John Tranter

Feints, Apparitions and Mode of Locomotion:
The Influence of Anxiety in the Poetry of John Tranter.

A paper prepared for the "Poetry and the Trace" conference under the auspices of Monash University held at the State Library of Victoria, 13 to 16 July, 2008.

Preamble

The topic of my talk today is a particular thread that runs through the poetry of John Tranter. Why choose this author? Well, I happen to know the work fairly well. Also, I have spent the last year or two working on a doctoral thesis for the University of Wollongong which — in a happy coincidence — looks at the traces of other writers' work as they emerge, fractured and distorted, in John Tranter's more experimental poetry. Two works that bracket this paper are T.S. Eliot's influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (first published in 1919), and Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, 1997.

   For decades now John Tranter has been stealing other people's poems and doing things to them: translating them, mistranslating them, rewriting them, poking them with a stick, traducing them, eviscerating them, pissing on them, and then publishing them and calling them his own. It's about time people knew what he has been up to while our backs were turned. This paper spills the beans, stirs in some chilli powder, heats them up and presents them for your enjoyment.

Most of the poems discussed are available in *Urban Myths: 210 Poems: New and Selected*, (UQP, 2006) by John Tranter. The rest are provided in this paper, and also in a PDF version available on my homepage, via <http://johntranter.com/00/trace-link.shtml>

A bad start, 1963: Stealing A.D. Hope's rhymes

When I was twenty I wrote a poem that answered A.D. Hope's poem *Australia,* using some of Hope's 28 rhymes, changing the rhyme scheme from *abba* to *abab*, using and abusing many of Hope's metaphors, and filling in the rest of the poem with my own dismissive and contemptuous words. I disagreed angrily with Hope's poem, perhaps because he was old and I was young, perhaps because he was a successful academic and I was, at that time, a failed one, but I can't remember now exactly what I was exercised about.

My poem has some of the iconoclastic flavour of the times, a good example of which is Allen Ginsberg's notorious 1959 jibe (Ginsberg 414–18) at academic poets:

> A word on Academies; poetry has been attacked by an ignorant & frightened bunch of bores who don't understand how it's made, & the trouble with these creeps is they wouldn't know Poetry if it came up and buggered them in broad daylight.

I wasn't as firm as Mr Ginsberg — no references to anal rape in *my* poem, thank you — but I could have been kinder to Alec Hope, a poet born, as I had been, in the Southern Highlands town of Cooma. Decades later, in his old age, a courteous Alec Hope kindly cooked a lovely

dinner for my wife and me — avocado vinaigrette, roast chicken,

dessert — and we shared a bottle of whisky.

Here's A.D. Hope's poem.

Australia

A Nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey
In the field uniform of modern wars,
Darkens her hills, those endless, outstretched paws
Of Sphinx demolished or stone lion worn away.

They call her a young country, but they lie:
She is the last of lands, the emptiest,
A woman beyond her change of life, a breast
Still tender but within the womb is dry.

Without songs, architecture, history:
The emotions and superstitions of younger lands,
Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
The river of her immense stupidity

Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
In them at last the ultimate men arrive
Whose boast is not: 'we live' but 'we survive',
A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state
Where second-hand Europeans pullulate
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
From the lush jungle of modem thought, to find
The Arabian desert of the human mind,
Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,

Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
Which is called civilization over there.

And here is my rather confused rejoinder:[1]

Australia Revisited

(with apologies to Professor A.D. Hope)

A nation of poets, sick green and academic black,
Concerned only with inter-faculty wars,
Darkens her Sphinx-like hills, which oft a hack
Contrives to use in worn-out metaphors.

They call her an old country, but they talk
Through their academic rectums — she is but
A woman having her periods, her walk
Bandy legg'd, a kangaroo in rut.

With top-forty songs and second-hand
Pseudo-Gothic buildings, and the coy cupidity
Of amateur poets burbling of sunburnt sand,
The swamps of her immense stupidity

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1   The poem, written circa 1963, is previously unpublished.

Flood her monotonous poets from head to feet.
In them at last the dreary men arrive
Whose cry is not "create!" but "we repeat!",
Whose verse is often less than half-alive.

And her universities, like steaming sores,
Where ageing poetasters tread the boards,
Where a second-hand professor bores
His audience, which dutifully applauds.

Yes, some like you turn timidly back to find
In the rotting jungle of traditional thought
Your little patch of desert for your mind
To safely dream away, and come to naught.

No learned doubt, your fixed preoccupation
With the Great Australian Cliché, with the Capes
And Deserts of the New Vogue affectation
Of cultured and reactionary apes.

REPLACING THE METAPHOR: 'AN ABSOLUTELY EXTRAORDINARY RECITAL'

Les Murray's poem 'An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow' has two secrets. First, it is not really about a man crying in Martin Place. Second, it is not quite as original as it looks. To take the first point first, this is what the poem is really about.[2]

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[2]   The poem is previously unpublished.

John Tranter

An Absolutely Extraordinary Recital

The word goes round Repins,
the murmur goes round Lorenzinis,
at Tattersals, men look up from their sheet of numbers,
the Stock Exchange scribblers forget the chalk in their hands
and men with bread in their pockets leave the Greek Club:
There's a fellow reciting Les Murray's poems
in Martin Plaza. They can't stop him.

The traffic in George Street is banked up for half a mile
and drained of motion. The crowds are edgy with talk
and more crowds come hurrying. Many run in the back streets
which minutes ago were busy main streets, pointing:
There's a fellow reciting Les Murray's poems
down there. No one can stop him.

The man we surround, the man no one approaches
simply recites, and does not cover it, reads aloud
not like a child, not like the wind, like a man
and does not declaim it, nor beat his breast, nor even
rhyme very emphatically — yet the dignity of his reading

holds us back from his space, the hollow he makes about him
in the midday light, in his pentagram of poetry,
and uniforms back in the crowd who tried to stop him reciting
stare out at him, and feel, with amazement, their minds
longing for the effects of Les Murray's poetry
as children for a rainbow.

Some will say, in the years to come, a halo
of force stood around him. There is no such thing.
Some will say they were shocked and would have stopped him
but they will not have been there. The fiercest manhood,
the toughest reserve, the slickest intellectual amongst us

trembles with silence, and burns with unexpected
positive judgements. Some in the concourse scream
who thought themselves satisfied with Mark O'Connor.
Only the smallest children
and such as look out of Paradise come near him
and sit at his feet, with dogs and dusty pigeons.

Ridiculous, says a man near me, and stops
his mouth with his hands, as if it uttered vomit —
and I see a woman, shining, stretch her hand
and shake as she receives the gift of Les's verse;
as many as follow her also receive it

and many weep for sheer acceptance, and more
refuse to weep for fear of all acceptance,
but the man performing Les Murray's poetry,
like the earth, requires nothing,
the man who recites ignores us, and cries out
of his writhen face and ordinary body

not words, but verse; not messages, but poetry
hard as the earth, sheer, voluminous as the sea —
and when he stops, he simply walks between us
mopping his face with the dignity of one
man who has read aloud Les Murray's wonderful poetry,

and now has finished his recital.

Evading autograph hounds, he hurries off down Pitt Street.

'An Absolutely Extraordinary Recital' is of course an interpretation of 'An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow', a poem by Les Murray (Murray 28), the ostensible subject of which — a man who weeps without apparent reason, causing onlookers to wonder why — is unique in Australian poetry. It is not unique in modern poetry, however. More than a decade before Les Murray published this poem, the Greek poet George Seferis (Giorgos Seferiadis) published a poem titled 'Narration' with an oddly similar unusual central event. Here is his poem.

Narration

That man walks along weeping
no one knows why
sometimes they think he's weeping for lost loves
like those that torture us so much
on summer beaches with the gramophones.

Other people go about their business
endless paper, children growing up, women
ageing awkwardly.
He has two eyes like poppies
like cut spring poppies
and two trickles in the corners of his eyes.

He walks along the streets, never lies down
striding small squares on the earth's back

instrument of a boundless pain
that's finally lost all significance.

Some have heard him speak
to himself as he passed by
about mirrors broken years ago
about broken forms in the mirrors
that no one can ever put together again.
Others have heard him talk about sleep
images of horror on the threshold of sleep
faces unbearable in their tenderness.

We've grown used to him; he's presentable and quiet
only that he walks along weeping continually
like willows on a riverbank you see from the train
as you wake uncomfortably some clouded dawn.

We've grown used to him; like everything else you're used to
he doesn't stand for anything
and I talk to you about him because I can't find
anything that you're not used to;
I pay my respects.

Unlike the Seferis poem[3], Les Murray's poem about a weeping man presents an optimistic quasi-religious epiphany, and is couched in quasi-religious language. It appeared in his volume *The Weatherboard Cathedral* in 1969. When it was reprinted in Alexander Craig's 1970 anthology (craig 206-7) it had the words 'Penarth, 1967' appended, which implies that the poem was written in Wales during a trip to Europe that Les Murray made in 1967. While in Britain he may have seen the newly-released 1967 American edition of Seferis's *Collected Poems 1924–1955*. The details, the verbal texture and the conclusion of Seferis's poem 'Narration' are all quite unlike those of Les Murray's poem, though the unusual central drama is interestingly similar.[4]

Translation: Staking a claim: Callimachus and others

Robert Frost said that "poetry is what gets lost in translation". On the other hand, a good translation can sometimes improve the original. Accidental harmonies and assonances and flashes of fortuitous alliteration often appear in the different language of the translated

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[3]   The theme that lies behind the Seferis poem may derive from the wars and occupations that have disfigured Europe, or the destruction of the city of Smyrna in 1922, or perhaps from the inevitability of loss and illness and death, and from the further fact that complaining about those such things becomes tedious to those who have perhaps endured enough, and don't want to know about another's suffering. In his novel *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoyevsky has his protagonist Raskolnikov complain that 'Man can get used to anything — the beast!' At the end of Seferis's poem the narrator, speaking perhaps to the reader of the poem, employs a similar concept: 'I talk to you about him because I can't find anything that you're not used to.' There is a pervasive and very European disillusionment behind the poem.

[4]   I have Edmund Keeley to thank for bringing the Seferis poem, and this similarity, to my attention.

version. Whatever kind of work gets produced, a translation always involves modification and appropriation.

In 2000 and 2001, I lived in England for six months, in Jesus College, Cambridge, as a visiting scholar. While I was there I wrote a dozen poems which were loose translations — mistranslations, really — of poems by other writers. Basically I took the gist of a poem — by Callimachus, say, a writer who lived in ancient Alexandria more than two thousand years ago — and placed the events in a contemporary setting. I also touched up the background and improved the interior decoration. Here's an epigram by Callimachus (Callimachus 166–7) , translated by A.W. Mair from the Greek, for the 1921 Loeb edition where it is numbered 44:

> The stranger had a wound and we knew it not. How painful a sigh — marked you? — he heaved, when he drank his third cup, and the roses, shedding their petals, fell from his garlands all upon the ground. He is badly burnt, by the gods, my guess is not amiss — a thief myself, I know the tracks of a thief.

In my clumsy hands the work is three times as long, and titled 'Harry's Bar', which you will find on page 222 of *Urban Myths*, along with nine other mistranslations.

Translation as Treason: 'After Rilke'

The Italians have a saying: "Traduttore traditore"... a translator is a traitor. An extreme form of translation argues, disagrees with and betrays the values embodied in the original poem.

I've occasionally suspected that the poet Rainer Maria Rilke was a bullshit artist, so when I turned my attention to his Duino Elegies it was not out of kindness. The critic Marjorie Perloff, in an article in *Jacket* magazine (number 14) on the difficulties of translation, notes the opening of his First Duino Elegy, to wit:

Wer, wenn ich schriee, hörte mich denn aus den Engel Ordnungen?
This line has been translated into English literally dozens of times, she writes, but, as William Gass points out in his recent *Reading Rilke: Reflections on the Problems of Translation*, (Gass 57-58) none of the translations seem satisfactory. Here are a few examples:

J. B. Leishman (1930) — Who, if I cried, would hear me among the angelic orders?

A. J. Poulin (1977) — And if I cried, who'd listen to me in those angelic orders?

Stephen Cohn (1989) — Who, if I cried out, would hear me — among the ranked Angels?

Gass (says Perloff) is very critical of these, but his own is (to her ear) no better:

Who if I cried, would hear me among the Dominions of Angels?

As I was typesetting Marjorie's article, I remembered reading something very similar recently. Indeed, I had typeset it. I found it in an earlier issue of *Jacket* magazine number 16, among a group of poems by Californian poet Rachel Loden. Her poem 'My Angels, Their Pink Wings' opens with these lines:

> Who, if I pitched a hissy fit, would even
> blink a powdered eyelid
> among the angelic orders? The night sky
> is indifferent and glittery with facts.

Well, if Rachel can do it, I can do it, I thought. My version of Rilke's First Duino Elegy is titled "After Rilke" (Tranter *UM* 214) and begins thus:

> I hate this place. If I were to throw a fit, who
> among the seven thousand starlets in Hollywood
> would give a flying fuck? Or suppose some tired
> studio executive, taken by my boyish beauty — no,
> I'd suffocate. Charm is only makeup-deep,
> I reckon, and staring in the mirror too long
> can give you the horrors: that thing in the glass,
> it doesn't care...

Translation: Homophonomania: Mocking Mallarmé

There is another much simpler mode of translation, though it has the disadvantage of appearing to be deeply stupid. This is so-called "homophonic translation". My poem "Desmond's Coupé" is a mainly homophonic mistranslation of Stéphane Mallarmé's 1897 poem "Un coup de dés...' ("A throw of the dice will never abolish chance...")

