships between Papa Bear and Mama Bear and Baby Bear) appear to be natural, and so necessary, immutable 'facts of life'. The fairytale shows the child the world as it was once in a mythical past where animals could talk; it does so in order to show how the human world is meant to be.

By making simply 'normal', arrangements that exist for a reason, the fairytale and fable naturalise and eternalise human behaviour. The tale with the talking animals teaches the child that the way of things in fairytales is how the world has always been *because* it is *even* this way with animals. This does not mean that the child believes she is surrounded by witches and castles and giants and talking animals. It means that the roles – in relation to each other – of males and females and parents and children appear to the child as eternally fixed. Good and evil must be fundamental categories, surely, if they apply to the animal as well as to the human world. But what rational sense could it possibly make to speak of animals as good or

evil? If foxes seem evil and sheep seem good to humans, then surely this is only because humans eat sheep and so do foxes. From the foxes' point of view – which foxes cannot express to our satisfaction – surely the roles must be reversed. And from the sheep's point of view: does it really matter by whom one is eaten? The sheep of the fairytale would have us think so.

One of the most potent illusions of the fairytale can be summed up in the terms of Ruskin's pathetic fallacy – in this case the impression children receive that the world is naturally ordered in terms of human emotions and human reasoning: a cunning fox, a gullible lamb, a greedy pig. Perhaps it is true that a bear can be fierce and a lion savage but animals act according to their instincts and not so as to conform with human stereotypes of behaviour. This naturalising pattern in the fairytale is as widespread as it is taken-for-granted as it is difficult to notice. It is hard to imagine childhood without these kinds of illusion. But on a planet where many other-than-human species are daily facing extinction, how wise (or fair) can this attribution of human motives to animal others be?

Were it not but one more instance of the pathetic fallacy, one might say that the irony for those facing extinction is that it is only possible for humans to paint animals into the social roles they enjoy in the fable and fairytale because animals cannot speak to defend themselves. In fact, the irony is only available through means of a particular kind of human self-consciousness – that which we associate with empathy and identification. Nor has the animal world generally been able to defend itself by other means from the savagery of the world's number one *alpha* animal: us. In this sense, what happens to the animals in fairytales reflects quite accurately the course of the millennia long struggle of humans to domesticate or dispense with animal others. The human message for the animal world – for the world of nature – has up until this stage in the human story – been quite simply: *domesticate or die*. Consider – the world's hundreds of millions of dogs today, all descended from the wolf, an animal on its way out, now numbered in thousands.

There is an important issue for interpretation here and it is one with which every intelligent child engages, at least unconsciously,

when she thinks about fairytales. Is the world presented in the tale really the human world? If the animals are actually people, then the story teaches – courtesy of its cartoon characters – how people behave and how we should behave with them. On the other hand, if the animals are really animals, the world presented in the tale teaches the child how to view the world of nature, how to think of animals, wild and tame and yes, also the humans who happen to resemble them. Certainly it would be silly to think humans have not learnt anything from other animals. It is hard to imagine where humans would have got the idea of singing if some birds had not been met in the forest.

Are fairytales allegorical representations of the human world or do they present the world of nature from a human point of view? Clearly, there is a contradiction between these views: on the one hand we are learning about how others are different from us, on the other hand we are learning how they cannot be different from us. Analysis resolves the contradiction in the following form: Human strangers, like the animal kind, are to be judged on *our* terms, in the language of our tribe; and like animals, they end up being unable to speak for themselves.

What is dangerous about the fabulous world of speaking animals is that it shows the child a world in which the contradiction (noted above) comes ready resolved. The child is taught why foxes must be killed at the same time as she is taught why not to trust people who behave like foxes. There is a nasty mind loop here which allows neither foxes nor people painted that way any chance of defending themselves. How sensible is it to teach children that other humans and other-than-human animals are the enemy, or that some animals (i.e. the domesticated ones) are our friends but that some others (i.e. the wild ones) are permanently bad and so deserve to die? The world is too small and too fragile for this kind of thinking. Humanity cannot afford to go on being on a war footing with nature. The world's present state and prospects call for a new kind of consciousness in which old fairytales (and fairytale thinking) will – among all those metaphors and allegories we live by – be subject to a fundamental and thoroughgoing critique – a critique of the kind offered by poetry's witness.

Mythic and Philosophical Imaginaries

It is relatively easy to unravel the myth making to which children are subject as part of their process of socialization. The stories – fabulous, allegorical or otherwise – which make them fit subjects for participation in a particular society are transparent to analysis in the manner of religious mythologizing. Only faith or credulity maintains the world as thus read. The Genesis God tells we humans to subdue and enjoy the world he gave us; it not difficult to see whose interests are served in this kind of thinking. How consonant is this manner of thought with what is witnessed at the high end of human consciousness – in theology and philosophy – in those discourses where we imagine the examined life in process?

Michele Le Doeuff, in her book *The Philosophical Imaginary*, shows that even the most abstract of philosophies (for instance Kant's) does not transcend the necessity of a landscape as ground or place of passage. The claim is not that topography is peculiar to philosophic thought; rather it is noteworthy that even in philosophy reference to a landscape in mind is necessary. For Le Doeuff a way of seeing the world is realised in an imagery which, as given, distracts us from the possibility of framing that landscape as the possible subject for a critique. Rather the reader takes the place for granted, as merely exemplary and accepts it as such.

In *The Philosophical Imaginary* Le Doeuff drew attention to a perhaps uncharacteristically metaphoric passage in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Now Kant for all his wordiness is thought of as a very literal, plainspeaking philosopher, one who might tangle us in logic but who rarely ties the reader up with imagery. The passage Le Doeuff quotes is from 'Of the Ground of the Division of All Objects into Phenomena and Noumena':

We have now not only traversed the region of the pure understanding and carefully surveyed every part of it, but we have also measured it, and assigned to everything therein its proper place. But this land is an island, and enclosed by nature herself within unchangeable limits. It is the land of truth (an attractive word) surrounded by a wide and stormy ocean, the region of illusion, where many a fog-bank, many an iceberg, seems to the mariner on his voyage of discovery, a new country, and, while constantly deluding him with vain hopes, engages him in dangerous adventures, from

which he can never desist, and which yet he never can bring to a termination. (1952: 93)

Such terms of imagery, landscape making, for Le Doeuff allow every philosophy the opportunity to ‘engage in a straightforward dogmatisation, and decree a “that’s the way it is” without fear of counter-argument, since it is understood that the good reader will bypass such “illustrations”’ (1989: 12). Philosophy has been like this from ancient times. Concrete imagery has long been available as a means of naturalising abstract arguments or better still, burying them as assumptions. It might seem obvious that this hypostatising technology was as available to philosophy as it was to every other discourse. The point worth observing is that those plain-thinking, unfictional discourses we now conceive as philosophy enthusiastically embraced it. What we have of pre-Socratic philosophy is partly aphorism in the form of a landscape imagery seeking to naturalise abstraction (e.g., Heraclitus’ not stepping in the same stream twice). Aristotle hoped to place himself beyond what he saw as a fault in this, claiming in the *Physics* that earlier thinkers had turned ‘far aside from the road which leads to coming to be and passing away and change generally. If they had come in sight of this nature, all their ignorance would have been dispelled’ (1952: 267).

Each of these instances amounts to what Nietzsche describes as an *involuntary memoire*. These oh-so-serious philosophers give themselves away. A little delving may show what they are up to despite themselves. From Aristotle to Kant, what this *involuntary memoire* reveals is the assumed primacy of a philosophic landscape which silences another view (any other view). The privileged view of the philosopher takes in a landscape which appears, naturally, to precede itself. The process of that privileging is itself one with the unconscious system making of language.

In the 11th section of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume frames a critique of philosophy he sees as tainted with flights of fancy or religious authority. Here the philosopher imagines himself Epicurus, representing himself to the Athenians:

When priests and poets, supported by your authority, o Athenians, talk of a golden or silver age, which preceded the present state of vice and misery, I hear them with attention and with reverence. But when philosophers, who pretend to neglect authority, and to cultivate reason, hold the same discourse, I pay them not, I own the same obsequious submission and pious deference. I ask; who carried them into the celestial regions, who admitted them into the councils of the gods, who opened to them the book of fate, that they thus rashly affirm, that their deities have been executed, or will execute, any purpose beyond what has actually appeared? If they tell me that they have mounted on the steps or by the gradual ascent of reason, and by drawing inferences from effects to causes, I still insist, that they have aided the ascent of reason by the wings of imagination... (1998: 16)

Might it not be more sensible to throw off the pretensions of tropic degree zero and engage philosophic writing on this reflexive basis – as discourse invested in the myth of reason?

If we can shake off our faith in a plain speech/writing which sets the examined life off from the everyday kind, then we will acknowledge continuities in those mindscapes through which the storied world has meaning for us, and provides us with a scene to witness and in which to act. Noted landscapes of thought include the obviously philosophical, as in for instance Plato's cave. In Chinese philosophies the idea of *dao* conveys an imagery easily translated into a similar metaphoric range in western thought. Philosophic landscapes also include the whole gamut of religious and mythical places to which the mind returns: the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark on the storm tossed sea, Sodom and Gomorrah, the nativity of Christ, Golgotha, Theseus and minotaur in labyrinth, Daedalus and Icarus in flight, Odysseus making his way home. There are the dramatic and novelistic landscapes of Europe's imperial age: Caliban's island in *The Tempest*, or Robinson Crusoe's, or Gulliver's Lilliput. Whatever the European world thinks of racism or human rights today it is yet to revise its opinion of the landscapes in which its world dominating adventure was drawn. So that today the ethical landscape in which the archetype of crimes against humanity is pictured is one that shows mid-twentieth century atrocities against Jews, rather than picturing a more general pattern of what European people did over centuries to the others in the world.

Having caught site of this unconscious aspect of a discourse avowing awareness, it might be unwise to allow philosophy the privilege of being the one kind of thinking among all others which knows what it is up to. From the point of view of the present project, from such a doubt may be fashioned this formulation: poetry need not excuse itself from any reflexive duties on the basis that these will be seen to by the discourse dismissing it. At the risk of yet another instance of pathetic fallacy, my contention is that poetry's duties are inside and out of the city walls, in and out of the dream; these duties are open-ended, ever increasing and unable to be delegated.

Global Consciousness in Retrospect and Prospect

Continuities between fairytale and philosophic thinking (as these concern the context of human affairs) suggest a traditional role for poetry, as outlined above – in the mediation of the natural and the social – in ways of witnessing and being and acting in the world. Acknowledging such a function for poetry is not to suggest that poets or poetry are in any way exempt from the critique to which all world conjuring should rightly be subject. Nor should it be taken as meaning that other discourses are surplus to requirement. What it does suggest is that the dual qualities of poetry as witness and awakening provide discourse across cultures ideally suited to dealing with those global crises which reason and its avatars in political life have spectacularly failed to remedy (and have certainly in some part produced).

A doubt has been established with regard to presumed continuities and commonalities (diachronic and cross-cultural) implied by the currency of the term 'poetry' (and the many foreign terms translated with this word). While there may be little reason to assume a common relation between poetries and the discourses from which they differ in various cultures and epochs, it is nevertheless the case that poetry's world-and-consciousness-altering potential today is cosmopolitan, however culturally specific its framing traditions may be. In this sense a knowledge of poetry's potential is in our time determined by the widest possible reading of poetry as heterogeneous worldwide discourse. I think this is what is implied by poetic consciousness in the twenty first century.

It is not my object in this chapter to outline the gravity of the world's environmental and population and related crises. Rather, I will take as read that there is no more pressing issue for political or poetic consciousness today than the state of the world's environment. That the world survived eight years of Ronald Reagan and thus far almost twelve years of George Bushes Snr and Jnr may suggest that the world is a very durable entity. Likewise the human made threat of nuclear annihilation has been survived for the time being; and yet this threat surviving the Cold War which produced it, none of the ethical failings concomitant with such destructive capacity are seriously addressed by those in power in the world now. Short-sighted greed, narrow-minded self interest and vacuous complacency are the predominant world-threatening motives in politics – local and global – today. Fear of the powers vested in those exercising such motives keeps many cultural workers clear of any role as advocates for the environment or against injustice more generally. Against the 'art-for-art's sake' hedges and the *je ne sais quoi* of poserish habitus, I say the poet today has a duty in common – to the tradition which sustains her and likewise to the air she breathes. That duty is not to speak for (and certainly not to speak over) others, but to stand up for ourselves and to stand up for those who have been knocked down – so as to witness a world to be shared. Our duty is to wake the world, to let the frog know that the water is about to boil.

We have woken to the nightmare of modernity. Out of the pure land we wake to a ruined world, a soiled nest. Modernity has a unique vocation for ruins. It restores the ancient ones to provide a contrast which will remain ineffective unless care is taken to clear the ruins of the new away. That is why city buildings implode and collapse so beautifully today, making way for their betters. This way the old stuff gets to be old and the new dissolves into the future before it becomes an embarrassment. The future is the edge we have to be busy on. It is our bread and butter. Consider Michel de Certeau's prophetic description of New York:

Seeing Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Center. Beneath the haze stirred up by the winds, the urban island, a sea in the middle of the

sea, lifts up the skyscrapers over Wall Street, sinks down at Greenwich, then rises again to the crests of Midtown, quietly passes over Central Park and finally undulates off into the distance beyond Harlem. A wave of verticals. Its agitation is momentarily arrested by vision. The gigantic mass is immobilized before the eyes. It is transformed into a texturology in which extremes coincide – extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space. (1988: 91)

From the environment's point of view (and note, it does not get to have one without a little of the pathetic fallacy) the city is the centre of a ruined world. The pristine centre distracts us from the carnage it makes possible. It has ever been thus with empires. What would be the good of an empire that could not provide someone with a shelter from what it takes to build an empire?

