DISTANT VOICES

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
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by

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ABSTRACT

‘Distant Voices’ consists of two parts: a collection of poems and a thirty-thousand word exegesis.

The poems are presented in three groups.

In Vocoder four long poems explore, in different ways, the idea of displacing the authorial ego with a kind of writing at one or two removes, through the process of translation, ventriloquy, mask or disguise. Speaking French presents 101 deliberate mistranslations of some of Rimbaud’s ‘Illuminations’ and poems by Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Verlaine. At the Movies is a group of narrative, discursive and reflective poems that speak about various movies and their cultural settings.

The exegesis is also presented in three parts. In it the poet John Tranter is discussed in the third person.

Part 1: About the Poems discusses the means of production and some of the theoretical implications of the poems presented in this thesis, partly in the context of Tranter’s earlier work, as the poems develop, extend and criticise some of Tranter’s earlier literary strategies.

Part 2: Prior projects discusses Tranter’s forty-year career as a writer, editor, publisher, radio producer, critic and anthologist, relating these changing roles to the writing in his twenty-odd books and his other projects, and attempting to trace a developing strand of experimental practice that finds its apotheosis in the process of translation, ventriloquy, mask or disguise underlying the thesis poems.

Part 3: Dream-Work looks at the three poets who have most influenced his work: Arthur Rimbaud, the Australian hoax poet ‘Ern Malley’, and the contemporary US poet John Ashbery, and also at the tripartite structure qualifying much of Tranter’s writing. Poetry is seen to occupy a liminal position in the Venn diagram where three fields overlap: dream theory, movie creation and criticism, and literary creation and criticism.
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Epigraph

We know that all literature is a form of disguise, a mask, a fable, a mystery: and behind the mask is the author.

— Leon Edel
Introduction

This thesis is made up of a collection of 113 poems and an exegesis. The poems are written in a mode that has become more prominent through my writing career, in which the lineaments of another art-work, usually a poem or a movie, are borrowed and transformed in some way, ranging from a simple imitative exercise to homage to satire to critique to an experimental reworking of a genre and its various examples.

The exegesis examines this use of borrowing, mask or disguise in the thesis poems, then steps back in time to explore this theme as it weaves its thread through my twenty volumes of published poetry.

Writers, like composers, learn their craft by studying the achievements of their predecessors, then by gradually varying and distancing their own work from that of others. This back-and-forth process of absorption and rejection, of learning and unlearning, is an essential part of the creative process, and one that can teach us a lot about a writer’s aims and basic preoccupations, as well as about the writer’s dynamic relationship to the tradition and materials of the craft. Harold Bloom’s writing on the ‘anxiety of influence’ has sensible things to say, and places this process in a central position.

This view of the way my writing has grown and changed has involved an analysis of the importance of three literary models in the development of my work: the contemporary American poet John Ashbery, the mid-twentieth-century Australian hoax poet ‘Ern Malley’, and the nineteenth-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud.

Ashbery (as a poet, as a set of literary tactics, and as their reification into poetry) is the main focus of the first poem, ‘The Anaglyph’, and of the fourth, ‘Electrical Disturbance’. The one hundred and one poems that make up ‘Speaking French’ each contain a line or phrase from an Ashbery poem. His playful deconstructionist strategies form a general background to the thesis.

The ‘Ern Malley’ oeuvre is a particularly Australian example of collaborative
writing, unconscious writing, energetic literary critique and conflict, and the strategic use of disguise. Malley is not present in this thesis, strictly speaking, but his spirit informs the thinking that went into various aspects of the work.

Rimbaud has been a long-term influence on my poetry, and on my thinking about tradition and about literary and social roles in their creative and destructive aspects. In ‘Speaking French: One hundred and one poems’ I unravel and transform poems by Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, and Verlaine.

Rimbaud developed a theory of the writer as a person transmuted into a visionary poet, embodied in the phrase ‘I is another [JE est un autre]’. As I discuss later, to escape the limits of the individual social being the authorial ‘I’ of the poetry has to become some other person or thing: in Rimbaud’s case the writer seeks to be transformed, through his role as a poet, into a visionary seer whose view of reality is free of the restraints of conventional religion, politics and literature. This sense of displacement and transformation is an important sub-theme of the poetry in this thesis and and also of its exegesis.

Another thread that runs through this text is the importance of the unconscious mind as it is expressed in dreams, and the similarity of dreams to movies, and to poems. As Buñuel said in 1953, ‘Film seems to be an involuntary imitation of dream … the nightly incursion into the unconscious begins on the screen and deep inside man.’ (Carrière 91) Dreams are masked and disguised versions of the urges that energise our psychic lives, and the processes of masking and disguise and the adoption of roles are central to the poems in the first two sections of this thesis.

The third group of poems is entirely concerned with the world of film, and the poems address particular movies directly and discursively.

Another current runs across these concerns at right angles, as it were: the metamorphoses of Romanticism as its revolutionary energies flow from the Industrial, Scientific and Political revolutions of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries through Symbolism and Modernism to Postmodernism and beyond. Kate Fagan and Peter Minter note that my _The Alphabet Murders_
(1976) is a Modernist long poem by one reading, a Postmodernist anti-epic by others, and Kate Lilley has positioned my work along a fault line that splits Modernism from Postmodernism, or perhaps in an area where their antithetical world-views overlap and clash; this conflict can be seen to energise and qualify my dealings with Ashbery, Malley and Rimbaud.

¶

Using the idea of mask or role in a different way — at another level, as it were — I felt that I needed to distance myself, the author of this thesis, from the poet John Tranter. It didn’t seem proper to have the poet tugging at the reader’s sleeve, justifying his errors and excesses and pointing out the various felicities of the verse.

Also I wanted the exegesis to achieve some critical distance from the iconoclastic young man who began his poetic career half a century ago, as well as from the older and — one hopes — wiser poet who quarrels and sometime agrees with him in these pages.

Hence in the exegesis I have chosen to refer to the poet John Tranter in the third person, and also to give prominent place to the views, both positive and negative, of the many critics and reviewers who have written about my work — his work, that is — over the years.
Poems, part 1: Vocoder: 4 poems

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 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 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 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 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 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 judgement from the Judge now alighting from the caboose, whose arrival
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
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.
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
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.
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
deep into the mulch of history, while I adjust the mask that
just fits more loosely every decade, and then I add up the little
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
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,
casting caution to the winds and the weather — sorry, welter
Of neighbours, 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
Into the bar: a Scotsman, an Irishman, and a capybara — 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
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.
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
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
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 catalogue of waste.
A dumb waiter brought me the tablets and a note about the projected
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
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.
It was stupid of me to harp on the sadness
Of that animal’s demise: I should forget about the feeling
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.
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
Honourably framed, but presented in a Potemkin-Village spirit.
There was a vast electrical disturbance just outside the walls.
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
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
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,
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,
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
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.
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 métier into an obligation. This,
It seemed, was the way to build the future. But it was
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,
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
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
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
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
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
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,
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
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
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
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
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
On the tepid waters of café society. Go to the meeting, don’t go, whatever. “Whose centre 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 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 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 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 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-centred and jealous, and has now 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 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 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
Your well wrought urn in the centre 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.
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 Sienna
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 résumés — 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 tête-à-tête.

He takes a disprin and feels legless, then he
has another one, then he feels
ambiguous. His ulterior plans
are unforgittably 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 (tenor sax),
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.
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.
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.

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.
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.
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 hooky 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, that 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 Centre 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 US 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 —


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.
Poems, part 2: Speaking French: 101 poems

Rereading Rimbaud: 36 poems
Misreading Mallarmé: 25 poems
Betraying Baudelaire: 20 poems
Vilifying Verlaine: 20 poems

Rereading Rimbaud: 36 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. He is his own consolation prize. We’d be delighted to have his uniform. 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.
Marinara

Michelle speaks to Cleveland, but the fantasy makes it ours: ‘The CIA did sit in, that is, sit in their offices on this issue also — they come on down the steps outside the Capitol, chanting initials: NATO the FBI most US troops — blah blah — then it’s denial and denial.’ Marina, this should be a speech from a script worked up in the story conference room of your dreaming self: Don’t hide it, your life will be on film: the entire avalanche, the whole disaster, the cascades of shit and honey, someday tilting in the sky over England like a Dornier — a blast crucial one single family and now gone.

Deluge

Upgrading the late edition for all US units. So why didn’t you clear the town square? In the thievery of my own dreams I can see the square like a crystal showing a blurry and refracted image of twenty people protesting. Sure, you visited downtown Los Angeles: it was always November there. You do not get that on the Internet. The patrol has no qualms about going on, and later we delivered the women to encourage the men to get moving and get that problem solved — it became the key that unlocked the pain of the Soviet Union, and today there’s a new location for the quiz shoot, a green meadow filled with buttercups.
We did want to buy the Kennedy coach.
It is ten a.m. and you’ll get the crop,
but you are the harvest and not the reaper.
The light shone on the long war unit.
That would give me what he feared:
the CIA. One is a dish of blood. The other:
stains on the carpet, red tadpoles lisping.
Both say they have won in the palace of sound.

It is off the hook, the phone. Any home
is related to a city, and that city is bait. Now
the agents call — 17 men — that is safe to assume —
and claim that the downfall takes place on the phone.
There was no song the Nashville people liked
in a field of political and human damage.

Well, there goes the chance of an open session:
the result won’t be known until tomorrow.
So much for the tools of democracy. Elections
are an assault on the rights of the people.
Talk to the PC makers. We need cheaper
entertainment, not cheaper political displays.
They use our money to promote themselves
so they can take our money again.

To see it all, but to miss that one second
when the gun is fired … there’s an old saying:
How much water is needed to run a horse?
I’d be interested in hearing your reply.
Today your wanderings have come full circle,
and you will tell us everything you know.
Royalties

We’ll make common cause with the Right, and take that message to the Ford Foundation who helped the CIA guy in Paris win a medal that let him sit in on the cultural deliberations of all those old freaks, whose virtue is really stubbornness. The quote of the week missed me — that is, I missed it — I just stopped by to look in on the literary debate, cast a vote ...

Democracy is what we define it to be.
Sure the Iranians voted in a government, but those socialist shits were going to nationalise — their oil, British oil, our oil, what the hell — so we put in that poet guy to agitate, Bunting. Sure, people were killed: so what?

Phrases

Condiments every two weeks and he was sued blind. No routine completed, no, don’t know a thing: some awful fee data, not that good. At some point Internet Explorer can ease the internecine issues. So one night we’re watching the news: he says the Soviet cages are what saved the civil service, and ‘What is the issue? Money? The assault rifle?’ This is the basis for the 1982 phone conversation.

So most of Congress said Mandela’s ANC manual was seditious, but their song was only a minute long. It was raining in the capital. They should reassess the true import of all those cases though even if many of them were cool, their share went undefended to the finish.
Pronto

No joy in this one, Bob. Would you like to be summoned for one little blot on the record, by a marshal, you who were always in the way? And list the indictment today, that will be implemented tomorrow? If you do that, old friend, the problem seems to be saying, the data will go on the skids — it could be a fun contest held in a field in the Boston area.

Now I don’t want you to get the idea that finding a guitar has anything to do with it. Just dish it up like the boss wants: though if you deal with the CIA — Hi — I’m Bob. Can’t talk now. Down in the park, listening to the guitars, lots of single mothers …

Departure

As a view of the busy sale we see only postures of the dream, and this one is also your mistake when you turn on the light and listen to the ABC on the pound and the dollar or the euro on a fix — so much for the public who know it in the wallet.
The Fixer

Call me. The distant box is open.
It has the fix-it. In three days of using it
he just couldn’t get through
to the end of ‘log enable’.
He had a stiff drink or two in a cool bar
when the investigating court
claimed that the CIA under any other name
would be the same.

All the defendants, the whole sack of them,
they are all free to come and go as they please
through the vanilla-flavoured venetian blinds.
On the phone, deletion is the aim.
This idea is not the only visionary
thing to happen in a small novel.

Metro

Two guys from Detroit pored over the suicide letter
as its auction price rose through the $8.00 range.
A male choir that this year sang in Vietnam
is now a medical team on a training course.
No one wants an incontinent hostage.
Femina’s call for us all to share the pretty things
fell on deaf ears; so much for the taste of justice.
They can’t be bought. An investigation will not
reveal me as a donor or a smaller companion.
The promise of learning is a delusion. That’s what
befalls most of us plagiarists: our suckers
reject the disillusion that comes with the ugly truth.
One guy says the economy is in fact the city of events,
the other says ‘no one is a real actor in the film.’
**Movements**

The guys in the Gulf of Aden did enough, but you know I said to kill one of those bad men on Friday, bring the body to me later.

To call the team ‘failures’ would make this a political stumble. The girls on Dataquest are young and silly: girls, your heads full of boys, why in the hot flush of being — why did you — of all the kids in this town, why should they —

yet if I want to take you on my lap and be romantic it’s No Way, José. If you go from the beach to the Hotel for the Young and the Stupid, you’ll get the idea that we don’t need more doctors, just a few idiots to sit on the dish; this sounds fine and energetic so they should be going out on a shaman basic poster.

**Flowers**

Jim Gott and old money don’t mix. There is no possibility of change. He sent flowers to the old lady, to no avail. Then he fought the Chinese laundry over the disputed crease in his last clean shirt sent by UPS, the Chinaman got a court order that he not be so called. He makes peanuts: his thousand a year is viewed as a decent living: you figure it out.

Old Gott was taken to court, a kind of maze synod, that September, ornamental cherry petals littering the streets.

Thirty-eight years later the charge sheet tells us that he was called The Fiendish. In the distant future, I shall be as efficient as you.
**Horticulture**

Thomas Cecil, what did you do?
The whole voyage will have to be cancelled.
A man can get what he wants
on the inside — much good did that do me.
Thomas was sued by the city
because he gave a false statement
when he came to the desert resort.
That means they’ll not nominate — that is —

because of the delay they called to say that the sea
— no, the Warsaw Pact countries mainly lack seas,
thus navies, though they have naval monuments,
the monument a monument to itself. If Greece
gives someone a permanent visa status, it means
that the Jewish faith cannot do for old Thomas.

**Anguish**

The May frostbite is still on the land,
a statement by analogy
down by John Quinn.
We should assess this.
Single men sit through the night,
nursing a grudge and a stiff whisky,
and a beaker of wine
darker than the deepest twilight.

Flying, all share a common fear.
My initials in the sky. She’s
come here with this deal, no pay
and no exit. Kinda nice to know that,
thanks for joining in the song
at the close, four years.
**Barbarians**

In the state-house today old McAfee
told his story, and none too soon. It is cool
and dim inside, but the patio is sunny.
He is only local news in a local court, but
I was as worried as anyone. All the media
were there, barbaric on the video phones.
They’re seeing it like so: he has a free kick.
Did you say ‘What happened to the eighties?’

Are they the only ones saying this lady
made a few dents in the system,
took her doses — I see it as two doses —
and then a plea bargain for the shopping assault?
This edition paints it as a gamble on love, or a kiss
too soon, or Mondo music and a new full moon.

**Bottom of the Harbour**

Maria today got a heap of stuff,
all she can use for a month.
Taylor said she should make one
for the Indian, that is, the male person
originally from the subcontinent
and since she wasn’t being the buyer
for two of them, she said no. There was
calm rapture in the way she spoke.

This had an effect on the warrior courtroom.
Do you mean that the US should give up
the Cold War tactics shown on the
Canton blankets? We use them to keep warm,
for goodness’ sake, it’s a case of being up at dawn
bottom-feeding in and around the drowned cathedral.
Dawn

Jerry Matsuno will get a band together, don’t worry: the system was breaking down, but a fix is just a phone call away. Then they can open the case. There are more witnesses to be called, so keep an eye on what Jerry Marshall wants. Really, all these criminals and junkies are the envy of a bevy of affected socialites. That is, their manners are affected, not their health.

The studies say they’re also obliged to slow down every Sunday. ‘At the top of their key’ means that for the ‘don’t feel safe’ area you should read ‘black and Latino vision’ area. Your call, call the Davidians for your weekend closure, and Monday a lesson on the civic union of Genesis.

Parade

The beautiful city is his only speaking song, a song that took place in the open air, and we also collected data based on a dream, the presumed landscape and the dream of home. It’s a CD of Fall songs, maybe, only the data is in a format that might give away the occupation of the person, and as we clambered into the shuttle, a flashlight shone on the ticket.

So the district judge knows that I am still at large, thanks to the informers the courts imprisoned. They added a goal to motivate the contestants and that’s one of the ideas they need to speed up: the one who negotiates with NATO will always be sad: the ideas of all the songs have always been known.
Scenes

The subcommittee poses a threat. When they say ‘the DB city’ they don’t mean the Deutsche Bahn AG or whatever... here the news spread like wildfire through the buildings — Ronald, get them! Don’t shout! or give orders. We told the customer what the customer wants. We’ve only potted palms, and one wolf a year. Then all the comedians disembark in San Diego.

That’s a company with a real future, though the double stop is daunting, I agreed with them, and I should say that the fondled sale failed on the killed day. They even want to set up cameras in the courtroom. We’ll all need visas, for this is the land where hope turns to fear.

Sorehead

I was arrested because of that internal memo, and ended up in a cell, then I was told to sit with the police and the local bigwigs. In the hushed and fast darkening room they said someone — someone — had reduced the safety margin on the airport risk factor, and I got the blame. An unaltered, PA six-pack call at 6 cents a day minus expenses, and I’m happy.

The local cop would not open the tomb of the deported — sorry, departed — and as usual he wanted to tell me a story. The goal is a pool of all new CC research, he said: they need a set of three standard deviations. A TV ad face makes comments, what would they know. Open the tomb, and let me in.
**Eighteen Fairies**

Eighteen sequential disasters this year,
that’s what happens when you plant the seed
and don’t plan how to reap the crop,
like “I had a coffee (plant growing) in the shade”
and “I had a coffee (…) in the shade (of the
trees that adorn the front at Nice).”
He sold some advertising, but his wife sold more
through the gullible mall culture of the sixties.

I am up to date. Does that sound immodest?
Well, fuck you. We had the dead eagle product
at $4.00 a hit, traffic increasing on the freeway, and
with his life written out in waves of music,
he knew he was a saint, but the sainthood, alas,
was as a false light to all the seeded day.

**Childhood Music**

Its stated goal is an assault on the new music.
The norm for most women: a silence
already filled with noises. She is
the editor of a different algorithm,
and clocked on to an experiment that feeds me
over the long tradition of discourse
which lasts longer than their own phone calls.
That’s why I quit and took up writing poetry

instead. But I guess that was a mistake.
Are the blues just a warp in the DNA,
a genetic splice on the silver bullet of jazz?
At the beginning of the major slowdown
music is used to liven up the dismal matter
late at night when every gesture is cool.
Genius

Josh Elliott, be innovative, nouveau. Hey, this is an ad that makes use of its own matching channel as a greed altar, but hungers are just another topic, to them, and a decent cost analysis is still needed. The BBC wanted to see if that moment still has a null market, or can they kick it into life? They only sell movies they don’t have the ending for.

For that large a show, get a couple to fight a ban made up of forcible sodomy law. ‘Separated at birth’ is all the formatting you need. You know where: what tools to use, you know what to say: we diva the couple to do a little more, and as for shared data, forget it: see ‘soufflés, social’.

Lives

Put me on the list of local media maniacs. I am an old man working on a dBase file, barely tolerated, living on the margin, and I know that all the men in the city are there for a reason. And then the insane visual was invented, the Enola come-on. Come on, I can’t hear you. Take the kids to see the conditions caused by the Vietnam War, why don’t you?

They’re not humane in Dawson City. It seems to me that your famous design champion is up a tree, and what effect does that have on the practical Mister? Mama must do what she must, shut down by the videotape marshal as a mandate for the people of Mormon.
Martian Movie

What to do? Nothing; just wake up to see if the units prod the day awake, to keep this idea like a jet in a hangar. You might be the key that all three of us need — (and Jimmy the Basin) — need to be on call to notify Kitty and the target — oh the arduous trade — do the scene — of what, may I ask? — the scene where some guy keeps keying the Martian into frame. How? I do not know. I’m a kid and all we know is how to create the creature, not its morals.

This was our ambition: to be small and clear and free. I’m on proxy, that is, resting, now in the slough where Marcelino and his pals make themselves scarce. The navy is in town and that guy called Austin is struggling to decode the signals. Yet the tomb riddle will be solved.

New Beauty

Being viewed as both coward and hero is debilitating; night after night this message returns, and naturally you try to deceive them in the music store, and then you want to sound like you’re playing with a famous band, playing a song that is to be a record of the navy’s faults. You can depend on the City Council to do what is wrong — the city may be Chantilly, and then again it may not.

So you pour all your resources into the battle to get to the top of the pops with your angry music, and force the listeners around the Pacific rim to vote your way: most are no friends of America. The airplane to you is that person, a star, rising high and then falling. That’s the Catch 22.
Dolls

Being viewed as a combination of beauty and ugliness is a debilitating affliction: with a false face and a different coat you would try to deceive them: out of night the token emerges in the music store, and they want to sound like something that’s already popular and thus out of date. Fashion has to change: that’s its essence. One day enduring values reign, then around the Pacific rim, an SQL battle — structured query language pestered the database for more and better data. Then again, you may get sacked; then where’s your cocky prognostication? Knee-deep in bullshit, a failure recorded over the navy’s default sonar ping on dolls and the airplane to you is that person, not America.

Childhood

Combing your hair, you don’t follow suit, you look all blotchy on the late show, performing for thousands of people, and indeed the team in the studio including John Updike and a close female friend cast doubt on the audience figures. You’re seeing the virus and these guys all dying in a fire-fight, but on a neighbouring island the locals benefit from new lease of life.

The goal of the pain can get busier than all the data in the world, the flaw in the work that we do for state PTA president is a lack of talent. Update the loan. The MIT Board is on the Internet and his roommate has enough votes to win one of the best seats in the house, still layered and glowing.
**Brooklyn**

Do they need to show more, to agree to put the data mining double digits to use?
Things get darker as we move, so go back a day:
a bang on the gong and he’s off to Brooklyn
with a call for a song set from Tony, sliding to CNN,
sun blinding him, trouble in the upper airway,
cost of sales data ballooning — he cannot operate.
It is the ‘FM in a Domain Name System’ hazard,
a haphazard collapse they can share with the boss
who already believes that we should solve it —
that must be what the publishers want —
two weeks’ extra pay, he would say that to keep me,
but I’m getting used to his lies. Sufficient unto the day
are its many small evils — Betty, comment on that, pronto.

**Shames**

Don’t kid me, I’m not Noah.
The corps existed in the new data —
Esprit de Corps, I mean — I mean give-away,
no way — people see the wheel
then get a phenomenal fright.
No one thought she did it — she and the Nazi salt,
baking bread in a cosy home in the Midwest.
Men appear, but they live in boxes.

Call me ‘wish of the mall’ and no,
I don’t want the Tutsi player.
Make a decision on the whole movie:
good or bad. Mary is no relation.
Kitty cat, you force the Nazi salute.
I need what? A system of stone?
**Story**

The Seagate exited at the same time, telling him to make a profit, but he found only enough to get by. They’re holding a playboy, he is on the sofa, unconscious. Fit the company’s last item behind the steering wheel, then consider the eulogy you posted on the Internet, no one was even in jail at that time, no one holding in the closet the nation, in the nation a house.

Today a new philosophy: and they testified to shut down certain data pathways, not wanting the bullet, the use of an application, so-called. The big guy looks just like you, the DNA test gets the nod. In the scene that you may not know, the surgeon is on CNN and then it goes dark.

**Tenure Track**

She thought she had seen all this before. Have cards, will follow suit. You could say. As we discussed the tenure track topic, people were listening in, like a radio audience. Perhaps in the last of days of my life

I’ll get to see some easier money, she said, easier than this rigmarole, studying myths in a manner similar to a dental student.