A homophonic translation is of course not a translation at all: you simply try to find English words that sound like the poem spoken in the original language, in this case French. So in my travesty, Mallarmé's phrase "*sous une inclinaison plane désespérément*" becomes "Susan's

inclination was plainly desperate," and so forth. Naturally this is fun, and sometimes funny, which is a bonus.

Yet as a poet you want to write a good poem, not merely nonsense. And you want to create something that does glance off or comment on the various meanings of the original. So I have taken liberties, and sometimes translated a French phrase into its genuine English equivalent; and I've sometimes added or subtracted words or phrases.

Mallarmé is often taken very seriously, as indeed he seemed to take himself, and I hope my disrespectful pie in the face of his epoch-making poem restores some human balance to his relationship with his disciples and literary descendants.

And of course dealing with the work of an important poet like Mallarmé takes us into the realm of the anxiety of influence, as Harold Bloom labelled it: the need to learn from past masters without being overwhelmed by their mastery, and the need for any artist to clear the undergrowth of history to make room for her or his own new work. That uneasy mixture of respect and aggression colours my poem, which is printed as an appendix to this paper.[5]

Before I leave this topic I should mention that the Australian poet Christopher Brennan wrote a parody of Mallarmé's poem a few weeks after 'Un coup de dés...' was published in the May 1897 issue of the Paris journal *Cosmopolis*. Brennan's poem was titled 'Musicopoemato-graphiscope', and it was published as a book by the Sydney firm of Hale

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[5]   These notes on Mallarmé's poem are based on my note published in *Rhizome* magazine.

and Iremonger in 1981. I reviewed that book in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 9 January 1982.

Another Australian poet called Christopher, Chris Edwards, has published his own homophonic version of 'Un coup de dés...'. His poem is prior to mine, and Chris encouraged me to finish my poem as a kind of friendly rival to his. His book *A Fluke,* a mistranslation of Stéphane Mallarmé's 'Un coup de dés...' with parallel French text, was first published in 2005 in a handsome edition by Monogene. 'A Fluke' also appears in *Jacket* magazine number 29.

Machine Translation: Tom Haltwarden and Joy H. Breshan

These notes are from an article I wrote in 1990 which attempts to explain the text analysis algorithms employed by the computer program Brekdown. The odd spelling is a relic of the days of DOS computers, where filenames could only be eight letters long. What follows is a very brief summary; the complete article is available on my homepage, at *johntranter.com*

'Brekdown' is a text analysis and text generation program written in Turbo Pascal for IBM-compatible personal computers, devised in 1985.[6]

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[6]   The program was created by the San Francisco programmer Neil J. Rubenking. It is based on an earlier Unix program called *Travesty* (another eight-letter title), by computer programmer Brian Hayes and literary critic the late Professor Hugh Kenner.

What does it do?

First, Brekdown requires a typed text to work on. For example, you can feed it a few pages of a sermon on brotherly love, or a set of instructions for building a kayak, or a short story written in Italian, or whatever text you wish. Brekdown scans the text and counts the frequency of letter-groups of a particular "chunk" size — this can be set form three to seven alphabetical and punctuation characters, including the spacebar. Brekdown keeps a record — in the form of an index and a frequency table — of which character occurs immediately after a particular 'chunk'. Brekdown can generate a 'reconstruction' of that text based on the probabilities of the occurence of each character after a particular group of other characters.

The 'style' of a piece of writing can be described in virtually value-free terms by the frequency table generated by Brekdown. The likelihood of a particular character following another group of characters can be seen as a function of the language's 'personality' as much as the writer's 'personality'.

Using the program nearly twenty years ago, I constructed two different texts in the 'styles' of two poets whose work I enjoy. First, I fed the machine some poetry by Matthew Arnold, then a dozen pages of John Ashbery. I tidied up and roughly lineated the resulting drafts.

The Matthew Arnold example was published as 'What Mortal End', by 'Tom Haltwarden', and the John Ashbery example as 'Her Shy Banjo' by 'Joy H.Breshan'.

Both the poem titles and the bogus authors' names are anagrams of 'Matthew Arnold' and 'John Ashbery' respectively, created by another Neil Rubenking program, 'Namegram'.

MACHINE TRANSLATION: *DIFFERENT HANDS*

I also used the Brekdown program to provide the first rough drafts for what became seven experimental prose pieces, published in 1998 in a collection titled *Different Hands*. It's difficult to explain, but Brekdown allows you to blend the styles of two different pieces of text, and can produce a fresh text with the blended characteristics of both. The piece I titled "Howling Twins", for example, blended Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" with the first fifteen pages of *The Bobbsey Twins on a Bicycle Trip;* and "Neuromancing Miss Stein" was made up from a blend of William Gibson's science-fiction novel *Neuromancer*, and Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B.Toklas*.

That particular text is analysed in a detailed and luminously intelligent way in Philip Mead's new book *Networking Language* (Mead 338–98).

MACHINE TRANSLATION: "THE MALLEY VARIATIONS"

"Ern Malley" was a hoax poet concocted in 1943 by two conservative

young Australian poets, Harold Stewart and James McAuley.[7] I was born the year Malley died; a case of what James Joyce called "metempsychosis", or the transmigration of souls, perhaps.[8] Many poets of my generation looked to Ern Malley as a patron saint of experimental verse, and found his works more interesting than the serious poetry produced by the hoaxers.[9] That hoax is analysed perceptively and at length in Philip Mead's new book *Networking Language* (Mead 87–105).

Using the Brekdown computer program I mentioned earlier, I constructed ten votive verses written in or through the 'voice' of Ern Malley, speaking in turn through the voices of other writers, in a kind of

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[7] Seventeen experimental poems in the manner of Dylan Thomas and Henry Treece were sent to Max Harris, the 22-year-old editor of *Angry Penguins* magazine, who published them all in a special issue in 1944, hailing the recently-dead young poet's genius. Public exposure of the hoax embarrassed Harris, who was further humiliated when the police in his home town of Adelaide prosecuted him for publishing Malley's 'obscene' verses. He was found guilty and fined. (You can read the entire 70-page transcript of that trial on the APRIL site: *april.edu.au*)

[8] As Maria Tymoczko points out in *The Irish Ulysses*: "Metempsychosis, the word that reverberates through *Ulysses* like the thunderclap in *Finnegans Wake*, refers not only to the rebirth of Ulysses, Penelope, and Telemachus but also to the rebirth of Ireland's avatars from The Book of Invasions: in *Ulysses* the types of Hebraic Milesian, Greek Tuatha De, and Spanish female reappear in contemporary Dublin. The motif of metempsychosis permits Joyce's characters to represent simultaneously characters from the *Odyssey*, *The Book of Invasions*, *Hamlet*, and the other mythic schemes that Joyce has used partially or wholly in *Ulysses*; Bloom is at once Ulysses, Milesian, the Wandering Jew, and Hamlet's father. In the repertory of mythic elements that Joyce uses in *Ulysses*, metempsychosis is in fact the mainspring; it coordinates and drives all the mythic systems of the book (Tymoczko 44).

[9] The public have agreed: Ern Malley's *oeuvre* has been widely discussed and has remained in print in several different editions in the six decades since his death, while the poems of Stewart and McAuley are hard to find, and are now neglected by the young.

double ventriloquy. I called the sequence of ten poems "The Malley Variations", and they include:

'Flying High', Ern Malley and Captain W.E. Johns, *Biggles Defies the Swastika*.

'The Urn of Loneliness', Ern Malley and Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness*.

'Smaller Women', Ern Malley and Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*.

'Under Tuscan Skies', Ern Malley and E.M. Forster, *Room With a View*.

All the ten "Malley Variations" can be found in *Urban Myths* (pp. 276–292).

Machine Translation: Listening to Mr Ashbery

And now for something entirely different. I am currently writing a book of poems as part of the doctoral thesis I mentioned earlier. Part of that typescript is a group or sequence of poems titled 'Electrical Disturbance: A dramatic interlude'. The sequence is laid out like a script for a radio play or feature for two voices. That's a form that I am familiar with from my years as a radio play and features producer for the Australian Broadcasting Commission.[10]

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[10] In the 1970s Tranter produced (that is, edited and directed) some forty radio plays and features for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (it is now called a Corporation) as well as writing some original plays; in the 1980s he acted as executive producer of the national arts program *Radio Helicon* for two years, commissioning, supervising or producing over one hundred two-hour programs.

This text is based on parts of a radio program in which John Ashbery read some of his poems and spoke with John Tranter. The program was produced by me and broadcast on the ABC's 'Radio Helicon' program in 1988.

Fast-forward two decades: an audio recording of the radio program was audited and translated by the Microsoft Windows speech-to-text function (as best it could, given that it had been trained to recognise an Australian, not an American, accent) and extensively rewritten by me over the next year or two. The are two speaking parts, 'A' and 'B'. They do not have a one-to-one connection with the original vocal texts; the speech divisions occur more or less at random. More or less. The title comes from an early line of John Ashbery's from his book *Some Trees*: 'My child, I love any vast electrical disturbance.' (Ashbery 20)

The entire text is available as an appendix to this paper.

MACHINE TRANSLATION: SPEAKING FRENCH

Also part of my current thesis is a group or sequence of thirty-three poems derived from Arthur Rimbaud's 'Illuminations', a group of 47 prose-poems which were not published during Rimbaud's lifetime. The process was loosely similar to that of 'Electrical Disturbance...', but with an important difference. My motto: You can always take things just a little further.

In this case, Rimbaud's prose-poems were read into the microphone by me, in French. Now the computer's speech-recognition program had

not been trained in French; that is, its dictionary consisted of only English words. Nonetheless it made valiant attempts to 'make sense' of the Australian-accented French it was given. And indeed some of the lines that resulted are quite reasonable: who could argue with the statement 'No one wants an incontinent hostage'?

Here is one of the poems:

Hôtel de Ville

The kids should visit a history museum
in their senior year, to understand disgrace as
one form of Clinton's victory. On the other hand
the European Community foreign debt gives
everybody bad dreams. So we do need to solve
the problem of students reading difficult things
that will lead them astray: why did Rimbaud
turn from socialism to capitalism? As if

it matters. We'd be delighted to have his uniform.
The name from the dish multiplies twenty black men.
We want to see all the modern art stuff, too.
Thank you. Press the button marked 'monument'
and see what happens: a recorded voice says
'I have wasted my life', and we pay to listen.

Trimming the fat: *Five Quartets*

Four Quartets, a group of four related poems by T.S. Eliot, was published in book form in 1942.1 Their titles are 'Burnt Norton', 'East Coker', 'The Dry Salvages', and 'Little Gidding'. Apparently Eliot

considered *Four Quartets* to be his masterpiece, which gives you some idea how important an editor — or the absence of an editor — can be. Valerie Eliot notes that in January 1922 Eliot 'returned to London, after spending a few days in Paris, where he submitted the manuscript of 'The Waste Land' to Pound's maieutic skill.' (Facsimile Introduction xxii) Ezra Pound had admired the poem, but edited the manuscript ruthlessly. At one point T.S. Eliot had meant to title the first part of the poem 'He Do the Police in Different Voices', a thought that didn't survive into the printed version. (Facsimile 4) Where Eliot had written on page 3 of the typescript 'And perhaps a weekend at the Metropole', Pound scrawled in the margin 'dam per'apsez' (31), and where Eliot had written on page 4 'Perhaps his inclinations touch the stage', Pound had admonished him thus: 'Perhaps be damned'. (45) But alas, Pound was not in England in the 1930s to rescue 'Four Quartets'. Here's the beginning of Eliot's poem sequence:

BURNT NORTON (No. 1 of 'Four Quartets')

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.
> What might have been is an abstraction
> Remaining a perpetual possibility
> Only in a world of speculation.
> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present …

I had the feeling that *Four Quartets* was far too overgrown — at nearly a thousand lines — and much too stodgy, and set about fixing both those deficiencies, as best I could, by pruning the poem severely. In my version — titled *Five Quartets* — the poem runs to 75 lines, and is printed as an appendix to this paper.

TRIMMING THE FAT: *THE TEMPEST* AND *BLACKOUT*

I had always wanted to "do something" with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. My first brush with it was not as a stage play, but as science-fiction, when I was thirteen: the 1956 movie *Forbidden Planet* was loosely based on *The Tempest* — it starred Leslie Neilsen as a spaceship captain with a helmet of beautifully Brylcreemed hair, Robbie The Robot, and others — all mixed in with a good dose of Sigmund Freud, and a lot of business with ray guns and invisible monsters from the Id.

Eventually I borrowed — all right, eventually I stole an idea from the New York poet Ted Berrigan. He had bought a second-hand western novel (western as in cowboy) and, using the typewriter eraser "White-Out", had obliterated most of the words, leaving a strange and

fragmented narrative he called *Clear the Range*.[11] Using a computer, I did the same to *The Tempest*, and called mine *Blackout*.

The quaint diction made *Blackout* feel a little odd, so I added fragments from two more contemporary pieces of fiction: a chapter from Tom Wolfe's "The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test", and the article "Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream" by Joan Didion. *Blackout* as it now stands consists of *The Tempest* and those other two texts, with most of the words removed, and the remaining words and phrases interleaved, though in the same order as they appear in the original texts. A selection from *Blackout* appears in *Urban Myths* (pp. 180–85)

Acrostics and Double Acrostics

Poetry and acrostics seem a good fit: Lewis Carrol addressed a number of acrostic occasional verses to the young girls of his acquaintance, and Gwen Harwood's wicked acrostic poem published in the Sydney weekly the *Bulletin* decades ago is notorious in Australia.