The modern world needs a museum – it needs the labels and the glass cases – in order to recognise itself. Our own old stuff would haunt us like a dead man's toothbrush. The detritus of others is a different story. Indoor, outdoor, on-line or in moving pictures, the rest of the world has become the West's museum. It is packed with doomed indigenities which have to be recorded before they vanish. These atavistic tribes in their colourful garb fit neatly between the wildlife documentary and the news. Their rhetoric is quaint and irrational. They are the becoming subjects of the developing world. The question is: will they be made to see reason? Or will they slip back into the realm of instinct? Dire consequences attend the answer.

Since colonial times the West has had a dual role in the parts of the world subaltern to it: creating and curing catastrophes among the natives. Having the technology the West has thus far had the running in the race to develop the world's best catastrophes. As long as it is somewhere else – in the past or on the screen or in someone else's country – the terror of catastrophes (blinding flash and pall of smoke) is entertainment.

When the smoke clears, when the dust settles, what kind of world will there be? It is always too early to answer this question, living, as we do, for the entertainment. The big bright distraction – gleaming towers, flashing knives – is a handy thematic for the world's

efforts to read itself today. Can we then ask: what kind of edge is the future for us? Who owns it? And whose future are we in the West fashioning now, just as we go about being ourselves and minding our business?

What are those things – abstractions or otherwise – which feed off the edge they share with the world? Which worlds feed off their others? Capitalism is the paradigm case, but consider the example of the world's press as a singular entity, grafted from everyone's misfortune, bringing everyone pleasure. Think of pornography. It presses beyond the imagery with which desire was formerly satisfied. Growth economics is like this too. We must always count to a higher number. All that there is is never enough.

Ovid, early in the *Metamorphoses*, has Jupiter realise that man is a cancer and needs to be cut out. The irony is that Ovid's king of the gods is a wholly anthropomorphic character. As is that wrathful, jealous guy who kicks off the Old Testament. He is simply the daddy of 'em all. So where would you start to cut out the cancer? The observation of such necessity merely secures the cycle of violence, encourages the idea that the world requires an imperial centre from which that violence is to be administered and measured.

The reader will not be shocked to read that something is seriously wrong in global consciousness today. The end of the Cold War offered the opportunity for China and the West to provide leadership for the building of a fairer global polity. Instead the United States and its closest allies have manufactured a 'war on terror' as side-line entertainment. They have done this in order to justify keeping the head buried in the sand with regard to various ongoing calamities suffered by the world's unrepresented majority, with regard to climate change and the ever intensifying exploitation of the world's resources, including its human inhabitants, most particularly in the majority world.

If poetry today provides a discourse across cultures for witness and awakening, then it represents a vital means for bettering the world. My intention in the rest of this chapter is to canvass the role of poet and poetry in the local-global consciousness now demanded by the world's present crises. One of the key reflexive questions attending this investigation concerns the role of reflexive awareness itself. Joseph Meeker has spelled out some of the scholarly dimensions of this task from the point of view of literary criticism:

Human beings are the earth's only literary creatures... If the creation of literature is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to examine its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment – to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind and what insight it offers into human relationships with other species and with the world around us. Is it an activity which adapts us better to the world or one which estranges us from it? From the unforgiving perspective of evolution and natural selection, does literature contribute more to our survival than it does to our extinction? (1972: 3-4)

Will having humans see themselves in the picture they inhabit help them to understand the damage they cause? Will the recognition of pathetic fallacies and of anthropomorphisms give other species a better chance of survival? Is there not a risk that such efforts will only encourage the self-centeredness of the earth's highest-impact ever species?

The effects of witness and of awakening can no more be predicted than can those of any political process; nevertheless we may count these well-intentioned efforts as powers for the 'betterment' of the world. By this term, I do not intend any kind of boosterism or devotion to growth or progress *per se*. 'Bettering' for present purposes I will gloss as making fairer, saner and more sustainable. A better world will be one in which there is less suffering, more compassion, a world in which humans may more justly (and more safely) strive, in which all other species may go about their business, less threatened by the business of humans.

How will poetic consciousness achieve any such ends? There can be no guarantee of any such outcome; however it may be salutary

for us to observe how those in other ages have despaired of the flawed consciousness of their times.

In his 1938 work *Poetry and Anarchism*, in a chapter titled ‘Why We English Have No Taste’, Herbert Read wrote of a change of consciousness (for the worse) witnessed in his time. Read saw this negative development in anti-intellectualism and in the mocking of the high-brow. For Read normality was a neurosis and the English ‘gentleman’ its avatar. Read wrote of the disembodied capitalist laughter, through which the individual suffers.

no longer a cell within the spiritual and economic womb of the community, he develops a new kind of consciousness – the protective mechanism of a mind exposed to criticism. He grows this shell of normality, a hard opaque exterior which admits no light; beneath which the senses stir like blind maggots. (1938: 40)

Read argued that the English had suffered ‘the severest form of capitalist exploitation, that of the spirit’s death: ‘We have no taste because we have no freedom; we have no freedom because we have no faith in our common humanity’. The conclusion Read draws is that ‘the cause of the arts is the cause of revolution’ (40).

Read wrote these words in dark times which were to become darker still. The only glimmers he saw were in Spain and in China, and in the utopic vision of the anarchic post-polity which might hopefully succeed the ‘withered-away’ state Marx and Engels had imagined. In our times we have witnessed an atavistic shift in consciousness akin to the regression Read saw in totalitarian fascism (and in its Soviet counterpart). For us this takes the form of black/white, us/them fairytale thinking, the demonization of others on the basis of differences of a kind you cannot vote for. What might be thought futuristic is the fire power the richest in the world deploy at the expense of some of the poorest; but this too is atavism – this is Vietnam again.

September 11, 2001. Ten years after the world's official war against capitalism was officially called off as a bad (backfiring) joke: there is a successful strike at the heart of the beast. The only one ever. Nor could it bring any comfort to the old familiar critics of capitalism. Perhaps this is a case of Trotsky's mind of man limping after reality? This attack is the resurgence of something morally inferior. Is this strike counterproductive from the point of view of those who died making it? How could it be? The mind of war is self-sustaining, set – its means justify the ends which justify means. The martyrs have already won heaven.

Duties of Presence to the Here and Now

In his essay 'Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology', Scott Slovic writes of a quest 'not only of consciousness itself, but of an *understanding* of consciousness. He cites Thoreau's favouring of the idea of *awakening*, and refers to the related metaphors of a number of nature oriented writers: *awareness, seeing, watchfulness* among these (in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996: 352).

Along with presence and witness, reflexive awareness is a longstanding pre-occupation of those writers who have engaged with the environment. Haiku provide us with familiar examples and *aides-mémoire* for the kind of consciousness indicated. Take Osaki Hosai's famous haiku:

looking back at the beach
even my footprints are gone

(in Higginson 1985 :32)

This consciousness is there already in the best known of traditional Japanese haiku:

furuike ya
kawazu tobikomu
mizu no oto

the old pond
a frog leaps in
water sound

(in Higginson 1985: 9)

Basho's poem shows action as sudden in the calm of nature. In the third line (often translated simply as 'plonk' or 'splash') our attention is brought so strongly and so closely to this particular action and its particular moment that we no longer need to see the scene at all. Our focus is on what we can hear: a sound diminishing, its moment passed by the time it is noted, or perhaps only known in the act of remembering it. Awareness of the passing of that frog-water-entering moment might point our imaginations back to the original (visual) scene: the ripples disappear and the pond is as it was. There is no pathetic fallacy here. The frog's impulse to jump is irrelevant to human perception. We only know the frog in the moment it hits the pond. In that moment our attention is gathered: to change, to sound, to the agency behind these. Work of Ruskin's poet of the first order.

Nature consists of such actions whether they are noted or not. The more we dwell on the before-and-after calm, the wider the world of the pond seems. The more we reflect on what the poem suggests as calm the more we realize that the poem's beginning scene must consist of all sorts of activity, and all sorts of sounds as well; these activities and sounds subordinated to the big picture – the pond. The eternity of the pond is demolished by the instant. Yet that eternity can consist of nothing but such moments. What is a pond after all but the home of frogs and what frogs eat and play with, likewise the home of whatever eats frogs and plays with them? What seems like a straightforward change deepens with engagement. It brings us from the complacent observation of a condition presumed as permanent, to the here and now. That frog jumping into the pond is a *satori* – an eyeslap – a signal to wake up and look around. Perhaps it is a dead *satori* – a cliché – today in the manner of Wordsworth's daffodils? If so, then it requires and rewards re-engagement.

The question of cliché draws attention to a contrast between presence to the here-and-now and reified forms of culture – in which that kind of presence might be acted out or feigned. Because high art practices are dominated by canonic models, a major source of

interference, limiting efforts at presence, has been the emanation of cultural forms and norms from an imperial centre. In the case of Australian poetry, these limits were till well into the twentieth century set by an established range for the appreciation of nature, as practised in the poetry of the British Isles. In the Jindyworobak movement, mid-twentieth century Australia witnessed the rise of an environmentally conscious poetics which avowed the aim of addressing this problem of presence. One of the movement's principals, Rex Ingamells, wrote in his 1938 theoretical work *Conditional Culture*: 'There are thousands of Australians today who, if they have not found eloquent tongue, feel, nevertheless, with childlike devotion, the familiar beauty and the utter loveliness of the outback environment in many of its moods...' (in Elliot 1979: 229). For Ingamells the power of the bush was something which gripped D.H. Lawrence (in *Kangaroo*) but Lawrence could only realize that spirit 'in small part' because he 'did not feel at home in the bush' (229). Ingamells looked forward to the birth of a new soul to be represented by genuinely Australian culture.

The real test of a people's culture is the way in which they can express themselves in relation to their environment, and the loftiness and universality of their artistic conceptions raised on that basis. When, for example, someone begins a novel and sets the scene in Australia, he cannot hope to produce great art unless he has a true conception of environmental values. (230)

'A clear recognition of environmental values' was the first principle of Ingamells' 'definite conditions' in establishing the Jindyworobak ethos:

'Jindyworobak' is an Aboriginal word meaning 'to annex, to join', and I propose to coin it for a particular use. The Jindyworobaks, I say, are those individuals who are endeavouring to free Australian art from whatever alien influences trammel it, that is, to bring it into proper contact with its material. (231)

By the late sixties things had, in a sense, come full circle in Australian poetry; it was the gum tree and billabong consciousness of place which irked the 'generation of 68' poets, who turned to America for their models and who found it ridiculous to refer poetic consciousness to legends of the bush in what was by now the world's most urbanised country. Nevertheless, in the work of the Jindyworobaks, and in the

professions of Rex Ingamells, we find a concern for environmental values which prefigures that of many contemporary Australian poets, as well of poets like Gary Snyder, with whom I will deal below.

If for Ingamells the real test of a people's culture was in the way they could express themselves in relation to their environment, then, from the contemporary point of view, there are a number of clear problems with the kind of environmental consciousness and the place-based aesthetic the Jindyworobaks espoused. With the witness of presence and recognition of place came the dangers of appropriation (one might say 'annexation'); specifically the danger of appropriating Aboriginal culture. In Australia, this risk may be read as paralleling the ideological doublethink enabling the 'Australian Natives Association' (established in 1871) to give itself this name – as an organisation for Australian born white men (and not Aborigines). The 'local' aesthetic Ingamells envisaged was strictly national in character and so should, I think, be contrasted with the calls for 'deep local consciousness' espoused by a poet like Gary Snyder. For Snyder, that kind of consciousness is the opposite of nationalism, something Snyder characterises as an impostor – as 'the grinning ghost of the lost community' (1999: 196).

A pressing need for world consciousness today is to replace national with natural devotions. A key strategy to this end – one for which poetry is a vital force – is that of witnessing circumstances to which one is present, recognizing that one's immediate context is an environment: that is to say, a situation in which my survival and happiness depend reciprocally on those of other organisms, sharing (what needs to be) habitable space with me. This recognition I call 'place-based aesthetics'. The key, I believe, is in recognizing one's self and conceiving one's identity in terms of dwelling, rather than in terms of abstractions-to-die-for, such as nation. Suggested here is an ethics of presence – as poetic practice – for which Heidegger provides a convenient formula: 'we are to think of the nature of poetry as a letting-dwell' (1971: 215).

Now, it would be foolish to think of poetry – whether as a set of canonic forms or established practices – as providing any reliable method for asserting these ethics or aesthetics. Our musings over the

pathetic fallacy and fairytale consciousness suggest some outlines of this problem for both high and canonic culture. Fixed forms provide formulaic pre-determined ways of seeing, and that reification contradicts the principles of witness and of presence. It matters greatly now how we describe/write about the natural world and human presence in it. An urgent task – and a call for reflexive consciousness – is to see how we are in the world, for instance rendered as landscape, and especially to see the ways in which human presence and activity render our own agency invisible or unnoticeable or ‘natural’. Poets around the world are today undertaking this task, providing examples of the kinds of consciousness required. Wislawa Szymborska’s poem ‘In Praise of Self-Deprecation’ witnesses a kind of *via negativa* with which anthropomorphism may be refused.