So this is how the department administrators get to mess up the hiring policy, relying on false information from the Internet on a normal working day. They had power, but it seems they just wanted to seem to be
a grunt soldier on a flight outta here.
Villas

In April, the sun was to be the display manager, advancing into mountain light, the fake mountain light in the back projection — Las Colinas: is it that the girl's address? When you check the pocket book, on the night, it’s open at a page where the Sonics appear on a vital mission to the azure quandary glowing under the Cleveland full moon.

They wanted an eighteen-city police commissioner. Ratings will determine the station’s campaign of violence — okay, call me — it only costs a dime — in time to shut down the TV show.
You post the key to a college guy, I get off here, the companion you can’t see, who sees everything.

Subcontinent Nocturne

The atmosphere is breathless. People don’t care about what the law allows you to display: a city full of media, before we're torn to pieces in the Class A data stack. And who used to be happy in a dungeon, pray tell, tied up with the Swedish maid? Don’t believe all the FAA tells you. The radio waves to the north of Bombay tell the young programmers to be on a cool team, to demand a training that gets them into the call centres full of money. Player after player falls, a large old domain is sold to the man in a blue suit. But the town seems a bit tedious on the trip back from the airport — after California, it’s a dump — I hear the city’s soulful call — don’t leave me again.
Winter Maps

The cascades cascaded; so far so good, and parts of Europe reminded me of the vineyards whose wine tasted of the forest floor.
I wrote down the names of these areas, and the list seemed both necessary and sufficient. The whole experience was a kind of education.
In the Northern hemisphere, the April dawn heralded spring, but not where I come from.

Lots of ‘money’ was signed over to me on the video shoot, just to bamboozle the nationalised people. It wasn’t counterfeit, but it had no exchange value, in the crucial new store.
To open an account you had to be up early, and answer this question: Are you a man or a mug-shot?
Misreading Mallarmé: 25 poems

Whistle While You Work

If you whistle while you work, you can make a living quoting Latin mottoes. He had a quick drink before the show and will now resume tickling the tonsils. Out there (beyond the Black Stump) it’s more serene. I’m a paid rule-book adviser; you had better listen — I prefer “you” in the plural. But to sit with you for a while, that’s all I want. Oh, someone more senior would suit you better, I see.

So it’s back to West Avenue where I used to live in the shadow of poverty, and the role in the stage play where the old woman is seen committing a crime. She held a raffle for the senior team, though they no longer had to do much to win the prize.
Among Wild Swine in the Woods

You can also lead, if you do the song
this senior year wants done.
Clothes newly cleaned, he travelled to
Newcastle this week to do point guard duty.
It was an ideal union by the sea. Far below,
your loan for nearly half a million drifted;
now the law makes you into a zebra, an ass
with stripes. You’ll learn to handle things.

Commissioner Millan grudgingly signed the clause
that Lamont wrote out in his will. It’s true
we have not avoided our destiny. We have to
clear the air. Literature being a kind of gas,
standing by the door at the book launch was clever,
in case you needed to get out of there.

Bracket Creep

The chief lender uses the turning of the year.
Lawford’s use of it will mean what I told you,
that they were all going into a sweet little deal
there where the law was buyable, if you
had a million — do I hear two million?
And all that lot gathered at the bar
were mourning the death of capital.
To tell the truth the air turned to smoke.

I long for a clatter of high heels
on the steps. That is, a door opening
onto the real world outside the banking sector,
fresh air, sunlight and bird calls.
I wish I had sons and also
daughters to aim at a better future.
Bomber’s Moon

Senator from the nuclear age,
our cages are no protection
in autumn’s far country, all rusted and red.
I wonder if there is a non-nuclear future —
there on my ten-year diary there is.
Chantal thought Julia was a pain in the neck
and for all the promises of dalliance, she was.
We’re off to a party held by yours sincerely

on the ground floor; you can come, if you promise
to behave. There is a leading lady, and a hero
denounced by the mob, and it’s probable
that our elected representatives don’t give a damn.
No, I am not the son of the senator, and clearly
not meant to fall into the vat of acid.

Drinking in the Kitchen

One man called Assad Lafontaine took a while
to recover. Whoever is this year’s ‘Mr. Immediately’
left for the notorious coast. The night is cold
and delicate and full of angels.
The governor is having some kind of fit.
And so we turn the page over to think of starting.
This is all there is. Go to Liverpool to buy a car,
or see the Polish workers leaving for Europe.

Salute the leaders of the music industry:
you could always take up the offer
to go to Tunisia to let him do as he pleased.
I got callers to say ‘The Don is on leave’.
If there turns out to be more than one caller, call
Gloucester or — if it’s obscene — call me.
Malaria

‘There’s no nuclear issue,’ Avila said belligerently. ‘Learn to live with it.’
The issue is what role would you have.
The kids were still at the jewellery store.
‘Look at yourself!’ could be a way of pointing at
vanity forever going down, the menacing shadow.
One glacier more or less doesn’t matter.
Civil defence doesn’t rate. The newer flocks

are just as false as ever. So go meekly
with your song, or warn those who were not sure
of a lifelong faith, knowing it was wrong to steal.
You have a strong lead in the electoral college.
Sickle cell anaemia won’t protect the Africans
this time. A senior tour will get malaria.

Digital Clock

Victoria’s receding song failed to call them in.
Nor did the wild song wallet call them out.
To our workforce, your brilliance is nothing more
than knowing what important details to leave out.
Write down what dictum is needed for the bit clock
on the Milan technique, at the blaze lift-off.
A logic bomb lobbed into the research lab
will close it down for two years. Careers

were shown, that didn’t include your
delicious rock sauce. He asked Victoria
to sing again, and now you have gone quiet
like an audience that wants to be respected.
All the class crew were directed to whistle
just before interval. Now your time here is done.
Old Folk

So the poor people promptly ordered a hamburger. The younger brothers came from the onyx land, the country that was in the news because of its atrocities. Before the story came the name: the name of Graham Vick’s Dunwoody 5 Housing Estate for the elderly and confused, where stubborn mathematical theorems are solved. So you’re not happy with the scenery around here.

A stamp could reproduce all this in detail, down to the last autumn leaf, the odd-looking smoke drifting from the chimney, the car idling on the drive. 10 The born-agains are still on the ‘don’t believe it’ routine. Here comes the call to sit on the board of La Compagnie australienne: it’s a local policy, so seek the arsenal. [14]

Cover Art

Is anyone clear about what we are supposed to do? We were promised verdant vistas, no? But what dismal scene is this? Lydia heard in our remarks, a critique of her own, or songs that could only be there for one reason, so she said, oh dear lord, when six or more of you are gathered, and she was offered no honour, it’s all your fault, you shit, just listen to him!

He had someone on the 40th floor show him how to appear in more than one movie and we knew all season why our tour with the big man was bound to fail, the fans gathered in the hall and told us all, miserable since Lydia said ‘No more Norman Rockwell tour’ and swore. [14]
Bookkeeper’s Holiday

On the train from Leicester I read a long short story and from border to border clambered through an imaginary landscape, the weather redundant though summery. Then I read the reports of what Markham knew and when he knew it, and how certain receipts were ‘lost’ by Markham, who left the firm in a hurry. Moths climb in the flame.

Ah, subtle Emilia, what’s up? What caused your convenient delay? One little Glasgow lesion, and your body recycling the air. We found — hidden in a locker — the books Markham took, and the old law books too. Olivier found them, but he was not to hear the slaughter, on the CD.

Lady Mondegreen

Tea with Lady Mondegreen at one of those classy places, candles, waitresses. She won a dollar a month in a raffle and on the spur of the moment banked it, so it slowly aggregated and grew: a bunch of digits quietly multiply in the database as it updates annually: checked, backed up, reified into cash.

Checking her diary — her time in Europe, well, she needed to erase some events: one crazy for the bottle, a pillar of waiting, betrayal, some of the group shot, at 1:00 PM eastern standard time. The report went to Wheeler, the defrocked monk who was told to lay down the law.
At Sans Souci

One morning he appeared at breakfast, saying he wanted to be a young romantic poet. Success at that is little more than dust. Curator of his own emotions, embalming his memories while they were still readable, scribbling, typing, buying and selling real estate.

‘All I want is a quiet talk,’ she said, and she sat smoothing her frock on her thighs.

‘Displacement gesture,’ the textbook said, starlings grooming their feathers. Sister Louise will see you now: don’t you want the massage? Louise wanted more from the so-called poet, more emotional salt, but he was all gesture, just a reputation, empty hands and a ‘mouth full of much obliged.’

Pride at Evening

All your home improvements may well turn to vapour in the evening as the money drains out of the market. You can sue, and you may win, but you’ll wait a long time for the money. Trouble, that was something between her legs and it sure made a mess of the accounts.

She and ‘Mr. Rayban’ had that ‘conversation’ then it broke up. Debt to assets, I mean.

You may recall that we were the life of the bourse, but not any longer. It never had a soul before. Failure is one domain to wish well behind you. Kindness is not necessary at the plant, and not in the office, but when you look at the wreck around you, maybe we were mistaken all along.
The Armani Endowment

You were born in an inauspicious year when theory was on the rise in seminar rooms, when old hands sought to reassure their colleagues. They went quietly, in the end, then didn't pollution arrive with the new song and the Armani money and a young professor? The great careers are like that, he said: a slow burst, then a slowly growing flame.

His secretary confessed that she had met ‘Graham’ at the races, she’d put a thousand dollars on ‘Corn Lordship’ and lost the lot, was this love? It was enslavement, of a poor kind, like a glass cross on a cheap necklace. Live off it, Professor, and don’t crack up.

Sheriff of Nothing

In his remote province his work was valued. That lifted his spirits, his biographer notes in a margin. Unsupported by reason's enigma he wanted more but he didn’t get it. Drat. Sitting in a darkened room, typing, for decades — a consultant of nothing, doing time. And the servants are glad to be enslaved, especially the worn-out wife, carving the lamb for dinner.

His biographer was not likely to reveal what his research turned up: infidelities, greed, cruelties large and small. Now he’s writing the life of a Eurasian beauty who lives beyond the law with a scrum of men. Her daughter will do well in New Jersey.
Blue Moss

All Sally could be convicted of is a love of luxury, and who could blame her? Years in a camp, among the torturers and the tortured. Too many cigarettes. No way is clear for escape. Eat your dinner, or there won’t be any more, her mother said. Hide in the toilet or die for two sacks of coal. There is no use trying to escape.

Don’t fight over what to drink, just drink. All year long we’re poor, then we’re middle-aged. Finally a dawn crowded with American soldiers. The dialogue was either a blip or a blunder. The long clear arm of golden liquid turned into spray, and the spray is a blue moss killer.

Break Some Eggs

A butler enters with a letter on a tray. Come in, sit down on the sofa. It’s always there. The young woman, she belonged to no one, she said, though she was married, strictly speaking. It’s not a good sign for the women on the jury to laugh. That shows no respect for the horrible murderer. Though perhaps he’s just a bystander, or a rodeo judge.

Think of the huge debt your adventures last year incurred while you were grovelling on your knees, humiliating yourself in front of a female junkie. In every pensioner there’s a child crying to be taken home. Nearly there, you said; we’re doing well in Omelette Park.
Water Taxi

Our Allen is a guy with a lot of tone, e.g. the 2008 Passat just wasn’t classy enough. The man who made the same mistake twice is exonerated, he says. Call Saul, he’ll affirm that. But instead you sepulchre an offer for lunch, and go to the sitting room in your uncle’s house where poor Mister $9.00 lives at plant level. The janitor’s union marks his limits.

Ready to alter the suit? Lucky for him the doctor cured his problem. Yes, he could be busy on a water taxi, he could lobby the unemployed. His services were listed on a toilet door in some gay bar in Cherbourg, that’s where he made his profits, and lots of them.

Muzzle Flash

Not able to make a clean break, Jed hung around the town for months, so it was said he had mammal delirium. His wife and I had a near-miss one time when he came rocketing out of the alley at the back of the movie palace, blam! glimpse of a gun muzzle flash, well, ‘palace’ gives the wrong idea. You might as well ask a hog what is happening.

He would keep calling around for the letters he wrote and gave to some youngster to deliver. He would tremble in a bar, or just hover above Munk Park, half alive. The scene is a renowned beauty spot named in honour of a Doctor Munk from Hong Kong.
Police Action

The years of ample pay are denied
by Old Tom. No one is willing, right now, to recall
the heights he scrambled to, trampling others.
And he was upset that his son hated him.
Oh well, the more you suffer, the stronger you are,
opined Liz, from behind a bottle of gin.
The old man really is something else, no?
What are the differences between these two

photographs? One is red, one is blue. And the face
resembled yours, the one reflected in the water.
Since the anguish of staff turnover bothers you,
take a holiday. While you’re gone we’ll
finish off the labour unions. In the cool dark outside,
whistling from the police took the form of sleep.

Smash and Grab

Sorry to keep you waiting, Ward. We have given
this whole business a great deal of thought.
It seems highly unlikely that you will ever
understand the depth of our grief on this issue.
It feels like post-natal depression, but with an edge.
Do you grasp that, dimly? But before we
put the knife in, do you have something more
to say for yourself? In your new script

a crazy film director follows a civil war, right?
And the script is riddled with confusion,
like the so-called fog of war. Slowing down
opens out new avenues, and you will have time
for your silly hobbies — your Alamo, your
Waterloo — and you may yet learn to please.
Working the Oracle

Well, said the senator, after a little soul-searching, this week let’s do local cuisine, dinner at the Red Rose Café. No more theatre. No more news from home while you’re deep in the crucible of capital: longhorn nausea. The whole class took the offshore tours package like some pocket history of the world, then Holly won a dazzling victory over Carole Lore.

She now had the measure of the A Class: it was due to what she learned in Vera Cruz.

From what the girl at the door said, Holly’s the courtier next in line, so select which senior dinner companion you want, and listen: he’ll show you how to lose, or how to win.

The Tomb of Baudelaire

The governess did it; it was her mission. Did the commissioner think she was beautiful? It was just one woman, as cold as marble. She went through what Mandela went through. Sure, she had allure, she nodded and winked, and in the end she received justice. It did nothing to improve things. What can you do with what is still an all-rural economy?

Walsh said he would grant legal aid but only for 14 weeks. Rick Thompson was also bringing a gift of some kind. We have moved on a little ahead of them. On the last yards to the prison that song was still within her, grazing, complete.
The Tomb of Edgar Poe

The mail is on holiday, my dear, but I shall apply an ornate version of your name to the envelope. The letter inside says that a famous poet fetched you from Liverpool to London for some disorderly conduct, the door locked and someone in there fornicating, the linoleum floor the scene of a historic union. Recalling all you explained about how to kill a man with a folded newspaper or a sharpened pencil, it really dawned on me what a shit you were, how one minute you see the fake shop-front of the spy outfit, and then you don’t, and in this training pit leased out to the interrogation schools the whole business starts to frighten even you.

The Tomb of Verlaine

Like a first-aid kit no one ever uses, here’s a list of the so-called ‘non-executive’ directors. With the terrorists in Oman, that offer is soon enough reneged on. Claudia, renew your governors; they were issued at no risk to you and your CD-ROM. If you fall in line behind me, I’ll tell you the only place in New York that is benign.

It’s a good idea not to be the last gorilla: see the others eating greedily from the trough. She’s the mark doll, and he showed her how to give the knuckle-ball salute to the Lords of the North, owners of that villa in the countryside, planning a gruelling test.
Betraying Baudelaire: 20 poems

*Well-equipped Men*

Lately I’ve been looking at old-fashioned plaids. 
I’m sure I deserve a beautiful suit. Call me, 
before the Hong Kong tailor leaves town. 
I hear the songs popular in the Falklands, 
yet I shall never return to the past, that attic, 
nor bid for the tawdry items that were on offer 
from the poorest chamber-pot to the glittering jewel, 
oh God, if we had been in clever Cleveland —

I would have voted for a brilliant uniform 
in a silent room and a loaded sawn-off shotgun, 
sawn in half for a leading role in the documentary 
about the muscley brothers in the rusting truck 
on target for the abortion clinic, the news story 
inflamed them and no one is responsible.
The Drunk at the Lecture

We would have lost a nuclear war if one had happened, but I was busy paying off my darling’s credit cards, and I wouldn’t have noticed. The news bleeds from one side of this great continent to the other. Drab Gelman, that was his name. He was often more formal than one needed to be. Is that a sign of some deep inferiority?

When things went wrong he bounced back. Everybody wondered who the new arrival was, but he was just the old arrival in a suit, speaking English well and Italian badly, the lingo of Leslie the Offender. Laughing, I maintain her in the style to which she would like to become accustomed.

Ghandi Dancer

I’ve done all I can to clear them all of suspicion. Now look at the movie, the more it strives to be clean and cruel, the more it leans towards the wistful, which is a kind of lie, then the work is redeemed by the song at the end and the senior kids can relax. Is it November already? How time flies. Now, winter snow, and back to the forties, when things were real.

Sincerely, I was silent when I was obliged to be. It was a near miss where their animal natures were concerned. A few more musical numbers and the plan will sell itself: studying English at Dundee for the honour of it, not for the hopes of Donna Ménagerie wanting more shop-floor space.
Ben’s Diction

Ben was a problem, grunting and babbling. Graham’s oratory was overwhelming. Between these extremes others muddle through: a miracle of salesmen, speaking fluently like bank managers. He glared at his bête noir, the armed Kinane, he owning the right to lawnmower the conference, while you, with your clearer view (view: special), won’t even stick with their EEC motives.

While all we know is serious harmful talk which of course grew ever more awful — is that a mixed blessing, or a fatal risk? The demand was far beyond what L’Enfant could do to satisfy it, for lifting them all up to the speaking occasion was too much for the boy. We lunched at La Jetterai.

Mister Real

It was known that he might come and dive into the blow zone of the high school formal; he had an inner name for their labels and their girlish innuendoes, for he knew nothing can bring a child undone more quickly that the crash into adulthood via the glands and a bottle of sugared bourbon and fizz. The ambrosia had an awful lot to do that night, for the kids were faded in the precise moment of bursting into bloom. A few more years and that cute blonde will be a harassed mother, wanting magic English, a civil hello from Mr. Real from Lincolnshire, an end to the slanging matches, and a private income to be spent only on champagne.
Liana

The constellations are rising in perfect order. If you want a future, make a wish now. Don’t long to be a secure monster; bring the other near, and listen. He has something to say to you. If you turn away, more water flows under the bridge, and it is your fault, stupid. That one is a real handful, a Sherman Tank.

Despite his position, in the American lingo he is lower than a pig in mud, and a minor criminal, and a sordid creep as well. Choose one of the songs that had hung around the fringes of the hit parade from the Time of Methuselah: the Lithuanian dirge that says the singer is known as Donna Karan.

Down by the Station

He knew he had to find a meal ticket. The last racket was a turkey. Then the scene changed, but intermittently as through dark mist and he found that he had become fashionable. He travelled up to his old college. So there he was, week-long, the honouree and his gadget, a shoulder holster with a spring release. He should have met Leonard Woolf first thing this morning at the station, but he was drunk and one of the servants had to do it. Last month he placed the folded bribe in the blue envelope and dabbed the back with a little honey like a seal or a kiss. Now his filibuster accent is on the evening news in the Year of the Dog.
Lateral Sclerosis

Small loans are the ruin of the older folk in Country Antrim, but in nearby Muckamore they’re laughing. Mr. Sillars went over them carefully — we all want that reporter off-limits — and the letter he provided for a signing-on fee seemed valid. Getting the focus right is hard: thirty dollars on the one hand, one billion euros on the other: one hungry family is a tragedy, a million a statistic. This information is useless. I want to go back, out of the bad stories. Be sure to include some of the rebels in the army. And carry a gun. If they can put up with their comrades their mournful future will take on a classical look, like a military history getting ready to be recorded.

Bohemians en route

More people, less room. This motel sure has a prickly atmosphere. The storm subsided; the dwarf led you to the end of a street. Her rehearsal of fear and alarm is an act, learned beautifully in London back in the fifties. Can we go back there, please? Love for the cute animal is contagious. One also has the infants to think about as we circle around the small museum which is really a 3-D colour diapositive of the usual Mexican tourist trap, including blue margaritas: sugar and salt on the rim of a glass of hooch on the slippery table, and now I am a two-man woman on the run.
Good Times

This is a great time for theology. Satan is everywhere, which makes you optimistic. A good opponent stirs debate. But if so, she with her loud ‘kill the money’ rant speaks more harshly than we need. The soul has to stay where it is, where the janitor hoovers a new home for the killer — dial 911, quickly! Unless you want a year of suffering from former Mafia thugs in Sicily where the ‘pleure similar douceur’ is kept for the tourists, more than half of whom are full of drink, calm and voluptuous as the poem says, where calm is the effect of severe brain trauma and very little tantalises the inner child.

Don Wan

A glass of champagne for luck and down you go, under the wave, past the has-been losers and someone called Monty: they are you, in the mirror, at the end of another weary year. You can’t be blamed for giving up, when no one comes to dinner — or she’s the wrong one, stumbling in through the hot-house full of dying plants, armoured, half-alive and calm.

The more we think we feel, the more we resemble the shabby poet Nadir Longley in his long decline, cadging drinks at dusk on the boardwalk. For him, to abandon art would have made nonsense of his long struggle. Thus there is no way out of the problem of pathos vs. experience.
Sharon

Sharon is one of those who live for the moment, a banquette piled high with sexy books. Sharon won the Preakness Prize, winner take all, leaving her alone in a single room. The year to year bonus came in advance for Sharon and one Michelle-Ange, who has long been her wife, more or less, always late for work, still singing in the shower recess.

Some friends of Sharon are as luminous as theory, in the form of morsels of learning doled out, and there are four envelopes and just one issue to wrestle with. She says "I feel the carousel starting slowly and going faster and faster!"

We are gone down into the land of the officials.

Deep Sky

In the hut by the tropical beach family values are a stumbling block, and the lithe boys leave them at home for the sake of the income from the dirty old man who pays them to mix his paints and just a little more, a sacrifice of honour. Now we really know it all happened by chance. Arriving late from the Montreux Jazz Festival is one of the sly well-informed.

What cultural roost there is in this country is ruled by schoolteachers and journalists, Patrick White said. True; far away in Sydney there had never been a cultural elite, and no Sir Norman Hartnell and his hats and frocks. Talent? It’s relative. Sexual pleasure is the absolute.
She got an ormolu cooler-cover from her daughter and she only turned seventy on Monday. The weather is warmer near the landmarks. Was your name on the honours list? No, I missed out again. So did Mark Lamarr, if that’s any consolation. If there is a cure I’ll make the journey, up in the discreet lift to the secret clinic; if not, not. Okay?

Four officers from the forum are here to see you, madam. It’s about the mail-order bride that Mark Hall married, and the visa problem; it is like watching a movie of a nightmare. Working for a dollar an hour gets her a green card and more useless literature.

Grace and Florence

When he’s finished killing the East German agent, ask him to report to the boss. What exactly are those marks on the walls? Later he came from all four corners of the future: it was a conspiracy of right-handed notions. We have been expecting you, Mister Bond — we hope you have enjoyed the onshore breezes, and the 3-D memory laugh behind the pool.

Sort through the list of Stasi agents; one of them is highly-placed in your office. No more will cygnets lap the pond. You met Ms Lamont? She’s on her former awful downward spiral, don’t ask. It’s the mental inhaler again, while her inflamed on-and-off romance becomes familiar.
The Chevrolet

He sold the car, therefore more hammer for him, less for an inference in some back room where he had been few feet from that brain, convinced that the story was coming to a close. He had an inside track with the mayor, or so he said, knowing the mayor was full of anguish. Wilson was the art-form minister, and he and the four unions were soon infamous.

There were new reasons every year in the long phrases from the sister of mercy, drawing her home for one more winter sun on the frosty conifers. Go to the London dungeon of the civil war period — you will not be immune; the mayor knows how to do top listening: stop listening.

The Enemy

If marginal calls are made, the stock market won’t be able to handle it. It’s less trouble for them to enable someone to fix it, than for them to fix it. You can tell the top brass: they have a flower in the buttonhole. A lovely pale blue check shirt, flax, linen. And a kiss for the informer in your lap, and for the boss, a stiff drink or two.