Of course, part of the pleasure in writing an acrostic poem is the knowledge that hardly any readers of the poem will notice the message

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[11] Kit Robinson mentions this novel in a post to listserv.buffalo.edu: "Don't forget *Clear the Range*, a western novel by Ted Berrigan, written using the cross-out method on a dime paperback. It's hilarious, stately, and strange." 29 March 1995, at <http://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?2=POETICS;T5aIKA;19950329085219-0800>. Later (8 June 1999) Bob Perelman also on listserv.buffalo.edu mentions it: "I can't remember if Ted Berrigan's white-out novel, *Clear the Range*, has been mentioned. It's a pure example of finding a text inside another." <http://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind9906&L=poetics&D=0&P=72911>

concealed within it. This is of course a simple-minded pleasure, and a simple acrostic is not that difficult to construct.

I was asked to write a poem for a booklet of poems to be presented at the 2000 Cambridge Conference of Contemporary Poetry (Cambridge U.K.) by its editor, Drew Milne. He had asked for a love lyric for the poet Mina Loy, so I took that as my starting point, and adopted the pen-name "Ethel Malley" for the exercise. Here's the poem:

Poem beginning with a phrase from Horace Horsecollar (on Mina Loy)

Eheu fugaces, sad to think how
Ecstatic angel can decline to wretch —
Neither mad nor bad, yes nor no,
Yet dangerous to know: how Patterson's
"Map of Tasmania"

Ever beckons the navigator is the nub
And lever of love and mania.
Now dick's declension from hopeful to wretched
Is Richard's ratchet's angle of dwell.
Ever hungry, never sated, I

Muse on the message the Muse has set
Into love's Pavlova — Miss Piggy's treat.
Now bring home the bacon, lard it well
And ponder Percy's porcine
Lucubrations, trace of my nib:

Oh how I love – alas, fleeting! – love you – O,

You wise and wicked little boy.

There are other things in this odd poem apart from acrostics: the pun on the name of the Roman poet Horace (Horace Horsecollar,[12] for those younger than I, was a cartoon character from the 1930s, a horse, friend of Clarabelle Cow, as I recall), Horace of course being the author of the lament "eheu fugaces" ("Alas, Fleeting", in its English translation). Then there's the mention of Sir Les Patterson's metaphor for the female pudenda: "Map of Tasmania", and so forth.

But the acrostics: the first letter of each line spells "Eeny Meanie Mina Loy", and the last letter of each line spells "Who's a bad little boy?" Getting that to rhyme was the fun part.

Equal on the fun scale was a poem I wrote recently as part of my doctoral thesis already mentioned, also involving a double acrostic. A little less fun, perhaps, because it was much harder, because much longer, and it involved the French philosopher Jacques Lacan.

I have always liked Hitchcock's movie *Vertigo*. One of my two poems about that movie is titled "Girl in Water".The similarity of a mirror image to a portrait painting plays a vital role in the film, and betrays the heroine's (that is, Kim Novak's) secret double life; indeed the plot

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[12] Horace Horsecollar was created by Ub Iwerks and Walt Disney. Horace first appeared as Mickey's plough horse in the cartoon *The Plow Boy* in 1929. He next appeared later that same year, in *The Jazz Fool*, and after that he became a regular member of the Disney supporting cast, along with Clarabelle Cow, Clara Cluck and others even more minor. Characterized as a cheerful know-it-all, Horace helped Mickey on his sleuthing expeditions in the comics before Goofy was created.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Horsecollar>

of the film is doubled: the main story happens twice: the first time as tragedy, the second time as tragedy.

In my double acrostic, one message mirrors the other. That's Lacan for you: mirrors everywhere. I won't read from it here: it is simply too weird, and too long. It appears in *Urban Myths* (pp. 315–6).

Terminals

The US poet, editor and critic Brian Henry has studied and summarised a technique I have often used; as I confessed earlier, the habit began forty-five years ago, in 1963, when I stole some of Alec Hope's rhymes. Not all poets rhyme.[13] In the case of poets who incline to blank verse, or free verse (which is blank verse without metre) I steal the last word or two of each line, and call the process "terminals".

I introduced John Ashbery's reading at the University of Sydney in September 1992[14]. One of the poems he read was the double sestina from his book *Flow Chart*. In his preamble to the poem he confessed — admitted — stated — that his double sestina uses the end-words of another double sestina, that of Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Complaint of Lisa" (1870). Sestinas are of course based on a string of repeated and rearranged end-words, not on rhyme or on any particular

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[13] You can't blame them: Milton called the process "The troublesome and modern bondage of Rhyming," and went on to say that rhyme was "no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre." ("The Verse." Milton, Preface to *Paradise Lost*, 1668.)

[14] The reading was held at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday 16 September 1992 in Room N395, Woolley Building , University of Sydney. The poet David Brooks was co-host.

metrical shape. Extend the idea to other kinds of poems — you can always take things just a little further — and you have the "terminal".

I have written nearly a dozen poems in this mode, stealing end-words from Matthew Arnold, W.H. Auden, Barbara Guest, John Keats, Frank O'Hara, Banjo Paterson and others. Brian Henry says, *inter alia:*

> With the sestina as a model, John Tranter has created a new form similar to the sestina but far more flexible in its emphasis on end-words: the terminal. Taking only the line endings from previously published poems, the terminal can be any length, and the number of terminals possible in the English language is limited only by the number of poems in the English language. The form has infinite potential. Unrestricted to 39 lines as in the sestina, not limited to 14 or 19 rhyming lines as with the sonnet and the villanelle, not expected to repeat itself like the pantoum and the villanelle, and not tethered to any rhyme scheme or syllable count like the ballad, terza rima, heroic couplet, alexandrine, sapphics, or ottava rima, the terminal as a poetic form is vastly open to possibility. [....] the terminal raises various issues about poetic form, conservation, usurpation, influence, and composition that no other form can raise. Because Tranter overwrites — and in the process simultaneously effaces and preserves — his source poem while retaining the anchoring points of the source poem, his terminals are both conservative and destructive.

I lack the time to read out all of Brian Henry's excellent paper, but I have attached it as an appendix to this paper.

Replacing the Chicken in the Sandwich: The Anaglyph

A year or two ago the magazine *The Modern Review*, based in Toronto, Canada, sent me a request: "We are attempting," they wrote, "to

assemble a group of critically interested writers / [and] readers to respond to John Ashbery's poem 'Clepsydra', by means of a critical essay, poem, personal response, etc. The author is in complete control of response type, content, and length."

Now John Ashbery's poem "Clepsydra" is a very strange poem. It's title is unusual — a *clepsydra* ('water-stealer') is a kind of water-driven clock used by the ancient Greeks[15] — and the poem's method is odd, too. It is also very long: 253 lines long, to be precise: nearly a dozen pages. It was written in 1965 and first collected in book form in the 1977 volume *Rivers and Mountains*. After wrestling with it for a while, I felt that it needed demolishing and rebuilding, and — with Mr Ashbery's permission — that is what I did.

I took the last word of two of each line from "Clepsydra", as with my earlier experiments with "terminals", and also the first word or two from each line. Thus each line of my reworked poem had its beginning and ending given to me; my task was to replace the meat in the sandwich, as it were: to turn a cold chicken salad sandwich into a hot pastrami and pickle sandwich. So my poem is a reinvented, perhaps flawed, or perhaps improved, version of that master poem, which is here reduced to the status of mere ancestor, model, maquette, or template.

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[15] An ancient device for measuring time by the regulated flow of water or mercury through a small aperture. [1640–50; < L < Gk klepsýdra, equiv. to kleps- (klep-, s. of kléptein to steal, conceal + -s- formative in derivation) + hydra, deriv. of hýdr water] *Random House Webster's Unabridged Electronic Dictionary*, 1996.

My poem — titled "The Anaglyph" — is partly about its own process — that is, the deconstructing and reconstructing of a poem, and it is also about my relationship as a developing poet with John Ashbery as a person (we have been friends for more than twenty years) and with his poetry, which is a different matter.

The word 'blazon' gives us a clue to one of the poem's effects ('Deep within its complex innards a purple jewel / Exists as a blazon, rotating slowly...). In the essay on John Ashbery in his remarkable study of forty-one US poets *Alone With America*, Richard Howard points out that Ashbery often buries a small 'blazon' in his poems, and quotes André Gide: 'I like discovering in a work of art... transposed to the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work... Thus in certain paintings... a tiny dark convex mirror reflects the interior of the room where the scene painted occurs... the comparison with that method in heraldry which consists of putting a second blazon in the center of the first, e*n abyme.*' (pp.19–20) That is, inside the poem is a reduced diagram of the poem itself, 'a tiny mirror for the plot, or maybe narrative', as Tranter says, referring to just this device, in his 1976 poem 'The Alphabet Murders'. Can that really be thirty-two years ago? The buried presence of Ashbery's poem — that is, the line-beginnings and line-endings from it — haunts "The Anaglyph" as a kind of fragmented and half-buried blazon.

The title of the poem itself, "The Anaglyph", is embodied in some of the poem's "business", for example in the line "their left and right perceptual fields, red and green'. This hints at the anaglyph's

dependence on binocular vision. An *anaglyph* is an image usually drawn or printed in red and bluish-green ink that, when viewed through spectacles containing one bluish-green lens and one red lens, presents a three-dimensional image. As such, an anaglyph is a binary image consisting of two superimposed and differently-coloured views of the same scene. Each version of the scene is perceived from a slightly different viewpoint.

"The Anaglyph" is printed as an appendix to this paper.

APPENDIX 1: DESMOND'S COUPÉ

Desmond's coupé is full of jam. He's in a quandary:
a bean lance, or a dance of circumstances.
He's eternally fond of his own naivety.
A swanky beam spells out a white
cranky tale.

Susan's inclination was
plainly desperate.

An ailment common in Siena
makes him think he's dead and buried
or makes him realise he's a bad dresser
on a plane, or in jail, but you don't dress for jail
and people don't wear a jacket on a plane any more.
Raise the bonds.

His three résumes — swallowed — he's just
a shadow of his former self — fooey! — a deep violet colour,
or an alternative he'll just have to adapt to
by the verge of the road.

Deep beans: his aunt has a rooster.
She's getting battier every year,
a fish in one hand, a peach in the other.

The Master of Surges,
or so we infer.

In the flames we see the communist menace —

uniquely, they've got the numbers, no?
But they hesitate when the corpse waves its arms.
Pluto (not Mickey) wants to play,
oh, what a nut! Chained
at the party, a name for the horse floats,
an old horse works it out,
tapping his hoof on the floor, good trick,
but then forgetting how old he is
behind the jade barrier.

These pedals take you to an agreeable horizon,
well prepared.

You old git, free meals,
a bad smell on the dratted train —
now he's heading for the air vents
in another carriage —
that's the spirit — actually, a jet plane
would be quite a temptation.
You could re-employ a division of passing firemen.

The secret item on the menu,
the chef's envy, even now
is cooling on the barbecue, or so you surmise.

Look straight at the homosexual:
nerveless, not very important, yet vain,
an old Hoover in his hand.

Potato crisps
are found in the deli, useless for a téte-â-tète.

He takes a disprin and feels legless, then he
has another one, then he feels
ambiguous. His ulterior plans

and unforgettably demonic.
He feels nothing
for the empty countries, Alaska, let's say,
home of the Inuit. This old idiot
had a chance to meet The Supremes, probably —
say, Louie, your son is some puerile hombre,
caressing a policeman and renting out a lavatory,
eating soup and getting vaguer —
a soup full of hard bones,
now he enters the aisle, bending his knee
like a bat flapping into the sea.
The old tenant reads Lowell ['s poem] against the sea,
a chance to ooze poetry —
financially speaking, that is — no, don't —
a voile handkerchief is an illusion
as antsy as having a phantom for a guest
in the chancellery
but that won't abolish folly
like this insinuating silence
or Dan's squelchy high-voltage approach —
he's simply rolling around and laughing ironically.
Ooo! — A mystery!
A precipice!
Frank Hurley!
A billion turbots! Laughter and horror
with the author Jimmy Guiffre (on guitar),
but no junkies, please,
no fur,

and that old berk verging on the index
like so, a lonely puff of smoke at Purdue —

so far, so good,

where recounting the effluent is the talk of the minute,
and it immobilises you.

A chiffon and velour coffee-coloured sombrero
for this stiff old white man
is derisory, an opposition horse seal,
rather tropical, the sombrero, quite unmarked,
exhumed, quite conkers,
the American prince who loves the cool,
he gives a little heroic cough.

Irresistible maize container!

Par for the course, but a pretty feeble reason to be acting virile
and like a foodie, maybe the ulcers explain his puberty
or mute his loose and bossy vinaigrette
(invisible from the front)
sparkling with umbrage,
with the stature of a shadowy filet mignon
and with the torsion of a siren
impatient at squeamish ultimatums.
A rare, yes, and vertiginous debut.

Time to snaffle
a bifurcated soufflé,
thinks the old bird.

His manner is rather false.
All up, with a toilet next to the bedroom,
evaporated brooms
impose an unborn infinite state
issuing from the stars — *que sera, sera* —
a pyre doesn't disadvantage the minors,
they're indifferent to the mutants,
that is, to the number of mutants that exist
apart from those agonising, sparse
hallucinations of mutants which start when they stop
and never seem to close, apparently, with an infant.

The park elk and his profusion of expandable rarities —
see, then the chief rat is ill —
evidence that the Battle of the Somme, for one of us at least
was a poor thing, though somehow illuminating
and written up in Hansard.

Choose a pen.

A left-hand drive car with a rhythmic suspension
that levels itself, an ox and some original scum,
no more wars, a delirious sound and just one crime
fleeing without identifying Jimmy Guiffre's true neutrality.