The buzzard has nothing to fault himself with.
 Scruples are alien to the black panther.
 Piranhas do not doubt the rightness of their actions.
 The rattlesnake approves of himself without reservations.

The self-critical jackal does not exist.
 The locust, alligator, trichina, horsefly
 live as they live and are glad of it.

The killer-whale’s heart weighs one hundred kilos
 but in other respects it is light.

There is nothing more animal-like
 than a clear conscience
 on the third planet of the sun.

(in Milosz, 1996: 21)

Consider the strategy by which the pathetic fallacy is reversed in Ferenc Juhász’ ‘November Elegy’:

My mind hunts in circles, sober, ruthless and cold.
 The dull tapping of autumn rain numbs the soul.
 Rain drips from the ivy leaves
 in heavy sticky threads: earth, sky, the roof-eaves
 sweat with fever. Soon there’ll be nothing alive!
 I can’t sleep, my mind has lost its wings.
 My brain is a live coal, the bed clothes are flames
 eating my bones. (93)

Revealed in Juhász' poem is recognition of the animality of human action and the capacity of consciousness to foil itself.

Eco-Poetics as Ethics for Action

In his essay 'Revaluing Nature: Towards an Ecological Criticism', Glen A. Love writes of the pastoral tradition:

the green world becomes a highly stylized and simplified creation of humanistic assumptions of the writer and his audience. Arcadia has no identity of its own. It is but a temporary and ephemeral release from the urban world, which asserts its mastery by its linguistic creation and manipulation of the generic form itself, and by its imposition of its own self-centred values upon the contrastive worlds.

(in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996: 231)

Arcadia in this sense serves the same function as the object-woman in Andrew Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' – or many of Shakespeare's sonnets. The contradiction (and the insult) inherent in gallant patriarchal objectification is that the most exalted of women could be any woman. The most exalted of words are directed at the object claimed to be uniquely deserving of praise; but reflection reveals that the words are self-exalting, that is to say, the gesture is onanistic, at least narcissistic. In the most famous of Shakespeare's sonnets the reader is explicitly told (in the punch line) how the value of the text surpasses that of the text's mocked object: 'So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.' The pastoral and the love sonnet share a common strategy, in the service of the imperial and patriarchal gaze: the appropriation of an object supposedly revered. The object appropriated is absorbed in the subjectivity which will neither take responsibility for its imagination, nor acknowledge the cultural forms which limit its shape. Orientalism is the specific contemporary formula for this phenomenon. Our others – whether to be desired or to be discarded – are mirror forms of ourselves. The reflexive moment is that in which the mirror would shatter.

And yet there is a real object and in either of the cases presently considered – the landscape and the object of romantic devotion – these indicate real passions, palpable desires. Love writes

of the pastoral, that its lasting appeal is to our ‘instinctive or mythic sense of ourselves as creatures of natural origins, those who must return periodically to the earth for the footholds of sanity somehow denied us by civilization²’ (231).

Through recognition of the pathetic fallacy and of the fairytale and through recognition of the context blindness to which the extremes of objectification may drive us, we see that myth and literary culture are susceptible of dangerous distorting effects, which may serve to naturalise the dominance of a particular species, culture, gender. If, to act on these recognitions and to counter dominative ethics and aesthetics, we hope for a poetics of commitment, then it will be well to recognise which ends and means are now at our disposal. I have mentioned place-based aesthetic and ethics of presence, the idea of a culture of witness, of poetry as an art of dwelling. Those who prize poetry as functionless may mock such intentions as naïve, but it is not my intention to discuss here what amounts to a question of faith: one either does or does not believe that world bettering action is possible through the life of signs. My faith is with Merleau-Ponty, when he declares, ‘through the action of culture I take up my dwelling in lives which are not mine’ (1964: 75). Consciousness is the means through which such dwelling may be effected and this is possible because consciousness is not a fixed state but a work on the way; itself, in this sense, a model for poetry. A reflexive key for poetics – the key to knowing what we are doing as poets – lies in understanding how genre and generic structure – likewise how tropological and grammatical choices – make meaning.

One way to model consciousness as transcending the dust of the everyday world is to give perception a physical way beyond that world, into space which makes the normative human other. This is what Han Shan and Gary Snyder have collaborated to do in the latter’s ‘Cold Mountain’ translations.

² In the English poetry of the twentieth century, one might name D.H. Lawrence as the most notable exponent of this view.

I settled at Cold Mountain long ago,
 Already it seems like years and years.
 Freely drifting, I prowl the woods and streams
 And linger watching things by themselves.
 Men don't get this far into the mountains,
 White clouds gather and billow.
 Thin grass does for a mattress,
 The blue sky makes a good quilt.
 Happy with a stone overhead
 Let heaven and earth go about their changes.

(1999: 524)

Human archetypes are challenged in this poem because we see both their necessity to the articulation of thought and the extent of their not fitting circumstances. What is revealed by these means is the absurd small-mindedness of a human measure for all things.

Cold Mountain is a house
 Without beams or walls.
 The six doors left and right are open
 The hall is blue sky.
 The rooms all vacant and vague
 The east wall beats on the west wall
 At the center nothing. (525)

That nothing at the centre returns us to Szyborska's *via negativa*, the buzzard's nothing to fault himself with. In *The Practice of the Wild*, Snyder makes efforts to positively characterise 'the wild'. He writes:

Wild is largely defined in our dictionaries by what – from a human standpoint – it is not. It cannot be seen by this approach for what it *is*. Turn it the other way:

Of animals – free agents, each with its own endowments, living within natural systems. (171)

For Snyder, 'to speak of wildness is to speak of wholeness. Human beings came out of that wholeness' (173). Snyder urges us 'to make a world-scale "natural contact" with the oceans, the air, the birds in the sky. The challenge is to bring the whole victimized world of "common pool resources" into the Mind of the Commons' (191). Snyder's calls for 'deep local consciousness' are framed by the conception that 'the body is, so to speak, in the mind. They are both wild' (176). As in the

terms of the Gaia hypothesis, sentience and awareness for Snyder are everywhere:

The world is our consciousness, and it surrounds us. There are more things in mind, in the imagination, than 'you' can keep track of – thoughts, memories, images, angers, delights, rise unbidden. The depths of mind, the unconscious, are our own inner wilderness areas... (176)

This notion of the unconscious as individual wilderness provides a valuable link between the work of dreaming and the play of art. The wilderness link likewise suggests what may be art's most fundamental vocation – witnessing wilderness within and beyond the borders of the body. Snyder writes, 'Wildness is the state of complete awareness. That's why we need it' (250). For Snyder 'the "art of the wild" is to see art in the context of the process of nature – nature *as* process rather than as product or commodity – because "wild" is a name for the way that phenomena continually actualize themselves' (261).

The 'revolution in consciousness' for which Snyder calls is one which will not be won by guns 'but by seizing the key images, myths, archetypes, eschatologies, and ecstasies so that life won't seem worth living unless one's on the side of the transforming energy' (251).

Just as the Heart Foretold

In Lynn White Jr's essay 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' we are told that the 'present increasing disruption of the global environment' cannot 'be understood historically apart from the distinctive attitudes toward nature which are deeply grounded in Christian dogma. White writes:

The fact that most people do not think of these attitudes as Christian is irrelevant. No new set of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity. Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man. (in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996: 15)

Is there a need – is there even a way – to turn off the innocent story that has become a danger to us and to those we encounter? Anthropol-

centric myths pose such dangers, just as do the myths of nation. Our parents grew up sometimes uncertain of their next meal and so they told us to ‘waste not, want not’, to eat everything that was put on our plate. The plates have got bigger and so have we. The answer is not to become more wasteful; the answer is to put less on our plates, and to make our plates smaller, and to seek other ways to lessen ourselves.

The fairytale story which taught tactics for survival becomes a potent destructive force. Its potency lies in its presumed innocence. These stories, like those metaphors by which we live, are not easily turned off. The question of critique – of how conscious or unconscious our reception of the stories – may in some degree be obviated, if stories can be turned around. In Judith Wright’s rite-of-passage poem ‘Legend’, a boy sets out, much in the manner of Lewis Carroll’s ‘beamish boy’ in the highly socialized nonsense of *Through the Looking Glass’s* ‘Jabberwocky’.

The blacksmith’s boy went over the paddocks
with his old black hat on his head.
Mountains jumped in his way,
rocks rolled down on him,
and the old crow cried, ‘You’ll soon be dead.’
And the rain came down like mattocks.
But he only said
I can climb mountains, I can dodge rocks, I can shoot an old
crow any day,
and he went on over the paddocks. (56)

The boy here is cocky; facing the amorphousness of threats with a bravery itself free of intention. In fact this heroism in the making is the product of the habit of mind which sees mountains as jumping in one’s way:

Up came the night ready to swallow him

Something equally amorphous turns the persona from the cycle of fear and violence, to awe and respect for his immediate circumstances.

But in front of the night the rainbow stood on the mountain,
just as his heart foretold.
He ran like a hare,
he climbed like a fox;

he caught it in his hands, the colours and the cold –
 like a bar of ice, like the column of a fountain,
 like a ring of gold.
 The pigeon, the magpie and the dove flew up to stare,
 And the grass stood up again on the mountain.

The boy comes to seek and catches something intangible and for which his original intentions and implements are of no use. In fact the implements of violence – of conventional physical power in the world – desert him:

His rifle broke, his hat blew away and his dog was gone
 and the sun was falling.

As in ‘Jabberwocky’, the hero-to-be goes off with what appear to be rote but violent intentions. In this case, through the power of transformation, violent intentions are shed and a non-violent result is achieved. Because there is no violence it almost seems as if the story lacks a climax. The battle does not happen; no one is defeated.

The blacksmith’s boy hung the rainbow on his shoulder
 instead of his broken gun.
 Lizards ran out to see,
 Snakes made way for him,
 and the rainbow shone as brightly as the sun.
 All the world said, Nobody is braver, nobody is bolder,
 nobody else has done
 anything to equal it. He went home as bold as he could be
 with the swinging rainbow on his shoulder.

The scene is, beginning and end, just as patriarchal, just as anthropocentric (as boy-centric) as Lewis Carroll’s nonsense. The difference between the success of this quest and that in ‘Jabberwocky’ is that the trophy brought home in this case – the rainbow – is something which will be a tool in its own right, something to carry over your shoulder instead of a gun. In ‘Jabberwocky’ one feels one has read a slice of a tale that will repeat itself ad infinitum. In ‘Legend’ one feels that the happenings described mark a turning point, that as a result of these events things change. The change is the result of an unseen force – the maternal persona of the poem. The change is shaped from maternal love, and the story is told from this point of view.

The result is that the protagonist can get out of the already written epic and write his own destiny. The landscape in 'Legend' is personified as testing adversary, as rite of passage. The legend setting is evoked by the confusion of space and time: 'When he came to the end of the day the sun began falling.' That confusion makes this particular human more a part of his landscape than he might conventionally have been. Simile shows the landscape and its affections as reversible. Witnessing that reversibility blurs the line between nature and a world composed of human intentions.

Genre and the bending or crossing of generic structures is a key to strategies for world view and their renovation/alteration. Famous arguments have been developed along these lines down through the ages; those of Vico, Northrop Frye and Hayden White being notable modern examples. In his essay 'Poetry and Modernity', Octavio Paz writes 'to see an allegory is to interpret it' (1991: 14). Allegories for Paz are really scriptures. 'In allegory,' Paz writes, 'the distance between being and meaning disappears: the sign devours the being' (13). Reminiscent of Bakhtin's contrast between the epic and the novelistic, Paz distinguishes the methods of allegory and the novel in the following terms: 'Allegory revealed the correspondence between this world and the world beyond; the novel emphasizes the distance between the real and the imaginary' (16).

Joseph Meeker's 1972 book *The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology* deals with an equally enlightening contrast between genres. Tragedy for Meeker is based on the now absurd assumption that 'the universe cares about the lives of human beings'; this Meeker sets against 'the comic imperative of preserving life' (1972: 167). Meeker observes that the tragic view of man has rarely been achieved, whereas comedy is nearly universal. Comedy grows from the biological circumstances of life and has no room for the moralism that dominates tragic modes of action (157-8). For Meeker 'warfare is the basic metaphor of tragedy... Comic strategy, on the other hand, sees life as a game' (168). Comedy naturally rattles the anthropocentrism on which the conceit of tragedy depends. The aim of comedy is laughter and laughter comes from letting go, from the

falling apart of things, from the centre not holding. It may seem ill-advised for those in planet-saving mode to have their audience fall about in amusement while the world disintegrates around them; but if the object of this exercise is surviving so as to have a last laugh, then this is surely a more encouraging generic structure than the scene of a stage littered with bodies, as traditionally delivered at the end of a tragedy.

War-mindedness is the key to understanding the current ecological crisis of conscience and consciousness in the world. War is the prerogative of those who will not laugh at themselves. The problem with war and with all tragic modes of thinking is fatalism. Like the suicide, the warmonger is trapped, sees no way out, is the victim of haunting archetypes and abstractions. Those who know themselves to be on violent missions from God are blind to the objective conditions in which they are invested. Along these lines, there is a continuity in doublethink between the Iraq situation today (oil achieved in the name of democracy) and the Christianising mission claimed for the continent grab of centuries past. In these circumstances it is fair to say that democracy is one of the vague axioms now requiring rethinking. This state of grace or nature to which the West has pinned the hopes of the world serves as justification for the toppling of unfriendly regimes, for the slaughter of innocents, for keeping the world on a war footing.

Planet Thoughts are Needful Now

In Les Murray's poem 'The Gods' the reader witnesses a doomed struggle against archetypes.