We are paying to stay for a while in your place — is that okay? We’ll get a cleaner. She smoked heavily: one lung less for her, and she’s lucky to survive the operation. King of the hill, for what that’s worth. This was mine, and I let it slip through my fingers.
The Fares

The Consul fell into the role of governor of foreigners all year long, and therefore looked normal enough on the senior news. No one knew he carried a gun, a Beretta. His sister embezzled four million British pounds skimming the fares, and no one suffered, she said, as it was a victimless crime. After they left, the long war began in the distant provinces which was good news for England, or so the Consul said. His lawyer made sure he had soap and hot water in the cell. To survive you need to play a very clever game, no? Rooted in twilight, dreaming, a skein of traffic made up that melancholy caravan.

Melting Moments

If you and that creep come in late for class don’t apologise, please. There’s no point. There never is. Arm in arm with the nuclear killer from year one, you think you’re immortal. For more years, it seemed, than an idealist has had hot dinners, we sat watching the cute New Zealander, one hand on her stomach and the other holding a carving knife, although that too is something that must be owned, together with the rest of the ugly drama. On Friday at dawn Méler will be there, full of love for her and her song, and the envelope full of powder, the reason for her lover’s ennui.
Venal Museum

Ask the foreman in — the jury’s verdict
is incomprehensible. Were you one of them?
Those nay-sayers? They are often the worst:
claiming to do good, they do the devil’s work.
Thank you for the enlargement; it helped.
So each found himself caught in a net.
Now we have a fair idea the killer was you.
The camera reaches out and takes your soul.

But the police have been amassing photographs
since the mid-nineteenth century. What do they
want with them? The images live in the dark,
and no one ever sees them, like a data stack
on a local area network on the far shore,
detached, corrupted, and badly normalised.
Vilifying Verlaine: 20 poems

Savoury Company

If the champagne sellers all know — and they should have been listening, no? — that one diplomat was on loan, and the other was mired in the double ethics thing, why, here are the spent bullets from his gun that were unplaced in the mall, and now made available to whatever strolling mister, any foreign news desk, or the Polish police.

And here’s the man who informed on him, brimming with useless apologies and bags of those Don Walsall salt crystals, that were once stacked in the freezer and now spill down the sidewalk, the thing we always forget to put in, despite rigorous testing from the class-mother.
Rhododactylos

If the others hear you offering Maureen Meehan use of the new fund and a free trip to Europe you’ll see sheer nastiness and doldrums unravel, with a promise of a long kill from one you will not be able to order about, as you used to do in the old days, when a smile and a frown ruled the city and the Rum Corps celebrated their long history as numbers men, enforcers and happy pensioners.

The rest I am not so sure about: which video fan stalked and killed the movie star, and which user is the insurer who has to pay for it? Deliver more stuff on Corfu. I’m sure you won’t be needing the cleanup from the sea. With the choir’s agreement, tomorrow you’ll be walking in a white park.

The Inspector of Tides

I don’t know who my friends are any more. The orchestra ganged up on the conductor and forced him to accept the union deal, which presented this major movement as a firm digression. Musical, maybe, but the lower classes soon put in the knife. A raise was given for workers who are cleaner than the managers. Good luck. And a young man had gone before his father who was up in front, sure that this film will raise your home repayments, and will have a firm Nissan gift voucher on the plan, the car plan, the plan that was for love of country and those who feared failing ledgers and accounts before dawn, but the Master of Tides will have the answer.
No Parole

With that lot of tough-guy senior citizens it was the Town of the Land Rovers. Men have a mystique of their own, like women, but more mystical. All the great religious madmen were mad men. You call this a holiday? On the one hand, the Romanian police, but then the local Mafia are more gruesome. Is Pakistan any better? If the Maori song disco dancing planner, she said, is on the train to Lahore, then I’m outta here. She had been the script girl on a movie that won all this year’s awards. We strolled out of the movie into the glare and noise of the street and she started arguing about some Sondheim musical, this event rounding the corner.

The Coloured Future

Left to their own devices they’re has-been nobodies, but when they’re called, they’re special. So they think. Too bad they didn’t ask my advice. It turns bitter when the shit hits the fan and they’re no longer news. Heaven has no rage like children who are born too late to a couple of homeless people, they can kiss the idea of promotion good-bye. What causes moonlight? Ask the year’s top diplomat, Mister Shankar, laughing alone in the top floor penthouse high above the corporate maelstrom, who orders all the rituals Colonel Bach instituted to be struck out and replaced by one woman who wears a dress too tight on all fours on the grass of the Executive Putting Green while her children at home review their budding careers.
Click-clack

Whoever has seen a man killed in a room — block it out now, and take this minimal version of the new mental repair option and use it. Promotion? An upward move should route you closer to the warm ocean waters off New Northshore, where you can float or walk through my own clan of mystical readers, or dream of rescue, paddling, red stretching far out to the horizon.

Old Tom retired and three of the others failed. The unlawful leader bombed Iraq, who shall not rule as that victor. The plans concealed in a golf ball will permit the fifth column to go home. Yes, the victor did praise Yossi Ben Barbour, hero of the battle of Bull Rock Creek.

Monkey Business

I think we have a buyer for the Mall. Ask the boy to take the other children down to the Cages and play — oh, play Taunt the Mandrill. Bob wanted a hyena coach to train the creatures to be usable patrol dogs. We had an excess. The results are not lost on Bob, who will call room service and not pay the bill. Signs of rot and corruption are everywhere. His wife hits the right note so that Princess Taekwando combined with the Rush Limbaugh of oral argument — read the 300-pound woman warrior, madly drinking — can fall through the floor and still be the living soul of the party, like a single cell within the worksheet that has the code to cancel the other calculations so that the sale of Fallbrook Mall collapses.
A Throw of the Dice

Margaret Bowman, you will see an unwelcome vision of a pile of junk food: you will seek out a fortune teller, this being the year of the high-school formal for the kindergarten brats. Then you will travel over the great water, and at the climax of a personal medical disaster meet with a racial bigot and after sharing lots of unsatisfactory meals, have an affair.

You are on track to create a novel of regret for what you did and didn’t do; there are no rewards in this world for pissing your life away. Despite the problems with traditional rock and roll in the days when the ballroom held very few men, you mastered the Labomba to no real effect.

Chinese Chequers

Catholics are lucky: people pray for them. The watt bulb awareness of all your computers added together will compile a loose description of your fate, and the nuns will sit and read it. You will pull the issue from a pool of hundreds — the most remarkable, and also the worst — and present it to the youngster who says that the cinema fumble was outside the normal range, and with a bigger thrill.

A sketch of your life would look like a mirror held up to your future, where the good times written backwards end nowhere. Don’t they anyway? Yet you are the reward rejected by that career. From where I sit I can see hundreds of freight cars. You will find, in that vista, all you could have been.
Aqueduct

The sole storm of Autumn stirred the muck. Some time you must tell me of your intentions. All races that are not fixed will play like this move, like Schultz’s insistence that the horse was not a fake. Now the patient listener uses the upper deck of an era to spot the cheats through binoculars, some kind of cop. In her role as an innocent, little Miss Nicole Milburn put the money on for her mother Tilly the Killer.

The fact that you are the one who owns the horse and fails to keep your one eye on the ball won’t impress the judge, said Officer Derek Reasoner. He had a script from ‘The Bulldog’ to work through: ‘You should have played the knuckle-ball scenario and offered a tip to the gentlemen in the bullpen.’

Target Acquisition

Visit a third of the mobile phone users and see what they say: gibberish, mostly. On May 6 Lunene and her lover in Belgrade will marvel at the horrible thing, the bombardier’s additional one-minute slot to drop rockets on the run-through; this will bump him into madness but that will be unfair, you see that the more innocent man that he really is will reverse the Bergman film horror.

Miss Montlake will cut her class. While input from those madmen would help, a drink of citrus plus use of the medical centre in the mall erases it all, why, the answer is right there: the rubble creeps own weapons, and we were the dumb old fucks — pass me that box of gin, will you?
You're not so virtuous, Jim. Edgar Hoover has a grainy photo you should see: some figure in fishnet stockings, a guy, fer crissakes! He says there's something about the turn of the ankle... all else is shadow. And way beyond the reach of the law a diminutive woman — Barbie and the Musketeers — gently pushes open a security door, a flashlight held in her teeth.

The Senate deleted the accusations from her file. Is that John Paul who enters silently behind her? ... as though the story could advance its pawns. In your filing cabinet they found a pencilled note, a pair of stockings... would that connect you to her? Two pirates lower the flag and fold it away.

It's a good thing for her to know that the Brochure is a major work. Put it right here, where the boss has to look at it every morning. Make an announcement: say that anyone, even that smelly derelict the boss's brother, can turn up and guzzle the cheap wine. People stoned on weak coffee write to us. Gawkers perpetuate the misquoted line.

We're checking the local mall cinema where motion occurs all night long in the rows of seats. On the screen a man floats over Niagara Falls, then plunges down like a human cannonball. Okay, we're drinking cheap whisky from a bottle in a paper bag, would you put us in gaol?
Bridge in the Rain

The dream (plan, outline) has a moment when a truck driver was misled: the Wilson Bridge appeared as some generous little connector road when really disaster waited; the will of a killer reified on a dirt road. On the radio, is the blonde goddess really a goddess? She was not young; in fact a remarkably old person for a stage performer called to tap-dance the yellow brick road to fame.

In this version of the warning against organised crime he uses his numbness as proof of his experience. The mob of men in the mall was a problem: there’s a wild crow in a train, name of Baron Corvo, and his warning will be obeyed: the moonlight, the night, the sleeping animals — it all gets carted away.

So Long

A US official remarked that Lisa M Altman could bring the global merger to a halt. In a generic business plan the profit holds, but in real life shit happens. Go meet the lenders in Polk Street Park, and you had better bring them their money. The ‘old mom’ rule will limit how far you can employ the Ramon Switch Trick.

Beyond the two-mile limit there are bodies in a magma pit of boulders beyond federal jurisdiction. Who will get rid of them? The perfume climbs into my tree. The rat race originated with the nipple. The mournful radar is a blanket over me.
Sextet

Basso Corzine called the office; he has pushed through the fire insurance claim. There will also be a broken neck, he says, speaking metaphorically, I hope. We, who see around corners, into strongboxes, must wear the guilt of our glancing. And now we face the union of the bebop juror and the hopeless lawyers, barristers, and cleaners.

In the music of the composure, sorry, composer, will you be another coconut cream, or just a typical bimbo fronting the cool jazz combo? Here on the beach the salt air permits these meanings. It will affect the possible use of the bedroom you mentioned in your call to Mr Corzine.

Asparagus and Me

Mark Henry, your group which sold humour or yellow grass told you not to read too much into the name carved on the soap. And so from a day replete with rumours, our lives ebbing always towards the centre, we firm up the contract. Lola, the remake seems doable now, if you call a conference, wages minimal, or maybe she can play a nun —

what do you think, Bob? — and watch the hero, a bearded guy, convincing old Folsom that the captives were shoved out of the helicopter in mid-flight. The state governor knew who the victims were. He will use the secret grip of the inner sanctum to effect the repeal of the appeal.
News Item

His character was moulded on that of the more bizarre children who were human, granted, though not one of them had a single emotion and the rest were wizards. Whistle and you’ll fly, was their motto. They will sharpen the border with their coup. I know that other channel where Senator Dole likened a military manoeuvre to a football ploy. I shall return in the dark and be seen.

Add this: Doctor Waldo misses the mark and the law misses the risk of a mad bomber, sick with anger because he is without a job.
He eats his slops without benefit of knife or fork.
He is hoping he’ll be a major news item on the nine o’clock news, tonight, in New York.

Stalled Innocence

We can just leave it outdoors all winter. That way, no one will mind. We hope.
So immobile was the audience that you could hear nominee Manuel Mile thinking.
In her last will and testament the missile shall bless all their work. It was signed and witnessed in a coal creek bed, there within the domain of the women’s historical novel and its siblings.

They say that you use your democratic right to endorse events that you would never countenance in your home town, and now to add the Arkansas colonel to the ticket will create a monster, if he’s elected.
The owner of the ‘don’t knock me out’ routine owns the large fish that featured in the novel.
Hair of the Dog

Wake up, you’re looking at this magazine, in which
an old woman shall blow bubbles in her local
swimming pool below the water mark,
far from her comfortable home and relatives.
She is surely the Republican who worked on
a method of registering reluctant voters
in slow motion. I was told to use the locker to
write this up, far from my local home folder.

On my lonely travels I will miss the Upper Bay
inbound crew, their happy work songs —
some women were complaining about the songs,
how they caused loss of bone marrow.
Read the tone of voice: when the guy who owns
a big truck speaks, get off your bike and listen.
Poems, part 3: At the Movies: 8 poems

Caliban

The hideous id is banished to the caves deep under the ground where the abandoned machines hum all night long.

Jack will ruin his master.
Dark Passage

Poor Vincent Parry: he rolls out of a garbage can and stumbles through a valley of coincidences, falling into the lap of a blonde.

Poor Vincent: we are locked inside his head, seeing everything, feeling nothing but vertigo as the screen swoops and wobbles with his weaving and ducking to avoid his fate. He can't have a drink, we would get splashed, he dare not look in a mirror, because we would be there gawking, dismayed …

Poor Vincent: he gets disfigured by a man with a towel and a razor, and wakes up tied to the bed. Madge calls, and whispers, and goes away, and calls back again, spying, sneaking a drink, and every fragment of conversation ends with Madge who, if she can't have what she wants, kills it. Vincent gets punched around and a pal gets it, beaten to death with a trumpet. Madge, fatal Madge, fallen Madge, defenestrated Madge on the sidewalk.

Ah, Vincent: he used to look handsome with a pencil-thin moustache, then he woke up looking like some movie star. He wants to call out in his bad dream: Untie me! Set me free! But he will not be free until he takes the bus to distant Peru alongside a couple of boring jerks
who have just stumbled over each other
in a bus station of all places.

Vincent dreams that he sits in a white jacket
sipping a drink by the moonlit beach in Peru,
feeling anxious until the music changes
and a blonde appears: Well, tie me down,
and start me dancing.

*North by Northwest*

A hero breasts Manhattan traffic, always
ready to stop off at a tourist destination.
A blunder with a telegram and Mother —
a demon never seen, only hinted at
in her distant, comfortable castle —

will lose her little boy, who quickly
plunges into an irritating adventure
in the picaresque mode — leaping
to conclusions as the scenery reels past,
into bed and out again, dodging and weaving

across a landscape more deadly and bucolic
with each passing trick of the light.
Of course it’s post-postmodern to have the hero
an advertising man rather than a policeman-detective
tough-guy action type, and the crop-dusting plane scene

is funny and priceless. Perhaps the Master was trying to
lighten up after Vertigo. There’s no fun there, just
descending levels of madness and sadness.
The blonde, unlike his sainted Mother,
is very good and also devious and wicked,

and so roller coaster morals are the norm
and in fact this unravelling storm of incidents
and grief is the painful future due to us
when we stumble blinking into the light,
for this sequence of parables was built

by its huge crew of many talents to be seen
and heard in the crowded dark, the wicked
are found out and trampled on, another
train, another bed, good night.
Shadow of a Doubt

Handsome Uncle Charlie, burdened by crime. He laughs and scatters gifts, but he looks unwell — no, he's fine — the man playing cards looks sick — he has a full hand of spades, but then, he gets to tell the story about how the ace of spades leads the pack. Suspicion follows you like a snake in the grass, so the story is torn up. But destroying the evidence points to the evidence. Sleeping dogs lie. Now, should a girl tell on the bad man?

It would kill Mother. But Uncle Charlie has been killing plenty of those, it seems, the lazy, greedy widows eating cake and wasting money — they deserve to die. Now those two men are here to see you, again — something about a survey, counting all the happy American families and listening closely to their apple-pie opinions as they look down from a high window through shade-dappled branches at a pair of neighbours gossiping in the sun. On the busy street the old traffic cop can't help the girl, he's avuncular and normal, and he has a job to do. Now everything falls to pieces and a killer pleads for his life. Traffic everywhere, an engine running and leaking gas, then back on the train again, the train that takes you out into the horrible world. The man with all the cards is here, somewhere, behind the viewfinder, watching everything,
a resident alien with a point of view.
Uncle Charlie has to die, we all knew that,
it just took a while to fall into place
in front of a speeding black locomotive
somewhere out of town, and far away.
Black and White

Everything loose, including the morals:
first one, then the other, a kind of sister:
a headache, a beating, and the bad one sneaks out
and chokes the child. Or is the better self
just a sober lady dying to have some fun?

And look, no coloured folk:
the streets are full of white Americans
strolling around a small town. Or dancing
which is also fun, or drinking alcohol,
that pool of mystery and regret.

She thinks: Put on the red dress.
Take it off. Say hello to the nice Doctor.
He frowns and looks concerned, and quickly
consults with an older, wiser man. Then he
writes it up, but we never see him
writing it up. He doodles with a pen at night.
Somewhere back in the fifties: the sound
of a typewriter clacking and a little bell
punctuating the script, I mean the story,
that is, the case notes. More fun in a truck;

later, nostalgia. Soon there are three women
arguing and hating each other; after a while
one of them starts forgiving one of the others.
First her sorrow and concern
for that other woman, then mine.

Where does she get the energy?
It’s the headaches, stupid. Try divorce,
and become a better human being, as if
that would help. Nothing keeps death at bay.
Somewhere a nicer person is moving
slowly towards me. When it’s time to say good-bye
I’ll die, just like that, for her sake. For my sake.
Say good-bye. Never leave me.
Boy in Mirror

First words: Gimme your hand! Then a fall, a death.
I left town in 1957 and went away, boarding school
gymnasium whirring sixteen millimetre movies:
*Escape From Colditz* or *Stalag Seventeen*, blondes
with heaving breasts were verboten for good reason.

So what do boys like about vertigo? It was
a way of experiencing something alien and new:
we had a trick of breathing much too fast for too long
then another boy would squeeze your chest from behind
as you held you breath and almost burst

and a million years later you would come to,
on the floor of a room on another planet
surrounded by strangers while your memories
converged slowly like a crowd at an accident.

*Picnic* was strong enough, when I was thirteen;

*Vertigo* would have finished me off.

Now I can face Madeleine in the water in a suit
with stiff blonde hair and stilted accent and demeanour.
The wounded boy in the water quickly becomes a man
dragging her backwards behind him as he swims

to the shore at the foot of a huge bridge —
trying not to bruise Kim Novak’s
wonderful tits.

Wounded three times, each time deeper
but he doesn’t know yet what horrors…

what mistakes, misunderstandings… he’s
juggling with a walking stick, he’s toppling
off a chair.

But he must have seen her stark naked!
Not glimpsed yet: if only he knew: Judy

from Salinas in the mid-West, stormy gateway
to the land of Oz, hiding two secrets,
loose, human,
but also art, and also dragged into a willed shape
by a troubled man

— restored in 1996 —

A footloose male: another in North by Northwest,
a direction no compass has ever known,
despite Hamlet’s ham-fisted play-acting:
‘I am but mad north-north-west —’

cut off from their normal jobs and bonding rituals.
Both women are imprisoned by a monster, though
the heroes don’t realise that. First
we have to follow and then rescue the princess,
unmask or defeat the monster, awaken the sleeping beauty
to our desires and needs, but the women are awake
already to their own desires.

Cherchez la femme, then the action
moves to a strangely threatening rural arena
far from the city: dangerous heights and fatal falls;

the (blonde) is unfaithful to the hero, maybe because
captured possessed by another monster and quite soon
the hero is a cuckold and the woman adulterous and thus
fallen, or falling, or dead and gone. We hear
some moody music — Bernard Herrmann’s
more insistent music: all right,  
I’m afraid of the future.

The first incarnation of the goddess is Madeleine,  
a name in search of lost time, and quickly dunked, and  
hailing from the East she is naturally cold

and remote in a steel-grey suit: now  
she drives an English car, a Jaguar with plates that say  
MGK 159, obliquely hinting at a stray fact  
just outside the camera’s field of view: the owner of the car  
once owned an old MG type K sports car,

then got rich  
and traded in the clunker for a Jaguar —  
but kept the plates — they always want  
some memento of their lost youth, and now  
an actress plays with his new toy, pretends to drive it, but

we never see her driving, just getting in and out.

Later she can be  
more authentic, working in a job,  
where she absolutely must clock on until Mister Handsome  
becomes pitiful and pleading. She might become

‘Judy’ from some dump in Kansas  
and wear sloppy clothes. Anything’s possible.  
Speak like a tart, Judy! Good girl! Now she  
walks on foot.

Earlier, locked in her metallic suit —

the wounded hero at the start  
quickly spiralling into madness —
the mirror shape of the plot and counter plot
in harmonic motion, the circular corsage,
the spirals in the trunk of a dumb tree, then

the camera notices her hair, and the clumsy portrait,
driving in diminishing circles around the sunlit town.
Spiral, circle, spiral, circle...

May I commend the awkward acting? ‘You
were the copy, you were the counterfeit —

those beautiful phoney trances’ — thus
more sincere, or just less competent —
rather than be like the brittle professional woman
in North by Northwest, or is that just a personal reaction?

And the smooth villain in the suit is named Elster,

German for magpie, a collector of beautiful things, but:
Die Elster stiehlt, so gut sie schwatzt — the magpie
steals as well as it chatters. So the great painter Elstir
haunted Proust — so much success! Yet
troubled by thoughts of his future death —

‘ambitious melancholy clouded his brow’ —
a clever analysis of a fleeting expression, which
may have been, in fact, the painter’s embarrassment
at hearing a gushy and pushy young suck-up artist
praise his ‘fame’.

So, Marjorie Wood says of her brassiere: principle
of the cantilever bridge, an aircraft engineer
down the peninsula designed it, in his spare time.
Between two deaths — Gimme your hand!
and a good policeman falls to his death
in the alley below, then the old college chum Gavin — Mission number, skid row? No, ‘Colour, excitement, power, freedom’ — San Francisco eighteen forty-eight — then Ernie’s Restaurant with its red velvet wallpaper and her green English car — in the Spanish Mission

graveyard calla lilies — mist fogging the lens — a suicide’s grave in consecrated ground? What madness is that? Catholic continuity girl, please!
Then at the McKittrick Hotel, an old drudge: ’I’ve been right here all the time, putting olive oil on my rubber plant leaves’, then a detour to the Argosy Bookshop and an avuncular European man — if he reads books, he must have glasses and a funny accent, then a strange darkness falling too swiftly, following the script into a kind of nightfall, however wrongly.

The scene in the redwood forest.
Her big white coat, so vulnerable …

Scotty (drinks) Boy, I need this!

There’s a brandy bottle. Next scene:

Scotch and soda.

Fluffy white coat!

Pink soft body underneath!

Scotty: I always thought you were wasting your time in the underwear department.
Good Barbara: Well, it’s a living.

Kim Novak, left-handed, writing a sad letter:
We had fun… and then you started in on the clothes…
Beside her crummy hotel, the Twelfth Knight bar.

She had to die…

I hear voices…

God have mercy!
Girl in Water

Waiting to meet a pretty girl — any pretty girl —
hot summer day in 1958, beach crowd, emotional algebra,
also list and remember: makeup, perfume, lipstick, talc,
telephone passion — no, a soda fountain, a pizza.