Rein in a memorable crisis
as you see fit.
Your venomous accomplice can view the results: nothing!
Nothing human, that is.

In lieu of an aura of elevation,
the absence of ordinary verse.

In the loo, an inferior kind of clap
is likely to disperse and conquer
those who act in a poor video.
Abruptly key the synonym.

Parson, men's songs are fond of perdition.

A dance, in the garage full of vague parables,
and which reality is dissolved?
Except where the altitude peters out
and an Aussie's loins are right on.

A few swans, a vector dealer and
a horse of interest —
and a quantity of signals in general sell on,
tell obliquities, part Elle's declivities —
the furs, poems, see what theatre
a septuagenarian from the far north of Australia
see in the stars — freezing, oblique and full of suet —
pass the aunt —
a killer from Noumea —
and this vacant surface is superior
to any successive hurt.

Side-rail was meant —
done, counted, totalled information
and a veiled ant, doubts, the rolls…

brilliantly meditating before the ratter
whose pointed bum is sacred —
and all the pensioners met Des and his coupé.

Appendix 2: Electrical Disturbance: A dramatic interlude

> Two voices:
> A: a literary scholar.
> B: a company director taking on the guise of a naïve young man.

A: A poem, titled 'Oxymorons'.

Outsourcing ruins the parties concerned with language.
They are employing level parking. You are one
who pretended to go at it this year.
You listen to other opponents, said the committee,
it wants to be yours and cannot be on the supporting level —
is there — are there other things for us?
To throw them into play, play — well actually, years —
but I considered playing hookey in Perot's third innings
when he was trying to read a recent edition of Greek poems.
That is one of the stains — without parole, open-ended.
And before you know it, it has lots of the things that are
       typewriters.
And he played it once more, I think... but only for two years.
Going into a new level — a different attitude —
it means roughly — it guarantees that you are his — you ...

We feel as if we truly believe the required stuff,
suggesting that it will offer a train,
it comes during the reading of the jury list
with a box on its tracks, now they eliminate the table
and encourage the water pilot and his destiny,
supporting charities — such noise
that it was warm and fuzzy
(if you're in your hair) and

they're risking a relative amount.

Playing ring-a-rosy and once again
they have said their share, a lasting example
of the world history of humans.
They are not a singular authority,
and the worker lives in poverty and reflects.

Units are an old man in a blue shirt,
selling paint cans for a living. So
in the evening everything should show
that you can find a way to use it.

B: A poem, titled 'What Works'.

One — I want to use what was wrong
and why I did the work of the house
where you first turned up for a day of work
on actual papers, was for reasons of summer.

Two — So far so good as New Delhi,
and we think there has been, in the lives of people
who are very common, a way or a growth of 21,
or maybe many more below the jury,
which will bring the way he rose from one end
of the worst case of each of the notes and stripes,
strange days indeed.

Three — he returns. Our lives seem more thorough
and lower, as a woman might seem.
Blazing blocks from the literature maven,

on his way into our Senior Center this evening,
and a list of rules for the future of the home
where his current visit is to our children:

what was wrong is in line with his words,
and he's here. What is a story of a growing boy:
what are you guys? Do you know what has changed
his or her choice, and released documents?
And only the light of what works, works. It works.

A: A poem, titled 'Some Trees'.

How to use these — are you
holding a joint letter?

As those things were still,
he performs, arranging a chance

to win his party's
morning and world instantly.

I recently met with these guys to try to
close down what we had barely been doing...

something that can be hard for exploring.
We did not live in an instant, as we're surrounded

by the silence, or a few hours silence a day,
and I was looking for his chorus of smiles.

Please have only one thing: parties, restaurants
and hotels of their own.

The Interview. Part One.

B: The Interview, part one. Can you
tell me about the 'scrimmage'?

A: In reading that the publisher is 28, and
expects to be a woman, he got ready a new
line of scrimmage that had been used
for the annual series of younger poets.
The first ones were in hand with the new cars.
That's all.

B: Now, to press the church of Saint Louis Blues:
one of the new rules for the event was
that one of the press would warn everybody
when he returned. Why?

A: The error rate was higher, and the defendants
were protesting that the U.S. Is the worst of all.
The code breaker of the jury is this year's fever.

B: But the East River — sorry, the year's fever —
that has been over for a year.

A: The firm was very large, as well as
the shame when it had to lose. That was large too.

B: What a year.

A: Well, the Server is a painting where I live in the mirror.

They have been the source for the bears and the lender,
who owns the line from the original range.

B: He is one of the U.N. And NATO people. Right?

A: I don't have any idea.

B: Okay. Would you like to meet some new friends?

A: Well, no. For those who are very easy,
who have a certain sense of publication,
I already have friends.

B: This is the feedback to the heart of everything.
Now, what about this 'error'?

A: I'm looking for violence, that is the error.
And a lot of parents are large and very annoying.

B: What about those so-called 'French Fires'?

A: After the old days of riots, all of the fires were over.

B: Not Fires, Fries. And who — where —

A: Four teenage girls. One of the stores was in Paris.

B: Paris?

A: His home in the water — we were stationed there.

B (looking behind him, voice muffled): The Seine?

The report... Maybe there is no such report.

A: You have a right to finish a long way off.
This is the year two women who are used
for the current issue, who are to review the data,
are eventually to write the report together.

B: I should have mentioned that there's a curfew
on the free-threaded analytic use of terms
which only satisfy a few people.

A: Do you mean a kind of censorship?
But the anger over yours truly...
it says in the book, and CVS violence...
(looking around): Why am I here?

B: You are available, you are the only person
along the lines of the overview of the animal,
and more powerful than ever... Now,
who was uncertain about two counts of rape?

A: The French conversation last month
was given an aggressive expansion. When
the infected meet with a long-term convalescence...

B: Really, before anything else, you should
address yourself to that end —

A: Okay, okay. A poem, 'Thoughts of a young girl'.

The second half of their hard work

came, live, to the shores of their violence;
that was the scope of the year, and

running back to the world in which you could hardly,
an hour ago, sign the bills. Are you
still waiting for the show's conclusion?

Most of the early lead roles are taken.
A dollar buys (or reserves) your livelihood.
We wait for your presence to show the way.

B: A poem, titled 'Last month'.

No change of support, only stasis.
Glad the great hero is alive and well.

Things have their own way in record time.
Black people used to resolve large receipts slowly,

and I am sure something is opening its doors
and willing to sell its earnings and dollars.

H. Lawrence Powell and I would open the doors
when we visited, he has one of the properties,

it has its own level. It is your own house in the year
of the solar wind, and this is the power of the book.

More of the Interview:

A: Preheat the oven, and the garden grove is ours.

B (mid-sentence): ... the interview, more of it.
If the market share falls away
from July onwards, at least
the paper has a review — The *San Francisco* —

A (butting in): There are some of my own flaws —

B: Claws? Flaws? The road runner?

A: Steady on. The higher the level of the opening,
the more you hurry, and the life of leisure users —
say about the past four years — it's a long
line of human sexuality. One, the first error,
then a power failure for what's left of the year.

B: Hmmm... Flaws become 'errors'. Three years,
filling out the history of the human heart.

A: History?

B: The one you're with has a history, you didn't know that?

A (calmly): Yes. (confused): Uh, no. Most of the time
I want to encourage a million hits.
The error you would have is a file on the arts,
corrupt —

B: It is where you have the power.
You must serve part of the first year.

A: Corrupt data, I mean. The report. Fine.
The more heard, the less gathered.

B (looking for a piece of paper): There is one more line...
about a college graduate you are trying to teach —
William eventually took up a lot of time, right? —
... reading the letter of your life... uh... forget it.
(laughs) Boy, the way you guys
were able to use these discoveries!

A: Well, however long the road, anyone can walk it.
The Berkeley Renaissance was really very much
a large American way of anger.

B: Berkeley? Really?

A (annoyed): Mortgages were foreclosed on a million homes!
The heavy use of work in the nation, Bertha
had some ideas about that —

B: You and Bertha, are you starting —

A (interrupting): We're not really starting anything.
The Federal forms of their injuries
have originally been worth 800 dollars per person.

B: There was no other way of reading it?

A: Whose side are you on? The proliferation
of the green arms of interaction
has various uses: the ones you used
for being a mother, and the one you used

to get your free meals.

B: A mother? Hmmm, I think you're right —

A: Sure... about fifty per cent of the road.

Appendix 3: Five Quartets

1

All might have been speculation.
What might have been opened?
I do not inhabit the garden.
There they were dignified, invisible,
over the dead bird, in response to
the flowers that are our guests,
in the drained pool.
Dry water, bird children,
garlic and mud in the blood
dance along the sodden floor.
Below, the practical *Erhebung* without
elimination, its partial ecstasy,
its horror. Yet the body cannot
allow a little dim light: neither
rotation nor strained fancies
with no men. Bits of wind in unwholesome
eructation, the torpid gloomy hills of Putney,
twittering into inoperancy and the other.
Abstention from its metalled bell
carries the cling wing.

2

Words move the Chinese violin, while
the words between the foliage
waste a factory, or a by-pass.
There is a time for the wind to break

and to shake the field-mouse with a silent motto.

You lean against a van
and the deep village, the sultry dahlias,
wait for the early pipe.

3

And the little man and woman
round and round the fire
leaping through the laughter
lifting the milking and the coupling
of man and woman of dung and wrinkles.
I am here in heat, and writhing high
into grey roses filled with thunder.
The rolling cars weep and hunt the ice.
That was not very worn-out.
Poetical fashion, wrestle with poetry.
Calm and wisdom deceived us, the dead secrets
into which they turned their every moment
and shocking monsters, fancy old men,
can hope to acquire houses under the Stock Exchange.

4

The Directory of cold lost the funeral.
I said to the dark, the lights are hollow,
with a bold rolled train in the tube
and the conversation fades into the mental ether,
the mind is in the garden, pointing and repeating
'There is no ecstasy!' The wounded steel,
the fever chart, is the disease,

the dying nurse our hospital.
The millionaire ascends from feet to mental wires.
I must quake in our only drink, blood.

Trying to use a failure, because one has
shabby equipment in the mess of emotion,
and to conquer men, is no competition.
Home is older, stranger, intense.
But the old lamplight is nearly here,
with the explorers.

5

I think that the patient is forgotten.
Men choose the machine, but the nursery bedroom
in the winter gaslight is within us,
also, the algae and the dead men.
The sea has the water,
the groaner and the women.

Where is there an end of it?

Where is the end of the wastage?
We have to think of them,
while the money is ineffable:

we appreciate the agony of others,
covered by dead negroes.

Appendix 4: Brian Henry: John Tranter's New Form(alism): The Terminal

First published as Brian Henry: 'John Tranter 's New Form(alism): The Terminal', *Antipodes*, June 2004, pp 36-43. I should like to thank Brian Henry for granting permission to reprint this article. In this version it has the footnotes which, in its original appearance in *Antipodes,* it lacked.

I. The Terminal: Its Predecessors and Position

Although all traditional poetic forms rely to some extent on the final words of each line — most often for rhyme and/or repetition — the sestina is the poetic form most often associated with end-words. With forms like the sonnet, pantoum, villanelle, and ghazal, the end-words themselves are less important than how they contribute to the form. A poet writing a traditional sonnet can choose any number of rhyming words to end the lines; the end-rhymes matter more to the form than the end-words do. A poet writing a villanelle or a pantoum must repeat entire lines, not just end-words, and the end-words contribute mainly to the structure and rhyme scheme of the villanelle or pantoum. A poet writing a ghazal must choose not only a word that will end every other couplet (the *radif*) but also words that rhyme (the *qafia*) to immediately precede the repeated word. Therefore, sonnets are associated with an array of rhyme schemes (and 14 lines), villanelles and pantoums are associated with repeated lines and specific stanzaic

structures, and ghazals are associated with their end units (the *qafia* and *radif*) and the couplet. Because the vast majority of sestinas written in the past few decades have abandoned rhyme and iambic pentameter, a poet writing a sestina today does not need to consider rhyme schemes or metrics; and the form itself does not require internal rhymes or repeated lines. The end-words themselves — and the order in which they appear — matter the most.

With the sestina as a model, John Tranter has created the terminal — a new form similar to, but far more flexible than, the sestina in its emphasis on end-words. Taking only the line endings from previously published poems, the terminal can be any length, and the number of terminals possible in the English language is limited only by the number of poems in the English language. The form has infinite potential. Unrestricted to 39 lines as in the sestina,[16] not limited to 14 or 19 rhyming lines as with the sonnet and the villanelle, not expected to repeat itself like the pantoum and the villanelle, and not tethered to any rhyme scheme or syllable count like the ballad, terza rima, heroic couplet, alexandrine, sapphics, or ottava rima, the terminal as a poetic form is vastly open to possibility. But because the existence of a terminal depends on a prior poem, it has the ultimate limit: the single poem. Thus, the terminal raises various issues about poetic form, conservation, usurpation, influence, and composition that no other form can raise.

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[16]   Or 65 lines like the canzone, the more restrictive cousin of the sestina. The canzone is also far less common than the sestina.

Because Tranter overwrites — and in the process simultaneously effaces and preserves — his source poem while retaining the anchoring points of the source poem, his terminals are both conservative and destructive. By using and acknowledging the original (he never tries to conceal his sources), Tranter performs an act of poetic conservation, calling contemporary readers' attention to a poem he considers worth reading while also encouraging comparative readings.[17] But by replacing almost every word in the original — with the exception of the last word of each line — with his own, he destroys the original poem, jettisoning its meaning, diction, emotional effects, historical context, and atmosphere, even if he tries to pay homage to the original by following or updating it.[18] No poetic forms contain such potential, and because Tranter now has published ten terminals — eight of them in his 2003 volume *Studio Moon* — it has emerged as a viable form that deserves further examination.