There is no Reynard fox. Just foxes
 I'm the fox who scents this pole.
 As a kit on gravel, I brow arched Play? to a human.
 It grabbed to kill, and gave me a soul.

(2006: 359-60)

The particular journey is invested – infested – with all that allows it to be read. We already know this fox, even and perhaps especially if we have never met a fox; because 'fox' is a collection of attributes which

we get from story books, from old tales, from wild life documentaries, from the encyclopedia. It is all very well to say that there is no archetypal fox, there are only foxes; the fact is that words already designate types before we even consider whether the categorisation is scientific or cultural or literary. True, no two foxes are the same. But without the word fox we have no call to conjure for ourselves the image of a fox.

So this poem plays with words against what words cannot help but do, which is to symbolise a world outside of themselves as if the words could be shed in the process. That sleight of hand is always there in language: words seem to dispense with themselves by pointing into the world. Things themselves, in their particularity, retreat as we approach them with signs.

A word is a story, a set, of mind. It colours a world and it contains worlds. A word is getting between mouth and ear; is always on its way somewhere, hunting or foraging. A word might be a kind of fox. This word *is* fox. Will it be domesticated? Will it have a home with us? The giving of souls then is paradoxical. We call the archetype by name. The individual, the real, lacks character, but is named as a type in a more general mythology: Just foxes; not Reynard.

It grabbed to kill, and gave me a soul.

We could just as easily reverse this line. The real fox dies when it is made a human thing, when it is personified or made archetype (of threat or freedom or both) or when it is otherwise fitted into the human story. Humans are lethal to foxes. A real fox disappears into this word, is trapped there. The image of a fox appears from that trap. To know things is to humanise them, to ensoul them. And that ensouling would rob the fox of any fox soul it might have had before it was caught in a word.

We're trotting down one hen-stalk gully.
Soul can sit up inside, and be.
I halt, to keep us alive. Soul basks in
scents of shadow, sound of honey.

Soul can be? Inside the cage of image? Of word? And be which soul? In this poem a distinction between the 'real' and the 'symbolic' eludes the reader because each has the other's tactics at its disposal. This trick – this trickiness – is possible because we can see by means of these words. And not only see. The senses are promiscuous in this poem in the same way that the real and the symbolic are.

scents of shadow, sound of honey.

We can smell and feel and swoon and sicken. And doing these things we inhabit the frame in which the fox travels. We identify. We are the fox traveling. There's something vertiginous in these effects; something which deprives us of the certainty that we are foxes. Or not foxes. Humans cannot know how foxes sense the world. Why should they not scent shadow or hear honey? Why is the poem called 'The Gods'? It is about the way we frame (so make) a world in innocent acts like those of perception. It is about the difficulty of getting out of the positions from which we read and perceive the world; about the difficulty of getting out of our corners and actually meeting others, rather than merely having assumptions about them or pictures of them in our heads.

*Dreams like a whistle crack the spring;
a scentless shape I have not been
threads the tall legs of deities
like Hand, and Colour, and Machine.*

It turns out in the last stanza that everything in the poem (perhaps everything poetic) is archetypal, and that if there are not – as there were for the pre-Socratic thinker, Thales – gods in everything, then at least every act of naming is an act of deification. The poet here has awareness of the godlike aspect of everyone who uses words, everyone who names. The poet works with the fact that God is made in the image of the making of the world that is the everyday work of words.

Perhaps that god-like god-making business is what souls are for? Perhaps though the problem with this sitting-up soul will be that the particular abstraction installed in the animal no longer serves, is no longer convincing to its human reader. Perhaps the making of gods –

along with sundry other ideal abstractions – is a characteristic passion of the human animal. If foxes have something for us to translate as ‘soul’ then this is somehow lessened in our saying so.

There is a madness and a destructive energy in every effort at making, which is to say at every effort at passing beyond the already made. The ego at stake in the case of the poet is that of the self styled Promethean, doomed darer of heaven; or in the case of Orpheus, the doomed darer of infernal laws. In sum, the poet needs to be guilty of the accusation levelled at Socrates – of delving above the heavens and below the earth.

Neither consciousness nor conscience is in itself the answer to the world’s present global/local dilemmas. As Frederick Turner writes in his essay ‘Cultivating the American Garden’, ‘we know that we can ruin things, especially complex and subtle things, by that domineering overconsciousness that Coleridge saw in himself as “the intellect that kills” and that Keats diagnosed in him as an “irritable grasping after fact and reason”’ (in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996: 49). Yet consciousness and conscience must be the vehicles of the needful change; through them we see what is to be done. If there is something mad about the egoism of ‘man’ and likewise of poetry, perhaps at least that madness can be deployed in the service of the *satori* which may save the human race (among others) from its ego-mania.

We in the West, live by and large, in a comfortable moment of crisis. Frogs we disdain as lesser creatures making muffled noises far off, but our own pot is yet to come to the boil. We need to wake up to ourselves. Now is a time for exhortation and for fabulous exemplars. Let us reclaim the fairytale and its archetypes and set them to a present purpose; set them on their heads, we with them. Allow poetry its subversive drift, use nothing for the purpose given. That dictum alone will stave off fatalism. Let us adopt the pantheism of the Romantics as means of decentering ourselves. As Wordsworth suggests, let us:

move along these shades
 In gentleness of heart; with gentle hand
 Touch – for there is a spirit in the woods.
 (147)

And let us witness our folly when we commit pathetic fallacies and when we hypostasise unwittingly. When we turn into statues, let us crack a smile and split the plaster, split our pants and see them fall.

Let us admit the comical aspects of our well intentioned indirections – the simple fact that we do not know where we are headed. The idea of poetry as journey into unknown space and of ‘world’s end’ illusions meet in the spectral figure of empathy (and fun), in the persona of Tom o’Bedlam’s song:

With an host of furious fancies,
 Whereof I am commander,
 With a burning speare and a horse of aire,
 To the wilderness I wander.
 By a knight of ghostes and shadowes
 I summon’d am to tourney
 Ten leagues beyond the wide world’s end.
 Me thinke it is no journey.

Yet I will sing...

(in Heaney and Hughes 1997: 129)

Like Judith Wright’s boy in ‘Legend’, let us run like hares and climb like foxes and be as bold as we can be – but this time not with guns and dogs but in the service of the wilderness and in awe of the rainbow – things which – however well or poorly we represent them – are not and never ours to make.

Community: The Word is a Window

The absolutely foreign alone can instruct us.
– Levinas

Poetry, as a continuity in efforts to acknowledge the power of words in themselves, manages to short-circuit a transcendent wish to stand the world out of words. Likewise the personal and the private of poetry have meaning only in the immediate context of an intersubjective circuit, minimally of poet and reader; realistically, of tradition and its devotees, and however disgruntled these may be – with themselves, with each other, with the work.

If community is to these extents unavoidable, then what kind of an object and what kind of a process is it that shapes the community poetry pre-supposes, that shapes the community poetry brings (or could bring) into being? Put aside for the moment a series of themes problematising poetry as a notional unitary entity; these including diaspora, indirection, ambivalence. The work of art lives surely in the hope of that cliché of a true marriage of minds or hearts. Such a marriage would be its life. Shall we characterize that communion as a ‘love’ relation? Shall we dignify it with magical words like ‘soul’? Then is writing in its autonomous universe a gift? Is it the free gift – the gift expecting no reciprocation – which Marcel Mauss denies? Or is it one of the host of bourgeois illusions fashioned to save the philistine soul?

How do these negotiations stand across cultures? The most essential of generic demands, placed upon poetry and fiction, provide the essential clues. Best plot is where you would not voluntarily go; best crises make you read your rules again, revise them. The story resolves conflict and in this sense – whatever risks it runs – has an essential affinity for peace. This affinity – and the prospects for

community – are threatened by the monologic mode of delivery – by the risk of speaking for or over, not about, others. The dangers inherent in representing others (for which orientalism is emblematic) point to a principal affinity of poetry today (one asserted in the first chapter of this work) – that it does to one's own words what a foreigner cannot help but do to other words come to. For the purposes of poetry, it is best to be *in other words*, that way to read a world awry.

Expulsion

Poetry has been in a process (or posture) of diaspora at least since Plato, in the *Republic*, gave voice to the sentiment that poets were dangerous and disrespectful and did not merit a place in the ideal state. Plato did though have his Socrates suggest that the poets might reform and defend themselves and find a way back later. Hence the *Defences*, most notably of Sidney and Shelley, but still being written today.

Platonic exile and the strangeness it brings in making strangers need to be considered as the product of a civilization of city states, united by a language and certain common customs (united in the fifth century by a pride in having defeated the Persian Empire) but divided by variation in political models. Exile and ostracism may be personal tragedies but they are, in general, temporary states, and ones which guaranteed the dispersion of powerful ideas throughout the Greek world. Importantly, exile as conceived in Classical Greece is not necessarily from one's language¹ (though certainly it would at

¹ Note though that in classical tragedy (as for instance in *The Suppliant Maidens* of Aeschylus and in *The Bacchantes* of Euripides), exile often involves exclusion from a language community. In *The Bacchantes*, consider the exile which Cadmus imagines for himself, following the frenzied and unwitting slaughter of his grandson, Pentheus (ruler of Thebes), by his daughter, Agave (Pentheus' mother), an exile from Hellas:

I, alas! in my old age must seek barbarian shores to sojourn there; but the oracle declares that I shall yet lead an army, half-barbarian, half-Hellene, to Hellas; and in serpent's shape shall I carry my wife Harmonia, the daughter of Ares, transformed like me to a savage snake, against the altars and tombs of Hellas at the head of my troops; nor shall I ever cease from my woes, ah

least have been from one's dialect). Nor is the exile necessarily the friendless and alienated figure we associate in our century with the refugee. For one thing the stranger has the protection of the most powerful god:

For dear is an alien tongue
To Zeus who cares for the stranger
And governs the counsel of Kings
(in Aeschylus' *The Suppliant Maidens*, 1952: 9)

The ambivalence with which Socratic and Aristotelian texts deal with foreigners yields a complicated legislative picture of their status, perhaps best represented by the *Laws* of Plato, in which strangers are to be treated with friendliness and honoured (1952: 790), but it is acknowledged that, as in the nature of exile, it is public offence which makes strangers (738). Nevertheless the *Laws* concludes with its protagonist, an Athenian stranger, requested to participate as instrumental (because of his foreign knowledge) in the foundation of the new state, a Cretan colony (799).

The Hellenistic cosmopolitanism expressed in Menander's dictum, *I am a man, and nothing human is foreign to me*², may have been prefigured in Zeno's lost *Republic*, which, from what is known of it, conflicted with the narrow insularity of the Republic proposed by Socrates. In the cynical (almost Swiftian) Republic we may infer from Zeno's extant *oeuvre*, all humanity is ruled by a single law. Julia Kristeva describes Zeno's Republic in *Strangers to Ourselves*, as one in which:

Love prevails over men and women who freely belong to one another, dressed in the same manner, having abolished marriage, schools, courts,

me! nor ever cross the downward stream of Acheron and be at rest. (1952: 351)

Certainly the strangers of the tragedy, Asian devotees of Dionysus, in *The Bacchantes* are non-natives of Greek and their chorus finds itself having to 'in foreign tongue express my joy' (1952: 349).

² In Allinson's translation: 'For me none is a foreigner if so be he is good. One nature is in all. And it is character that makes a tie of kin' (Menander, 1930: 505). Cf. the Mohist notion of 'universal love' in ancient China (Mozi lived c. 470-390 B.C.E.).

money and even temples – only the inner god of the Spirit was revered. Cannibalism, incest, prostitution, pederasty, and of course the destruction of the family are also accepted among the features of that ideal State³. (1991: 60)

Those whom Plato branded a tribe of imitators (443) and whom he urged ‘must be compelled to declare that evil acts were not done by the gods’ (327) are, if anything painted in a more contradictory light than the strangers who appear to be a necessary evil of the State he sees in prospect. We should remember that the poets⁴ are not expelled from the Republic merely because they are third hand imitators of the truth, but because they are enemies of reason, guilty of strengthening the feelings and ‘letting them rule... instead of drying them up’ (433).

In the third book of the *Laws*, having praised the poets as a *divine race* who ‘often in their strains, by the aid of the Muses and the Graces... attain truth’ (666), Plato elaborates through his Athenian stranger the subversive role of the poet in relation to the state. He describes a multitude once willing to observe good order and which ‘would never have dared to give judgement by noisy cries’ (675). This multitude was in time corrupted by the poets who:

³ Kristeva comments on what we are able to reconstruct of Zeno’s cosmopolitanism, that it:

emerges from the core of a global movement that makes a clean sweep of laws, differences and prohibitions; and that by defying the polis and its jurisdiction one implicitly challenges the founding prohibitions of established society and perhaps of sociality itself; that by abolished state-controlled borders one assumes, logically and beforehand, an overstepping of the prohibitions that guarantee sexual, individual and family identity. A challenge to the very principle of *human association* is what is involved in cosmopolitan utopia: the rules governing exchanges with the other having been abolished (no more State, no more family, no more sexual difference) – is it possible to live without constraints – without limits, without borders – other than individual borders? (1991: 60)

Zeno’s Republic would appear to present just the sort of challenge to *everything sacred* which the poets will be accused by Socrates and Plato of unwittingly posing.