Do they dream of mystery and adventure, women?

or do girls want to drown in literature? No, stupid. I
bet she’d like a fragrant pizza topped with mozzarella,
or is that just me? A movie: Item: Kim Novak. A drive-in —

yes, more subtle and powerful appetites litter the sand.
So become that detective, wounded, pitiful; so

learn to love and learn to fail in love, in the back row at the Bijou,
in parked cars, or snug among sand-hills ... your spyglass a nib,

keyhole secrets memorised and filed away, until
eternity comes calling at the foot of a staircase.
After that ending, another climb, another cliff

beyond which something awful awaits: love

or falling in love, or into love, or falling into death, a
uniform and dizzying and swift descent
that leaves you breathless, leaves you
very unsteady like a cork in the water,

effervescent and febrile and emotionally labile,
ready for almost anything.
That conscious pilot spoke: quod scripsi
scripsi, I have written what? I have written for

girl in water ‘girl in water’, girl
or woman in waves of water. I,
keen to find behind mirrors, wavering echoes, burn
in plots and complex narratives to draw

many clues out, threads of meaning. A
new insight into the convoluted plot

of good and evil I can look for, where good men whine,
villains struggle to prevail and bluster

against ordinary background noise and hubbub:
kaleidoscopes of criminality and subtle fiscal judo
scam and prosper, and some ordinary guy

will win and lose everything. I

owe more than money. The key will turn:
nervous ex-detectives afraid of causing harm
drop into floods of anxiety, plunge into semi-
enervating doubt; whirlpools of suspicion, and later

refuse help from well-meaning friends or
from glum old girl-friends, dawdling, doodling, who
understand too well their weaknesses, their
lack of manly self-respect, who know how hypnotic

those doubled mysteries within a mystery are. You reach

into a maelstrom of neurosis. Beyond bodily desire,
these complex chess-like fantasies are the true romantic
scenes in your life: the most ludic acrostic paradises: click!
It's the early sixties: before heroin,
before herpes and AIDS ruined things,
before the women's movement.
Jack Kerouac is still alive, though only just,
with eight years left to live. But

let's leave America behind and take
a cultural detour down to the cellar
where a successful American export,
a jazz band, is winding up for the night.
The hero is a nice guy: short back and sides,
casually dressed in slacks and a neatly pressed
polo shirt. You'd like him. He plays a trombone.
A trombone? But first

we see a city at dawn: a man wearing a beret
idling along the cobbled street on a push-bike

then a girl wearing a scarf and carrying
one of those long loaves of bread
in her basket, bought at a local bakery!
It must be Hollywood: and it is! Though
with a French savoir-faire and a touch of

je ne sais quoi. As we get used to the silky
black and white, and the smooth lighting, we realise
we have been drawn into one of those indoor-outdoor binary universes: when the action happens
indoors, the lighting is perfect, a studio in Burbank, say,

where even in the phoney park the light is just right.
But in the “real” outdoors it's windy and overcast
and the lighting is kind of muddy and
the passers-by look suspicious and distracted,
so it must be Paris, or a version of it.

Yes, in a dive in Paris the hep cats are jumping, jiving like it was the forties, when in fact rock’n’roll has come and gone, JFK is President, and the Ford Edsel is old hat.

Then we see the hero’s name: Ram Bowen.

Can they be serious? A name like that, and Paul Newman with a trombone? Well, this is a Paris of the mind, where ordinary suffering humanity get to be pushed around by a bad script, so anything can happen. The hero’s buddy is a black guy,

but he’s played by Sidney Poitier and wears a suit and tie and a wristwatch and a short haircut, so he’s all right — however deeply touched by the madness of art — that is, jazz entertainment.

Then two women arrive on holiday:

one white, divorced, with two kids back home, and the other black and single. So we have four Americans in Paris but with angst instead of fun: these jazz dudes may be polite and press their shirts, but poor Ram:

his struggle with the demon of art and all those late nights make him despondent.

So through the sets of matched doubles day after day the Jane Austen problem keeps rearing its ugly head: ladies,

how do you catch your man, when he’s
a wild free spirit who suffers for his art?

Of course there’s a resentful older woman
with a French accent: we see her checking the till
in the cellar at daybreak when the crowds have gone,

and cooking, but she keeps to the shadows,
nursing her hurt beauty behind a veil of makeup.

We get a clue as to why Ram is a musician,
not a writer: Paris is picaresque, he says.
His new girl friend Lillian misses this,

or maybe gets it and neglects to correct him,
shaking her blonde hair, straightening her gloves,
wavering her handbag at the expensive scenery,
thinking — perhaps — that picaresque is French
for picturesque, and not wanting to

put the kibosh on a blossoming affair:
the guy’s Paul Newman in mufti, after all.

Meanwhile Sydney Poitier has a tormented talk
with his dusky lady friend Connie: colour,
the question of colour, that he can avoid in Paris.

Should he go back to New York and face it?
The colour problem that brave Americans are
painfully working through, white and black alike,
maybe it’s his duty: she says it’s his duty
until his teeth ache, but then she says

she wants to have dozens of children.
What’s a guy supposed to think?

Ram wakes up late from the hangover of music.
He and Lillian have long talks about how art eats you up, and we note that Ram wears his wristwatch to bed, no doubt needing to time what happens between those pressed white sheets. As dawn breaks over tourist-flavoured Paris he yawns and rises, his hair perfectly combed. How can you tell if a man’s art is authentic?

Why, opines the lady, it’s the way he made me feel. She speaks to him of Ram Bowen in the third person, and addresses his dimple, which broods in silence. Honey, he insists, I live music, morning noon and night! Meanwhile her outfits are astonishing: one beautiful coat after another, scarves, gloves, hats: the product of resourceful shopping as wide-ranging, committed and passionate as Ram’s devotion to his trombone.

Yes, Ram is hitched to his mournful trombone and we have the feeling that one day he’ll find himself alone with the thing, an old couple who don’t much like each other.

“We are the night people!” the nicely-dressed black man exclaims on the tourist boat, “and it’s a whole different world!” Sidney is hinting at a kind of underground where moral values are reversed, where being cool is better than being prosperous and where art has usurped Mammon’s place on the altar.

Then he checks his watch and adjusts his tie.
and the illusion breaks up into ripples.
He’s a type, not a person, a vacant role
waiting to be imitated and filled in,
a cool black dude with the race problem

and a stern girl friend to worry about.

They play some music as an interlude
from the dialogue, though for Ram
we know that this view is back to front.
Now why is that saxophone playing second fiddle
to a trombone? Have you ever seen a band
with a dominant trombone? Is it because
Paul is more handsome than Sidney?
Taller? More white, let’s say? Then
we are asked to believe that Louis Armstrong,

America’s ambassador of cultural goodwill,
is some great giant of modern jazz, oh please,
gimme a break, he was briefly avant-garde
before the Great Depression, long ago,
and the furious God of Bop has long since

consigned him to the dustbin of history
and the lounge rooms of the middle class.

Now Ram’s pal the coke fiend is snorting heavily —
it’s his way, he says. Well, he’s a French Gypsy,
not a regular guy. Now Ram makes him

see his future in the figure of an old friend
ruined by drugs, busking on the street,
drooling and plunking on a tuneless guitar.
Gypsy, see a doctor, Ram says earnestly,
suddenly the concerned bourgeois. Then
more tourist epiphanies — shopping and kissing —
and as Ram hugs his blonde under an umbrella
an abashed camera coyly looks down
at his slacks and highly-polished casual shoes.

In this cloudy autumn weather they

cast no shadows, like devils, and chez nous
read the Herald Tribune just to keep in touch.
In the corner, a television set. This movie
might well appear there, titled The Tender Trap.
Sidney goes crazy with love and buys

more flowers than he can afford.

Then Ram meets a powerful agent
who knows everything — Ram is good,
but his music is not good enough,
says the wise man. That’s an opinion,

but not a life plan. What to do? Being moody,
that’s not suffering, you have to be a bastard
like Rimbaud. He used to keep lice in his hair
so he could flick them at passing priests, and
for a while there he was a sodomite —

no blondes for him — and when he got moody
he killed a man by throwing a rock at him,
and in the end he tore up his talent
and left all that art shit behind. So, Ram,
marry the blonde or the junk or the trombone,

just quit pissing around, will you?

At last Lillian comes to rest in her hotel room,
exhausted by her efforts to persuade a dumb guy
to marry her, in a wilderness of dishevelled suitcases
and loose shopping. Then he turns up, then

he has an attack of gloom and abandons her.

Oh, Ram! You and the script writer both
seem to have lost your grip at the climax:
a more authentic person has taken over
and inhabited this blonde like a virus and

as the train for Le Havre chugs out of the station
in a cloud of steam I realise that Lillian
is smarter and more fun than Ram, and maybe
she’s better off alone on the boat train heading
back to New York and her two kids, where Frank O’Hara

has just finished his poem ‘Lana Turner has collapsed!’
on the Staten Island ferry on his way to a reading
in a snowstorm, and some other different and
more interesting movie is about to begin.
Neatly-dressed bohemians: a publicity shot from *Paris Blues*.
Exegesis, part 1: About the poems

As with some of John Tranter’s books of poetry, the volume of poems submitted as part of his DCA thesis is divided into three parts:

1. Part 1: ‘Vocoder’¹ is a group of four long poems that explore, each in a distinct and different way, the idea of displacing the authorial ego entirely with a kind of writing at one or two removes, through the process of translation, ventriloquy, mask or disguise. Each of these four poems has a fractured, oblique or obscure surface, and raises issues relating to the denying of the authorial ego, and the adoption of other roles.

2. Part 2: ‘Speaking French: 101 poems’ presents another approach to authorial displacement. Each poem is a reworked machine ‘translation’ (set up to fail as a translation in each case) of some of Rimbaud’s prose-poems from the sequence he titled ‘Illuminations’, plus poems by Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Verlaine. This follows Tranter’s earlier experiments with the Brekdown computer program (mentioned below), which offer another set of procedures in the service of the same idea.

3. Part 3: ‘At the Movies’ is a group of poems with less ambiguous intentions. Narrative, discursive and reflective, they engage with and speak directly about various movies and their cultural settings, mainly US movies from the period of film noir in the early 1940s into the 1960s.

Tranter has written many poems in each of these three modes before, and in a sense these new poems are corrections, reinterpretations, rewritings or in some cases more extreme versions of earlier practices.

Tranter had long practised taking over and altering other people’s poems. In fact at the very beginning of his career, in 1963 (when he was twenty) he wrote a poem that answered A D Hope’s poem ‘Australia’, using seven of Hope’s 28 rhymes, changing the rhyme scheme from abba to abab, borrowing and distorting many of Hope’s metaphors, and filling in the rest of the poem with his own dismissive words. Tranter argued with Hope’s poem perhaps because Hope was old and Tranter was young, or perhaps because Hope was a

¹vo·cod·er, n. an electronic device that synthesises speech. Random House Webster’s Unabridged Electronic Dictionary.
successful and well-known academic poet and Tranter was at that time unknown.

A D Hope’s poem ‘Australia’ and Tranter’s ‘Australia Revisited’ are provided as appendices to this thesis.

Another, later, intervention in another Australian poet’s work is ‘An Absolutely Extraordinary Recital’, a critical rewriting of Les Murray’s poem ‘An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow’. In Tranter’s hands, the topic of the Murray poem — a man publicly weeping without apparent reason — is translated into the topic of a man giving a public reading of Les Murray’s poetry. The similarity between communion in public religious worship and ‘communion’ in the public consumption of poetry is a strong subtext and prop to many of Murray’s poems, and is here dragged into the open, metaphorically speaking. The poem is previously unpublished, and is printed as an appendix to this thesis.

It is interesting to note that more than a decade before Les Murray published his poem, the Greek poet George Seferis published a poem titled ‘Narration’ with an oddly similar central event. This is discussed in a footnote to ‘An Absolutely Extraordinary Recital’.

Just as Murray’s early poem ‘Spring Hail’ can be read as a version of Dylan Thomas’s ‘Fern Hill’ transported to the Colonies, and his ‘The Buladelah-Taree Holiday Song Cycle’ can be seen as a white appropriation of the spiritual universe portrayed in Ronald and Catherine Berndt’s translation of the Moon-Bone Song Cycle of the Wonguri-Mandjigai people, as many have noted, so the common theme explored in Murray’s ‘Rainbow’ poem and Seferis’ poem about a crying man can also be read as an endorsement of the concept that borrowing — whether conscious or less-than-conscious — is not solely the province of putative ‘post-postmodernists’.

The Anaglyph

John Tranter and poet David Brooks introduced John Ashbery’s reading at the
University of Sydney in September 1992\(^2\). One of the poems Ashbery read was the double sestina from his book *Flow Chart*. In his preamble to the poem Ashbery revealed that his double sestina uses the end-words of Algernon Charles Swinburne’s double sestina ‘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 metrical shape. Extend the idea to other kinds of poems, borrowing the last word or two of each line, and you have the process or form that Tranter has called ‘terminals’.

He has written many poems in this mode, taking end-words from Matthew Arnold, W.H. Auden, Barbara Guest, John Keats, Frank O’Hara, Banjo Paterson and others. The US poet, editor and critic Brian Henry has studied and summarised this technique of Tranter’s in a paper published in *Antipodes* magazine in 2004; his paper is reprinted on the internet.\(^3\) Henry mentions and quotes from the Ashbery sestina. He looks at ten of Tranter’s poems and discusses each different kind and example of borrowing in detail.

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, alexandrines, sapphics, or ottava rima, the terminal as a poetic form is vastly open to possibility. [...]

\(^2\)The reading was held at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday 16 September 1992 in Room N395, Woolley Building, University of Sydney.

\(^3\)At <http://johntranter.com/reviewed/2004-henry-terminals.html>
... 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. (Henry 32)

A year or two ago the magazine *The Modern Review*, based in Toronto, Canada, sent Tranter a request: ‘We are attempting to assemble a group of critically interested writers/ 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.’

Ashbery’s ‘Clepsydra’ is a complicated piece of writing. Its title seems to have little connection with the poem: a *clepsydra* is a kind of water-driven clock (the name means ‘water-stealer’) used by the ancient Greeks. The poem is also long: 253 lines long, to be precise: nearly nine pages. It was first published in book form in the 1977 volume *Rivers and Mountains*.

Other critics have dealt with ‘Clepsydra’ by tracing various influences in it. Annette Gilson, for example, uncovers evidence of the influence of Emily Dickinson:

> In one of her most frequently cited circumference poems, ‘The Poets light but Lamps—’ (Poems 883), Dickinson describes the influence that poets have on later readers as a kind of ‘vital Light’ that ensures that the poets’ ‘Circumference’ will be preserved. Both of Ashbery’s references to circumference reflect this Dickinsonian luminance, explicitly linking an image of light to a spatial circumference figure. (2) In this way ‘Clepsydra’ registers the dimension of Dickinsonian circumference that suggests that the ‘vital Light’ of a prior poet

*Clepsydra*: an ancient device for measuring time by the regulated flow of water or mercury through a small aperture. [1640–50; < L < Gk klepsyдра, equiv. to kleps- (klep-, s. of kléptein to steal, conceal + -s- formative in derivation) + hydra, deriv. of hydr water] Random House Unabridged Electronic Dictionary.
continues to exist, even after she is dead, by lighting the ‘Lamps’ of later poets. (Gilson 1998)

Tranter’s ‘response’ to the poem was quite different. With Mr Ashbery’s permission he set out to dismantle and rebuild it.

He took the last word of two of each line from ‘Clepsydra’, as with his earlier experiments with ‘terminals’, and also the first word or two from each line. Thus each line of Tranter’s reworked poem had its beginning and ending given to him; his task was to replace the meat in the sandwich, as it were.

So ‘The Anaglyph’ is a reinvented, perhaps flawed, or perhaps improved, version of that master poem, which is here reduced to the status of ancestor, model, maquette, or template.

‘The Anaglyph’ is partly about its own process — that is, the deconstructing and reconstructing of a poem. It is also about Tranter’s relationship as a developing poet with John Ashbery and with Ashbery’s poetry.

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...’ lines 236–7). 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 centre of the first, en 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 writes, referring to just this device, in his poem ‘The Alphabet Murders’, written over thirty 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’ (84). 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 perceived from a slightly different viewpoint.

‘The Anaglyph’ is similar to Ashbery’s original poem ‘Clepsydra’, having the same number of lines and the same line beginnings and line endings, yet it has been written by a different author at a different time in a different society, coloured differently and seen from a slightly different point of view, and one which has one more layer of knowledge than the original. When Ashbery began work on ‘Clepsydra’ in the 1960s, nothing like it had existed before. When ‘The Anaglyph’ was begun, its progenitor had been modifying the ideal order of the literary landscape, to use Eliot’s phrase, for three decades.⁵ ‘The Anaglyph’ depends on the earlier poem, and perceives the world partly through and from that poem’s viewpoint.

On the first page Ashbery’s poem is displaced, codified and rationalised. The title of Ashbery’s poem, ‘Clepsydra’, refers to an ancient Greek water-clock, which appears disguised twice in ‘The Anaglyph’:

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. (17–19)

Later in the poem, ‘that tiny hydraulic clock’ (234).

The mention of Proust’s great novel (‘The way / Things fade away, les temps perdu seems to be the point / Of this rodomontade’ 157–9) reminds us that the

⁵‘The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them.’ (Eliot, Tradition, 47–48)
scents and flavours of his remembered life soaked into Proust’s writing. Over many years these changed from private, evanescent memories into private handwriting fixed on paper, then to corrected proofs, the text of which was reified into public print, and eventually entirely replaced Proust’s own actual life, as this poem seeks to replace its progenitor.

Favourite themes of Ashbery’s are also glancingly referred to: old schoolteachers, for example (‘the old school-teacher’s chief act of belief’ 39) and his use of ornate words harvested from the dictionary: ‘Those crowded riverine cities’ (63) reminds us of Ashbery’s title ‘Those Lacustrine Cities’ — that is, cities built beside or on a lake. The phrase ‘ashes and diamonds and nourishing food’ (77) obliquely refers to the title of the 1958 Polish movie *Ashes and Diamonds* directed by Andrzej Wajda, based on the novel by Jerzy Andrzejewski. Ashbery had the nickname ‘Ashes’ bestowed on him in that decade by his poet friends Kenneth Koch and Frank O’Hara. In the movie, a poem by the nineteenth-century Polish poet Cyprian Norwid is quoted:

> So often, are you as a blazing torch with flames of burning rags falling about you flaming, you know not if flames bring freedom or death. Consuming all that you must cherish if ashes only will be left, and want Chaos and tempest Or will the ashes hold the glory of a star-like diamond The Morning Star of everlasting triumph.⁶

Ashbery himself, as the maimed father-figure, makes a brief appearance to protest what has happened to his poem: ‘From Rochester he came hence, / A writ of Cease and Desist clenched in his teeth’ (135–6). Ashbery was born in Rochester, New York State, in 1927.

Speaking of father-figures, the distancing yet ligaturing effect ‘The Anaglyph’ seeks to enact between Tranter the translator and Ashbery the originator is

addressed by Lacan:

Rather, the subject would now find himself alienated in a symbolic system which he shares with others. That system structures the human unconscious, and communication with the other can now be enacted through the shifting positions of signifiers in a system of symbolic exchange. The self is still an appropriated self, but what is appropriated is language as the other, and not an ideal but alienated image of an individual self. (In the resolution of the Oedipus complex, this would involve moving from a specular rivalry with the father, in which the child seeks to take the father’s place, to an assumption of the function of the father and, most fundamentally, of the symbolic father who, as Law, is that which makes possible all symbolic operations.) (Bersani, summarising Lacan, 115–16)

One final function of the poetic father is to license the son to take his place. It is worth noting that Tranter has stated that he asked Ashbery’s permission before embarking on this disfigurative exercise:

After wrestling with ['Clepsydra'] for a while, I felt that it needed demolishing and rebuilding, and — with Mr Ashbery’s permission — that is what I did. (Feints 29)

Perhaps to empower Ashbery as the lawgiver, other elder poets are downgraded. The most common thematic reference in ‘The Anaglyph’ is a series of references to bear hunting, the first of which is ‘a hunter in the dim mirror killing a bear’ (33). Poet Galway Kinnell was born in the same year as John Ashbery, and also lives in New York City. Daniel Schenker says

In one of his [Kinnell’s] best known poems, “The Bear,” an Eskimo hunter stalks a polar bear who eventually succumbs to the sharpened bone coiled in the hunter’s bait. When the hunter comes upon the bear’s carcass he eats voraciously of the animal’s flesh as we would expect. But instead of then abandoning the carcass or considering its other uses, the hunter climbs into the body and life and death of the bear. The object of the hunt thus becomes not the mere domination of the bear by the hunter, but an effort to acquire an understanding of what it’s like to be something other than oneself. As if to validate his attempt to identify with the other, the hunter is granted a vision of
spring at the end of the poem as geese come trailing up the flyway
and a mother bear tends to a litter of new-born cubs.

Kinnell’s poem contains an explicit comparison between bear-killing and
poem-making, where his Eskimo hunter ponders thus: ‘…the rest of my days I
spend / wandering: wondering / what, anyway, / was that sticky infusion, that
rank flavour of blood, that poetry, by which I lived?’ A hard question to answer,
for an aboriginal American, from inside the corpse of a dead bear.

This seems light-years away from Ashbery’s modus operandi, and in ‘The
Anaglyph’ the business with the dead bear is perhaps a ‘feint’, an example of
what poetry is not, except in a willed personal myth drenched in contemporary
bourgeois American nostalgie de la tundra.

In ‘The Anaglyph’ there are eight further references to Mr Kinnell’s ill-fated
bear: ‘inhabiting a reputation’ (51), ‘the story of an Eskimo inside an
eviscerated bear like this?’ (72), ‘the fact that he “inhabited” the smelly bear-
skin ...’ (73), ‘clambering inside an animal’ (78), ‘that animal’s demise’ (105),
taxidermy at midnight’ (106), ‘a polar bear falling over, and the hunter’ (156),
and a final dismissive if syntactically ambiguous aperçu: ‘He read poems about
killing large animals to keep awake / On the tepid waters of café society.’ (210–
11)

Other images deal with Ashbery’s poetry as an influence and refer more
sensibly to the process of rewriting as redesign or rebuilding: ‘this project, I
admit that / It is like gutting then refurbishing a friend’s apartment.’ (43–44)
‘returning to my sources, raking through my prototypes’ (48), and ‘blueprint is
found and seems just right’ (49).

Not that ‘The Anaglyph’ is loaded with a freight of too-serious literary
endeavour: that would betray Ashbery as much as Tranter, and of course
seriousness in itself has no literary value, nor has its cousin, sincerity. As Harold
Bloom reminds us, Oscar Wilde remarked that “All bad poetry springs from
genuine feeling.” There are lighter moments, and many of them.

⁷Oscar Wilde: Gilbert, in The Critic as Artist, pt. 2, published in Intentions
For example: ‘the fireworks, they / Ended with a fizzing Roman candle sound that frightened the guest who was / Intended to rescue Gertie McDowell from that dirty old man.’ (100–102) In 1918 the US Postal Authorities burned copies of the Little Review carrying the instalment of James Joyce’s Ulysses in which young Gertie McDowell exposes her drawers to the gaze of masturbating Leopold Bloom in the dusk while roman candles fizz and explode in the sky. Joyce’s passage parodies the style of women’s magazine stories of the time:

And then a rocket sprang and bang shot blind and O! then the Roman candle burst and it was like a sigh of O! and everyone cried O! O! in raptures and it gushed out of it a stream of rain gold hair threads and they shed and ah! they were all greeny dewy stars falling with golden, O so lively! O so soft, sweet, soft! (Joyce 477)

Exclaiming over roman candles must be a universal phenomenon. Jack Kerouac, in On The Road, published in 1957, and seemingly unaware of Ulysses, writes:

‘The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes "Awww!".’ (Kerouac 8)

(1891). Though Bloom, too lazy or too confident to check his sources, expresses the concept as ‘Oscar Wilde sublimely remarked that “all bad poetry is sincere.”’ (Bloom, xix)
Other lighter references:

lines 23–25: 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”] John Ashbery’s apartment is in a building that bears a large sign advertising “COOPS”, or co-operatively-owned apartments. The vertical alignment of the word ‘coops’ does not allow for hyphens. See the note to ‘Ninth Avenue’ below. (Photo: John Ashbery’s apartment building. Photo by John Tranter.)

91: The assurance Baron Corvo had an excess of, a crowing assurance] The eccentric writer Frederick Rolfe (1860–1913) adopted the pseudonym ‘Baron Corvo’ (along with several others). The Corvidae are a family of birds including crows, ravens and jays;
corvine: crow-like.