Australian critic Martin Duwell has argued that Tranter's generative forms — which include, but are not limited to, the terminal — are

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[17] Indeed, the terminal invites comparative readings more than any other poetic form does. While Tranter's terminals are notable as individual, distinct poems, their reliance on and use of other poems creates a new potential for reading. Although one could read a terminal without knowing or reading the original poem, knowing the original allows a reader to see another — in fact, a central — dimension of the terminal: what it is built (and builds) on. That the terminal can respond to, contradict, imitate, parody, or do its best to ignore the source poem is another indication of its flexibility as a form.

[18] While this aspect of the form might seem to support the view of language as infinitely unstable — each word replaceable by another word — and undermine the notion of singularity as it pertains to the Poem, Tranter's retention of the end-words for his terminals indicates an essential aspect of the original that is ineradicable, no matter how far his uses of the end-words stray from the original. The terminal could be viewed as a palimpsest that covers most but, importantly, not all of the original.

meant as stays against confusion: "it is hard to avoid the conclusion that there is a connection between this poetry's obsession with its own processes of generation and its entropic setting."[19] This kind of statement is commonly made about contemporary poems in traditional form when the poet is not considered a traditionalist. In an attempt to reconcile postmodernism with poetic tradition, critics frequently view poets who engage with traditional forms — especially poets otherwise considered innovative or experimental — as responding to the chaos of twentieth-century life. Such thinking neglects to account for why traditionally minded poets — i.e., those who detest, distrust, or ignore the technical advances of modernism and postmodernism — write in form. It also contradicts the common critical view of postmodern prose writers who have exploded rather than refined the novel form, apparently for the same reason postmodern poets work with traditional forms: to establish bulwarks against chaos. This view is as limited and reductive as it is pervasive, and is seldom advanced by poets themselves. While Duwell perpetuates this kind of thinking, he can hardly be blamed for doing so, considering that this observation, which has become a critical truism, occurs in a brief book review — not exactly the forum for an in-depth investigation of a postmodern poet's use of traditional forms like the sestina.[20]

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[19] Martin Duwell, review of *Studio Moon*, *Australian Book Review*, November 2003, pp. 54-55.

[20] And few critics would even notice, much less address, Tranter's use of generative forms.

The American poet James Cummins offers a more satisfying explanation of postmodern formalism in his essay "Calliope Music: Notes on the Sestina," which confronts the uneasy situation of the sestina today.[21] Cummins, one of the most capable sestina writers in the United States — his first book, *The Whole Truth* (1986), is a verse novel composed of 24 sestinas and was recently brought back into print by Carnegie Mellon University Press in its Classic Contemporaries series — initially echoes Duwell but also ventures elsewhere: "Besides the desire for permanence — which is itself, of course, another way of stating the fear of impermanence — formalists want sport, play … an abstract field with clearly delineated rules, wherein the cleanly played game, the artifice, stands clear of the messiness of life, and comments on it."[22] Though he adds another consideration to the topic — that of "play" — Cummins, like Duwell and many others, feels obliged to reach beyond the challenges and pleasures of form to "the messiness of life," as if formal play required any outside justification to be worthwhile or meaningful. Many experimental poets, especially those associated with OULIPO and Language writing, have foregrounded process, or artifice, in their work, using chance operations, mathematical or scientific structures, or other non-traditional forms to frame their writing. Given their long-term commitments to these processes, these poets either are

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[21]   Cummins defends the sestina against detractors who link the form's popularity to the ease with which beginning poets can write (fake) sestinas by foregoing metrical regularity to focus on their end-words. The primary challenge of the sestina is keeping repetition from becoming merely repetitive, or redundant.

[22]   James Cummins, "Calliope Music: Notes on the Sestina," (www.maryadams.net/classpages/ 309_609/poetry_downloads/sestina_essay.pdf), 2.

chronically unable to cope with the chaos of life or are deeply interested in the formal and generative qualities of the processes themselves.

Cummins also points out that "corollary to this is the idea of the received form, brought to perfection by masters of an earlier time — Petrarch, Dante, Shakespeare — against whom one can be measured, with whom one can take one's place. One can master a form and … it can grant permanence."[23] But with nonce forms — like Tranter's terminal, or those used by Lyn Hejinian in *My Life* or Christian Bök in *Eunoia*, for example — there are no masters against whom to measure oneself or stand beside. The creator of a new form, in effect, becomes the master against whom later poets will measure themselves, if the form lasts. Such poets do not seek to follow the paths of the "masters of an earlier time," but to establish another, parallel path of which they become the origin.

Cummins's comment about masters resonates with Duwell's admission that he used to interpret Tranter's use of others's poems as "competitive," stemming from "the common desire among poets to excel, to outdo all others," but he now wonders "whether it is not a response to the challenge to revivify the poems, to prevent them from becoming mere historical art-objects."[24] One has to wonder how using a poet's end-words could be considered competitive, since the "common desire among poets to … outdo all others" rarely entails revisiting the

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[23] Cummins, 4.

[24] Duwell, 55.

site of the original and walking a pre-determined path. Only one of the authors of Tranter's sources is Australian — the nineteenth-century balladeer Banjo Paterson, who is hardly competition for the urbane Tranter writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. If the terminal arose from competitiveness, Tranter would seek to "outdo" elder figures like A.D. Hope, Judith Wright, and Gwen Harwood, or poets like John Forbes, Martin Johnston, Alan Wearne, Laurie Duggan, Ken Bolton, and Pam Brown, who share many of his aesthetic beliefs, or Les Murray, Robert Gray, Kevin Hart, Peter Porter, and Chris Wallace-Crabbe, who do not. Although Tranter could be avoiding competition with fellow Australian poets, competing instead with the British and American poets who provide the sources for most of his terminals, his choices of poems do not support that line of reasoning. If he truly wanted to "outdo all others," he would not turn to the work of poets of the New York School or peripheral figures in Beat and Language writing, many of whom still write outside the mainstream and go unacknowledged by most poetry readers. To write American poetry off the map, Tranter would have to tackle poets like Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, Elizabeth Bishop, and Robert Lowell. Or if he wanted to compete with American poets of his own generation, poets like Charles Simic, Mark Strand, Charles Wright, Louise Glück, Robert Hass, and James Tate would be far likelier sources than those he has chosen.

Clearly, as Duwell later realized, something else compels Tranter to write over other poets's poems. His more recent hypothesis — "to

revivify the poems, to prevent them from becoming mere historical art-objects" — seems closer to Tranter's intentions, but also seems inadequate because of the sources of Tranter's terminals. Of the nine sources he uses for his terminals, only four — John Keats's "Ode on Melancholy," Banjo Paterson's "The Man From Snowy River," Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," and W.H. Auden's "In Praise of Limestone" — could be considered "mere historical art-objects." O'Hara's poetry will never need revivifying; and because relatively few people have read them and because they are recent, the poems by Kathleen Fraser, Diane di Prima, Barbara Guest, and James Schuyler do not require such rescuing.

Though Duwell's consideration of Tranter's generative forms is most welcome in a critical climate that does its best to ignore the formal and material qualities of poetry, I would argue that Tranter created the terminal not to mimic or hold off chaos, compete with other poets, or rejuvenate dying poems, but to present himself with new challenges in style and conception while interacting with other poems and, thus, their authors. Poets who work in traditional forms — particularly poets, like John Ashbery and Paul Muldoon, who reinvigorate or reinvent traditional forms instead of plodding through them — often see the restraints of form as liberating or catalytic. For such poets, the pre-established strictures of the form — such as the number of lines, rhyme scheme, end-words, or metrical pattern — paradoxically assist, rather than hinder, poetic creation. Muldoon and Ashbery seem apt points of reference for Tranter's terminals because both poets are

prolific *and* innovative in their approaches to form, which would seem to contradict the cliché that form stifles creativity.

The sonnet is Muldoon's traditional vehicle of choice, but few of his sonnets are immediately recognizable as such.[25] Their line lengths vary significantly, and the rhymes are often so far apart or so faint that they serve more of a structural role than an oral/aural one. Perhaps as a result of his extended residence in the United States, Muldoon's poems have recently begun to gravitate from the sonnet to other forms: the sestina ("Cauliflowers" in *Madoc* [1990], "Green Gown" in *The Annals of Chile* [1994], "Wire" in *Hay* [1998], and "The Misfits" and "The Turn" in *Moy Sand and Gravel* [2002]), terza rima ("Cows" in *The Annals of Chile*, "Blissom" in *Hay*, and "Unapproved Road" in *Moy Sand and Gravel*), the rhyming pantoum ("A Journey to Cracow" in *Hay*), the ghazal ("The Little Black Book" in *Hay*), and the extended villanelle ("Milkweed and Monarch" in *The Annals of Chile* and "Longbones" in *Hay*). And there are numerous poems in rhyming couplets and quatrains in those books. Still, Muldoon's persistence in traditional forms — especially the sonnet — over 35 years of writing seems to signal an indelible desire to participate in a tradition — specifically, a lineage of poets working in

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[25] Although only one poem ("Kate Whiskey") in Muldoon's first book, *New Weather* (1973), is a sonnet, eleven of the 34 poems in his second book, *Mules* (1977), are sonnets. "Kate Whiskey" is one of Muldoon's more conventional sonnets, but sonnets in *Mules* often embrace hybridity (as the book's title would indicate) by recombining Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnet genes. Among subsequent books, *Why Brownlee Left* (1980) continues this emphasis on the sonnet, with nine of the book's 28 poems being sonnets. *The Prince of the Quotidian* (1994) is essentially a sonnet sequence composed as a journal of a month. And Muldoon's verse plays, such as *Six Honest Serving Men* (1995), revolve around the sonnet.

forms, from Keats to W.B. Yeats to Frost to Seamus Heaney, all of whom have done some of their best work in the sonnet form.

Although Ashbery's poetry has less formal intensity than Muldoon's does, he has a similarly adventuresome attitude toward traditional forms.[26] The relatively disciplined formal poems in his first book, *Some Trees* (1956) — "Pantoum," "Canzone," some sonnets, and the sestinas "Poem," "A Pastoral," and "The Painter" — were followed by the more innovative sestinas "Faust" in *The Tennis-Court Oath* (1962) and "Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape" in *The Double Dream of Spring* (1970). This experimentation with the sestina culminated in the double sestina in *Flow Chart* (1991).[27] More recently, Ashbery has

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[26] Ashbery and Muldoon also share a propensity to end their books with long poems. This tendency is especially pronounced in Muldoon. At four pages, the last poem in *New Weather*, "The Year of the Sloes, for Ishi," is technically not a "long poem"; but it is the longest poem in the book. Similarly, the seven-part sonnet sequence "Armageddon, Armageddon" in *Mules* is the longest, and last, poem in that volume. With the 300-line "Immram" at the end of *Why Brownlee Left*, Muldoon starts to move into genuine long poem territory, and he has maintained the practice of ending each of his books with a long poem: the 49 linked sonnets of "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants" at the end of *Quoof* (1983), "7, Middagh Street" at the end of *Meeting the British* (1987), the 233-part title poem of *Madoc*, "Yarrow" at the end of *The Annals of Chile*, the 30-part sonnet sequence "The Bangle (Slight Return)" at the end of *Hay*, and "At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999" at the end of *Moy Sand and Gravel*. Among Ashbery's books, *Rivers and Mountains* (1967) ends with "The Skaters," *The Double Dream of Spring* (1970) ends with "Fragment," *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* (1975) ends with the title poem, *Houseboat Days* (1977) ends with "Fantasia on 'The Nut-Brown Maid,'" *A Wave* (1984) ends with the title poem, and *And the Stars Were Shining* (1994) ends with the title poem — all long poems.

[27] Here are the first two stanzas:

We're interested in the language, that you call breath,

if breath is what we are to become, and we think it is, the southpaw said. Throwing her

a bone sometimes, sometimes expressing, sometimes expressing something like mild
  concern, the way

written pantoums ("Hotel Lautréamont" and "Seasonal" in *Hotel Lautréamont* [1992]), a cento ("The Dong With the Luminous Nose" in *Wakefulness* [1998]), and a near-villanelle ("Real Time" in *Chinese Whispers* [2002]). Despite these occasional forays into various forms, the sestina is the form he has returned to most frequently over the past five decades.

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has been so hollowed out by travelers it has become cavernous. It leads to death.

We know that, yet for a limited time only we wish to pluck the sunflower,

transport it from where it stood, proud, erect, under a bungalow-blue sky, grasping at the sun,

and bring it inside, as all others sick into the common mold. The day

had begun inauspiciously, yet improved as it went along, until at bed-

time it was seen that we had prospered, I and thee.

Our early frustrated attempts at communicating were in any event long since dead.

Yet I had prayed for some civility from the air before setting out, as indeed my ancestors had done

and it hadn't hurt them any. And I purposely refrained from consulting *me*,

the *culte du moi* being a dead thing, a shambles. That's what led to me.

Early in the morning, rushing to see what has changed during the night, one stops to catch one's breath.

The older the presence, we now see, the more it has turned into thee

with a candle at thy side. Were I to proceed as my ancestors had done

we all might be looking around now for a place to escape from death,

for he has grown older and wiser. But if it please God to let me live until my name-day

I shall place bangles at the forehead of her who becomes my poetry, showing her

teeth as she smiles, like sun-stabs through raindrops. Drawing with a finger in my bed,

she explains how it was all necessary, how it was good I didn't break down on my way

to the showers, and afterwards when many were dead

who were thought to be living, the sun

came out for just a little while, and patted the sunflower

— John Ashbery, *Flow Chart* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 186–187.