⁴ The ego at stake here is that of the poet as self styled Promethean, doomed darer of heaven – *poietes*, from the Greek, *poiein* – the one who makes. In Latin – *vates* – the seer, the prophet, the one who foretells.

introduced the reign of vulgar and lawless innovation. They were men of genius, but they had no perception of what is just and lawful in music; raging like Bacchanals and possessed with inordinate delights – mingling lamentations with hymns, and paeans with dithyrambs; imitating the sounds of the flute on the lyre, and making one general confusion; ignorantly affirming that music has no truth, and, whether good or bad, can only be judged by of rightly by the pleasure of the hearer... they have inspired the multitude with lawlessness and boldness and made them fancy that they can judge for themselves. (676)

Note the context of this outburst as a discussion of freedom and authority, examples of the indulgence of each furnished, respectively, by Athenian and Persian history. In the *Republic* it is the *guardians* who are ‘devoted wholly to the maintenance of freedom in the state’ (330). With no role for the feelings and with the guardians taking care of freedom, there would appear to be nothing for the poets, who are guilty of painting the gods as sinful, possessed of a sense of humour. Homer, for one, has them all laughing at Hephaestus, has Zeus forgetting his plans in moments of lust, ready to relieve himself anywhere.

Poets, in the *Laws*, are unable to tell the difference between good and evil (720), are always therefore in danger of composing things ‘contrary to the ideas of the lawful, or just, or beautiful or good’ (720). In fact they are presented as the victims of an ambivalence which is in the nature of the inspiration upon which they depend:

the poet, according to the tradition which has ever prevailed among us, and is accepted of all men, when he sits down on the tripod of the muse, is not in his right mind; like a fountain he allows to flow out freely whatever comes in, and his art being imitative, he is often compelled to represent men of opposite dispositions, and thus to contradict himself; neither can he tell whether there is more truth in one thing that he has said than in another. (684)

Marked contrast is made here between the poet’s position and that of the lawmaker: ‘But this is not the case in a law; the legislator must not give two rules about the same thing, but only one’ (684). Yet we note in the last book of the *Laws* that only those who have known inspiration can be the guardians of the law (797). The poets’ expulsion

is offered them to be worn as a badge of honour.⁵ They are exalted, if ironically, outside of the city gates. We might infer their presence outside as showing, and therefore necessary to, the way in. Socrates gives specific instructions for dealing with their appearance:

And therefore when any one of these pantomimic gentlemen, who are so clever that they can imitate anything, comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderful being; but we must also inform him that in our State, such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so when we have annointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city. (331)

Plato's Socrates had lit on the idea that poetry was in some sense the opposite of the idea of government. Plato's solution to that little difficulty was to give the poets a garland each and send them on their way. But while the logic of poetry and that of governance are clearly at odds in the Platonic conception, there yet remains between them a relationship of interdependence. In a sense no less metaphorical than that in which Plato's republic should be taken – the poets were out there already, up against the limits of understanding, at the dangerous border between sense and nonsense. This distinction between poetic consciousness and its alternative points far into the future to the theory of ambivalent (as opposed to bivalent) logic for which Kristeva (following Bakhtin) argues in *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

The cap in hand posture, anticipated for the expelled poet, brings to mind Kafka's man from the country in 'Before the Law', and it brings to mind Walter Benjamin's dictum that the documents of civilization are always at once the documents of barbarism. Kafka's protagonist in 'Before the Law' spends a lifetime failing to get through a gate which he learns at the last was built only for him. A moral one might infer from the parable is that if you cannot see that the gate in front of you is for you to pass through then effectively you are seeing a wall in your way. Stepping back from the obstruction allows us to observe that one would never be able to get through a

⁵ Further that this expulsion, unlike the biblical one from Eden, is generally taken by the re-writers of Plato's text, as a dare to find the place of poetry in the ideal state. More, for instance begins his *Utopia*, with a poem by a poet-laureate.

gate the function of which was to conceal the (unknown) law one had hoped to approach. There is something of this paradox in poetry's relationship, not only with the yes/no logic of law which excludes it, but with poetry's own (canonic) laws of inclusion and exclusion, with the governance of its own polity (with the mere fact that poetry may be so conceived).

Floating

If poetry cannot live outside of the pain of exclusion from its own potential, then in this it is not alone. The poet, as made stranger, is one of a long list of personae denied participation in states. The exiled artist, the refugee, indigene, the gypsy, the Jew, the novelist, philosopher, objector-of-conscience, republican, monarchist, communist, anarchist, humanist, feminist – all have claimed earth's homeless heart and seen themselves beloved of Zeus (or some equivalent deity) or the people, of justice or of virtue. All have been stood outside of their means of making sense of the world. All have gone on making sense of the states which cannot quite succeed in depriving them of a view.

Perhaps poetry's is only a conventional diaspora, one to which we have been habituated. And will it not always be convenient for split subjectivities to be able playfully to banish a personality from time to time? A made stranger is one who has no choice but to inhabit strange space. S/he makes it so in an in/voluntary act of presence. Equally s/he may be allowed (and again this is an act of presence) to unmake this and her/his own strangeness. Such an unmaking might entail an act of supplication, perhaps even an apology or a defence.

If poetry has had an affinity with foreignness, then poetry's has been conceived as a community of foreigners or even of strangers to themselves. The position of the poet in the modernist – and later – conception is – like that of the foreigner in a new culture – one we might see as foreshadowed by Lewis Carroll's Alice, who – in *Through the Looking Glass* – enters a wood where things have no names. Yet the poet finds names in this space beyond, and names the things of one world as if they were in and of another. Innocence

recovered, the poet's world is one being named again, re-named as if for the first time. There are long continuities inherent in this position. Invoking Zeus's power as god of borders and strangers, one acknowledges the difficulty of prayer where the words won't be right for the place. Washed ashore in the land of the Phaeacians, Odysseus prays to the unknown god of the stream:

Hear me Lord, whoever you are. I come to you as many others have come, with a prayer. I am a fugitive from the sea and from Poseidon's malice. Any poor wanderer who comes in supplication is given respect, especially by the immortal gods. I am such a man, and I now turn to you after much suffering and seek the sanctuary of your stream. Take pity on me, Master, I am your supplicant. (Homer, 83)

So the man who calls himself nobody prays to an anonymous god. Poetry depends on just such a putative presence where absence is indicated. For the purposes of this chapter, Lyotard's *différend* is invoked in arguing the place of poetries as situated by work of witness in the space between languages.

Last of the floating signifiers to which this work attends, community is not merely all things to all: where mentioned – where given conscious expression – community becomes the concrete expression of an ideal of collectivity, of common interest and of common will. Poetry's community – as continuity of effort of the kind we might call canonic – can be taken as read in Pound's poem 'Histrion'⁶:

⁶ In *The Necessary Angel* Stevens writes of the poet as a character somewhat resembling Virginia Woolf's Orlando, in terms of longevity:

Suppose we try, now, to construct the figure of a poet, a possible poet... He must have lived all of the last two thousand years, and longer, and he must have instructed himself, as best he could, as he went along. He will have thought that Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton placed themselves in remote lands and in remote ages; that their men and women were the dead – and not the dead lying in the earth, but the dead still living in their remote lands and in their remote age, and living in the earth or under it, or in the heavens – and he will wonder at those huge imaginations, in which what is remote becomes near, and what is dead lives with an intensity beyond any experience of life. (656-7)

No man hath dared to write this thing as yet,
 And yet I know, how that the souls of all men great
 At times pass through us,
 And we are melted into them, and are not
 Save reflexions of their souls.
 Thus am I Dante for a space and am
 One François Villon, ballad-lord and thief,
 Or am such holy ones I may not write
 Lest blasphemy be writ against my name;
 This for an instant and the flame is gone. (71)

There is perhaps a concordance here with the view of poetry's function Robert Graves was able to express in the foreword to *White Goddess*: 'The function of poetry is religious invocation of the Muse; its use is the experience of musical exaltation and horror that her presence excites' (14). Needless to say this was not an uncontroversial claim when first published in 1948. Serious as his intention was, one may easily read Graves' as a teasing mock-atavism for the mid-century.

In like vein the anti-canonic of what was considered anti-poetry through much of the twentieth century now provides powerful canonic continuities for the reader, showing for instance modernist antecedents for post-modern developments in poetry. Modernism's debates over the pure and the impure of poetry are suggestive of the divide between the aesthete and the activist; in turn of two very distinct senses of community – that of the excluded (or self-excluding) avant-garde (cultural entity beyond the people's grasp), that of a vanguard which could consider itself *of* the people and which might serve and lead from that position. In 1935, Pablo Neruda wrote of an 'impure poetry', as one to be:

...ravaged by the labour of our hands as by an acid, saturated with sweat and smoke, a poetry that smells of urine and white lilies, a poetry on which every human activity, permitted or forbidden, has imprinted its mark... A poetry impure as a suit of clothes, as a body, soiled with food, a poetry familiar with shameful, disgraceful deeds, with dreams, observations, wrinkles, sleepless nights, presentiments; eruptions of hatred and love; animals, idylls, shocks; negotiations, ideologies, assertions, doubts, tax demands... (in Hamburger, 243)

Neruda wanted poetry to have a human reek, a poetry 'like bread that can be shared by all, learned men and peasants alike, by our entire, immeasurable, wonderful extraordinary family of peoples'.

At stake here is all that corny business – amounting to a consciousness of duty – of purpose in poetry, such as the aesthetes and art for art's sake devotees long mocked. The problem was always in reconciling a passion for art, as autonomous process/product, with passionate commitment to the world. A persistent nihilism has made this divide plausible for many, but ultimately one might read here a line between 'mockers' and 'makers', between a critical aesthetic (perhaps of 'pure' art) and a way to being in a better world. In a letter he wrote to Cortes-Rodrigues, Pessoa made mention of 'the terrible importance of Life, that consciousness which makes it impossible for us to produce art only for art's sake, and the consciousness of having a duty towards ourselves and towards humanity'. For Pessoa all works of art had a civilizing function (in Hamburger, 162). Such a function we might take as indicative of a powerful and particular style of poetic community, one which – among the multitude – must include Whitman and Dickinson, Brecht, Neruda, Celan.

It is difficult to know how literally, how tangibly, one should (or could) take the idea of community as it applies to poetry. There is community of a kind when one poet responds to another, when he or she annotates the other's pages, when a voice long stilled echoes in his or her head. Without this abstract and yet essential form of community, it is difficult to imagine how the process of poetry could continue at all.

Community is minimally – for poetry and poets, as for anyone and any text else – a consequence of the intersubjective facts of language; it is what we consciously and unconsciously make of ourselves through the process of dialogue. We humans are rarely out of the community of words, the community of words is never out of us. In this manner we are of the world; because I *do* refer to a world which is outside of my saying – that saying which the world inhabits in making possible. I do make possible a world in my saying, which is

the habitation of the already said. I do pass beyond saying in the dialogue which is my means of overwhelming alterity. As with language, and largely as defined by language, particular communities are most clearly defined by the line of inclusion/exclusion (belonging and not). Some paradoxical formulations are relevant to poetry's exilic/cosmopolitan conception of community – these are, of community as unavowable, of the community of those who have nothing in common, the community of those who have no community. In the cyber-age, the idea of anonymous community is gaining currency.

Is a community a participatory process or an edifice of civilization? In relation to art in general and to poetry in particular the canon is the key object in contention. Canon is what survives of art until now, it is that against which all future practices need to be measured. In a certain sense canon and community are opposites (the one dead, the other living). Their vital interdependence suggests though that they are different views of the one phenomenon; namely culture. In one case, art is read as trace of past practice, in the other art is a dialogic process in the here and now. Dialogue is possible because of the edifice of culture as it presently persists. Culture is possible because of the conversation that brought us thus far.

Poetry's community may be in large part an illusion; for instance the illusion of a readership – as most potently unveiled at the poetry reading where the audience consists entirely of those impatiently waiting to read out their own stuff. Community might be located – *in extremis*, invisibly, impossibly – somewhere between haunting and prayer; with haunting, with prayer – in the intangible space between subjects/objects uncertain of each other. The poet finds names in this space beyond them, and names the things of one world as if they were in and of another. So with haunting (like laughter) revealed – a space where words are surpassed, no longer suffice. So with prayer – the words of one world suffice for an otherworldly purpose, are understood because all things are understood. In either case – presence where absence is suggested – the question of a gift in the intangible space between subjects. Dialogue itself, is means of making intangible the subjectivities – or shifting personae – in which the canon consists. For Merleau-Ponty the reversibility of con-

versation and its relation to the subject constitute a kind of blurring, in which they become impossible to pick apart: 'the conversation pronounces itself within me. It summons me and grips me; it envelops and inhabits me to the point that I cannot tell what comes from me and what comes from it' (1974: 19).

Back on earth – among embodied subjects who see and understand each other, not for transcendent but for practical purposes – we return to a non-starting point in the endless reversibility Emile Benveniste implies for the relations characterising 'I' and 'you'. Partnership in dialogue (1971: 223-30) constitutes the necessity and possibility of community – as something open-ended, continuous, unending, but unendingly brought into question by those instances in which subjects are literally lost for words.

Doubt and Community

Hiatuses infest all subjectivities. This recognition is one characteristic of twentieth century psychology's problems with the idea of a unified self, it is characteristic of the crises of identity to which every human science and social practice of our time has been subject, it is a characteristic of poetic ambivalence as it has been practised since the onset of many and varied modernisms.