114: presented in a Potemkin-Village spirit ] Potemkin-Village, a pretentiously showy or imposing façade intended to mask or divert attention from an embarrassing or shabby fact or condition. 1935–40; after Prince Potëmkin. “Catherine's [the Great’s] tour of the south in 1787 was a triumph for Potëmkin, for he disguised all the weak points of his administration — hence the apocryphal tale of his erecting artificial villages to be seen by the empress in passing.” (Encyclopaedia Britannica Deluxe edition 2004 CD ROM).

115: a vast electrical disturbance] The phrase comes from an early line of John Ashbery’s: ‘My child, I love any vast electrical disturbance.’ (Some Trees, Corinth 20) ] and is used again in ‘Electrical Disturbance: A dramatic interlude’.

131: coffee and a Strega] Strega (Italian: witch) is a liqueur. In Frank O’Hara’s poem ‘The Day Lady Died’:

    It is 12:20 in New York a Friday [....]
    and for Mike I just stroll into the PARK LANE
    Liquor Store and ask for a bottle of Strega and
    then I go back where I came from to 6th Avenue...

131: Il Miglior Fabbro] Not in fact a New York café, bar or restaurant, though perhaps it should be. This phrase was T S Eliot’s dedication of The Waste Land to Pound: ‘the better maker’ or ‘the finer craftsman’, which is what Dante calls Arnaut Daniël, an Occitan troubadour of the twelfth century and the inventor of the difficult sestina poem form, a favourite of Ashbery’s.

143: the pearl-handled revolver] A radio play device: a common name for any clumsy explanatory dialogue. In an archetypal radio play, to identify the villain to the radio audience, who are ‘blind’, and where the type of gun the villain is holding is vital in identifying the real murderer, typical dialogue ran thus: “Carruthers, you swine, put down that pearl-handled revolver!”

151: Not likely to allow me to escape the whirligig of voracious time.]
Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, (act five, scene one):

Clown: ... And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges.

186: a canal reflecting its own anagram] Psychoanalytic philosopher Jacques Lacan developed a theory of the ‘mirror stage’ of ego development. Reflections and mirrors are of course symbolic of the central process this poem enacts. *Canal* is an anagram of *Lacan*, whose name appears in another mirror later in the thesis.

197: a step or two away from them] Frank O’Hara again. His 1956 poem “A Step Away From Them’ contains the lines:

   It’s my lunch hour, so I go
   for a walk among the hum-coloured
   cabs. […] First
   Bunny died, then John Latouche,
   then Jackson Pollock. But is the
   earth as full as life was full, of them? […]
   A glass of papaya juice
   and back to work. My heart is in my
   pocket, it is *Poems* by Pierre Reverdy.

200: Leading to a rowboat mounted in a park] From John Forbes, ‘Monkey’s Pride’:

   I’ll be employed on a rowing boat
   mounted in a park,
   the one the avenues lead to
   because society has elected me / to decorate
   its falling apart with a useless panache […]

208: Infant mortality was declining as aspirin consumption increased.] Though the two trends are not directly related, each is a product of scientific advances occurring over the same period:

   In 1897, scientists at the drug and dye firm Bayer began investigating acetylsalicylic acid as a less-irritating replacement for standard common salicylate medicines. By 1899, Bayer had dubbed this drug ‘Aspirin’ and was selling it around the world. Aspirin's popularity grew over the first half of the twentieth century, spurred by its effectiveness in
the wake of Spanish flu pandemic of 1918, and aspirin's profitability led to fierce competition and the proliferation of aspirin brands and products. (Wikipedia)

Starting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a precipitous decline in infant mortality was observed in the United States. Economic growth, improved nutrition, new sanitary measures, and advances in knowledge about infant care all contributed to this decline in infant mortality. (Lee, Kwang-Sun. 'Infant Mortality Decline in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries: the role of market milk.' Perspectives in Biology and Medicine, Volume 50, Number 4, Autumn 2007, pp. 585–602)

229: Ninth Avenue] John Ashbery's New York apartment abuts Ninth Avenue. See the note to 'Twenty-second Street', above.

232: to turn your back on Europe] As a young man, John Ashbery lived in Europe for a decade from 1955 to 1965 — indeed, one of his poems is titled 'Europe', though it is mainly about the eponymous Paris metro stop and its neighbourhood — then returned to live in the United States. 'Clepsydra' was 'one of the last poems Ashbery wrote while he was in France. The poem was composed in the Spring of 1965...' (Shoptaw 83). The unusual number of French phrases and names in 'The Anaglyph' also suggest this French connection: Salon des Refusés, Buffon, Paris, eau-de-cologne, la vie littéraire, longeurs, Mallarmé's abyss, Valéry, appliqué aperçus, puissant, les temps perdu, simple entendre.

251: Your well wrought urn] Ashbery’s oeuvre; the reference is to both the noted critical study of poems by Donne, Wordsworth, Keats, and Eliot, The Well Wrought Urn by Cleanth Brooks, and to John Keats’ poem ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, which ends: ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty. That is all ye know on Earth, and all ye need to know.’
Desmond’s Coupé

This poem is a mainly homophonic translation (or mistranslation) of Stéphane Mallarmé’s 1897 poem ‘Un coup de dés…’ Tranter provided a note to the poem in a 2006 issue of Rhizome magazine (12–13):

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 désespérement” 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

⁸The 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 ‘Musicopoematographoscope’, and it was published as a book by Hale and Iremonger in 1981. Tranter 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 Tranter’s, and he encouraged Tranter to finish his poem as a kind of friendly rival to his own. 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. Mallarmé’s poem can be found at <http://www.mallarme.net/Coup_de_dés>
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.

The idea of homophonic mistranslation is not new; Louis Zukofsky and his wife Celia used the technique in their versions of the Roman poet Catullus (1969), and more than half a century ago Frank O’Hara wrote ‘Aus Einem April’ (1954), the first line of which is a deliberate mistranslation of the first line of Rainer Maria Rilke’s poem ‘Aus Einem April’ (‘From an April’) (Rilke 10). David Lehman (in Jacket 4) points out that O’Hara’s poem begins with the line ‘We dust the walls’; and Rilke’s poem begins ‘Wieder duftet der Wald,’ (‘Again the forest is fragrant’). The rest of the O’Hara’s poem, though, abandons close homophony and plays more loosely with the original. Rilke’s poem begins:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wieder duftet der Wald.} \\
\text{Es heben die schwebenden Lerchen} \\
\text{mit sich den Himmel empor, der unseren Schultern schwer war; ...}
\end{align*}
\]

O’Hara’s poem (186) opens like so:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{We dust the walls} \\
\text{And of course we are weeping larks} \\
\text{falling all over the heavens with our shoulders clasped ...}
\end{align*}
\]

Gérard Genette (Palimpsests, 1997) points out that the classic example of this genre is Mots d’Heures: Gousses, Rames, by Louis d’Antin van Rooten [first published in London in 1967], who presents as a volume of hermetic French poems (with English glosses on the obscurities) a series of French transphonations of nursery rhymes (‘Mother Goose Rhymes’):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Un petit d’un petit}
\end{align*}
\]
S’étonne aux Halles
Un petit d’un petit
Ah! Degrés te fallent

thus transposes, as you have probably guessed already, to

Humpty Dumpty
Sat on a wall
Humpty Dumpty
Had a great fall.

Alison Rieke notes a link from Humpty Dumpty to Louis Zukofsky:

Zukofsky also glances at the word play of another Louis, Luis d’Antin Van Rooten, whose edition of Mother Goose transliterated into French resembles Zukofsky’s handling of foreign languages. Zukofsky made the connection between Swift and *Mots D’Heures: Gousses, Rames* by reading a review of Van Rooten’s book in which the reviewer compares the technique of the joking French transliteration of Mother Goose to Swift’s play with the sounds of Latin. ... The pertinent quotation from Swift appears in the review, which Zukofsky clipped and saved and which is now preserved at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Centre with his composition notes for ‘A’-22 and ‘A’-23.

Van Rooten’s sly poems are meant to be comic; Zukofsky perhaps less so. In Tranter’s hands, Mallarmé’s poem is considerably less solemn than in the original. Three examples:

Mallarmé: Un coup de dés / jamais / quand bien même lancé dans des circonstances éternelles / du fond d’un naufrage

Weinfield translation⁹: A throw of the dice / will never / even when launched in eternal circumstances / from the depths of a shipwreck

Tranter: 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. (1–3)

From the shipwreck which Mallarmé paints in misty though intensely spiritual terms to Desmond’s naivety is certainly a step or two down the ladder of seriousness, though the sense of quandary is of course central to Mallarmé’s poem.

Mallarmé: celui / son ombre puérile / caressée et polie et rendue et lavée

Weinfield: this one / his peurile shade / caressed and polished and rendered and washed

Tranter: say, Louie, your son is some puerile hombre, / caressing a policeman and renting out a lavatory (58–59)

Mallarmé wrote that ‘everything exists in order to end in a book,’¹⁰ though it is doubtful that he had policemen and lavatories in mind.

Mallarmé: prince amer de l’écueil / s’en coiffe comme de l’héroique / irrésistible mais contenu / par sa petite raison virile / en foudre

Weinfield: bitter prince of the reef / wears it as an heroic headdress / irresistible but contained / by his small virile reason / in a lightning flash

Tranter: 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 (91–95)

Here the ‘prince amer’ becomes an American prince, whose ‘heroic headdress’ is downgraded to ‘a little heroic cough’.

Perhaps the most salient difference between Mallarmé’s poem and Tranter’s version of it is that in Mallarmé there is a consistency of tone and vocabulary throughout (as there is in Eliot’s Four Quartets, below). The variation of theme and topic occur within an overall economy of literary decorum.

¹⁰Mallarmé, Stéphane. ‘tout, au monde, existe pour aboutir à un livre.’

Le livre, instrument spirituel. (378)
In Tranter the opposite is the case; though there are some tenuous links to the master poem, the employment of homophonic ‘translation’ causes the vocabulary and topic to vary erratically, leaping from seriousness to crude slang in a single phrase: ‘heroic’ to ‘cough’, for example. The only literary decorum is a total lack of decorum, relentlessly imposed.

Five Quartets

_Four Quartets_, a group of four related poems by T S Eliot, was published in book form in 1942.\(^{11}\) Their titles are _Burnt Norton_, _East Coker_, _The Dry Salvages_, and _Little Gidding_. Apparently Eliot considered _Four Quartets_ to be his masterpiece. 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’.

Tranter evidently had the feeling that _Four Quartets_ — at nearly a thousand lines — was overgrown and repetitive, and he set about fixing those deficiencies by pruning the poem severely. His version — titled ‘Five Quartets’ — is Eliot’s poem with most of the words removed, and runs to a more economical 75 lines. Its restructuring and distortion of the original text is extreme; here is what Viktor Shklovsky has to say (12) about such procedures:

In our phonetic and lexical investigations into poetic speech,

\(^{11}\) The four poems had been published individually from 1935 to 1942.
involving both the arrangement of words and the semantic structures based on them, we discover everywhere the very hallmark of the artistic: that is, an artefact that has been intentionally removed from the domain of automatised perception. It is “artificially” created by an artist in such a way that the perceiver, pausing in his reading, dwells on the text. This is when the literary work attains its greatest and most long-lasting impact…. because of this, the object is brought into view.

Later Shklovsky defines poetry as ‘the language of impeded, distorted speech. Poetic speech is structured speech.’ (13) What has occurred to the rather conventional language of Eliot’s poem is that its easy rhetorical flow and conventional sequence of insights and images have been truncated and chopped into fragments, and those fragments disconnected from their usual linking words and phrases. The ‘automatised perception’ that allows the eye to glide over the lines without being forced to notice each word has been disrupted. Here is a passage from *Four Quartets*:

This is the one way, and the other
Is the same, not in movement
But abstention from movement; while the world moves
In appetency, on its metalled ways
Of time past and time future.

IV

Time and the bell have buried the day,
the black cloud carries the sun away.
Will the sunflower turn to us, will the clematis
Stray down, bend to us; tendril and spray
Clutch and clinging?
Chill
Fingers of yew be curled
Down on us? After the kingfisher’s wing

This becomes:

Abstention from its metalled bell
Rather than guess the intentions of climbing plants and trees, the reader is here forced to invent the mise en scene and syntactical connections that are needed for this to make 'sense'. The act of reading — that is, making sense of a string of alphabetical marks — is so complex, rapid and automatic that these guesses at meaning have already taken place before we are consciously aware that they are needed. As attention is paid to the words, a series of conscious reinterpretations and adjustments are called for as predictable sequences of words fail to materialise. This kind of de-natured writing activates an extra layer of awareness in the reading mind and enlarges and refreshes the range of possible responses to a text.

Electrical Disturbance

The next piece, a group or sequence of poems titled ‘Electrical Disturbance: A dramatic interlude’ is laid out like a script for a radio play or feature for two voices, a form Tranter was familiar with.¹² 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 Tranter and broadcast on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s ‘Radio Helicon’ program in 1988. Nearly two decades later, an audio recording of the radio program was audited and translated by a computer’s 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 John Tranter in 2005 and 2006. The speaking parts ‘A’

¹²In the 1970s Tranter produced (that is, edited and directed) some forty radio plays and features for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (now, 2008, ‘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 arts-related radio programs.
and ‘B’ do not have a one-to-one connection with the original vocal texts; the speech divisions occur more or less at random.

As noted earlier, the title comes from an early line of Ashbery’s: ‘My child, I love any vast electrical disturbance.’ (Some Trees, Corinth 20) The original radio program was powered by electricity; Tranter’s version of it is itself a vast disturbance to the original.¹³ Shklovsky makes a point about the need to disturb the conventional:

> In order to transform an object into a fact of art, it is necessary first to withdraw it from the domain of life. To do this, we must first and foremost “shake up the object,” as Ivan the Terrible sorted out his henchmen. We must extricate a thing from the cluster of associations in which it is bound. It is necessary to turn over the object as one would turn a log over the fire. (61)

In the 1988 recording, John Ashbery begins by reading his poem 'Paradoxes and Oxymorons' (Selected 283):

> This poem is concerned with language on a very plain level.
> Look at it talking to you. You look out a window
> Or pretend to fidget. You have it but you don’t have it.
> You miss it, it misses you. You miss each other.
>
> The poem is sad because it wants to be yours, and cannot be.

Tranter’s transformation of these lines:

> Outsourcing ruins the parties concerned with language.
> They are employing level parking. You are one

¹³ When Ashbery came on-line to begin the original recording of this reading-interview in 1988, he noted that he had travelled through a violent electrical storm to get to the New York ABC studios. From the Sydney end of the line, Tranter remarked that he must have enjoyed the experience, as in his first book he had written the line ‘I love any vast electrical disturbance.’
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 — (2–6)

Like a radio play script, the piece begins with a cast list for two voices: ‘A: a literary scholar; B: a company director taking on the guise of a naïve young man.’ Both personas could be made to fit Tranter, perhaps; this thesis would argue for his status as a literary scholar, and the half-title page of his collection *Urban Myths* states that ‘He ... now lives in Sydney, where he is a company director.’ (UM i) Perhaps the guise of a ‘ naïve young man’ was invented to allow his character to draw out the older, wiser Ashbery.

The use of two voices provides an arena for conflict and dramatic tension. For the first half of the poem, the voices seem to address the air, or perhaps the reader, conveying the computer-mangled monologues into the public space of the printed page, just as the original radio program consisted of some static poetry reading by John Ashbery, designed to be overheard by the radio audience. But the program also contained a question-and-answer interview between Tranter and Ashbery, and by line 96 the poem begins to move in this direction too.

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. (96–99)

As well as disagreement, there is misunderstanding:

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 — (106–198)
We cannot be sure who misheard or misread 'fries' as 'fires', as the original draft provided by the computer's 'translation' was extensively rewritten by John Tranter. The characters 'A' and 'B' are a construct, for one thing. Perhaps the computer mistranscribed the word; perhaps Tranter added it as an apparent mistranscription. The innocent reader cannot be sure of anything, in fact: the whole of the text of this piece may well have been a complete erasure, rewrite and obliteration of the original draft, or perhaps a partial rewrite. Does this matter? The connections between the original radio program and the poem as we have it in this thesis are strained, but also in a sense meaningless. One cannot explain the other. Occasionally, though, the focus becomes intelligibly self-aware:

A: (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... (124–127)

This is possibly a (slightly distorted) description of the power-relations between the ABC interviewer and the famous poet interviewee, though we should remember that the ‘... speaking parts “A” and “B” do not have a one-to-one connection with the original vocal texts...’

Speaking French

Following the 'Vocoder' group comes a group of one hundred and one poems loosely derived from the work of four French poets of the nineteenth century: some of Arthur Rimbaud's 'Illuminations', and poems by Mallarmé, Baudelaire and Verlaine. I shall focus on the Rimbaud poems here. Most of what is said about them can be applied to the other three: the technical procedure was the same.

The process of constructing these poems was loosely similar to the method used with 'Electrical Disturbance', but with an important difference. Here, the
original poems by the four authors were read into the microphone by John Tranter, in French. The speech-recognition program had not been designed to handle French; that is, its dictionary consisted of only English words. Nonetheless it made valiant attempts to ‘make sense’, in English text, 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’? As with all of Tranter’s experiments, the product of the machine was treated as raw material, as rough drafts for more finished works, and considerable rewriting was done.

A further restraint was imposed late in the rewriting process, one which relates these poems to the concerns of ‘The Anaglyph’ and ‘Electrical Disturbance’. Each of the 101 poems contains one or more lines or phrases from poems by John Ashbery.

Rimbaud’s ‘Illuminations’

Rimbaud’s ‘Illuminations’ are a group of 47 prose-poems which — unlike the work of the other three French poets — were not published during their author’s lifetime.

Apart from Ashbery, Rimbaud is the other major influence on Tranter’s poetry, an influence which began a few years earlier than Ashbery’s, in Tranter’s adolescence. As Fagan and Minter put it:

By 1968 Tranter was navigating a chiasmic cultural parallax, attracted to both American metropoetic and post-Romantic French Symbolism. This contest defines the direction of his first three books — the final ‘crisis’ of which is played out in The Alphabet Murders. Tranter’s solution to history was an inverted, Orientalising dialectic, and its synthesis was in the seminal figure of Arthur Rimbaud. (Par 13)

‘Odi et Amo’, Tranter’s review of Charles Nicholl’s Somebody Else: Arthur Rimbaud in Africa, begins with the mock-lascivious statement: “When I was seventeen, I fell in love with a sodomite.” Tranter’s
teenage crush endured and matured into a complex relationship.... Tranter has represented Rimbaud as 'an intoxicating role model for a rebellious teenager... poetry was the essence of his life.... [he was] intellectually brilliant... [and wrote] the most dazzling and gifted poetry of his period, perhaps of his century.... [his poems] combine revolutionary modernist methods... with an intense lyricism.' (Tranter, 'Word for Word') He also describes his pin-up vagabond as 'one of the most dazzling poets of all time... [with] a very moving lyrical urge underneath all he wrote.... a Lucifer figure in many ways, and we always admire the bad boys more than the goody two-shoes.... I've never really moved on from Rimbaud.' (Tranter, *Cortland Review*) This collocation of precocious poetic essence, stupefying lyricism and seditious brilliance sets up Rimbaud as the Romantic-Modern poet par excellence.... 'Rimbaud' becomes Tranter’s glamorous meta-brand, a sublime junction between erotic hyper-essentialism and high modernist investments in proto-romantic self-constitution. (Par 15)

Tranter has addressed Rimbaud before; three decades ago, early in the 1970s, he wrote 'Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy'¹⁴, which was rewritten for its appearance as ‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’ five years later in the collection *Dazed in the Ladies Lounge* (1979), and the topic crops up again and again through Tranter’s oeuvre. As I mention later in this paper, these early poems attempt to relocate Rimbaud firmly in the proto-Modern, and not all critics were persuaded that the attempt had been successful.¹⁵ Todorov points to some of the dangers in this approach:

> To "discover" an author of the past, to translate his theories into a contemporary vocabulary, to relate them to current ideas, the endeavour is both seductive and unattractive — by its very facility. Such an activity provides a faithful, though caricatural, image of all

¹⁴Published in *New Poetry* vol.21 no.5–6, 1974 (pp.34–39)

¹⁵’...the interrogation of History and Culture that fails to hold one’s interest in “Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy”...’ (John Forbes, *Meanjin*, 249–53)
interpretation and of all reading. Unless we let the author's sentences speak for themselves (but in what language?), we merely tend to relate them to ourselves, by contrast or likeness. If I feel the need to introduce such texts, it is doubtless because I want to make their author into one of my own predecessors. (Todorov 190–91)

Rimbaud’s sentences have already spoken for themselves, long ago. One problem of writing about another writer is to avoid standing in front of him as you write, thus blocking the reader’s view. Tranter’s Rimbaud is of course nothing like Rimbaud, but rather like Tranter, as he would like to be seen. How to get rid of that curtain of authorial rhetoric? Tranter has quoted a saying: ‘Take rhetoric and wring its neck,’ attributing it to Rimbaud, which seems suitable, but Fagan and Minter point out that Tranter is actually mistaken here, as the Rimbaud quote appears not in ‘The Alphabet Murders’ but in Section 12 of his later poem ‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’: ‘now a paste of / bullshit obscures the surface of the legend / that cast out flattery and took rhetoric / and wrung its neck.’ See John Tranter, ‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’ from Dazed in the Ladies Lounge (1979), republished in John Tranter, Trio (Cambridge, UK: Salt Publishing, 2003), p.109. (Footnote 10)

In fact the phrase is probably from Verlaine; or so Arthur Symons, who knew Verlaine¹⁶, writes:

Coming into a literature in which poetry is generally taken to be but another name for rhetoric, he [Spanish poet Ramon de Campoamor] followed, long before Verlaine, Verlaine’s advice to ‘take rhetoric and wring its neck.’ (Cities, 82)

Later the US poet Conrad Aiken used the phrase in a poem, where Verlaine

utters it over a game of chess:

Verlaine puts down his pawn upon a leaf
And closes his long eyes, which are dishonest,
And says 'Rimbaud, there is one thing to do:
We must take rhetoric, and wring its neck!...'
Rimbaud considers gravely, moves his Queen;
And then removes himself to Timbuctoo... (Aiken 141–42)

Three decades after 'Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy,', Tranter retrieves the French poet from the realm of the proto-Modern where he had previously attempted to locate him, and retranslates more than thirty of his poems using the machinery of the twenty-first century, the electric blender of postmodern disassembly and reconstruction, converting his words into a shape Rimbaud would never have recognised. As Todorov advises, he lets 'the author's sentences speak for themselves (but in what language?)'

To turn to the Rimbaud poems, here’s an example of the distance between one of Rimbaud’s prose poems in French and Oliver Bernard’s translation of it into English, and its incarnation as part of Tranter’s oeuvre. First, the Rimbaud (Rimbaud 274):

**Arthur Rimbaud: Métropolitain**

Du détroit d’Indigo aux mers d’Ossian, sur le sable rose et orange qu’a lavé le ciel vineux, viennent de monter et de se croiser des boulevards de cristal habités incontinent par de jeunes familles pauvres qui s’alimentent chez les fruitiers. Rien de riche. — La ville.

Du désert de bitume fuient droit, en déroute avec les nappes de brumes échelonnées en bandes affreuses au ciel qui se recourbe, se recule et descend formé de la plus sinistre fumée noire que puisse faire l’Océan en deuil, les casques, les roues, les barques, les croupes.
— La bataille!

Lève la tête: ce pont de bois, arqué; ces derniers potagers; ces masques enluminés sous la lanterne fouettée par la nuit froide;
l’ombre niaise à la robe bruyante, au bas de la rivière; ces crânes lumineux dans les plants de pois, — et les autres fantasmagories. — La campagne.

Ces routes bordées de grilles et de murs, contenant à peine leurs bosquets, et les atroces fleurs qu’on appellerait coeurs et soeurs, damas damnant de langueur, — possession de féeriques aristocraties ultra-rhénanes, Japonaises, Guaranies, propres encore à recevoir la musique des anciens — et il y a des auberges qui, pour toujours, n’ouvrent déjà plus; — il y a des princesses, et si tu n’es pas trop accablé, l’étude des astres. — Le ciel.