But Ashbery has written far more free verse than Muldoon has, and the sonnet represents a much smaller part of his oeuvre than it does for Muldoon. Thus, in this context, Ashbery's poems that use traditional forms are more extra-ordinary than Muldoon's. Given his reputation as an innovator, we would expect Ashbery's formal verse to experiment with, disrupt, or even defy the forms at hand. His double sestina in *Flow Chart* — one of the few in the language — uses the end-words of another double sestina, that of Algernon Charles Swinburne's "The Complaint of Lisa" (1870). Since Swinburne's poem rhymes "breath" with "death," "bed" with "dead," and "thee" with "me," it presents formidable challenges to an American poet writing in the last decade of the twentieth century. Rhyming and repeating "breath" and "death" seven times in one poem would be a challenge to any poet, which is perhaps in part why Ashbery pursued it. Despite the rhymes and the restrictions of the form, Ashbery avoids stilted diction by varying line lengths and using a colloquial style. And by placing the double sestina toward, but not at, the end of a 216-page-long poem, he downplays its significance in relation to the rest of his work. Ashbery's double sestina also serves as a prototype for Tranter's terminals, taking as it does the end-words from a previously published poem. Where Ashbery's terminal is also, and most obviously, an embellished traditional poetic form, the forms of Tranter's terminals range from the Keatsian ode to ballad quatrains to the irregularly rhyming, sonnet-oriented "Dover Beach" to free verse, naturally because the sources of the poems also vary in their forms.

II. Tranter's Terminals

Tranter's Terminal	Source Poem
"Grover Leach"	Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"
"See Rover Reach"	Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach"
"In Praise of Sandstone"	W. H. Auden, "In Praise of Limestone"
"Paid Meridian"	Diane di Prima, "On Sitting Down to Write, I Decide Instead to Go to Fred Herko's Concert"
"Trastevere"	Kathleen Fraser, "Re: searches [fragments, after Anakreon, for Emily Dickinson]"
"The Twilight Guest"	Barbara Guest, "Twilight Polka Dots"
"Thanks, Joe"	John Keats, "Ode on Melancholy"
"Three Poems About Kenneth Koch"	Frank O'Hara, "3 Poems About Kenneth Koch"
"Snowy"	A.B. ("Banjo") Paterson, "The Man From Snowy River"
"Elegy, after James Schuyler" (later retitled "Radium")	James Schuyler, "Buried at Springs"

Rather than attempt to hide their sources, Tranter's terminals frequently acknowledge them in their titles, which anagrammatize the poet's name ("Paid Meridian," "Thanks, Joe"), pun on or edit the original poem's name ("Grover Leach," "See Rover Reach," "The Twilight Guest," "Snowy," "In Praise of Sandstone"), or otherwise refer to the original poem ("Three Poems About Kenneth Koch," "Elegy, after James Schuyler"). The sources of his terminals are canonical poems by canonical poets — John Keats's "Ode on Melancholy," Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," Banjo Paterson's ballad "The Man From Snowy River," W.H. Auden's "In Praise of Limestone" — or poems by first- and second-generation New York School, Beat, or Language poets — Frank O'Hara, James Schuyler, Barbara Guest, Kathleen Fraser, Diane di Prima.

With the classic poems, Tranter updates, deflates, or transplants[28] the ideas and ideals of the originals; with the more recent poems, Tranter's choices of poets point to his own aesthetic affinities and can be seen as attempts to build connections between him and poets he admires through their poems.[29] In both cases, Tranter uses the original poems as sites of engagement.

One of Tranter's more memorable terminals, "Thanks, Joe," takes Keats's "Ode on Melancholy" as its source. Divided into three numbered parts, "Ode on Melancholy" uses the same stanzaic structure and rhyme scheme as "Ode to a Nightingale," "Ode on a Grecian Urn," and "Ode on Indolence." Each ten-line stanza combines the rhyming quatrain of the Shakespearean sonnet — ABAB — with the final sestet of the Petrarchan sonnet — CDECDE — to create a hybrid form. But as Keats's sonnets frequently veer from their models, the third section of "Ode on Melancholy" deviates from this template, with the final sestet

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28   "In Praise of Sandstone," which Tranter calls an ode, transplants Auden's "In Praise of Limestone" from Italy, where "this land is not the sweet home that it looks," to Sydney. "Think how stone has defined this region," Tranter writes, leaving "the present for a while [to] dig down / through the past, to more brutal times" — i.e., Australia's convict history and the destruction of aboriginal culture (*Studio Moon*, 73). Like Auden, Tranter juxtaposes geological and human history, with human avarice marking progress: "citizens are caught / in the processes, fed, recycled, until they resemble / their own parents tangled in the fight for food and water / and a protected place in the sun" (75). And like Auden, Tranter recognizes the infinitesimal span of human life — especially when compared to the age of the land — and the invisible yet enormous presence of the dead.

29   The geographic — and, in the case of O'Hara, chronological — distances involved here make Tranter's gestures toward poetic community seem more urgent — because they are less likely to succeed — than they would if he were living and writing in the United States.

rhyming CDEDCE instead of CDECDE. This change also occurs in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," which begins by deviating from the expected rhyme scheme — CDEDCE and CDECED — in its first two sections and in its final section (CDEDCE), and in "Ode on Indolence," which changes the rhyme scheme to CDEDCE in the third section and to CDECED in the sixth and final section of the poem. ("Ode to a Nightingale" alone remains consistent to the form.) Such formal lapses should be attributed not to a lack of rigor but to a desire to employ variation within fixed forms. Although he worked mainly in traditional forms — especially the rhyming couplet and the sonnet — Keats rejuvenated those forms through technical variations, enjambing his rhyming couplets and thus rejecting the rigidity of the heroic couplet of Alexander Pope and other neo-classicists and altering the rhyme schemes of his sonnets to deviate from his Shakespearean, Spenserian, and Petrarchan models.[30]

"Ode on Melancholy" is dominated by the proper nouns Lethe, Proserpine,[31] and Psyche and by the personified Beauty, Joy, Pleasure, Poison, and Melancholy. The poem begins with a negative injunction that establishes a series of negative commands:

> **No**, **no**, go **not** to Lethe,[32] **neither** twist
>   Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;

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[30] Keats wrote 66 sonnets, more than two-thirds of them Petrarchan. "On the Sonnet," written toward the end of his life, deviates from all traditional sonnet forms. Keats invents his own rhyme scheme for the poem, masterfully wedding style and content since the poem is an attempt to find "sandals more interwoven and complete / To fit the naked foot of Poesy."

[31] Also known as Persephone, reluctant queen of the underworld.

> **Nor** suffer thy pale forehead be kiss'd
>   By nightshade, ruby grape of Proserpine;
> Make **not** your rosary of yew-berries,
>   **Nor** let the beetle, **nor** the death-moth be
>   Your mournful Psyche, **nor** the downy owl
> A partner in your sorrow's mysteries

"Ode on Melancholy" delivers nine negatives in its first eight lines, establishing an atmosphere of non-permission. The act for which the poem does not offer permission — succumbing to melancholy — takes its most extreme form in suicide (signaled by the poisons wolfbane and nightshade). The poem exhorts its reader not to seek forgetfulness (via Lethe, the river of forgetfulness) or to indulge sorrow or morbidity, "for shade to shade will come too drowsily, / And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul." Instead, Keats urges the reader to "glut thy sorrow on a morning rose, / Or on the rainbow of the salt-sand wave, / Or on the wealth of globed peonies" — in other words, on beauty (or Beauty). This advice about what to do "when the melancholy fit shall fall" indicates that Keats considers melancholy a potentially aesthetic experience. And to ensure that it is an aesthetic experience, beauty must be admitted into it; pleasure and pain must coexist.

   Though connected to the Romantic exaltation of suffering as a source of poetic power, this view stems in part from Keats's chronic fear of inaction and the melancholy that often arises from stasis. In an

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[32]   This phrase speaks to the first quatrain of "Ode to a Nightingale": "My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk, / Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains / One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk."

1817 letter to his publishers Taylor and Hessey, he describes his current mental state: "lowness of Spirits — anxiety to go on without the Power to do so."[33] And in an 1818 letter to his brothers George and Tom, he writes, "I cannot bear to be uninterested or unemployed, I, who for so long a time, have been addicted to passiveness."[34] In his poem "To My Brother George," he admits to a melancholic nature that the ebullience of his verse usually disguises: "Full many a dreary hour have I past, / My brain bewilder'd, and my mind o'ercast / With heaviness." But as "Ode on Melancholy" makes clear, Keats believes it is crucial to learn from "the wakeful anguish of the soul" in order to produce poetry, for only the poet sees Melancholy in "her sovran shine," and the figure of the poet — "him whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine" — possesses the soul that will "taste the sadness of her might, / And be among her cloudy trophies hung." The poem manifests an awareness that "Beauty must die," "Joy['s] hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu," and "aching Pleasure [is] / Turning to Poison" "in the very temple of delight." Keats's belief in the bond between truth and beauty makes room for the awareness that suffering is an integral part of reality and cannot be ignored or transcended through art.

Tranter's terminal based on "Ode on Melancholy," "Thanks, Joe", presents as extreme a twist on Keats's poem as one could expect. In "Thanks, Joe," melancholy emerges as an alcoholic's despair over

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[33] *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), I.146.

[34] Ibid., 214.

sleeping with a transvestite, who represents (false) beauty in the poem. Because he retains Keats's end-words, Tranter maintains the rhyme scheme of "Ode on Melancholy," but he drops the numbers for the three sections and changes the stanza lengths to ten, nine, and eleven lines, respectively. The elevated diction of Keats's poem has degenerated here to the contemporary colloquial; thus, "rosary of yew-berries" becomes "at Wagga picking boysenberries," "let her rave" becomes "she'd been on some rave," and "among her cloudy trophies hung" becomes "Damn, she was well hung." Tranter's poem seems intent on amplifying Keats's belief, expressed in a letter to his publisher John Taylor on 27 February, 1818, that "Poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity — it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance."[35] Tranter's "Thanks, Joe" certainly surprises through excess, but one would be hard-pressed to refer to that excess as "fine"; and though the poem is presented as a memory — a "Remembrance" — via a dramatic monologue, the setting and subject of the poem militate against viewing the poem as "highest thoughts" put into words.

Instead, the poem's style aligns it more with the "first thought best thought" model of poetic composition, as the first seven lines demonstrate:

> Thanks, Joe, I'll have a martini with a twist.

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[35] Ibid., 238. Keats's quote also conjures the impossibility of "Singularity" in language, an impossibility that Tranter's terminals — by depending upon other poems for their existence and by demonstrating the vulnerability of those poems to revision, even by another poet — seems to illuminate, however inadvertently.

> I can drink spirits, but I can't take wine.
> I lost my taste for it, the first time I was kissed.
> I met this woman, down from Proserpine,
> she'd been out at Wagga picking boysenberries,
> came up to Sydney, wanted to be
> a model. She liked sherry. She had this owl …

The speaker's self-pity has produced self-absorption, evident by the use of "I" six times in the first four lines of the poem, until he introduces the woman, at which point he shifts to "she" and then, after observing that "Life's full of mysteries," to "we." The speaker's statement about life's mysteries comically recalls Keats's notion of negative capability, which is made possible "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."[36] Of course, Tranter's speaker cannot live with doubt, as the poem reveals:

> We drank — what a night. I woke drowsily
> the next day, and looked at her naked body. My soul
> shrivelled, my blood froze, I thought I'd fall
> flat on my face, it was like a cloud
> had hidden the sun. What she'd told me, that was
> bullshit. She was a bloke! The sheet was a shroud,
> the bed a grave for my self-respect.

The absurd epiphany — the woman is a "bloke" — is couched in terms that recall, but parody, Keats's own: the "soul" has "shrivelled," "a cloud" (of melancholy) was blocking the sun, the bed sheets became "a

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[36]   Ibid., 193.

shroud" and "the bed a grave" for his "self-respect." More striking than the knowledge that the woman "down from Proserpine" is really a man is the speaker's hyperbolic reaction to this discovery. Later in the poem, he claims, "I wanted to die. / I remembered her filthy kisses, her lying lips." By reacting so negatively and with such vitriol, he foregoes any opportunity to become a sympathetic figure. The frame of the poem — the man is speaking to a bartender about the experience — sets the events of the poem in the past, and the speaker's continued absorption with the experience — he cannot drink wine because of it, and he feels compelled to relate the story, unsolicited — demonstrate that he has not recovered from it. What could be a humorous or self-deprecating anecdote becomes a disturbing one despite the speaker's witty flourish at the end of the poem:

> Do you know the Latin tongue?
> They have a motto: 'Love's like a river — clear
> one day, dirty the next.' You know, I might
> have another. Damn, she was well hung.

The speaker's inability to forget or rise above this melancholy dramatizes two lines from another of Keats's poems, *Endymion*: "Pleasure is oft a visitant; but pain / Clings cruelly to us."

The conventions of the Romantic lyric also establish an occasion for an illuminating contrast between Barbara Guest's "Twilight Polka Dots" (1989) and Tranter's "The Twilight Guest." Both poems share a setting — a lake — but that setting has dramatically different roles in the poems. The lake in Guest's poem features more prominently — as "a

conscious body" — than the human couple in the poem — "two / figures who in the fixity of their shared glance were / admired by the lake." "Wishing to set a tone of solitude edged with poetry," the lake despises the fish that swim in it because they interfere with what it considers its "duty": to "provide a scenic atmosphere / of content, a solicitude for the brooding emotions." Thus, the lake "dwelt on boning and deboning"; it has murderous intent — consciousness but no agency. The two people — ostensibly lovers — choose the lake as the setting for their romantic evening because it "offered a picture appealing both to young and / mature romance."[37] In "The Twilight Guest," the lake recedes into the background and serves merely as setting. Only one person — a poet — is present in the poem; Guest's lake has been replaced by Tranter's poet as the poetic consciousness of the poem.