Regardless of the extent to which his personality was generated by the cultural crossings that shaped his life, Fernando Pessoa's is the paradigm case of the several persons of the poet. His poetic is the embodiment of what one might call a 'truth of masks'. It puts flesh on the bones of Valéry's belief that 'if each man were not able to live a number of other lives besides his own, he would not be able to live his own life' (in Hamburger, 75). Pessoa's heteronyms provide the paradigm but the observation would be as true of Yeats or of Pound. The difference is perhaps that in the case of Yeats⁷, we often find the several masks in the one poem. 'Easter 1916' would be a convenient example.

⁷ In a diary entry, Yeats wrote, 'I think that all happiness depends on the energy to assume the mask of some other self... a rebirth as something not oneself, something...created in a moment and perpetually renewed (Jeffares: 197).

In the shape of doubts as to who we are is acknowledged the difficulty of approaching a community of the self. In like manner poetries face us with the problem of how to sustain or enable a community of dissent, one which is not only subject to its own doubts but actually exists for them. If poetry must doubt the possibility of its having purpose, has it at least the guarantee that such a lack is approached by means of doubt? Dada was the original of that reflexive modernity which dealt (or feigned dealing) with itself as phenomenon in just the terms it brought to bear on society and on art in general. Georges Ribemont-Desaignes writes in a piece titled ‘Artichokes’:

Dada, having only a few years or months or days to live, looks for a lawyer to draw up its last will and testament...

Dada doubts everything. They say that too constitutes a principle. No, doubt is not *in principio*, but even if it were thus, if dada believed in doubt, exactly that would prove that there is no principle. (in Rothenberg and Joris: 337)

Interrogating poetry’s relation to society in a way which brings into question the efficacy of a poetic *function*, Ottó Orbán’s poem, ‘Sinking Orpheus’, written for Sándor Weöres on his 75th birthday, begins:

The sober mind is annoyed to discover that poetry’s utterly functionless.
 Defending the defendable, it sings of the doormat and it puts it by the door:
 the dying poet lies on his side on the ground
 and writes in the dust with his blood the word: *heimat!*
 But should this scenario fail,
 for lack, let us say, of a Struggle for Independence,
 he is still permitted to sing of the scheduled reforms –
 the government’s or the opposition’s – whichever appeals to him.
 The sober mind, as we know,
 (to use its own favourite expression)
 with its indispensable aids to survival,
 the various clichés for use in case of fire, flood or earthquake,
 resides in the collective unconscious, or numbskull.

(1993: 37-8)

But a sober mind, precisely because it is annoyed with poetry’s lack of purpose, may yet succeed in attributing one to it. Orbán ironically reminds us that the death of the poet might open a field of intentions, such as is confused by our not knowing whether it is poetry or the resident of the numbskull which sings of the doormat it puts by the door. The poem as process and artefact blurs the canonic

personae which go into the making and the keeping of the poem. In the second stanza of 'Sinking Orpheus' Orbán writes of the everyday creature who:

was with me one minute, nowhere the next, wavered and rose and then fell
through the mysterious medium in which
a gabbling angel dictates down the phone, and the poem is ready for printing
and from the thick bog a slippery presentiment floats to the surface
serrated teeth, reptilian neck, and shark's fin,
most monstrous of monsters, the soul.

This artist's soul, reminiscent of the abomination of which Horace writes at the beginning of the *Ars Poetica*, is indeed a strange concoction of personae, no community at all, authentic only to the enigma of its gabbling angel.

Whatever status we allow the artist, the soul, the poem, we acknowledge that they do participate in a community, even if of the outside, perhaps Blanchot's *community of those who have no community*. As such they are borne in a common relation to society, and to the resident of the numbskull of which Orbán writes, and which they threaten by the means of the very rejection to which they – artist, soul, poem – are subject. Their community depends specifically on the rejection of that critical *habitus* which exists to exercise judgement over poetry and to conceal itself from the exercise of such judgement. And yet poetry's community depends on that *habitus* and on the fact of judgement just as surely as judgement depends on its objects: in this case the poem-candidates for the canon. From the point of view of the production of poetry, here then is a principal site of ambivalence: to depend on what it must reject and threaten, i.e. the process by which the canon is kept.

The monstrous concoction of soul Orbán offers us demonstrates the arbitrary nature of the community which coalesces as both bound by *différends* and covering over where a *différend* has been. Myth and metaphor, the making of words in common, depend, however they are motivated, on the exercise of arbitrariness. The truth of a community is of a recognition in common which naturally generates meaning. Take an anthem as an example of culture

generating community with populist application⁸ the confusion of patriotism and its intellectual weakness is the assumption that a community is the result of a meaning it exists to generate. We did not, by and large, decide how to be a people. Rather we find ourselves, borne of accidents, with a particular range of meanings and actions constitutive of and available to us. Those antics, conventions and the like, by which we play at constituting ourselves as such, mainly function to conform to the observation that the doormat is by the door.

⁸ The singing of anthems is deeply implicated in the circular motion enjoining the revered anonymity of the subject worshipping the state as apotheosis of the state worshipping subject. Anthem quality is the soul stirring effect of a tune and the lyrics it carries or connotes. A particular kind of tune bears the affective investment of a people; it is the means by which they recognise themselves among themselves, a kind of self-welcoming gesture. Benedict Anderson has drawn attention to three key paradoxes of the national. The first concerns the contrast between the objective modernity of nations and the subjective claims to unbroken tradition that characterize the sentiments of nationalists. The second paradox is that nations are particular instances of identity of which all persons are – at least notionally – possessed. That is to say, nation is a kind of universal difference: everyone's nationality is not the same as someone else's. The presence of refugees in and 'between' nations complicates this picture. The third paradox is between the political power and the intellectual weakness of the abstraction. Nationalism is – against the world's other –isms – conspicuously lacking in great thinkers (5).

Building on Anderson's contribution, I would like to suggest two paradoxes of 'anthem quality': these are the *uniformity of differences* and the *automatisation of strong affect*. In the serious world of sincere nations and nationalists, uniformity of differences is revealed in the fact that the overwhelming majority of the world's national anthems are written and arranged according to the rules of classical western musical forms. Every member of the series 'nation' must have a national anthem; as a consequence, though anthems are notionally intended to express the differences between nations, reflection reveals that they serve also to illustrate the consistency of national investments across international borders.

The repetition of a sentiment or a particular representation leads often to cliché or tautology. An overplayed pop song torments, even nauseates the wearied ear. Not so the anthem for the devotee of nation. Anthem is the breath and so the embodying – in *unisonance* – that gives a modern nation life. Populations go on being moved, sometimes over long stretches of history and over vast territories, by the tunes of, and words in, their national songs. Emotion remains and is even intensified after the meaning of the words has been forgotten.

The (canon-conscious) poem as process, which commences in the knowledge of a contingent destination, though appearing as if on the outside, is as limited as any other discourse to the stock of enabling signs constituting its milieu. In recognising its situation, as an (always compromised) art of the outside, the poem has the opportunity to articulate an ethics of presence for the larger community in the cracks of which or outside of which it falls. By such means poetry would, despite itself, be performing a function for the numbskull which, yes, it too inhabits.

Community of Futures, Community of Outcasts

A poem lives if it lives as a passion of traces. It is in those terms that Orbán declares poets the 'haunters of the future' (1993: 18). Poem and those personae who make it and read it, do not survive above or aside the patterns of assumption – canonic patterns, grammatical patterns – from which the poem is cast. Those whose work it is to *understand* the poem, are, as I have argued, never fully knowledged, never completely aware of the poem's potential or interpretive range. The more clearly it is shown that the poem's potential exceeds any one reader's capacity to finally deal with it, the more worthwhile it will be for readers to come to spend time with that text. There is a gloomy spin which might be put on the poem's epistemic effects, as in Tadeusz Różewicz' poem 'Knowledge':

Nothing will ever be
explained
nothing leveled
nothing rewarded

nothing
never

time will not heal anything
wounds will not scar
a word will not take
the place of another word

grass will not cover up the graves
the dead will die
and will not rise again

the world will not come to an end

poetry will drag itself
on
towards Arcady
or the opposite way (119)

Yet if the politics of the canon are necessarily hidden (unconscious in the terms of Jameson's thesis [1981: *passim*]), it remains the case that poetry allows, by means of indirection, a way past those traps which stand in the way of the completion of knowledge/s. Thus poetry allows futures which could not have been without it. What requires the faith of assumption is the metaphysician's received world-as-ever-thus. The faith in doubt required of the ironist is necessarily contingent. It depends on a next frame and a next following. The ironist remembers the rug pulled out from under and so anticipates its next occasion. Modern, especially modernist, poetries, despite their failure to agree with each other, have often defined themselves and their notional community, if not as functional, at least in terms of world changing work. In Marinetti's 'Manifesto of Futurism': 'We want to hymn the man at the wheel, who hurls the lance of his spirit across the earth, along the circle of its orbit' (in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 198). In Tristan Tzara's 'Dada Manifesto on Feeble and Bitter Love': 'Dada is the chameleon of rapid and self-interested change' (in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 304). Tzara's efforts to undermine the pretension of a purpose or a place for poetry or Dada are themselves, predictably enough, undermined by the character of his own assertions:

dada is the dictatorship of the spirit, or
dada is the dictatorship of language,
or else
dada is the death of the spirit
which will please many of my friends. Friends.
(in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 303-4)

Death and dictatorship are the leitmotifs of the community at its own throat which Dada very generally showed Europe in a likeness of its own image. Poetry's community has been asserted among the legislators of the new order. For Whitman's 'founding song of the free community of equals', read Auden's disowned poem 'Spain':

Yesterday all the past. The language of size
 Spreading to China along the trade routes; the diffusion
 Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;
 Yesterday the shadow reckoning in the sunny climates.
 Yesterday the assessment of insurance by cards,
 The divination of water; yesterday the invention
 Of cartwheels and clocks, the taming of
 Horses. Yesterday the bustling world of the navigators.
 Yesterday the abolition of fairies and giants,
 The fortress like a motionless eagle eyeing the valley,
 The chapel built in the forest;
 Yesterday the carving of angels and alarming gargoyles.
 The trial of heretics among the columns of stone;
 Yesterday the theological feuds in the taverns
 And the miraculous cure at the fountain;
 Yesterday the Sabbath of witches; but today the struggle.
 (in Cunningham: 97-100)

In Osip Mandelstam, survivor and finally victim of Stalinism, we find a convenient example of Mallarmé's 'solitary poet in the face of the universe':

If our antagonists take me
 And people stop talking with me;
 If they confiscate the whole world –
 The right to breathe and open doors
 And affirm that existence will exist
 And that the people like a judge will judge;
 If they dare to keep me like an animal
 And fling my food on the floor –
 I won't fall silent or deaden the agony,
 But will write what I am free to write,
 And yoking ten oxen to my voice
 Will move my hand in the darkness like a plough
 And fall with the full heaviness of the harvest...
 (in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 396)

Mandelstam's avowal of witness as vocation offers an antidote for the excesses which may be sung in the founding of the hoped-for free community.

That destruction of every voice and point of origin, with which Barthes (1977: 148) associates writing, becomes itself the

condition of the possibility of writing's origin and community. Sartre writes 'the permanent possibility of abandoning the book is the very condition of the possibility of writing it and the very meaning of my freedom' (1989: 37). Rejection then is the originary and reflexive possibility of writing which exists only on the basis that it may discard or dissolve itself. A first condition in which the canon-inhabited author lives out her or his judgement on the canon is the possibility of total rejection from the outset and from every setting out thereafter. By way of her/his own works s/he can withhold what little is in her/his power of the canon's next possibility.

In 'Like this for Years', Michael Dransfield – antipodean archetype of the self-destructive poet – deals with the dual frustration of 'the failure of language' and the fact that 'no good comes of singing or silence'.

In the cold weather
 the cold city the cold
 heart of something as pitiless as apathy
 to be a poet in Australia
 is the ultimate commitment.
 When y've been thrown out of the last car
 for speaking truthfully or mumbling poems
 and the emptiness is not these stranded
 endless plains but knowing that you are completely
 alone in a desert full of strangers
 and when the waves cast you up who sought
 to dive so deep and come up with
 more than water in yr hands
 and the water itself is sand is air is something
 unholdable
 you realise that what you taste now in the mornings
 is not so much blood as the failure of language
 and no good comes of singing or of silence
 the trees wont hold you you reject rejection
 and the ultimate commitment
 is survival (1987: 50)

Is a reason necessary or possible for such a commitment? In 'Perhaps...', a poem dedicated 'for the loneliness of an author', Shu Ting writes:

Perhaps these thoughts of ours
 will never find an audience

Perhaps the mistaken road
 will end in a mistake
 Perhaps the lamps we light one at a time
 will be blown out, one at a time
 Perhaps the candles of our lives will gutter out
 without lighting a fire to warm us.
 Perhaps when all the tears have been shed
 the earth will be more fertile
 Perhaps when we sing praises to the sun
 the sun will praise us in return
 Perhaps these heavy burdens
 will strengthen our philosophy
 Perhaps when we weep for those in misery
 we must be silent about miseries of our own
 Perhaps
 Because of our irresistible sense of mission
 We have no choice
 (in Milosz, 1996: 298)

Michael Hamburger in his 1969 work *The Truth of Poetry* writes of commitment as something unavoidable for the poet: 'Commitment is not only a matter of conscious attitudes; merely to write is to commit oneself, and to reveal a commitment that cannot possibly be confined to the aesthetic order' (19).