Le matin où, avec Elle, vous vous débattîtes parmi ces éclats de neige, ces lèvres vertes, ces glaces, ces drapeaux noirs et ces rayons bleus, et ces parfums pourpres du soleil des pôles. — Ta force.

_Metropolitan (trans. Bernard)_

From the indigo strait to the seas of Ossian, on the pink and orange sand which the vinous sky has washed, crystal boulevards have just risen and crossed, at once occupied by young poor families who get their food at the greengrocers’ shops. Nothing rich — The city!

From the desert of bitumen flee in headlong flight under sheets of fog spread out in frightful layers in the sky which curves back, recedes, and descends, formed of the most sinister black smoke that the Ocean in mourning can produce, helmets, wheels, ships, cruppers — The battle! Raise your head: that arched wooden bridge; the last kitchen gardens of Samaria; those masks lit by the lantern whipped by the cold night; the silly undine with the noisy dress, at the bottom of the river; luminous skulls among the pea seedlings — and the other phantasmagoria — the country.

Roads bordered by railings and walls, hardly containing their spinneys, and the frightful flowers you would call souls and sisters. Damask damning with tedium — the property of fairy-tale nobilities from beyond the Rhine, Japanese, Guarani, still fit to receive the music of the ancients — and there are inns which are never open any more — there are princesses, and, if you are not too overwhelmed,
the study of the stars — the sky.
The morning when, with Her, you wrestled among the gleams of snow, the green lips, the ice, the black flags and the blue beams of light, and the purple odours of the Polar sun — your strength. (Ibid. 274–75)

Metro

Two guys from Detroit pored over the suicide letter as its auction price rose through the $8.00 range. A male choir that this year sang in Vietnam is now a medical team on a training course. No one wants an incontinent hostage. Femina’s call for us all to share the pretty things fell on deaf ears; so much for the taste of justice. They can’t be bought. An investigation will not reveal me as a donor or a smaller companion. The promise of learning is a delusion. That’s what befalls most of us plagiarists: our suckers reject the disillusion that comes with the ugly truth. One guy says the economy is in fact the city of events, the other says ‘no one is a real actor in the film.’

The phrase from Ashbery’s poetry is ‘The promise of learning is a delusion.’

It’s clear that there is little point attempting to trace the links or connections between the ‘original’ and the final draft; to call them tenuous would be to understate the matter. The ‘content’ of the original has been completely dissolved in the acid bath of ‘translation’; form is in charge of the meaning here. Shklovsky reminds us that ‘form creates for itself its own content.’ (24)

This distance between original and ‘translation’ is great enough to accommodate a complete transformation of one poem into a different literary object altogether, according to chance, incompletely effective computer transcription algorithms and personal poetic idiosyncrasy. On the other side of
that gap lies freedom of an extreme kind.

**JE est un autre: an aside**

As Rimbaud wrote, *JE est un autre*, and this concept is worth looking at in detail.

Rimbaud wrote two letters in May 1871, one on 13 May to Georges Izambard, and a similar though longer letter two days later to Paul Demeny (Rimbaud 5). They are generally known as the ‘Lettres du voyant’. In each letter he sets out his theory of the poet as a person transformed into a visionary seer, embodied in the phrase ‘I is another [JE est un autre]’. In both cases the letters of the first person pronoun are capitalised, and the sentence reads ‘I is another’, not ‘I am another’; that is, the first person, the speaking voice, the authorial ‘I’ of the poem has become some other person or thing: not Rimbaud the person, but Rimbaud as a poet, has been transformed.

Other significant phrases from Rimbaud’s two letters are ‘... I have discovered I am a poet. It is not my fault at all,’ ‘So much the worse for the wood if it find itself a violin ...’, and ‘If brass wakes up a trumpet, it is not its own fault.’

The transformation is from sleep to action, from inarticulate raw material (brass, wood) to finely-worked musical instruments, from dumb matter to music. In Rimbaud’s own case it is the change from youth to adulthood (for all that he was sixteen at the time), from blindness to vision, from unconscious inaction to articulate life, and from innocence to experience.

The Rimbaud scholar Enid Starkie links this claim of radical transformation to the alchemical study which Rimbaud had undertaken. ‘In occult theory,’ she writes,

- primordial thinking is an autonomous activity whose object the thinker is. The outworn conception of the personal writer producing his own work is totally false. The writer is merely the vehicle for the voice of the Eternal, he himself is of no account for he is merely the
unconscious expression of someone speaking through him.

Further, she quotes Rimbaud from the 'Lettres du voyant': 'It is wrong to say Je pense [I think], one should say on me pense [I am thought],” and goes on to explain that ‘The poet cannot know why it is precisely he who has been chosen; he has had no say in the matter and it has occurred without his volition.’ (Starkie 122)

But recourse to alchemical theory is not the only way of interpreting Rimbaud’s self-alienation here. Rimbaud translator Oliver Bernard notes certain obstacles in Enid Starkie’s path to understanding which she herself may not have been aware of:

Despite certain amiable eccentricities, I recognised Enid Starkie when we met in Soho in 1962 or 1963 as a genuine representative of the academic establishment. This did not prevent me from liking and admiring her, nor lessen the pleasure I felt at her telling me that what I had done ‘annoyed [her] much less than most Rimbaud translations’. But her position in life, if I may put it like that, cannot have helped her much in empathising with a rebellious and revolutionary sixteen-year-old runaway, younger and more disturbing than any of Starkie’s Oxford students, and possessed of what Edgell Rickword calls ‘a natural genius for the language of abuse’. This is why I now think that Starkie placed such great emphasis on Rimbaud’s esoteric knowledge about alchemy — because she found it a more congenial line of enquiry than the politics of the Empire, the Commune and the Third Republic, and particularly Rimbaud’s involvement with the Commune and with communards. I don’t doubt that she would have written excellently on the subject of the fading beauties of Parnassian verse which the sixteen-year-old Rimbaud so cruelly mocked in 1871; but then she would have written a different book altogether. Her *Arthur Rimbaud* remains the standard conventional biography. (Rimbaud xxx-xxxi)

Of course Rimbaud’s left-wing views along with his homosexuality and his faith in poetry were to undergo total conversion. He would adopt a dogged bourgeois individualism and devote the rest of his life to accumulating capital
as he matured from the wicked schoolboy into an angry, lonely, wandering adult, the restless nineteenth-century character the French call a *fuguer*. But that was after his childhood and his poetry had both ended, and after Paris and everything in it had been left far behind.

As a side-note to this aside, Rimbaud travelled on foot obsessively. He made several journeys between Charleville and Paris this way, a journey of nearly two weeks; later he walked though Germany, walked over the Alps (twice) to Italy, and travelled to Scandinavia, Java, Cyprus and finally North Africa, where he journeyed frequently between Arabia and areas in North Africa as a trader, on horseback but often on foot. The illness that killed him, cancer of the knee, would seem to have been partly caused by the relentless punishment he dealt out to his legs and feet.

The book *Mad Travellers* by Ian Hacking studies the phenomenon of the *fuguer*. From a review in US Publishers Weekly:

> In a series of four essays originally delivered as the 1997 Page-Barbour Lectures at the University of Virginia, Hacking closely analyses the history of the dissociative fugue, a malady that enjoyed a brief vogue in the 1890s, particularly in France. Its symptom was compulsive bouts of walking in a state of complete forgetfulness of one’s identity. <http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Mad-Travelers/Ian-Hacking/e/9780674009547>

More significant, from another review of the book:

> I was left with the impression that French surveillance, mixed with frequent desertion from its conscript army, went a long way to explaining the Fugue phenomenon. (Edgar 600–601)

Rimbaud and Verlaine were under frequent surveillance by police spies in France and in England because of their connections to the *communards*. And Rimbaud deserted from the Dutch Army in Batavia in the Dutch East Indies and fled back to Europe. But I digress.

Leo Bersani provides a summary of a Lacanian approach that is equally useful in relation to Rimbaud’s claim that ‘*I* is another’: ‘... the appropriated
self is an ideal self: the infant (and later the adult, to the extent that his relations are lived in the Imaginary order) sees in the other a total form, a full or completed being, which he possesses by identifying with it.’

A fuller quotation brings out the link with developmental psychology and the ‘mirror stage’:

In Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory, our relation to the world is marked by the Imaginary when it is characterized by an effort to master the world through a process of narcissistic identification with it. The source of the Imaginary order (and of all later identificatory relations) is the ‘mirror stage’ of infancy. According to Lacan, this stage occurs between the ages of six months and eighteen months; the infant, still physically helpless, anticipates his own future physical coordination and unity by an identification with the image of the other as a total form. This is equivalent to saying that the child’s self is at first constituted as another; the human self is originally an alienated self. The principal effect of the mirror stage on intersubjectivity can be found in relations of aggressive tension in which the self exists only as another and the other is seen as an alter ego. For example, in erotic relationships dominated by the Imaginary, each lover will attempt to capture his own image in the other… The other is seen as withholding the self, and so the knowledge one has of him through one’s efforts to appropriate oneself in him is a paranoid knowledge. Indeed, for Lacan the alienating nature of self-identification makes the perception of the self in the other a paranoid perception from the very beginning. At the same time, the appropriated self is an ideal self: the infant (and later the adult, to the extent that his relations are lived in the Imaginary order) sees in the other a total form, a full or completed being, which he possesses by identifying with it. … the superego… is not so much a fantasy-identification with a parental figure as it is an alienating distancing of the self from itself. (Bersani 112–16)

In Tranter’s destructive mistranslations of ‘Rereading Rimbaud’, through a collaboration between Tranter and a machine that could not have been
imagined in Rimbaud’s lifetime, Rimbaud’s voice is finally freed from any trace of itself, and becomes completely ‘other’.

At the Movies

This third and final section of the poems prepared for this thesis presents twenty or so pages of poems about different movies, usually in a readable, discursive and sometimes critical voice.

Reviewers have commented that in Tranter’s very visual oeuvre, mention of movies is frequent, and the techniques of contemporary film (sudden scene changes using jump-cut, cross-fade, dissolve, and so on) are often borrowed as literary form. Barry Hill, reviewing Ultra in The Australian, writes:

They are highly visual, cinematic poems that Tranter directs like Polanski. They can make us feel like we are in a film; then, just at the right time, we are back on the street, where the poet stands with his merciless phrase-book…. Brilliant. (2001)

Kate Lilley reviews The Floor of Heaven:

Read through multiple levels of reported speech and frame narration, the narratives themselves are richly reminiscent, loaded with novelistic and cinematic reference. The book as a whole can be construed as a serious pastiche, and a reading of the classic narratives and scenarios of melodrama and film noir, orchestrated around the oxymoronic trope of fated accident. (2000, 106–14)

Robert Potts reviewed Late Night Radio:

In his descriptions preceding this (of plots and images from famous films, on the experience of watching the movies, on the nature of escapism and realism, on the way in which the flux of cinema — the rapid cuts and disjunctions — mirrors a modernist mediation of an incorrigibly various worlds), and in other poems, Tranter has offered just such a disorientation, raising exactly those questions of a reader’s ‘investment’ and ‘reward’, and, I think, asking a necessary question as to whether such a balance-sheet approach to art and reception is valid. (1999)
Philip Mead looks more deeply into the cinematism underlying much of Tranter’s writing, focussing on *The Floor of Heaven*:

Probably the single most important marker of cinematism in John Tranter’s *The Floor of Heaven* is the style and tone of the narrators and the fact that they sound like voice-overs to the narratives they frame and enact. I think it’s useful here to read the narratives of *The Floor of Heaven* in a revision of the terms Ann Kaplan identifies as the five key features of film noir: ‘1) the investigative structure of the narrative; 2) plot devices such as voice-over or flashback, or frequently both; 3) proliferation of points of view; 4) frequent unstable characterisation of the heroine; 5) an “expressionist” visual style and emphasis on sexuality in the photographing of women.’ In film noir thrillers or mysteries there is usually ‘a male hero in search of the truth about an event that either has already happened or is about to come to completion.’ (Mead, *Space* 206)

The poem’s title [‘Breathless’] is an unmistakable allusion to film, to Godard and Truffaut’s *A Bout de Souffle* (1959) and Martin Erlichman’s 1983 Hollywood remake, *Breathless*. What is in play here is the idea of homage. The French *Breathless* is a knowing homage to Hollywood noir thrillers and gangster movies. The mise en abyme of Tranter’s title is its insertion of itself into a trans-cultural exchange of filmic homage, knowing allusions and remakes. (Mead, *Space* 212)

Tranter has written poems specifically about movies in the past; indeed, his second book is titled *Red Movie*. Perhaps his most strenuous attempt at an analysis of movie culture is ‘Those Gods Made Permanent’ (first collected in *Under Berlin*, pp.51–56, from which poem the phrase ‘under Berlin’ is taken), a six-page poem which draws on Joseph Losey’s *The Servant* and Fritz Lang’s *Doktor Mabuse the Gambler* and to a lesser extent various other movies, and asks the kind of questions Robert Potts refers to above. Andrew Taylor cites some lines from this poem as examples of ‘narrative waywardness’ common in Tranter’s work:

‘... we find the plot folding up like a robot / and stumbling off in the wrong direction / too abruptly for us to get our bearings. / [ ... ] What we asked for led to nothing, what we didn’t want to see / was made
plain.’ (Under Berlin 53). Just such a narrative waywardness, it should be clear, is the hallmark of many of Tranter’s poems. They are in no small measure similar to the cinema. They are often highly visual, cut rapidly from scene to scene or image to image, and are often filled with fragments of what could be dialogue. (Taylor 1991)

Tranter’s poems ‘The Creature from the Black Lagoon’ and ‘High School Confidential’ bear the titles of specific movies (both made in 1956 by the same director, as it happens). And on a different theme, Tranter has said of his poems:

I suppose that poetry writing is what I do instead of film-making, which is what I would do if I had the money and skill. (Tranter, Hahn 2003)

The ‘movie’ poems in this thesis hark back to those earlier concerns, take account of a more disparate range of movies, and interrogate them more thoroughly and with a more theoretically-informed perspective. ‘Girl in Water’, for example, not only mentions Lacan (albeit in a telestich acrostic) but positions some of Hitchcock’s artefacts from the film Vertigo inside a poem that acts as a Lacanian machine.

It’s worth mentioning that a poem that addresses a movie is free to say what it likes, but only within the context of addressing that particular movie and its world. In terms of subject matter, the focus of a poem can be seen as that part of human society which is “cropped” to fit within the frame of the poem’s cultural viewfinder. Thus the particular focus of each of Tranter’s movie poems (rather than any formal aspect of the verse) acts as a constraining device. The procedure acts like the device of writing within the constraints of a ‘genre’ or a ‘form’: a stage play is essentially different to a radio play which is itself essentially different to a documentary movie, for example.

Tranter has often made a point about poetry: that the meaning of a poem is not a ‘meaning’ that can be decoded using ontological semantics; it is more like the complex and obscure personal significance of a dream. The film director Luis Buñuel has said that ‘Film … is the finest instrument we know for
expressing the world of dreams, of feeling, of instinct.’ (Carrière 91) This point is treated at greater length in the discussion of Tranter’s book *The Floor of Heaven*, below. The triad of poem, dream and film overlap like a Venn diagram across a central common area of meaning. The problems of reception of those three art forms refer to the linking of various kinds of meaning with the larger problems of human life and interaction against a social background.

Because these poems generally work in the ‘discursive manner Professor Hope argues for and practises,’ to quote an early critic (Haley 1970), they provide their own critical arguments, more or less, as they proceed, so the following notes will deal mainly with points the poems neglect to bring up.

‘Caliban’ is based on *Forbidden Planet*, 1956. In the film, a rocket ship arrives at the planet Altair 4 to uncover what happened to the Bellerophon Expedition, sent out some twenty years earlier. They contact a survivor, Doctor Edward Morbius (Walter Pidgeon), who explains that some unknown force wiped out nearly everyone in his party. Only he, his wife (who later died of natural causes), and his infant daughter (now a beautiful young woman) survived. Morbius explains: ‘In times long past, this planet was the home of a mighty, noble race of beings who called themselves the Krell.... this all-but-divine race disappeared in a single night, and nothing was preserved above ground.’ We find out eventually that Morbius’s unconscious mind, fuelled by the gigantic underground energy generators built by the Krell, has destroyed the Bellerephon’s crew and is trying to destroy the recent visitors as well: its incarnation, a powerful invisible monster, roams the planet by night. At the climax Morbius realises what he has done: ‘My evil self is at the door, and I have no power to stop it.’ The theme and setting of the movie is loosely based on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, and the dramatic moves are built on a loosely Freudian understanding of human nature, echoing the interest in psychoanalysis in the US in the decade of the 1950s.

‘Dark Passage’ is based on Delmer Daves’s 1947 movie *Dark Passage*. Vincent Parry (Humphrey Bogart) has been wrongly convicted of murdering his wife and sent to San Quentin prison for life. He escapes. A stranger named
Irene Jansen (Lauren Bacall) helps him evade the police and hides Vincent in her stylish apartment. Vincent realises he is too recognisable, and a friendly cab-driver takes him to a plastic surgeon. In a technique reminiscent of another 1947 movie, the much less interesting *Lady in the Lake*, the first half of this movie is shot from the hero’s point of view; we first see his face after the surgery, when the bandages come off, which is also when he sees his new face for the first time, in a mirror. The mirror is the hinge point between his two identities, the old (never seen) and the new, hero of this new story, just as a mirror shows a translation of the real world and the real self. The film *Dark Passage* was based on the novel *The Dark Road* by David Goodis, and the narrative is marred by implausible coincidences.

In Alfred Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* (1959) mild-mannered Madison Avenue advertising executive Roger Thornhill (played by Cary Grant) is mistaken for a government agent by a gang of spies led by the urbane James Mason. Thornhill becomes entangled in a series of dangerous adventures and is pursued across the United States by both the spies and the government, while becoming further entangled in the arms of a beautiful blonde (played by Eva Marie Saint) whose loyalties are ambiguous. Highlights are a crop-dusting plane that hunts down and tries to kill Thornhill in a mid-west cornfield, and the final chase across the gigantic faces carved into Mount Rushmore.

Alfred Hitchcock often listed *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) as his favourite among the 53 films he directed in his 50-year career. In the film, Uncle Charley (Joseph Cotton) comes to visit his sister’s family in the archetypical American small town of Santa Rosa, California. Uncle Charley is especially drawn to his niece Charlie (Teresa Wright), who is named after him and who idolises him. The plot turns sinister as a pair of detectives show up tailing Uncle Charley, whom they suspect of being the ‘Merry Widow Murderer’. Charlie, in her late teens, is faced with a terrible disillusionment and the threat of murder. The movie is full of pairs of objects, duplicate characters and mirrored themes, and reflections, repetitions and opposites.

‘Black and White’ is loosely based on the 1957 US movie *The Three Faces of
Eve, about a young woman with multiple personality disorder. The script by Hervey M. Cleckley is based on a book by Corbett Thigpen which is based on a doctor’s notes (Thigpen’s?) about an actual case, though the facts have been distorted to fit the story, according to the book I’m Eve, by the real person who is the subject of the film, Chris Costner Sizemore (co-written with Elen Sain Pitillo).

‘Boy in Mirror’ and ‘Girl in Water’ are two different takes on the 1958 Hitchcock colour movie Vertigo, starring Kim Novak and James Stewart, which itself consists of two different but entangled stories that seem to repeat or reflect one another. Scottie (James Stewart) is a San Francisco detective who retires after a traumatic experience with heights that has caused him to suffer from acrophobia (fear of heights). His college friend Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore) persuades him to follow Elster’s suicidal wife, Madeline (Kim Novak). Gavin says that his wife is possessed by the spirit of his wife’s great grandmother. Scottie is taken by her beauty, and tails her around San Francisco. The two fall in love. But when — because of his fear of heights — Scottie is unable to save Madeline from killing herself (or so he believes) he has a nervous breakdown. After he recovers he comes across a woman named Judy (Kim Novak), who (naturally!) bears a strong resemblance to Madeline. Obsessed by his love and loss, he begs Judy to change her looks and clothes to look like Madeline. He then discovers that Judy (from Kansas) in fact acted the part of Madeline as part of a plot by Gavin Elstir to kill his real wife. Judy accidentally falls to her death. Scottie is left alone again. The similarity of a mirror image to a portrait painting plays a vital role in the film, and betrays Judy’s secret double life; indeed the plot of the film is doubled.

The poem ‘Boy in Mirror’ notes a frail linguistic link between Hitchcock and Proust. The villain in Vertigo is called by the very unusual name Elster (German for magpie, a creature that collects beautiful things, though associated with death and bad luck); the French author of the novel the script is based on (Pierre Boileau, whose book is D’entre les morts, 1954) can hardly have done this by accident: Proust’s great post-impressionist artist character in A la
recherche du temps perdu is called Elstir, and is troubled by thoughts of his future death.

Alert readers of the other Vertigo poem, ‘Girl in Water’, will note that the words made up by the first letter of each line of the poem (an acrostic) spell out a message, as does (separately) the last letter of each line (technically, a telestich). The initial acrostic grew out of a conversation with Douglas Messerli about Hitchcock’s movies; Messerli said in an interview with Charles Bernstein: ‘Why, when I was 12 years old did I so thoroughly enjoy Hitchcock’s Vertigo, for example, and yet at 13, hate North by Northwest — a movie I now love?’ (Messerli 2004) To Tranter it seemed obvious why a 12-year-old boy would surrender to the charms of Ms Novak in Vertigo, thus the acrostic; though as it happened his analysis was inaccurate in Douglas Messerli’s case.

The telestich (the last letter of each line) reflects a Lacanian reading of the mirrors and portraits in the movie, and how they reflect the boy-girl relationship. Of course how each audience member perceives patterns of meaning in the action of the film constructs a further mirror relationship; movies are built to reflect and to satisfy the fears, desires and dreams of the paying audience, feelings which are projected onto the characters and adventures on the screen. The acrostic reads: What do boys like about Vertigo? Kim Novak’s wonderful tits. And the telestich reads: Lacanian double feature: girl in water, boy in mirror, check!

In a way, this poem is a technical echo of ‘The Anaglyph’, in which the first and last few words of each line of the poem are taken from John Ashbery’s poem ‘Clepsydra’. In ‘Girl in Water’ the first and last letter of each line have been derived from two prior sentences; the poem’s lines are forced to conform to that sequence of letters, just as the lines of ‘The Anaglyph’ are forced into the procrustean cast of the prior Ashbery poem.

‘Paris Blues’ offers an acerbic running commentary on the film Paris Blues, black and white, 1961, starring Paul Newman as Ram Bowen (‘Ram Bowen’ is a clumsy Hollywood feint at the name of the poet Rimbaud) and Sidney Poitier as Eddie Cook, with Newman’s wife Joanne Woodward as tourist Lillian
Corning and Diahann Carroll as her friend Connie Lampson. Louis
Armstrong’s ample ambassadorial grin has a small part. Set in Paris, the film
attempts to link Paul Newman’s exploration of jazz and late nights with Arthur
Rimbaud’s poetry and bohemian lifestyle, with ludicrous results.

’s second fiddle / to a trombone…’] Aficionados of trombone-fronted jazz
bands will no doubt call to mind Wilbur de Paris (1900–1973),

Kai Winding (1922–1983), JJ Johnson (1924–2001), Tricky Sam Nanton
(1904–1946), Jiggs Whigham (born, like the author of this poem, in 1943),
Miff Mole (1898–1961), Bob Brookmeyer (b.1929), and at least a dozen
others.
Exegesis, part 2: Prior projects

This is a brief survey of John Tranter’s twenty-five books to date and the responses they elicited: twenty-one poetry books and four anthologies/compilations totalling some two and a half thousand printed pages in all. It also takes in the editing of various magazines including *Free Grass* (five pages) and *Jacket* magazine (over seven thousand pages), his creation of a twelve-page cartoon adventure, and his more recent work exploring the Internet as a publishing medium. Apart from providing a historical outline, the focus of this survey is mainly on the strand in Tranter’s writing that explores masks, impersonation, appropriation and translation, which gradually becomes more salient and wide-ranging as his writing develops.