The most significant shift between Guest's poem and Tranter's, however, is the reduction in the number of figures in the poems, from the lake, couple, and fish in "Twilight Polka Dots" to a single individual in "The Twilight Guest." The "theatre" and "evening performance" of Guest's poem yield Tranter's solitary poet in a Romantic quest for a poem in her lakeside cottage. Tranter transforms the fish of "Twilight Polka Dots" into the activity of fishing — not literally, but figuratively; the poet in "The Twilight Guest" fishes for poems at her cottage, using emotions as bait. So when a poem is finally caught, it is caught because

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37   Paul Hoover, ed. *Postmodern American Poetry* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 67-68.

"the image of the moon" is reflected on the lake. Tranter presents the scene convincingly, even as he employs common tropes in the process:

> Taking a turn
> at twilight around the shore of the lake
> she watched the sky darken, and turning to
> a sound on the surface of the water
>
> she noticed the image of the moon tossed
> on the ripples, backward and forward,
> seeming to be made up of flake on flake
> of phosphorescent light. There, the
> poem — its back browned,
> its belly silver, tossed and shied in
> to shore and — *there* — it was caught.[38]

Tranter's achievement here is less the poem itself, which presents a romanticized view of the poet as Poet, than what he has done with his source poem. The ultimate effect seems one of regression, as Guest's ambivalent lyric becomes more pure, or idealized, with Tranter. Although less than a decade separates the two poems,[39] the poetics of the earlier poem seems more unconventional than that of the terminal based on it.

Tranter's more radical rewritings occur mainly with older poems. Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" provides not one but two terminals —

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[38] Tranter, 63-64.

[39] Tranter wrote "The Twilight Guest" in the mid–1990s. The poem was first published in 1996, in *Verse* magazine.

"Grover Leach" and "See Rover Reach." Arnold's poem begins with a description of a seacoast and what it invokes for the poet:

> The sea is calm to-night.
> The tide is full, the moon lies fair
> Upon the straits; — on the French coast the light
> Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
> Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
> Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
> Only, from the long line of spray
> Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
> Listen! you hear the grating roar
> Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
> At their return, up the high strand,
> Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
> With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
> The eternal note of sadness in.

This sonnet-length first stanza introduces a scene that appears only in the distance in Tranter's "Grover Leach." By diminishing the setting — and thus the grandeur — of the original and by transforming Arnold's meditation into a scene of courtship at the State Fair, "Grover Leach" begins like a parody of the Arnold poem:

> It's Saturday, meet me tonight,
> Grover said to a young lady at the State Fair —
> meet me under the electric light
> that burns in the sky over the hot dog stand
> under the Ferris Wheel by the edge of the bay.
> Let the farm slumber in the night-air,
> let the corn nod under the spray

> as the waves beat against the land.
> Meet me where the mob's roar
> drowns our laughter, and our mad fling
> will magnetically excite each strand
> of feeling in the crowd, and the Wheel will begin
> to spin and spark like a dynamo, and bring
> the wonderful twentieth century rolling in![40]

Tranter transplants the setting of the poem from the coast of England to the farmlands of Anywhere. Grover's falling in love compels him to neglect his farm, embrace "the mob's roar," and, with the help of the Ferris Wheel, welcome "the wonderful twentieth century" and, thus, modernity. The tone of Tranter's poem, until this point, seems lighter than Arnold's, which uses the sound of waves on rocks as the accompaniment to "the eternal note of sadness" and the sea's "melancholy, long, withdrawing roar."

But "Grover Leach" shifts dramatically in part two, connecting the speaker's memory of the ocean bringing "to the bay an ancient tidal flow" to Grover's suicide by drowning:

> For Grover, life on the farm had grown drear
> and he learned to despise the modern world.
> His wife left him, though his heart was true,
> the farm failed, and that's why, it seems
> old Grover waded in, and drowned his dreams.[41]

How different this trajectory is from Arnold's. Where "Dover Beach"

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[40]   John Tranter, *Studio Moon* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2003), 24.

[41]   Ibid., 24-25.

begins with "the eternal note of sadness" and "the turbid ebb and flow / of human misery" and (almost) ends with the admonition "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another!," "Grover Leach" begins in courtship and ends with divorce, economic ruin, and suicide. Even Arnold's reason for his admonition — "for the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams, / So various, so beautiful, so new, / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain; / And we are here as on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night" — seems less grim, because it is less particular, than the fate to which Tranter consigns Grover. Grover's death, though solitary and self-inflicted, alludes to the night battle at Epipolae — when the Athenian army attacked itself as well as its enemy because no one could see — to which the last two lines of "Dover Beach" refer. And the foreboding Dover Beach resembles the farm after Grover's death:

> And so the farm sleeps, waiting for a new
> owner, and Rover waits too in that yellow light
> that seems to paint the wet sand with pain
> so it resembles a watery plain
> where screaming seabirds dash their reflected flight
> over the glitter of the State Fair, Saturday night.[42]

Although both poems offer little consolation, Tranter's "Grover Leach" offers none. This rewrite of Arnold's poem might begin in parody, but it ends in stark confirmation of the negative catalogue that Arnold attaches to the world: Grover's world has "neither joy, nor love, nor

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[42] Ibid., 25.

light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain."

Other terminals work with newer texts as their sources and forego revision and parody as they seek to use the terminal form to establish connections to the authors of the original poems. Divided into three separate poems — "Que Viva Mexico!," "Gallop Along! or Hurry Back," and "The Inca Mystery" — Frank O'Hara's "3 Poems About Kenneth Koch" pays light-hearted tribute to his friend. In Tranter's version, the titles for individual poems have been dropped and numbers are used instead to distinguish the three poems from each other; and the individual poems are not the same length as O'Hara's. The first O'Hara poem, "Que Viva Mexico!," reads:

> May I tell you how much I love your poems?
> It's as if a great pipeline had been illicitly tapped
> along which all personal characteristics
> are making a hasty departure. Tuba? gin?
> "qu'importe où?" O Kenneth Koch![43]

Tranter's first poem, designated only by a "1," is more than twice as long as O'Hara's:

> He never writes poems about writing poems,
> this dog-eared wunderkind who's tapped
> the unconscious of the race. His main characteristics:
> in the fall he develops a fatal liking for stiff gin
> martinis. He's not a disguised Mayor Ed Koch —
> the hair's different — and don't let anybody tell you
> he is. He kisses wives under the mistletoe,

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[43]   *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, edited by Donald Allen (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 151.

given half a chance, and he's a sink of indiscretion,
so look out, gossip-wise. A knot of contradictions, he is
a simpering tough guy, and a brutal sook — mercy me,
here he comes! Violently athirst![44]

Although Tranter has kept O'Hara's end-words, his approach in the poem differs markedly from O'Hara's. He has kept the subject indicated by the poem's title — Kenneth Koch — but that subject has changed significantly in Tranter's poem. The Koch in O'Hara's "3 Poems" is a close friend, and O'Hara addresses him directly, in the second person, in the poem; the Koch in Tranter's "Three Poems" is an invention[45] and is appropriately referred to in the third person. For O'Hara, Koch is the addressee and the subject of the poem; for Tranter, Koch is the subject. This shift in focus and the change to the original poem's structure allow Tranter to rewrite O'Hara's "3 Poems About Kenneth Koch" without pretending to the knowledge of Koch that O'Hara possessed. His handling of the terminal conveys respect both for the original poem (even as he rewrites it) and for Koch (even as he intentionally miswrites him). At the same time, Tranter enters this community, however vicariously, making clear his admiration for both poets.

In the second part of the second poem in "3 Poems About Kenneth Koch," O'Hara offers lavish praise: "Under the careful care of our admiration his greatness / appears like the French for 'gratuitous act'

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[44] Tranter, 86.

[45] In his note for the poem, Tranter writes, "Only a lunatic would take any particular statement in the poem to be necessarily true" (114).

and we're proud / of our Hermes, the fastest literary figure of his time."[46] The overlapping lines in Tranter's terminal, however, continue the anti-portraiture of the first poem: "He thinks constantly on the greatness / of Edna St. Vincent Millay. He's quietly proud / of his conversational Greek, and one time / he gobbled a whole bag of bagels in Dinky's Delicatessen."[47] In the third poem of each poet, both O'Hara and Tranter consider the whereabouts of Koch, who is apparently in Mexico. Missing his friend, O'Hara tells Koch to "hurry," and when the telephone rings at the end of the poem, he answers, "Hello. Kenneth?," insinuating that Koch has made contact with him.[48] Tranter begins by "pondering the Orientations of Kenneth" then claims that he "leaves for Mexico, and once there, decides to vanish — / a pop, a flash, and a small, perfectly-formed miasma / has entirely replaced him."[49] The rest of the poem describes the aftermath of his supposed disappearance, and, unlike O'Hara, Tranter ends not with the hope of contact, but with "the loss of the illuminations of Kenneth."[50] For Tranter, the loss is less a personal loss than a literary loss, as the poem demonstrates that his relationship to Koch is primarily literary, not personal; and while he can adopt O'Hara's end-words for his "Three Poems About Kenneth Koch," he cannot attain — for reasons of geography and time — the

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[46] O'Hara, 152.

[47] Tranter, 86.

[48] O'Hara, 152.

[49] Tranter, 87.

[50] Ibid.

same kind of relationship that O'Hara had with Koch. Thus, Tranter's gesture toward community must remain a literary gesture.[51]

As "Three Poems About Kenneth Koch" shows, Tranter's terminals can allude closely — in details and/or conception — to their sources yet deviate from them at crucial points. "Paid Meridian" both follows and departs from its source, Diane di Prima's "On Sitting Down to Write, I Decide Instead to Go to Fred Herko's Concert." (The poem's title is an anagram of di Prima's name.) Di Prima's poem relies on fragmentation, quick shifts, and occasional rhyme for its rhythmic effects, which range from purposely clumsy doggerel ("the long cry of goose / or some such bird / I never heard / your orange tie / a sock in the eye")[52] to the colloquial ("smelly movies & crabs I'll never get") to the high lyrical ("O the dark caves of obligations," "O all that wind"), which is then undercut by the self-conscious statements "(alack)" and "Even Lord & Taylor don't quite keep it out."[53] These effects contribute to the overall sense of movement in the poem, which never settles into

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[51]   A more oblique triangulation appears in Tranter's "Elegy, after James Schuyler" (originally published as "Respirating Buds," which is an anagram of its source, Schuyler's "Buried at Springs"). [Now titled "Radium". — J.T., 2008.] Although indirect, Schuyler's poem mentions O'Hara ("it's eleven years since / Frank sat at this desk and / saw and heard it all") and mourns the passing of time without him ("even the boulder quite / literally is not the same"). Tranter's elegy mentions neither O'Hara nor Schuyler, but could refer to them through certain details — "a beach house," "a diary," "a talent," "the snapshot" — that seem like potential clues and make the question "How much have I suppressed?" an invitation to sleuthing. In both elegies, the poems exude feelings of loss without resorting to sentimentality.

[52]   Though, given di Prima's association with the Beat poets, perhaps the effect is intended to be more performative than comic.

[53]   Hoover, 273-274.

anything but the constancy of motion. This constant movement, of course, is suggested in the title: as she sits down (to write), she gets up (to go).

Tranter's "Paid Meridian," however, dwells. Although the poem contains movement, the movement is limited to the physical, when the narrator leaves his apartment for a party and later returns to his apartment. In "Paid Meridian," someone named Joan telephones the narrator, who had just started to work on a drawing. Suddenly the narrator is at a party at Joan's apartment, then on a bus on his way home because "parties make me anxious."[54] Conceived as a dramatic monologue, "Paid Meridian" remains in a single mode — the colloquial.[55] Whereas the voice in di Prima's poem jumps, Tranter's stays consistent. The result is that "Paid Meridian" seems more distant than "On Sitting Down to Write"; the dramatic monologue has removed the author from the poem and is presented as a clearly literary work with a literary tradition. Di Prima's poem is all di Prima even as it refuses to identify with any single poetic mode. At the end of her poem, di Prima affirms her presence: "I came here / after all."[56] But in "Paid Meridian," Tranter further effaces his (and his narrator's) presence: "there's nobody here, / really, nobody at all."[57]

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[54] Tranter, 65.

[55] Di Prima's jarring rhymes have been softened by Tranter through longer lines and homonyms (e.g., "Thai" for "tie"), resulting in a more "natural" diction.

[56] Hoover, 274.

[57] Tranter, 66.

By simultaneously acknowledging and effacing the sources of his terminals, Tranter simultaneously acknowledges and effaces his own role in writing them. Although all forms, whether traditional or invented, raise issues of conservation and innovation, originality and influence, Tranter's terminals are unique because they combine the conservative, influence-embracing aspect of traditional forms with the innovative aims of new forms. They depend on the existence of other poems even as they replace almost all the words of those poems. The terminal is further enriched by the opportunities it provides for responding to others' poetry, whether through parody, homage, or revision.

Although it is too soon to know if the terminal will become an influential form, Tranter has laid a robust foundation for other poets seeking the challenges and pleasures of form, the pull of tradition and the openness of experimentation.