Because a community is bounded by *différends* we can say that it depends on rejection and that its truth must be a lie (or at least be misunderstood) from the outside. This is especially so from the point of view of those who bear witness to the *différend* which a community builds over. Such bearing witness always risks (whether it attempts in its own right) the foundation of a new metaphoric and a new community. It involves the becoming foreign of those bodies which, by this means, inhabit prospectively a community which cannot yet be theirs. For Emmanuel Levinas speech founds community and it does this by giving; it explains us with respect to itself; it is a kind of teaching (1969: 981). Poetry, subjecting its own language and community to the exigencies of experience as from the outside, has the cosmopolitan vocation of witness in the cause of peace.

As indirection of consciousness the poem is a gift to a community which cannot yet be because the poem will make it possible, complete it or allow its completion. Perhaps it is the unknowable gift which W.S. Merwin foreshadows in writing of a most certain and intimate unknowable event, 'For the anniversary of my death':

Every year without knowing it I have passed the day
 When the last fires will wave to me
 And the silence will set out
 Tireless traveller
 Like the beam of a lightless star
 Then I will no longer
 Find myself in life as in a strange garment
 Surprised at the earth
 And the love of one woman
 And the shamelessness of men
 As today writing after three days of rain
 Hearing the wren sing and the falling cease
 And boding not knowing to what
 (in Milosz 1996: 272)

Death is the ultimate community in the dissolution of community and for which no prescription or avowal makes difference.

Against death – the comic impulse. Beyond the grave, if there is survival, it will be according to the rules of canonic logic.

That logic which imposes a vertical and hierarchic community on those (personae) under its sway, may paradoxically have the function of opening what it contains to the whims of a community, even of a community which specifically exists not to have a function. In Kristevan terms we could say that a bivalent logic, imposed on the productions of literature, has nothing to allow but the work of ambivalence. Ottó Orbán concludes his poem 'Sinking Orpheus':

Orpheus the diver. He scrapes the skin of the age and it scrapes him,
 but human suffering is merely the air in his cylinder,
 the essence of his mastery is this: that the depths are a freight on his poems:
 down in the depths is a shadow, a ship that went down,
 around it no coins, no amphorae, only the darkness within things,

and within that still denser, the darkness of genesis,
 infinity contained in a mere point of fire –
 though infinity's not made of points: everything wavers,
 only the wind, only the whirling, only the flux remains firm...
 Seekers of treasure, we circle a sunken star with its torso of light,
 while empires stream by in a pearled string of bubbles,
 and above us the ocean of time is pulsing with light.

(1993: 37-8)

Efforts at reclaiming a significance from the wrecks of the past, efforts at a canonic sentience, serve to recover only the darkness within things. And yet there is a kind of mastery to avail those reading in the canon, a mastery founded on the reciprocity in which Orpheus and his age scrape each other. It is both difficult and futile to imagine fire on the ocean floor. And yet a star is sunk there, light pulses above us. We are in these delusions, in the facts which betray them, as in the air of suffering which fills this diver's cylinder, a sort of community: a community of impossible subjects and which only exists where community is impossible. Such is the Orphic position to which the bearing witness of *différends* brings us. Such is the canonic necessity of surpassing the contents of the canon. By means of this necessity the canon lies open to what it cannot contain: its foreign becoming body – its future.

Wandering

To be situated by crimes past is, as was argued in Chapter 4, the universal ethical *in media res*. Sweetness and light may not have brought us but religions have obviated such ideal intersubjective conditions with the idea of an imposed and therefore necessarily hierarchic harmony. Post-religion, knowledge of our position may be ethically immobilising. To the extent that we act, it will always have been out of ignorance. Nietzsche's guilt as the mark of reactive thinking, the bad conscience of Christian invention, he regards as the condition of peaceful society (1977: 116). Then do we choose guilt when we decide for peace?

The canon-as-unchallengeable foundation, in profane as in sacred literature, is a receptacle and validation of the crimes by which we now mis/read and in which we are mis/read. Through memory,

through the efficacy of a record, courts may establish the guilt of individuals or of governments (so of nations), even for crimes long otherwise forgotten. But time's passage blurs the roles of literary works and of their readership. If it is on the basis of what the canon contains that we and our future are possible, still the future fades into our fading to past. We are impossible to pick apart: as victim, as perpetrator, as ignorant, as fully knowledgeable. There is a community of *différends* where individuals, all haunted in like manner, blur. In Paul Celan's 'Fugue of Death' we find the apotheosis of such a community as Hegel's master and slave together make up.

we are digging a grave in the sky it is ample to lie there
 A man in the house he plays with the serpents he writes
 he writes when the night falls to Germany your golden
 hair Margarete
 he writes it and walks from the house the stars glitter
 he whistles his dogs up
 he whistles his Jews out and orders a grave to be dug in
 the earth
 he commands us strike up for the dance
 Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
 we drink in the mornings at noon we drink you at
 nightfall
 drink you and drink you
 A man in the house he plays with the serpents he writes
 he writes when the night falls to Germany your golden
 hair Margarete
 Your ashen hair Shulamith we are digging a grave in the
 sky it is ample to lie there

(1972: 33-4)

Making the effort to see clearly as through a fog of silence (or of noise), one knows that death is what dwells between the oppressor and the oppressed. For Levinas silence is the greatest violence. And silence may come in a deafening chorus. The jolly singalong of national culture, in which we drink our own health, is a process in which the signs of our enabling are absented, in which we collectively forget the means by which we have come. It is easy to see the desirability of forgetting that which makes us culpable. In his essay 'Holocaust', Baudrillard writes: 'Forgetting extermination is part of extermination, because it is also the extermination of memory, of history, of the social, etc' (1994: 49). Does this silence (and its technology) not throw into question the absolute (the pure) community

of those without community? In *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, Lingis writes 'Communication is an effort to silence, not the other, the interlocutor, but the outsider: the barbarian, the *prosopopeia* of noise' (1994: 71). For Lingis, 'One sees in the dialectical cadence of communication, proceeding by affirmation and contestation, an interval in which each makes himself other than the other, when one sees each one speaking in order to establish the rightness of what he says' (1994: 71).

Poetry – like any discourse – makes sense to the extent that it succeeds in this way; but poetry has duties against reason as well as for. Poetry's cosmopolitan community finds itself on a resistance to the othering of others. An ambivalent art, one in which inside and outside do not escape each others' conditions, poetry is a hesitation, for instance between sound and sight; between sound which conjures vision and sight in which speech lives. Poetry, in its modern role of having to suffice for the amorphous outside of other discourses, in its scavenging role as witness of the unsaid and unsayable, bears witness to rejection. Because its work is unfinalisable it is doomed to generate more of its kind; doomed equally to an infinite regression into the canon and the labyrinth of silences which conceal its means. These conditions commit the makers of poetry to a process and not to the unknowable of what will for a time be saved as the elements of a next *bricolage*.

To be escaped by one's meanings, to escape one's potentials in the effort of meaning, the givenness of what one is *allowed* to mean: these are the volitional parameters of poetry's community, of the differences made both of and by its participants.

In *La Communauté inavouable* Maurice Blanchot's community is not only one of making but equally one of unmaking, of 'not doing', of 'unworking' (1988: 23). His unavowable community is one which, 'by opening unknown spaces of freedom, makes us responsible for new relationships, always threatened, always hoped for, between what we call work, *oeuvre*, and what we call unworking, *dés-oeuvrement* (1988: 56).

What kind of community can poetry or its makers achieve when the work of art is torn between conforming and not, between making and unmaking sense? However art conforms to its canonic necessities, however canons bend to the shape of what they next contain, community remains the canon's structural opposite. Its principles are horizontal and metonymic. Community is always beside itself, never arrived, never over or under. For poetry, as for the rule of law more generally, frustration lies in this failure of community to coincide with itself.

Yet the work of making and the work of keeping the canon are contiguous and in some ways homologous. As *énoncé*, canon and work participate in the same illusion of stillness, the fatalism of an *oeuvre* that is because it had to be (cf. Macleish's declaration that 'A poem should not mean/But be'[in Allison et al, 1983: 1029-30]). Can critic and poet participate in the one community? The hats are passed around, but if we allow the two personae completely to co-incide, there will be no model for either. Blurring of making and gatekeeping/conserving processes, however desirable, is a risk to both. The industry that has evolved between reader and author, depends certainly on the idea that these roles are distinct, but is frustrated by the *wandering* of a host of ambiguous personae between these two idealized poles. Critics and academics make their acts of reading exemplary texts. Authorial wandering – a refusal to settle or find a last frame – is often best read as a sign of work-in-progress. The world is God's text, so we learn in the Gospel of John; 'the poet is a little God', Vicente Huidobro tells us in his 'Ars Poetica' (in Rothenberg and Joris, 1995, p. 185). The facts of text are intertextual. The telling of stories always opens onto a new story or a new telling, by virtue of which it acknowledges, not the particularity of its own antecedents, but the fact that its context is canonic: that is to say, an audience can be relied upon to together remember characters, events, images, trains of thought prior to any particular reading.

A culture tends towards coherence in its manner of resolving against aesthetic wandering. A canon's resolving against indirection performs a function for a community which cannot otherwise know itself; it may perform this function in the service of a textuality (such as poetry's might claim to be) which disallows itself a function. But

the canon's accounting only succeeds in numbering the virtues by which it designates itself as the place of greatness (a singular place). It does not recognise itself as the place of the word between, the dialogic word-on-the-way. The canon is the ready-made home, the *heimlich* of word, of text. It brings to life those ghosts which acknowledge us. But the canon is not living speech; it is a set of words arrested. An art of words is in their *unheimlich*, their unfitting, mistakeness, their wandering from intention. Harold Bloom makes this point in *The Anxiety of Influence*, when he writes 'to imagine is to misinterpret'. 'Critics,' Bloom confides, 'in their secret hearts, love continuities, but he who lives with continuity alone cannot be a poet. Bloom claims that 'most of what we call poetry – since the Enlightenment anyway – is... questing for fire, that is for, discontinuity.' Bloom expresses his version of the link between psychoanalysis and criticism in the following terms: 'I am predicating that these revisionary ratios have the same function in intra-poetic relations that defense mechanisms have in our psychic life' (1973: 88). Thus is justified Bloom's central theses: that 'every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem' and that poetry is 'a disciplined perverseness' (1973: 95). Criticism may be seen in this light as the exercise of the repetition compulsion, work which justifies itself as the discovery of what has been repeated, in order to determine what is new⁹. The canon then is that sanctification of which Deleuze writes when he asks 'what good is moral law if it does not sanctify reiteration?' (1994: 4).

⁹ Martin Joos, in *The Five Clocks* touches on the relationship between repetition and literary textuality:

If a man who reads Hamlet a hundred times is a more faithful devotee of literature than one who reads Hamlet ten times, then the narratives of baseball games claim one of the largest bodies of rereaders intensely devoted to literature; for they insist that the texts must read so nearly alike that one who has let slip a few random facts will glance at the date to make sure it isn't yesterday's paper. It is clear that one profits thrillingly from the thousandth departure from the same text... Baseball is a highly literary game. Its rereader, knowing that the players need not be superlative athletes as in tennis or soccer, feels no bar to identifying with them – a necessity of literature. (1967: 57)

The figure of return which interests Deleuze is the Möbius strip, or its corollary in the sewn-together wrong-way-round handkerchiefs of Fortunatus in Lewis Carroll's 'Sylvie and Bruno' (the outside of which contains the inside and vice versa):

It is, however, still by skirting the surface or the border, that one passes to the other side, by virtue of the strip. The continuity between reverse and right side replaces all the levels of depth; and the surface effects in one and the same Event, which would hold for all events, bring to language becoming and its paradoxes. (1993: 48)

The möbius track is an apt image for the mistakenness entailed in the authorial wandering necessary to the production of literary works. This is the mistakenness anyone experiences in trying to explain a new place to themselves; it is the mistakenness of a Columbus who will not recognise the New World he is in. Like Columbus, the artist of any persuasion is the agent of a future agenda, to which s/he can have no privileged access. Mistakenness is necessitated by the impossibility of knowing the true nature of the work's relation to its material. Merleau-Ponty describes this position in terms of a *wrong-sidedness*:

It goes without saying that language is oblique and autonomous, and that its ability to signify a thought or a thing directly is only a secondary power derived from the inner life of language. Like the weaver, the writer works on the wrong side of his material. He has to do only with language, and it is thus that he suddenly finds himself surrounded by meaning. (1964: 44-5)

All the words with which we approach the business of making with words are from the wrong side of the track: a track which like the Möbius strip is continuous, at once *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. One never arrives; one has been here before. The place cannot be known; it is full of our *daemon*. The poem – any work of art – and the conversation in which it is carried interanimate to achieve a community, if they can, on the basis of such a blindness to the wrong-sidedness of the work in relation to its material.

In 'Mayakovsky's Suicide Note', the fact of death is secondary to the (future) community the poet forges from the 'inner life of language':

1
 She loves me, loves me not.
 I tear my fingers
 and scatter them,
 broken,
 as one tears,
 superstitiously,
 and scatters all over
 May
 the little wreath of daisy.
 Let the haircut and close shave
 reveal
 greyness,
 and the silver of years
 pound.
 I hope,
 I believe:
 I shall never be
 one
 of shameful prudence.

2
 It's two o'clock already.
 I guess you're in bed.
 The Milky Way
 a silver river
 in the night.
 I'm in no hurry,
 no point
 waking
 troubling you
 with telegrams.
 As they say,
 the incident is closed.
 The loveboat simply
 cracked up against circumstance.
 You and I:
 quits,
 no use listing
 mutual griefs,
 miseries,
 hurts.
 Look at how quiet the world is.
 Night
 has levied a tax
 of stars in the sky.
 In such moments
 one gets up and speaks to
 ages,

history,
the whole cosmos.
3
It's two o'clock...
I guess you're in bed.
Or maybe you're
also up with this thing.
I'm in no hurry.
No point
waking
troubling you
with telegrams.