Parallax, 1970

John Tranter wrote his first poems in 1960 at the suggestion of his history teacher, John Darcy, while a boarder at Hurlstone Agricultural High School, on the outskirts of Sydney. A decade later Tranter had side-stepped his father’s plans to turn him into a farmer and abandoned his own ambitions to be an architect, a painter, a trumpet player or a filmmaker, and had focussed on the one thing he seemed to have a talent for: poetry. He had written around three hundred poems and had published some seventy of them in various Australian journals when, in 1970, he assembled the typescript for his first book. He was twenty-six. The book, titled *Parallax and other poems*, was published by Grace Perry (b.1927) as the June 1970 issue of *Poetry Australia* magazine.

Reviews of the book were generally favourable, though Martin Haley in *The Advocate* (a Catholic magazine) in September 1970 complained that ‘He is experimental in the mode current at present in Australian verse — much influenced by contemporary American practice, post-Poundian. As with Pound “in extenso”, coherence is the difficulty. […] The general effect is quite baffling, and illustrates the weakness in abandoning for poetry the use of that discursive manner Professor Hope argues for and practises.’
Imitating his predecessors is the last thing Tranter was interested in. Haley may not have read Shklovsky, who quotes the French literary historian F. Brunetiere on literary movements that break away from the previous movement: ‘Finally, Romantics of our time [the late nineteenth century] want to create something different from the works of classical writers…’ Shklovsky adds, ‘There were also those who wanted “to create something quite similar” to their predecessors. I know them very well, indeed! But it is precisely these who can be excluded from the history of literature and art.’ (51)

Rodney Hall (in *The Australian*, of which he was a notable poetry editor at that time) wrote, ‘John Tranter’s… are inward, self-regenerating poems — the best of which are exquisite… Mr Tranter controls his poems to such a fine degree… one is tempted to say his grasp of his theoretical position might well be too strong.’

**Red Movie, 1973**

*Red Movie* was published by Angus and Robertson Publishers in 1972, while its author was working in Singapore for the Education Division of the same firm. Angus and Robertson’s poetry editor, Douglas Stewart, agreed that the firm should publish the book, saying to Tranter in 1973: ‘I didn’t really know what it was all about, but I could tell that you can write well.’

The poems in the first part of the book follow on from the more lyrical and dramatic poems in *Parallax* (1970), and show the strong influence of Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies*, which Tranter had studied at the University of Sydney.

In 1974 Tranter compiled a one-hour selection from Frank O’Hara’s poems for ABC Radio National; the detailed reading of O’Hara’s 586-page *Collected Poems* which this task called for brought him his first proper appreciation of this subtle poet, whose cultural gestures and wit are sometimes difficult to decipher and whose apparent casualness Tranter had previously dismissed. It is worth noting that John Forbes, a friend of Tranter’s and trained in English and Fine Arts, had ‘got’ O’Hara immediately, whereas Tranter — trained in
Shakespeare, Pope and the Romantics — much preferred the approachable lyricism and formal stylishness of John Ashbery’s early poetry through the 1960s and early 1970s. Forbes, with his quick mind and ample cultural cynicism, was always a few steps ahead of his Australian colleagues, and occasionally he made it clear that he found their dozy recalcitrance irritating.

The title poem ‘Red Movie’ is placed last in the collection, and appears to show a change of direction: it is eleven pages long, in five parts, and has a fractured and elliptical surface. Much of its imagery is derived from what seems an indiscriminate mélange of serious literature, the movies, and pop culture, though that is true of much of Tranter’s work. It is notable in showing a formal move away from sentiment and lyricism, though traces of them remain in the poem’s concerns with autobiography.

The Blast Area, 1974

Martin Duwell, teaching in the English Department at the University of Queensland, established Makar Magazine and the Gargoyle Poets series of poetry pamphlets in the early 1970s. Tranter reviewed the first six of the Gargoyle Poets in New Poetry magazine volume 22 number 1, in 1974. His own small collection of poems, The Blast Area, became Gargoyle Poets number 12, a 36-page pamphlet. It was dedicated ‘with respect and affection to the memory of John Darcy’, the teacher who had set him on the path to poetry fourteen years before. John Darcy had been killed in a motor accident in 1961.

The loose group of eight poems that open the collection might seem reminiscent of the ‘portrait’ poems of Red Movie — ‘Mark’, a portrait of a young man damaged by methedrine (‘speed’) and paranoia, is an example — though the last four poems veer away from common sense into a surrealism that is more humorous than profound.

‘Poem ending with a line by Rimbaud’ hints at the idea of borrowings and masks: the poem is designed to end with a line by another poet, Rimbaud (though the main stylistic precursor would seem to be Auden), and a rhyme in
English and French:

Wax the ski. Compress the snow.
She: Et mon bureau?

A central group of fifteen poems seem like snippets from a European movie about fast cars and beautiful people. The title of one of the poems and the theme of automotive danger point to the 1971 movie *The Last Run*, starring an avuncular but morose George C. Scott, a treacherous woman and a hot two-litre BMW sedan, and hints of world-weariness and existentialism.¹⁷

The final third of the book consists of ‘The Poem in Love’, a sequence of fifteen pseudo-sonnets: an octet and a sestet, but only fragmentary rhyme. An epigraph from Paul Ducasse sets the scene: ‘It’s possible that a poem in its own realm of being may take on a life of its own, and thus return by means of love some of the anguish and the suffering invested by the poet in its creation.’ It might seem that Paul Ducasse is a distant relative of Isidore Ducasse (1846–70), Uruguayan-born French writer, who used the pseudonym Comte de Lautréamont; but alas, the stilted phrasing and the self-conscious aestheticism of this apt epigraph are deceptive; Monsieur Ducasse is a figment of John Tranter’s imagination. We shall return to this tendency to masks and fictionality later.

The poem does attempt to ‘take on a life of its own’, and speaks though the musing voice of the narrator in a jumble of styles and non-sequiturs, fragments of Bob Dylan (‘all smacked up on the highway / down by the river bridge’), Byron (‘The Poem / that now walks in beauty like the diesel tram’) and New York School flip wit (‘I drank a Pepsi like they do in N.Y. / and that fizzy noise was like how / you could hear the Sonnet feasting on itself.’)

New Zealand critic Andrew Johnson:

“The Poem in Love” is also important for the way in which Tranter’s

"poetry about poetry", his habitual public re-invention of his means of addressing us, becomes looser, lighter, more inclusive. “The Poem”, in this poem, might stand for the variety of strategies we employ to make sense of the world, and for the fleeting, unstable patterns we think we perceive in our experience. It’s as if having reached an extreme of cynicism about “meaning”, Tranter lets it in through the back door, and a new-found humour with it. (Landfall 50)

The book was slight both in physical form and literary effect. The combination of exuberance, cheeky wit and the loose sonnet form points forward to a later volume, Crying in Early Infancy: 100 Sonnets.

The Alphabet Murders, 1976

In his 2003 interview with US writer Robert Hahn, Tranter explains how he came to write his next book. Hahn had said that it seemed to him that Tranter has consciously tried to avoid having a distinctive personal style. Tranter answered: ‘I’m aware of that, or at least of something like that. When I wrote The Alphabet Murders, in 1974, I’d been writing for fifteen years, or, say, learning to write. I went to Singapore to work for a couple of years, as an editor for a publishing house, and while I was there I tried to write some poetry but I found that it felt artificial and false. […] When I wrote The Alphabet Murders, it was after a lot of bits I had written in an attempt to get away from my own voice altogether. And I think I’ve followed this pattern ever since. I write in bursts, for a month or so, and then leave it behind, and when I start again I’m aware of trying to find a new way to write, to escape my own rhetoric.’ As Doctor Johnson says, writing of Pope, ‘he that has once studiously formed a style rarely writes afterwards with complete ease,’ (Johnson Lives 253) and the film writer Jean-Claude Carrière writes, ‘In a screenplay, as elsewhere, you must be wary of technique, which can so quickly turn into mere fluency.’ (Carrière 158)

The Alphabet Murders ended up as a long argument with traditional poetry (including Modernism, now part of history) and a dismantling of its values; writers are traduced, parodied and dismissed, and poetry itself is seen as a
voyage to nowhere (literally, zero). At the last moment a supernumerary stanza (A, the twenty-seventh letter of the alphabet) allows the poem to return to its own departure point. As in many Tranter poems, the ending of *The Alphabet Murders* turns the reader back to the beginning, trapped inside the roundabout of art.

En route some masks are adopted and disfigured. The Australian poet R D FitzGerald had published an essay in *Southerly* magazine in 1973, arguing for a considered respect for tradition on the part of young poets. ’(T)radition is not just an impulse out of the past;’ FitzGerald writes, ’it is a progressive movement overtaking the present and helping carry it into the future.’ True enough, perhaps, but the young Tranter was having none of it. In section 20 (After R D FitzGerald) of ’The Alphabet Murders’ Tranter transcribes a hundred or so words of this article, chopping it into free verse lines, then gradually stitches nonsense phrases into the fabric:

... the very incoherence and craziness of most
that you have to say are not restrictions,
but machinery capable of jacking up the present tense
and marching it along like a heavy sandwich
into the slobbering mouth of the future. (42–43)

In all, Tranter seems to trust that the range, vigour and stylishness of his attack on earlier forms of poetry will provide its own set of values to replace those which he has disparaged so energetically, though of course culture has a way of producing and then absorbing almost any critique.

The younger Australian poet-critics Kate Fagan and Peter Minter have written a thorough and stylish analysis of *The Alphabet Murders*¹⁸. It locates the strategies behind the writing in their cultural and chronological milieu, and presents dozens of useful insights:

If we seek to uncover the scene of dismemberment, resolution and

self-constitution, *The Alphabet Murders* marks the spot. (Par 3)

Tranter’s knowing, experimental and satiric fantasia sets up two sufficiency conditions: repudiation and futility. (Par 10)

One of Tranter’s lasting contributions to Australian poetry has been his interrogation of the Romantic subject. His work consistently tries to decode the problem of ‘ego.’ (Par 17)

Returning to the impossible romance of a whodunit scenario usefully underscores the spectre of Tranter as Poet Select, who is possibly suffering the anxieties of influence, in a Bloomian sense — or at least a little sociability panic.... But once the opening carnage has been shot from various angles, and tropes of narrative departure done to death, we gradually realise that the poet is still in the building. (18)

Tranter’s blazon is a clever disappearing act. It is a blazon about blazon, an emblematic description of a descriptive emblem. In this sense it perfectly mirrors *The Alphabet Murders*’ narrative logic: a mise en abyme or play-within-play structure that multiply defers arrival, symbolised in the poem’s return to the letter A.... *The Alphabet Murders* is a modernist long poem by one reading, a postmodernist anti-epic by others. (Par 20)

Returning to the letter A at the alphabet’s material finale, Tranter takes one small step into prose, and so makes an absolute pact with teleology. Section 27 thus signals *The Alphabet Murders*’ most radical scene of departure. Tranter finally kills off the romantic subject by reviving writing: ‘After all, we had left poetry behind before this trip had even begun, and all the while we have been bereft of its silly promises of beauty...’ (Par 25)

One of the many themes of ‘The Alphabet Murders’ is the possibility of a communal art, one prior to the Romantic focus on the individual. Tranter’s reading of Mallory’s *Le Mort D’Arthur* (and books about Mallory’s life) provides a model and fragments of quotation:

... this is architecture, friend, and masterful;
we gape to find the cathedral of words so large
that everyone can find in it the works of his favourite period, and yet you can always strip that work...
of ill-framed accretions and their polyphonic noise without pulling the whole thing down. Is it plausible that ‘strength’ lies in age and British feats of arms? Are these bits the ‘real’ cathedral? They might have been, the whole might have been designed by one man and finished in the one compelling style, but ‘The whole has rather grown than been made.’ (UM 45)

Surprisingly, Luis Buñuel provides a useful comment:

Buñuel often said that films should be like cathedrals. The authors’ names should be removed from the credits, leaving just a few anonymous reels, pure, free of any trace of their creator. Then we would watch them the way we enter a cathedral, not knowing the names of those who built it, or even the master builder. (Carrière 176)

The arguments rehearsed by ‘The Alphabet Murders’ owe a lot to Eliot. As a young poet, Tranter had been influenced by T S Eliot’s poetry: by the Modernist function the verse enacted as much as the actual words and rhythms of the early poems, which we now understand to be shaped as much by Pound as by Eliot. But Eliot spent as much time looking backward as forward; his writings on Dryden, Donne and Dante as well as a dozen minor writers gave his voice a distinct authority when he looked at the relation of a poet to his tradition:

... what happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. (Eliot, Tradition, 47–48)

And Todorov agrees:
Just as the meaning of a part of the work is not exhausted in itself, but is revealed in its relations with the other parts, a work in its entirety can never be read in a satisfactory and enlightening fashion if we do not put it in relation with other works, previous and contemporary. (Todorov 244)

A slightly different view is given by Shklovsky:

...when I speak of a literary tradition, I do not have in mind a literal borrowing by one writer from another. I conceive of it as a common fund of literary norms from which each writer draws and on which he is dependent. If I were to use the analogy of an inventor and his tradition, I would say that such a literary tradition consists of the sum total of the technical possibilities of his age. (Shklovsky 64)

Eliot, of course, was the most classical of Modernists, in both senses of ‘classical’: he was central to the way Modernism was translated from French Symbolist models into English poetry in the early decades of the twentieth century. And he was a Modernist in a thorough-going way in his construction of a nightmare urban modern landscape, in his intense and abrupt use of collage, pastiche and jarring juxtaposition, in his insistence on the contemporary everyday world as valid subject matter, and in the way he and his friends positioned poetry at the front of the barricades of the avant-garde. All these Modernist traits are to be found in ‘The Alphabet Murders’, which in some ways is a direct descendant of ‘The Waste Land’. But Kate Lilley alerts us to the other side of the coin:

As a double agent, working for both the modernists and the postmodernists, whichever way he turns in this city of forked roads and forked tongues (‘For history is a kind of city’, AM, p.8), the poet is embroiled in heresy and conspiracy, accused of back-sliding or bad faith. Tranter teaches us to recognise the freight of history as it is reconfigured in the present; the always laughable and always touching resurgence of the rhetoric of modernity, its inherent contingency. In ‘The Alphabet Murders’ he reminds us that ‘what we have left behind . . . / itself must generate enough good luck for the whole voyage’. [... ] It is the seam between modernism and
postmodernism which Tranter’s poetry excavates, writing the present as the past’s future and the future’s past, measuring the gap between epochs and styles and models, holding up for inspection a word like ‘poplin’, offering the poem as a ‘nostalgia machine’ which comments on its own technology, shows its own working. (Lilley, ‘Tranter’s Plots’)

Crying in Early Infancy: 100 sonnets, 1977

Why one hundred sonnets? When Tranter went to Brisbane to work as a radio producer for the ABC in 1975 he got to know Martin Duwell, who had published *The Blast Area* in 1974, and who now wished to publish another of Tranter’s books. Tranter had fifty or so short poems he’d been working on. He realised they were about the size of sonnets, and with his background in the printing industry he knew that the ideal page-count for small books of poems was 64 pages all up (four sixteen-page folded signatures), which would accommodate fifty pages of poetry plus fronts and backs. Two sonnets just fit on a page, so he proposed a book of one hundred sonnets, and finished the typescript over the next year. This could be seen as an example of a technological constraint helping to determine one aspect of the outer form of a literary work. (It is not an accident that the sonnet-like poems in this thesis total one hundred and one.)

Further technical constraints are explored. ‘Sonnet 50 (from a BBC synopsis)’ is in fact derived from a BBC synopsis. As Play Reader at the ABC Radio Drama and Features Department in 1974, one of Tranter’s duties was to pore over the catalog of radio play synopses provided by the BBC’s Transcriptions service, to which the ABC had for many years subscribed. Any of these plays could be ordered from the BBC and broadcast by the ABC free of further charges. The severely condensed narratives appealed to Tranter, and they needed little rewriting to transform them into verse:

John is handling a tidy affair
with Louise, wife of his friend Robert.
John tries to persuade her to leave
Robert, and to burst with him in some foreign country. She meets John secretely...

[...]

... but is Marjorie really dead? If so, who really killed — set in London — killed her?

These are reminiscent of a poem by John Ashbery, ‘... by an Earthquake’ though Tranter could not have read the poem at the time, as it hadn’t yet been written. Here is an excerpt:

Ambrosius, suffering misfortune, seeks happiness in the companionship of Joe, and in playing golf.

Arthur, in a city street, has a glimpse of Cathy, a strange woman who has caused him to become involved in a puzzling mystery.

Cathy, walking in the street, sees Arthur... *(Can You Hear, Bird, 20)*

Perhaps as a counter to ‘Poem ending with a line by Rimbaud’ *(in The Blast Area, 1974)*, we find ‘Sonnet 14 (beginning with a line by David Malouf)’ which begins ‘Was that garlic, or old age?’

Five of the sonnets use the constraints of rhyme (for example, number 53: drive / glass / pass / alive / drink / gramophone / alone / mink // gift / attack / cry / rift / back / die). Others are numbers 44, 47, 63 and 92.

The loose sonnet form and the humorous and sometimes cynical attitudes expressed in the poems seem an expression of emotional release after the dark humour and erratic angst of *The Alphabet Murders*. Some critics disapproved of the carefree — some would (and did) say careless — attitudes to poetry, focussing particularly on the deliberate use of mistypings. One morning in Brisbane Tranter’s wife Lyn was baking bread; ‘yeast rises in the breathless air’ becomes ‘Yeats rises in the breathless air,’ and ‘it was greasy all over like a window’, became through a slip of the fingers ‘it was greasy all over like a widow’. This last error was retained on the urging of John Forbes, and Roman Jakobson *(Jakobson, Selected III, 741)* agrees with him:

Is it then possible to limit the range of poetic devices? Not in the least; the history of arts attests to their constant mutability. Nor does
the intent of a device burden art with any strictures. We have only to recall how often the dadaists and surrealists let happenstance write their poetry. We have only to realise what pleasure the great Russian poet Xlebnikov derived from typographical errors; the typographical error, he once said, is often a first-rate artist.

The reviewer Cary Catalano wrote ‘…the influences he is now working under are clearly corrupting and destructive ones. His technique is sloppy and inexact, and he rarely has anything arresting to say. As Troilus puts it, “words, words, mere words, no matter from the heart”’.

Dazed in the Ladies Lounge, 1979

The matter of Rimbaud, a crucial literary influence, had been essayed by Tranter in the long poem ‘Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy’ in *New Poetry* in 1974. The version published in *Dazed in the Ladies Lounge* five years later (ten pages long, in fifteen parts) is reworked and more controlled, and re-titled ‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’. The influence of Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* is again evident. Reviewing Tranter’s 1982 *Selected Poems*, and focussing on the poems in *Crying in Early Infancy*, John Forbes asks:¹⁹

> But how do you write, knowing that the poem can never escape from Literature and, at the same time, not wanting merely to demonstrate the obvious? The long poems ‘The Alphabet Murders’ and ‘Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy’ both strike me as circling around this problem. In them Tranter is like the coyote chasing the roadrunner, using a great deal of energy and cunning, but never catching him…. the interrogation of History and Culture that fails to hold one’s interest in ”Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy”...

The need to escape from Literature can be seen as a strategy in the same arena as the need to escape from one’s habitual mode of rhetoric. Within the practice of literature, it is a problem with no achievable solution. David Carter pointed to the self-destructive behaviour of this poem:

‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’ might be seen, in this light, as a review or retrospective, though it is also the (re)discovery of a problematic which refuses to go away (an introductory note says that the poem was begun in the early seventies and finished nearly a decade later). This bleak if jokey poem cuts away relentlessly at its own foundations, its own progenitors, consigning itself to ‘unforgiving darkness’. It interrogates the Magian Heresy but at one further remove, finding the very symbolist paradox, and not merely its paradoxical goal, to be a seductive fraud (and yet still unavoidable, irresistible, as poetry keeps discovering itself). (Carter 121)

Carter’s use of the phrase ‘the Magian Heresy’ is a nice point: it is the title of an article by James McAuley — one half of the 1943 hoax poet ‘Ern Malley’ — in Quadrant magazine in 1957. In it McAuley attempts to turn back the tide of the postmodern by insisting on a return to the literary values of ancient Rome, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, where the presumptions of a disobedient mankind will be ‘corrected’ by a severe dressing-down from the gods:

After modernity, what? One cannot escape the impression that poetic modernity, whose inmost impulse was the Magian Heresy, has come to an end. It does not seem possible to go further along this road when the futility of the enterprise has been so patently demonstrated. [...] The beginning of recovery is to recognise that the magian ambition did not in fact bring poetry into a vaster domain but into a smaller and darker one. It is by lowering the transcendental pretensions of poetry that, strangely enough, its true greatness opens once more before us: we come out of the romantic-modernist labyrinth into the broad and high world of Virgil and Chaucer and Dante and Shakespeare, where the true proportions of things are recognised, and the presumption of man is corrected by the measures of the gods. (McAuley 1957 70–71)

This cramped and punitive view of the varied energies of Romantic and Modernist poetry is dismaying to read. It was published a year after John Ashbery’s Some Trees appeared in the United States. Twenty-three years later, McAuley’s mood had grown even darker:

Yet it is an easy prophecy that our conservatism will not much longer
prevent the emergence of black poetry\textsuperscript{20}, with its verbal violence, its formlessness, its antinomian and analogical frenzy, its pretence that all that is needed, to attain the realm of freedom and love ‘out there’, is to violate all decencies and tear down all conventions, and its secret winking inner light of wicked knowledge that ‘out there’ is neither freedom nor love but only one shelf of the vast hell of the egotists — the Poets’ Shelf, no doubt, though there may be room for some critics as well. (McAuley 1970 62)

Carter’s use of the phrase ‘the Magian Heresy’ also recalls Rimbaud’s construction of the poet’s role, as well as Mallarmé: ‘The whole of my admiration goes to the Great Mage, inconsolable and obstinate seeker after a mystery which he does not know exists and which he will pursue, for ever on that account, with the affliction of his lucid despair, for it would have been the truth …’ Tranter printed this endorsement by Mallarmé of a permanently obscure mystery as one of the two epigraphs to ‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’ in \textit{Dazed in the Ladies Lounge}. (\textit{Dazed} 7)

At the same time, Tranter’s poem attempts to relocate Rimbaud, often seen as a Decadent or Symbolist poet (perhaps because his first notable English sponsor was Arthur Symons\textsuperscript{21}) in the realm of the proto-Modern.

A brief detour: In a 1986 paper Andrew Taylor surveys a number of Tranter’s poems, focussing on ‘Leavis at The London’ (\textit{Dazed} 39) in some

\textsuperscript{20}From the context it should be clear that neither African-American nor Australian aboriginal writing is the target here: poetry from the dark side of the human soul is what is meant.