— Brian Henry[58]

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Appendix 5: The Anaglyph

Hasn't the charisma leaked away from the café crowd, and that other
Authority, the *Salon des Refusés*? I have forgotten much of
That old sack of enthusiasms and snake-oil recipes, the way
You have forgotten your own childhood, since
You woke up just in time to watch the adults disappear   5
From the world they had bequeathed us. It seems the scenery all around
Is hilly and unfarmable. Being brilliant has been reckoned
Into a procedure by some old guy, with a motto that is
More fitness, less flab. I hanker to go back to the land.
This means ruin to the culture-watchers. But the basic   10
Principle of my ambition is to be one excessively distracted
Entity at the mercy of the lurid, blurred and half-perceived
Motions of the Martians at the Halloween Hop. Fake? They sure are.
Summer is called Humidor here, the month of damp draughts.
The tale of my attempt to farm stubborn soil leaked from   15
Untruth to legend, my unlikely phase of boy-scout honesty being
Before I came to the big city. Here behind the tiny horological waterfall
Drums amplify the fun, but only at nightfall, then just for a moment
Of horrible error as I clutch the wrong person's hand. That was true,
Only I said it wrong. Ugh. Now watch my serpentine   20
Gesture as I withdraw my hand, only to replace it with a congruent
Message that attempts to excuse this tactless fact,
Tearing at the sky over Twenty-second Street, but
The sky leans nonchalantly against the coop — I mean "co-op" — about
As graceful as a cowboy leaning on a chicken co-op — I mean "coop" — who
                     either   25
Has an anger management problem or is under the influence of a form of
Some anxiety that eats at him. I'm not the fly-away
Marrying kind, nor a grumpy bachelor with a broken heart whose pieces
Are seen scattered over the range. That begs for an independent
Yet symbolic judgment from the Judge now alighting from the caboose,
                     whose arrival   30

Whether timely, to the tick of a caesium atom, or tardy, has to be
Seen to be believed, like
The face of a hunter in the dim mirror killing a bear. As
Nostrils give away suppressed anger by flaring, so an argument
That is over leaves traces — nervous twitch, grimace. It   35
Is impossible to hide my feelings, I guess. Look ahead,
That effervescent persona and its emotional lurches and rocketings
Affected so much, and its magnum opus that was called
By another name is now the old school-teacher's chief act of belief,
Or something very like it, gleaming in the rain. Hold up that light.   40
Has it shone on the tenebrous back-yards yet? Or yet admitted that
It is unable to illuminate the wasteland of wet barbecues, so much
Of its fuel has flared and lit up the landscape… this project, I admit that
It is like gutting then refurbishing a friend's apartment. Now, are
The reply and the echo finished with? I asked a redundant question, and   45
That answer suffocated it, as a firmly pressed pillow
Has choked a banker, but no one knows whodunnit. That whole thing
Of returning to my sources, raking through my prototypes until
The last blueprint is found and seems just right: perhaps this is
Peace — a crowded peace — under the hot sun.   50
That we are afraid of it — inhabiting a reputation, the whole thing
About establishing who you genuinely were — are — I'll admit. There
You hope your opus will be taken for legerdemain, but your effort sinks
Deeper into the mulch of history, while I adjust the mask that
Just fits more loosely every decade, and then I add up the little   55
That memory leaves me, a kind of pittance, the totality
Mustered and gathered… a look of boredom in a young person's eyes,
And all those hopes and struggles are quite lost.
Accents and dialects distort them, once again.
To have escaped from a tangle of difficulties, from   60
Nothing but obstructions, into a glowing absence
And then to take a deep breath and plunge into
Those crowded riverine cities, greedy for contact with ghosts that are
Precisely what we want them to be, our plans furthered,

Seeing alphabet soup spell out the aleatory message and the time,   65
Casting caution to the winds and the weather — sorry, welter
Of neighbors, barking dogs, traffic cops — it leads to a general confusion.
And permit me… no, commit me, please, while the cops are standing
Around chewing the fat, and pray that these
Moments miss you like a whistling arrow. Thunk! The old tapir tapered   70
Into the bar: a Scotsman, an Irishman, and a capybary — I've heard it. But
Wasn't the story of an Eskimo inside an eviscerated bear like this?
The fact that he "inhabited" the smelly bear-skin… I feel that
Neither brave feats nor stories about them can cut it.
Did not a Dandy Dinmont yap? I deliberately stayed   75
This way, spiritually a hunchback, drooling and gaping at the stars
That promised ashes and diamonds and nourishing food all the way,
As though clambering inside an animal was simply the reverse
Of some method of becoming notorious. My cheating heart is known
Once its modus operandi is — among the cognoscenti — firmly established.
        80

The look of a man is the man, Buffon said, and style a condition
Of those whose reputation is a handbag and whose blindness
Was being talked about even in Paris: a troubling myopia, so
That their left and right perceptual fields, red and green, slowly separated,
Only to hitch up again, like inspiration and perspiration. Go on, shout   85
And be heard. Is this anaglyph what I really want? My declamatory
Nature was made to seem just a yokel act. I must admit it is
Not without a certain eau-de-cologne charm, insinuated the farmer. And yet
An invisible horror prevents me from making love to you among the
                         previsions,
Then the post-visions I am subject to arrive, fits of   90
The assurance Baron Corvo had an excess of, a crowing assurance
Which tainted his career, under the blasts of air conditioning,
Whatever. There on the bank statement
At the beginning of the Age of Façadism was a catalog of waste.
A dumb waiter brought me the tablets and a note about the projected   95
After-effects, should they amplify the symptoms instead of curing them,

Though Frederick Rolfe was never cured. This
Emptiness will do fine. Just pop it in a doggy bag, thanks. Did you say
                    "previsions"?
Was that a mispronunciation? "Provisions", maybe, held
Too close to the chest, a fake poker hand of fate. The fireworks, they   100
Ended with a fizzing Roman candle sound that frightened the guest who was
Intended to rescue Gertie McDowell from that dirty old man. It's
Gesture that fills out the role, as water makes the weather. over, and the
                    hunter
It was stupid of me to harp on the sadness
Of that animal's demise: I should forget about the feeling   105
Which resembles taxidermy at midnight on an empty highway.
A telescope brings us a soothing view of distant mountains
And all the mountain people. Who knows where they're going?
Moving from crag to cave to avoid the night
There, which is really ghastly when it comes on.   110
Beside the darkness, each farmer carries his own personal
Landscape around inside his head, a "landscape" being
What surrounds your idea of yourself, it's so
Honorably framed, but presented in a Potemkin-Village spirit.
There was a vast electrical disturbance just outside the walls.   115
Each time it's different, down through the centuries
For the sake of cultural improvements they go on repeating a dream that
Continually gives out a soft fluorescent glow, it was
Like standing on the prow of a moving ferry in the morning
With the spray bursting all around   120
And a feeling of nausea mixed with ecstasy washing over me. In a way
The whole experience was fake, except for the scale.
Really, what do Eskimos think of giants?
Not too much, I reckon. They say they like them.
A moment later they're saying how needlessly big they are. But   125
Also they are likely to flatter them. A cloud of dust
Or whirling fragments resembling a mistral rises up ahead,
But no one understands it: the old verbal torrent

In new guise, transformed into a sheaf of falling leaves, which

Are gathered up, bound, and stuffed into a briefcase,   130

And it's time for coffee and a Strega at Il Miglior Fabbro. When

Acts of killing fill nightmares and movies, only the calm

Of this bibulous routine can bring surcease. Then the shreds

Of another adventure assemble: a tour through the old college premises

Undertaken to the tune of the jig "From Rochester he came hence,   135

A writ of Cease and Desist clenched in his teeth". Here, see this,

Like a pistol on a silver platter, it's all yours

And it was mine once. Take it, go on. I kept it because

It had been handed down, and I had hoped it might be my insurance

Against the waves of devoted fans inefficiently   140

Seeking to take over the social scene and then the whole world.

The round platter, alas, has always been covered with dust,

So small it can hardly hold the pearl-handled revolver reclining on it.

Thereafter it should be passed on to other worthies, noted by

The comfort of strangers they fail to offer you, or me, even.   145

Like the wily coyote, I'm no sleep-abed; I tried all

The most difficult forms, even threnodies ending with the words

"After all" or "Never mind!" And in my fine eye-rolling frenzy I almost

Exaggerated my metier into an obligation. This,

It seemed, was the way to build the future. But it was   150

Not likely to allow me to escape the whirligig of voracious time.

After all, *tempus fugit* however we might chase it. Indeed,

All kinds of regret sprinkled my breakfast as the slant angle of

The day lit up the diner and the light began to increase

So that I was dazzled, then I heard a loud thump, dull, heavy,   155

Like a polar bear falling over, and the hunter saying something

Not quite obscene, but close enough. *Criminy!* The way

Things fade away, *les temps perdu* seems to be the point

Of this rodomontade. Does a traditional verse form simply provide

A protected place for the poet to plead the case for his vital   160

Concern for *la vie littéraire*, or is it a carapace, a palace?

And you can meditate there all summer long.

It was a little insight I had, one of the world's smallest.
Distant requests annoy me. The Poetry Club may be ultra-sensitive
But its supine and self-serving acquiescence   165
To the demands of those creeps… okay, that's in the past
And it belongs there and I promised not to whine. But oh, how
The past haunts me, its vapid fashions, the rigmaroles… they wish
But also harangue, that's why I resent them, the ones I talk with.
And in this way my paean to non-discovery   170
In brittle yet oracular verse persuades us, but nevertheless
The map you provided was helpful in leading us beyond
Madness to something better: squatting in Circe's mansion. Only
You desire us to fail — just there, perhaps, where your verbal acts
Are sentinels warning us of the slow-moving, quiet   175
Invasion of middle America by pod people over many years.
Be quiet — hush! — they are nearby, whispering the poem itself
In a parody of oratory. I'll explain more plainly: the map
Of the literary world is a pantomime, and its longeurs have become
Prolongations of our prevarications on bad weather days, and also   180
Fine days where things seem okay but are not, those dull events
We shall banish from the Ideal Republic. Who called? No, I am
Not speaking to that shit: he just wants to be
Opposite me at the literary lunch. He got some fame recently, only
To be thrust into obscurity soon, I hope. It seems broader,   185
The sum total, a canal reflecting its own anagram, but will it ever
Become legible? Hidden behind a screen of rocks
And foliage, the creep quickly inhales the distant
Ether and faints, thank goodness, and what I own
I see before me shining like a dagger. Meanwhile   190
I am only me, a faithful shadow of my real self, and
Private doubts evaporate between the Spring and the Fall
And even this is seasonal, and I thank you
For being so patient, you could have made some other
Voluntary or involuntary gesture like sneezing to prove your   195
Maturity or you could have hung and dangled from the branches

Of a tree to attract my attention a step or two away from them.

It intensifies my desire to know you, a gesture like that, to

Form an opinion of your feints, apparitions and mode of locomotion.

In this way I control the crowded avenue to the Palace of Fame, the one   200

Leading to a rowboat mounted in a park where I perch and think to

Myself and then jot it down, being careful to leave a blank space

That is the secret indication of Mallarmé's abyss, a.k.a. "The Unknown."

Eating ragwort is morally better than gobbling a quail tagine; the difference

Can never be explained to the obtuse. At this distance   205

It seemed impossible to reach the reader, Valéry murmured, then said the

                 phrase

"Over and over" to himself, again and again. Meanwhile

Infant mortality was declining as aspirin consumption increased. There was

To be a meeting about aspirin and other drugs later that evening,

He was told. He read poems about killing large animals to keep awake   210

On the tepid waters of café society. Go to the meeting, don't go, whatever.

"Whose center wobbles is bound to fail," the Latin motto says, and having

The progression of the equinox too much in mind brings rain

As they form a phalanx of epigones, those who come after.

Why don't they just get used to that? They can't be equal   215

Without coming before, and that's impossible. The cup of

Contentment will never touch their lips. Ministering

To stunted talents is my fate; each day I tread that lonesome trail alone

And return at nightfall bereft and grinding my teeth at

What they dish out: similes as appliqué aperçus. They   220

Might as well hand in embroidery. The Force, puissant yet invisible,

Still surrounds us. Yet there is also a Dark Force

Between the cruel mandates of history and them.

It is because the greatness of art is like a snobbish relative

That we shall never agree on a strategy, and   225

Entertainment washes over us, leaving us ethically incomplete.

Former East German border guards know too well that that

Closes off an awful lot of options. The Moment

Of Death is dallying on Ninth Avenue, as yet uncertain of

Its intentions. I'll just leaf through the paper until   230
You wake up. I'm not planning to go anywhere. You know, it
Wasn't a small thing, to turn your back on Europe. The walls
Are turning into their own murals. Please don't speak
Of time within the hearing of that tiny hydraulic clock you
Invented, it can be self-centered and jealous, and has now   235
Grown furious. Deep within its complex innards a purple jewel
Exists as a blazon, rotating slowly, saying that this
Existence is temporary, that you may lodge and idle here
Only so long as you don't irritate the gods. Someone's
Purpose niggles at you. Then the sunbeams flood in at acute   240
Angles and frighten the other diners. I thought, then,
Of having whatever I wanted, but it seemed that a distant
Image of you chided me. My admiration is a test
Of how you might accept it: gracefully, or boorishly, or not.
You hesitate, don't you? I hate that. Please accept this   245
Wooden gesture, and you're right, the over-decorated representation
Returns whence it came, though it was easily said, and simply meant,
With nothing ulterior about it: a *simple entendre*. I'd like to alight
With you from the caboose on a hot dry day in a wonderful town. You
Must help the Judge measure the exact length of the shadow of   250
Your well wrought urn in the center of the town square — it is still intact;
Appreciation gives it the shine and the shadow — but just now somebody
is phoning to arrange for drinks — will you join me? — later this evening.

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