(in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 249-50)

There is something terrifying in the calm assurance of the poet at work till the end which is his own work. One's own death at one's own hand, fashioned with poem for footnote, fashioning a canonic community, in living words which haunt the reader in the reader's bodily here and now. In a related final fragment, published as 'Unfinished' in the *Selected Verse*, Mayakovsky writes of the embodiment of words, of their force ringing through centuries:

I know the force of words and warning they can sound
I don't mean those which draw front-row applause
But words at which coffins break lose to pound
the ground this way and that with heavy paws
They may be cast out publishers ignore them
But words forge on tighten their belly-bands
ring through the centuries and trains come crawling
to lick and fondle poetry's horny hands
I know the force of words They seem a petal flung
Under the heels of dancers just a trifle
But man possesses backbone heart and tongue

(1985: 268)

The bringing of worlds into being (work of backbone, heart and tongue) is a collective work in which the body and the outside are in the condition of perpetual reversal we know as community; that community which Irigaray expresses as *infinitely neighbouring* (111), and which for Levinas, lives in the epiphany in which God is reached through the *face of alterity* (195).

The Word is a Window

When Levinas writes that ‘the word is a window; if it forms a screen it must be rejected’ (205), it may be replied that we are not necessarily privileged with the means of judging between these. And that perhaps what forges community is the failure of the reflexive capacities behind speech to keep up with speech’s manifestations. Herein lies the fascination of the transcendence in which speech participates: that the between of us remains perpetually beyond consciousness, that what we say is always beyond the means of apprehension at our disposal; that we are thus, if in community, always beyond ourselves. Community exists only in the circle of alterity by means of which bodies apprehend each other only ever from the outside, in the gap which sensate experience broaches and makes common.

If poetry finds no community but the one which Blanchot suggests, of those who have no community, we may argue that this is because it is the *art* of being lost between, because it is (or rather it has long since become, in the movement from Romanticism to Modernism) an art of homelessness, the art (to go back to Plato) of the one disallowed from the city. The particularity of its dissonances establish the frame of affinities and disaffinities enabling and disabling community. Speech is the site between us in which we become participants in a community which opens onto rejection, the risk which has, as Blanchot writes of the *community of lovers*, ‘as its ultimate goal the destruction of society’ (1988: 48). The betweenness which makes possible culture also constitutes the risk to which it is subject: the risk of violence. It is in the exercise of this risk that civilizations build and threaten their others and as well threaten the calm they cultivate, the idleness for which they live. The mind Marvell imagines in ‘The Garden’ as one which, transcending its pleasures and resemblances, creates ‘far other worlds’, may indeed have the effect of ‘annihilating all that’s made’ (1972: 101). Such is the negative power of imagination and such is the desire which can never quite found poetry’s community – that paradoxical transcendent wish (as stated at this chapter’s beginning) – to stand the world out of words.

In *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* Lingis writes:

To see the other as another sentient agent is to see his postures and movements directed to a range of implements and obstacles about him. To see the other is to see her place as I could occupy and the things about her as harboring possibilities that are open to my skills and initiatives. It is to see the other as another one like I am, equivalent to and interchangeable with me. It is the sense of the death awaiting me that circumscribes the range of possibilities ahead of me. To see the other as one who has his own tasks and potentialities is to sense another death circumscribing the field of possibilities ahead of him... But the other turns to me empty-handed from across that wall of death. (1994: 127-8)

But is death for the artist or the writer like this? Is Mayakovsky's death like this? What of a Keats, what of a name 'writ on water'? Acknowledging alterity is intimation of mortality. Death closes the corpus, death reduces that life of process to its products and leaves those products notionally open to unending judgement.

Levinas claims that the welcoming of the Other is the consciousness of my injustice. But while the foreigner may not necessarily be in proximity with me, my knowledge of that Other, foreigner or otherwise, demands a proximity borne of opening, in the face to face, a consciousness of the same. Yet it remains to ask: What if the Other should not welcome me? What if the face should not summon me, what if it should turn away? There would still be these words, whether windows or screens, and they would still lie between us; move with us by the means in which they are made infinite and by which we offer to ourselves our choosing, our wishfulness. Blanchot's 'impossible community' is one which can never be finished and which always and necessarily risks disappearance.

Speech is evanescent and community has – by virtue of its being under negotiation – the unknowable status which Socrates, in the *Cratylus*, attributed to a transition always going on (1952: 114). Bertholt Brecht echoes Valéry's 'perverse delight' in the dictum that a work of art is never finished but abandoned (in Block and Salinger,

1960: 29), beginning his poem in ‘About the Way to Construct Enduring Works’:

How long
Do works endure? As long
As they are not completed.
Since as long as they demand effort
They do not decay. (1976: 193)

It is in that failure to decay (corollary of never arriving), which can be said of none of us personally, that we discover a community which condemns itself and in which we are, as Sartre claims, *condemned to freedom*.

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Richard Rorty writes that the oppressed, deprived of a voice, can only be spoken for. For him the victims of cruelty:

do not have much in the way of a language. That is why there is no such thing as the ‘voice of the oppressed’ or the ‘language of the victims’. The language the victims once used is not working anymore, and they are suffering too much to put new words together. So the job of putting their situation into words is going to have to be done for them by somebody else. (1989: 94)

The *problem* of community may be best expressed in the fact that it is not only we humans who are condemned to our freedom. For Lyotard the animal is the paradigm of the victim (1988: 28). What Rorty says seems unacceptable for his oppressed fellow humans, but compelling in the case of animal others (those who have never had a language as victims). In dealing with the effects of our freedom a first step will be to witness the presence of the world (of worlds) which lack our forms of expression. Robinson Jeffers writes in his poem ‘Carmel Point’ of the extraordinary patience of things:

This beautiful place defaced...
Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
Not faintly. It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
That swells and in time will ebb, and all

Their works dissolve. Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
 Lives in the very grain of the granite,
 Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff. – As for us:
 We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;
 We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
 As the rock and the ocean that we were made from.

(in Milosz, 1996, p. 34)

How may we learn to dwell among and not over those for whom – in witnessing – we cannot help but speak? What of the gap between the languaged and other sensate beings, even insensate beings (the *fellow created* of certain religions, the others deserving our compassion, as in Buddhism)? It is true that we cannot let them speak. Does this fact diminish our need for their voices, our need to meet ourselves in them? Are we able to witness what we cannot allow? We push toward too easy a transcendence when the goal of seeing less of ourselves simply involves our lessening, our retreat; at least the retreat of humanity's most virulent strains. That virulence can just as well be measured by genocidal effects as by the reduction of bio-diversity: two extreme monoculturalisms. If we manage to order that retreat, we only get there by means of speech. And it is language which, like the missionary's love, abolishes what it cannot see and abolishes what allows it.

How are *we*¹⁰ divided: as selves and between selves, between communities and idioms? To what extent are we entitled to speak or

¹⁰ The problem of identification and of community may, for certain purposes, be reduced to the question of what is implied by the pronoun 'we', so long problematic for scholarly discourse. In a 1984 interview, titled 'Polemics, Politics, and Problematization', Michel Foucault says:

I do not appeal to any 'we' – to any of those 'we's' whose consensus, whose values, whose traditions constitute the framework for a thought and define the conditions in which it can be validated. But the problem is, precisely, to decide if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a 'we' in order to assert the principles one recognises and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather, necessary to make the future formation of a 'we' possible, by elaborating the question. (1991, 385)

It may well be asked whether one, as a writer, gets out of the process of identification (with readers) so easily. As Lyotard writes: 'We are in fact always under some influence or other; we have always already been told something, and we have always

write as if these divisions were mannered or modelled after each other? Or is this the same mistake a phenomenology might make in assuming too easy a passage among subjectivities: is it the strategy of the imperial, inclusive, pronoun *we*? In Merleau-Ponty's formulation of *we* as (becoming) the question and of the world as reply, community discovers us, because it is only in such an open and dialectical movement that speech is possible.

Poetry's Community

My broad aim in this book has been to approach a philosophy of words of which poetry can make use. That effort has involved wrestling with what is for poetry the paradox of consciousness – that this form of indirection in words is achieved by those who – in important ways – do know what they are doing. It is also true that, in interesting ways, poets do not know what they're about. Indirection being a key strategy in this particular language game, poetry itself was that star at which I have attempted not to look too directly.

Poetry needs a law to write against. But the *perruque* which poetry effects is only a theft from an official point of view. The *perruque* is the reclamation of something stolen from everyone by official consciousness. It can be an expression of solidarity and without implying anything other than a diversionary process (de Certeau, 1988: 27) – a process which, in the case of poetry, not only allows, but may become the law.

If justice and its law is more generally an 'art of theft', as Plato has his Homer say, the canon is the kind of theft which official consciousness and its prescriptions rely on. By the means of survival the canon enables the inscrutable intentions of one age and place to serve the unknowable desires of another. The canon is in these terms the theft which, providing us with a cultural community, makes us who we are. It becomes the repository from which are taken the everyday words, as well the avowedly literary wordings, which will

already been spoken. We are weak and the gods exist because we didn't win' (1989, 137).

alter the repository by unofficial means. The canon is the continual source of its own continuous demise: its making.

As *langue* and canon are officialising thefts, ones whose means entail automatic legitimisation, so that retrieval (of time) the worker effects by means of the *perruque* is automatically illegitimate: this is not what you are here to do, not what you are paid for. *Langue* and canon take something which is or was among the belongings of particular individuals (*parole* or *oeuvre* as the case may be) and convert these into regimes to which anyone may be subject. The *perruque* reverses this, turning the actual order of things to the ends of 'popular tactics' such as, for de Certeau, leave order 'tricked by an art' (1988: 26).

Poetry lives with the carnival of which Bakhtin writes in Rabelais, that carnival in which time itself kills the old world, gives birth to the new (1994: 224), the carnival which reminds us of the process of rebirth by means of the grotesque, the abject of the body (234). The truth of laughter, the victory of laughter: these are what Bakhtin discovers by way of carnival ambivalence (208-9). Between the semiotic and the symbolic, for Kristeva, poetry effects the practice of transgression. An affinity for the beyond of words is what poetry finds in laughter. Its community is in that survival: survival of a practice which is never the same as it was.

The exhortations of poetry, as those of fiction, of any art, are unlike those we live by, because poetry is committed to the cause of challenging every commitment. And thus its freedom haunts the future. In his poem 'A Small Country:1' Ottó Orbán writes:

I too was duped about poetry being omnipotent... We have no ocean? Let's invent one... I don't believe that poetry is a care package dropped from a helicopter among those in a bad way. The poem, like a bloodhound, is driven by its instincts after the wounded prey. But the latter will change form and essence on the run: go ahead, catch the real anguish in the act. You follow the trail of probability's interstellar Mafia, the trail of the Black Hand, who had spun a gas cloud (torn from the sun) as if it were a lottery wheel – this way inside the cloud, a massacre and a tourist path could intersect. It cajoles, with a reasonable image of the future, a passion for gambling. (1993: 59)

The carnival is unpredictable, the crowd turns on itself. The community of poetry is evanescent – lives with these risks if it lives at all. Poetry must make a community of those, who, lost between haunting and laughter, have not even a community of themselves, because it is their selves which cast the doubt in which community is ironized away. The contingency on which poetry depends and to which it paradoxically draws attention in the effort of distracting from it, is the contingency of names.

As for the question of the efficacy in general of a *metabusiness* for those who make poetry, one would be pressed to find a better answer than the one Henri Michaux offered in his *Slices of Knowledge*: ‘It is not the crocodile’s job to yell: “Watch out for the crocodile!”’ (in Rothenberg and Joris 1995: 615).

The image of the business with which I would like to leave the reader is simply this: the clumsy knot I cannot unravel is one I am content to travel, and not a knot at all. It is the möbius track, apparently two-sided, but actually singular: finite, continuous, never ending. We may say of this one-side-which-is-the-other: it is language and consciousness at stake, or it is *langue* and *parole* or it is haunting and it is laughter. Whichever abstractions suit our mood, however metaphorically or metonymically we take them, it is the irreconcilable of reason poetry’s ambivalence puts paid to.

Community is in the conversation on the way, in the fact of being on the way, in the fact of my foreignness as a traveler. The conversation is so distracting I fail to name the place where I have tripped failing to get past myself, in order to make words say, as Merleau-Ponty suggests, *more than they have ever said*. But if this is poetry’s vocation, then we acknowledge that poets were legislators all along; that, as Richard Rorty writes: ‘A sense of human history as the history of successive metaphors would let us see the poet, in the generic sense of the maker of new words, the shaper of new languages, as the vanguard of the species’ (1989: 20). Where does the vanguard of talents – individual and collective – stand in relation to the tradition enabling it? Let us return briefly to Robert Graves, for whom, you will recall, the function of poetry was the invocation of the Muse. And today? For Graves, in *The White Goddess*:

function and use remain the same; only the application has changed. This was once a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in philosophy, science and industry, and brought ruin on himself and his family. (14)

Perhaps here, in the falling action of the book, will be an opportunity to interrupt (even end) this turn in the conversation. Because this is not a job you finish. The best one can do is to walk off knowing it will find you later on. As Brecht has suggested – this unfinishedness is such as demands the work endure. So saying I invoke community in this most simple form – Let us continue the conversation!

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