\textsuperscript{21}In his monograph \textit{The Symbolist Movement in Literature} (1899) which was an expansion of his pioneering essay “The Decadent Movement in Literature” (\textit{Harper’s}, November 1893). The \textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica} says: “Symons’ poetry is mainly \textit{fin de siècle} (i.e., disillusioned) in feeling. \textit{Silhouettes} (1892) and \textit{London Nights} (1895) contain admirable impressionist lyrics, and at his best he is sensitive to the complex moods of urban life.”
pardonable puzzlement:

The question that immediately poses itself is just who is ‘you’? Is it F. R. Leavis, addressed by the poem’s subject? Is it the reader, similarly addressed? Is it the poem’s subject, being addressed by it/ him/herself, the modern colloquial equivalent of ‘one’?... Does ‘you’ refer to a number of different addressees, each with his/her separate needs? It might, but the poem does not enable us to distinguish them from each other. If the addressee is indeterminate at least this far into the poem can we determine just who is doing the addressing? (Taylor 1986)

The second person pronoun has always been an ambiguous and adaptable weapon in the Tranter armory, as it has for many other poets. Marjorie Perloff quotes a 1973 interview with John Ashbery, who explicates the tactic better than most:

The personal pronouns in my work very often seem to be like variables in an equation. ‘You’ can be myself or it can be another person, someone whom I’m addressing, and so can ‘he’ and ‘she’ for that matter and ‘we’; sometimes one has to deduce from the rest of the sentence what is being meant and my point is also that it doesn’t really matter very much, that we are somehow all aspects of a consciousness giving rise to the poem and the fact of addressing someone, myself or someone else, is what’s the important thing at that particular moment rather than the particular person involved. I guess I don’t have a very strong sense of my own identity and I find it very easy to move from one person in the sense of a pronoun to another and this again helps to produce a kind of polyphony in my poetry which I again feel is a means toward greater naturalism.²²

(Perloff Indeterminacy 63)

But Taylor seems to express a frustration at the absence of a single, locatable and unified voice at the heart of the poem. It is only when he comes to ‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’ that he looks past that problem and proposes that ‘role’, or a multiplicity of roles, not ‘voice’ or ‘subject’, is the

source of the writing’s energy. He notes the curious instability and invisibility of the subject, amid a flux of roles, in this poem:

It is one of Tranter’s more pressing poems, acting out a radical assessment of its own possibilities. The sequence starts and ends with what seems a firmly locateable subject: ‘Sitting by the river under damp trees / I listen to the wind in the leaves / whispering hatred and loneliness …’ and ‘Learning, where the deeply human / is the object of a fierce knowledge, / can reach an imitation of the style of love, / but in that future under whose arrogant / banner we have laboured for our own rewards / we shall both be gone into that / unforgiving darkness.’

Such a subject constitutes or situates itself as the romantic rebel; but like the historical Rimbaud, and like the poem itself, it refuses to stay fixed. The result is a poem which seems both deeply concentrated and remarkably elusive, the subject again revealing itself as that which has no visible nature of its own with which to authorise such roles as that of Romantic rebel. These roles come to it from outside, from culture or from history, and are not an expression of the subject but an impression on it. The subject itself appears only, as I said before, in a style of remaining invisible within their multitudinous flux. (Taylor 1986)

This shift of attention from the search for an authentic voice to an analysis of a flux of roles seems to clear a path to a more interesting and useful way of reading Tranter’s work.

Yet when it came time to assemble Urban Myths, his 2006 ‘New and Selected Poems’, Tranter chose to pass over ‘Rimbaud and the Modernist Heresy’, now more than a quarter of a century into the past. Perhaps it was time to move out from the territory of the Modern and leave it behind for a more complicated set of concerns that drew their energy from the post-postmodern. Perhaps the dramatic (sometimes melodramatic) ‘interrogation of History and Culture’ that had failed to hold John Forbes’s interest had now lost its grip on its author’s attention. And perhaps this poem, that had seemed the cornerstone of Dazed, now seemed backward-looking and mired in an early stage of its
author’s literary development. As Tranter has said in an interview in 1980:

He [Rimbaud] did say ‘one must be absolutely modern’, which in today’s terms means that one must not be very interested in Rimbaud, I suppose. He, in his own work, didn’t look back to any other poet that was alive a hundred years [before], he was only interested in the future. There’s a line in my poem that says ‘to follow you we must desert’ — it’s a contradiction, but if one believes in what Rimbaud was doing, one must abandon Rimbaud the way he abandoned all the writers around him at the time.

Another contradiction that is interesting there, too — if you believe in what Rimbaud did, you have to agree with the fact that at the end of his writing career, which only lasted five years, he abandoned and repudiated all that he had ever done. (Interview with Mr Jan Garrett, 1980)

There is also a group of twenty-two poems in loose blank verse in a thirty-line form that neatly fills a printed page (another technological constraint?) and that crops up later in Tranter’s oeuvre, to be named the ‘trenter’ (see Appendix 5). On the topic of constraint, Jakobson and Baudelaire have useful things to say:

[O]ne cannot but agree with Baudelaire’s indignant question in his letter of Feb. 18, 1860 to the critic Armand Fraisse:

Who is then the imbecile who deals so frivolously with the Sonnet and who does not see its Pythagorean beauty? It is by virtue of the constraining form that the idea springs forth more intensely. There is the beauty of a well-worked metal or mineral. Have you noticed that a fragment of the sky perceived through an air-hole gives a more profound idea of infinity than a wide panorama seen from a mountain top?

According to Baudelaire’s notes, what the sonnet needs is a design, and it is the construction, the network, that proves to be the primary guarantee of the mysterious life predestined to a work of the mind.

(Jakobson 781)
Perhaps the most successful of these thirty-line poems are the five poems that deal with the idea of noted European intellectuals in various Australian low-culture settings: ‘Leavis at The London (Hotel)’ (mentioned above), ‘Sartre at Surfers Paradise’, ‘Foucault at (The) Forest Lodge (Hotel)’, ‘Roland Barthes at the Poets’ Ball’, and ‘Enzensberger at “Exiles” (Bookshop)’. Like the other poems in this group, the poem about ‘Foucault’, rather than being soaked in a common kind of intellectual respect, is derisory and full of contemporary phantasmagoria, as though the cheap and noisy Sydney/ Hollywood setting had drowned out the high tone of the imported European theory:

Our guide
to the good life is a drunken junkie, half
girl, half executioner, breathing gas, who
fucks like a disco wizard and exemplifies
sheer speed as a final virtue, eating out
with a rush: that’s how tonight develops
into a drug catalogue blazing in the
waiting room where I get a crush on
Suzanne Pleshette and in that flash
rise like a broken bottle into the light. (Dazed 41)

Rimbaud’s hallucinatory urban scenes could be seen as an influence here, though perhaps the exemplary bourgeois, Baudelaire, is the more apposite model, seen through Walter Benjamin’s spectacles, as reported by Michael Jennings:

This notion of a shock-driven poetic capability was a significant departure from the understanding of artistic creation prevalent in Benjamin’s day and in fact still powerfully present today. The poet is, on this view, not a genius who ‘rises above’ his age and distils its essence for posterity. For Benjamin, the greatness of Baudelaire consists instead in his absolute susceptibility to the worst excrescences of modern life: Baudelaire was in possession not of genius, but of an extraordinarily ‘sensitive disposition’ that enabled him to perceive, through a painful empathy, the character of an age. And for Benjamin, the ‘character of the age’ consisted in its thoroughgoing commodification. Baudelaire was not simply aware of
the processes of commodification from which the phantasmagoria constructs itself; he in fact embodied those processes in an emphatic manner. When he takes his work to market, the poet surrenders himself as a commodity to ‘the intoxication of the commodity immersed in a surging stream of customers.’ The poet’s role as producer and purveyor of commodities opens him to a special ‘empathy with inorganic things.’ And this, in turn, ‘was one of his sources of inspiration.’ Baudelaire’s poetry is thus riven by its images of a history that is nothing less than a ‘permanent catastrophe.’ This is the sense in which Baudelaire was the ‘secret agent’ of the destruction of his own class. (Jennings 15)

Last is the five-page poem ‘Ode to Col Joye’. Rod Mengham has discussed this poem in a paper ‘John Tranter and the Real Boeotia.’ Mengham mentions that ‘The immediate occasion of its composition was a commission from John Forbes for a piece for his magazine Surfers Paradise….’ The poem… appeared in the March 1979 issue. He also points out that the poem is in one sense a paean to Sydney, though ‘Rather than portray Sydney as an international centre, as Australia’s point of leverage on foreign culture… Tranter ambiguates his register of foreign influences, and neglects the urban environment almost entirely in favour of a domestic setting; this is an indoor poem, written at the kitchen table. Sydney is equated with homeliness, with the opposite of everything that is self-aggrandising.’

Unusually for Tranter, the line-lengths and line indentations are erratic and reminiscent of the discursive free verse of John Forbes’ friend Ken Bolton, a fictionalised view of whom appears in the poem: ‘from his sternly-thinking head issues a balloon / with the words / it’s a / John Tranter day…’ Various literary possibilities are presented and dismissed, and the poem ends with a reference to the minor 1950s Australian rock’n’roll group Col Joye and the Joye Boys, who had performed at the picture theatre in Moruya, Tranter’s home

²³Delivered at the Association for the Study of Australian Literature annual conference in Hobart, Tasmania, in 2001.
town, when he was fourteen: ‘it’s a day for writing something “fresh” / for
Surfers Paradise / and that makes it a Col Joye day; that, / and the bright air /
glistening with poetry and the desire to please.’ The title is a pun on Schiller’s
‘Ode to Joy (‘Ode an die Freude’, 1785), set to music by Beethoven in his Ninth
Symphony.

Selected Poems, 1982

The book sums up the best work of a career at mid-point. But a ‘selected
poems’ is of course a selection; that is, many more things are left out than are
included. The forty-seven poems of Parallax (1970), a 64-page summing up of
Tranter’s first decade as a writer, are here, a dozen years later, reduced to seven
pages containing only eight poems, and those poems are brief, elliptical and
slightly abstract. The intense emotional expressiveness, the theatrical gloom
and the sentimentality of the younger writer have been air-brushed out of the
picture. But Jakobson’s wise words should be kept in mind:

Do not believe the poet who, in the name of truth, the real world, or
anything else, renounces his past in poetry or art. Tolstoy tried in
great exasperation to repudiate his works, but instead of ceasing to
be a poet, he forged the way to new un hackneyed forms of literature.
As has rightly been noted: when an actor tears off his mask, makeup
is sure to be forthcoming.

(Jakobson 742)

Six years later Tranter wrote that ‘I’m a slow learner, and part of my
development as a writer was learning — gradually, almost poem by poem — to
blend the cocktail of poetry using less and less of the syrup of lyricism.’ (‘Four
diversions’ 588–92)

Alas, lyric sentimentality leaks into the last ten (otherwise uncollected)
poems of this collection. In ‘Meteorology’ and ‘The Letter’, nostalgia and regret
for lost love strive for literary status, borrowing the tone of voice of
Constantine Cavafy, though the savage irony of ‘Speakeasy’, ‘The Poet at Dural’
and ‘Reversal Process’ attempt to balance the boat. Is cynicism the other side of the coin of sentimentality?

The book failed to win any of the literary prizes of the period.

**Gloria, 1986**

Tranter turned forty in 1983. He had been a poet for more than half his life. When his *Selected Poems* failed to achieve the notice Tranter felt it deserved, he turned away from poetry for a time. In 2006 he talked to journalist Rosemary Neill about this period:

I was out of work, I was drinking too much, I was on the dole, very depressed. I’d lost a job because I was on a grant for a year. I had a *Selected Poems* come out in ’83 [in fact 1982] and it didn’t win any prizes and no one took any notice of it. It was like closing a door on a whole writing career. I didn’t think I’d write much any more. (Neill par 7)

Tranter obtained therapy and medication for his depression, which eventually began to abate. Late in 1983 he found some editorial work, and in 1984 he was offered a one-year Literature Board grant. His wife sold her typesetting business, and he and his family left for a month in the US. Tranter went on to Germany and Italy. He was abroad for three months altogether. By late 1986 he had made a further three overseas trips, and had begun work on a prose project. In a 1994 interview with Barbara Williams, Tranter related how he came to write *Gloria*.

I think I was trying to write a novel, as I do every five years or so. I had been inspired by a short story called *George* by the Australian writer Christina Stead, published in the *Paris Review* in 1967 (Issue number 40). Her story is really a monologue, and it has a breathtaking headlong rush that drags you through this character’s life and a love affair that went wrong. I wanted to get that obsessive effect of a monologue that buttonholes you and won’t let you go — one reviewer quite rightly likened *The Floor of Heaven* to the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* — and I began the piece that turned out to be
Gloria in prose. Eventually I realised it wasn’t going to go the length of a novel, so it became a short story. That kind of thing happens more times than I care to mention. Then it wasn’t working as a story, so I thought ‘Why shouldn’t poetry get the same kicks as prose?’ and I turned it into verse, with much difficulty. Then I turned it back into prose, with even more difficulty. That didn’t work. After about two and a half years it had turned back into verse again — a kind of loose blank verse — and that’s the way it stayed. (Williams 224)

Writing of the later, expanded version of ‘Gloria’ that was published in Southerly in 1991 and in The Floor of Heaven in 1992, critic Kate Lilley writes:

‘Gloria’ … offers the most recursive framing of the relations between writing and speaking, voice and narration, psychic process and textual order. It is framed as an account by an anonymous member of a small therapeutic group of a meeting under the authority of the ‘troop leader’, Dr Masterson, over a picnic lunch. … [the story] begins with a literalized gesture of textual transmission: ‘Gloria handed the doctor a bundle of notes’ (3). Masterson responds: ‘“Yesss, this is interesting, Gloria,/ but it looks complicated, full of bother./ Tell me, what does it represent? Hmmm?”’ (3). The narrator intercedes to tell us, ‘It represented horror, but we didn’t/ know that then’. (Lilley 2000 par 21)

[T]he story she tells, in the first person, is that of her younger sister, Karen, as told to her twin, Marjorie. Karen, in turn, is telling the story of her ex-lover, Blake, now incarcerated and ‘hearing voices’. This extraordinarily elaborate framing might seem to defeat any further complication, but leads to another equally recursive story of Blake’s textual fetish. As the essential prelude to sex with Karen, Blake must read aloud a certain story of adultery, blindness and conspiracy to murder. When Karen refuses the roles assigned to her in this fantasy, Blake is prompted to tell the ‘true’ story of blinding and lobotomising his father, for which he has devised his own punishment. He must read the same page of the same story aloud to his father, over and over, forgotten even as it is heard. When his father dies, Karen unwittingly becomes the father’s surrogate, and the occasion of its conversion from compulsion to fetish. At the end of this story of
compulsive rereading, and of ‘Gloria’, the narrative in which it is embedded like a key, Gloria is back where she began, preparing to read her manuscript aloud: ‘Let’s start at the beginning, then, shall we/ where I have this extraordinary dream.’ (Lilley 2000 par 23)

Under Berlin, 1988

Tranter’s next book opens with a group of thirty-three poems on generally domestic subjects, written in a relaxed tone of voice, and showing little of the cynicism Tranter had been criticised for in the past, and indeed little of the restless experimentalism of form and approach that was to mark some of his later work.

The first poem, ‘Backyard’, a thoughtful and slightly sad look at the rituals of the Australian family (including a brown dog), has become one of the most frequently anthologised of his poems. Christopher Pollnitz wrote in a review of the book that

[f]or all the literary sophistication that underpins its limpid surface, there seems no avoidance of an authorising subject in ‘Backyard’. How to write and read poetry may still be a theme, but in the new quiet voice of these poems the falsifying of signification is addressed as theme rather than embedded and enacted in the difficulties of the signifying medium. The tone remains cool in all these poems of the quiet voice. There is no colloquial collaring of a reader, and no Romantic self-exhibitionism either. There is, however, the simple or subtle emotional kernel that goes with a unified speaking voice.’ (Pollnitz, *Scripsi*)

These are followed by twenty-eight poems in a sequence titled ‘Sex Chemistry’: fractured logic and fragments of sexual and other adventures make these poems seem like snippets from movies that lack a coherent narrative. One, a dialogue about a failed relationship (‘The Subtitles’) was later made into a radio feature for two voices, one male and one female, and translated into French for a Radio
Three poems about movies point to Tranter’s interest in that art form. ‘High School Confidential’ and ‘The Creature from the Black Lagoon’ deal with American movies made in 1956, and the longer ‘Those Gods made Permanent’ mainly discusses Joseph Losey’s *The Servant* (1963) and Fritz Lang’s 1922 classic *Doktor Mabuse the Gambler*, a five-hour silent film which Tranter had seen at the University of Sydney in the early 1960s. Tranter returns to these concerns in this thesis.

‘The Creature from the Black Lagoon’ calls to mind the fantastic romantic roles that monsters projected from the Id can play in our art and poetry. The 1956 movie *Forbidden Planet* bodies forth one of these monsters; but there are others, European rather than American:

As a child, living in the country, I saw Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis*. In it I discovered my first city, and for a long time I believed that every city on earth resembled the one in the movie — full of muscular men walking with bowed heads. I also wondered whether certain flesh-and-blood women didn’t conceal metallic women whose secret would be revealed only by death at the stake.

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24 Alain Trutat, the head of programs at Radio France-Culture, had bought the French rights for the radio feature *The Subtitles*, and Étienne Vallès produced a French version of the piece. On 9 and 10 February 1993 portions of the Australian and the French versions of *The Subtitles* were played to the audience on the second evening of a two-day conference on radio production titled ‘Nuits australiennes’ or ‘Ways of Hearing Australia’ in Paris. Tranter was present. Alain Trutat discussed what he’d liked in the piece when he first heard it, and Étienne Vallès talked about how he came to develop his extremely sensitive production, which happens to run for almost twice the length of the Australian version. When asked by the author if he had added anything to the piece to make it so much longer than the English-language original, he replied ‘No… I just made the pauses… a little bit longer.’
We may well spend the greater part of our life looking for the cinema monsters of our childhood. Our first monsters: unforgettable, like first loves and first thrills. (Carrière 211)

Four slight but subtle epigrams wind up the collection, one rhymed: the last and the shortest poem in the book, it receives the longest endnote, and proposes a cultural likeness between Sydney and another busy polyglot city-port on the fringe of empire, ancient Alexandria. We shall return to Alexandria in a later volume, Borrowed Voices.

Mr Rubenking’s Breakdown

Next, in yet another effort to ‘take rhetoric and wring its neck’, Tranter turned to the computerised deconstruction of text. In 1991 he published an article and two poems in Meanjin magazine (number 4, 1991) that outlined a method of utilising the text-analysis and reconstruction computer program Brekdown to manufacture poems. Over the next few years he used the program to write seven experimental prose pieces, published in 1998 as the collection Different Hands. In the 1991 article, though, he presented two poems as the revised output of the machine, the poem ‘What Mortal End’ by poet ‘Tom Haltwarden’, and ‘Her Shy Banjo’ by poet ‘Joy H. Breshan’.

‘What Mortal End’ is the reworked draft output of Brekdown’s reconstruction of some poetry by Matthew Arnold. Both the poem title and the name ‘Tom Haltwarden’ are anagrams of ‘Matthew Arnold’.

‘Her Shy Banjo’ is the reworked draft output of Brekdown’s reconstruction of some poetry by John Ashbery. Both the poem title and the name ‘Joy H. Breshan’ are anagrams of ‘John Ashbery’.

Discussing the later work Different Hands and the Brekdown computer program that made them possible, Philip Mead points to the contradictory nature of the experiment, where Tranter had to struggle to make some useful sense out of the incomprehensible draft material provided by Brekdown. ‘As an author, Tranter has to de-jazz the overly jazzed-up draft material. Like a kind of
creative computer virus, Brekdown deconstructs and reconstitutes digital information, that the anti-viral e-poet then retrieves.' (Mead 367) He entertains a further thought:

As a counter to these habits of reading and traditional media of production, we might imagine the *Different Hands* poems being performed by a computer-animated ‘prosthetic head’, to use the title of a recent installation by the Australian artist Stelarc, or even being spoken through an electrolarynx. (*Networked Language* 371)

And in a footnote to this text:

Tranter has already experimented with computer-simulated voice performances of poems, using the program ‘Willow-Talk’, which provides a number of pre-styled synthetic voices that ‘vocalise’ phonemes which the program recognises (and sometimes mis-recognises) from typed text.

See <http://www.jacketmagazine.com/04/rubenking.html>; this site reproduces the ‘Mr Rubenking’s “Breakdown”’ article from *Meanjin* and includes audio links for synthetic vocalisation of the two accompanying poems. (526)

It should be noted that the ‘synthetic vocalisation of the two accompanying poems’ is actually more complicated than that. For this piece, Tranter wrote a short radio play (less than five minutes long) for three voices, set in a recording studio, and processed it through the ‘Willow-Talk’ text-to-speech computer program.

Two synthetic voices, one male (‘Paul’) and the other female (‘Joy’), play the part of two actors who have arrived at the recording studio to perform the poem ‘Her Shy Banjo’ by poet ‘Joy H. Breshan’ (who is one of the readers).

The other synthetic voice is that of the recording engineer, ‘Bob’. In the popular music field, recording engineers are traditionally called ‘Bob’ to avoid confusion, whatever their real name, as musicians move from studio to studio; though this one’s ‘real name’, we learn, is Robert Bobchuck.

Paul and Joy chat about the script, which they don’t like very much. Joy seems unsettled by the poem she is about to read, which is odd, since she
claims authorship of it.

‘What the hell is this — is this supposed to be poetry?’ she asks.

‘Modern poetry,’ Paul replies. ‘Oh well, it’s a living.’

They inform us that they are in fact ‘several robots’. ‘We all think we’re John Ashbery,’ admits Joy, ‘and we enjoy writing poems. Here is one of my poems now.’

They read out ‘Her Shy Banjo’ (alternating their voices), and when the recording is done, comment on how confusing the whole experience has been.

‘What was that about?’ Joy asks.

‘Who knows, Joy,’ Paul replies. ‘You wrote it.’

‘I wrote it?’

‘Maybe Mr Ashbery wrote it,’ Paul suggests, forgetting for a moment that he thinks he is Mr Ashbery.

Bob reads the end credits, and a brisk musical sting closes the play.

No doubt Tranter’s many years working as a radio drama producer for the Australian Broadcasting Commission lie somewhere in the background of this *jeu d'esprit*.

It is also worth noting that this is the technical reverse of the procedure used years later in the ‘Rereading Rimbaud’ poems in this thesis, where a speech-to-text computer program builds typed poems from audited speech. In the radio play of the Joy Breshan recording session, the opposite occurs: typed text is the raw material, and is given form and substance in the speech provided by the computer, together with the vocal timbres and speech oddities of three distinct yet fake ‘personalities’.

**The Floor of Heaven, 1992**

As though temporarily satisfied with his grasp of form where the lyric and the discursive poem are concerned — he was now approaching fifty — and
perhaps needing a break from working with computers and robots with personality problems, Tranter turned aside in this next book to explore narrative again at some length.

_The Floor of Heaven_ consists of four loosely inter-linked short stories, or epyllia²⁵, in a loose blank verse that varies between four and six feet per line. The first is ‘Gloria’, published as a booklet in 1986, and discussed above. The version of this poem in _The Floor of Heaven_ is expanded, as Tranter explains in 1994:

> So ‘Gloria’ was published in the _Age Monthly Review_, a very good magazine that is now defunct, at about eleven typed pages in length. Then one day I woke up — I must have had this understanding in my sleep; perhaps I was in one of Buñuel’s dreams! — and realised that Gloria has a sister; and her boy friend had a brother; and a whole new layer of the story came to be written, which made it about twice as long. (Williams 225)

The form for these four tales is monologue driven and entirely narrative: what lyrical insights emerge do so from the mouths of the characters. In much of the book the story takes the form of a tale within a tale, where a narrator enacts the role of a character in the tale he or she is telling. In an interview with Barbara Williams in 1995 Tranter said

> I… wanted to play with the idea Jean-Claude Carrière used in his script [co-written with Buñuel] for the 1972 Luis Buñuel film _The

²⁵ ‘Epyllion (plural: epyllia) — a brief narrative poem in dactylic hexameter of ancient Greece, usually dealing with mythological and romantic themes. It is characterised by lively description, scholarly allusion, and an elevated tone similar to the elegy. Such poems were especially popular during the Greek Alexandrian period (c. 4th–3rd century BC), as seen in the works of Callimachus and Theocritus. (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The four books of Apollonius Rhodius’ _Argonautica_ (third century B.C.) total less than six thousand lines. The four books of Tranter’s _The Floor of Heaven_ total less than four thousand lines.
Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, where a character tells the story of a dream he’s had, and the plot follows him into that dream; in which a character tells the story of a dream he’s had, and the plot submerges and takes us with it into that dream; and in fact as a viewer you never quite get out of that labyrinth, which is great fun if you can handle it. (Williams, 224–25)

As Buñuel said in 1953, twenty years before he made The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie:

Film is a magnificent and dangerous weapon if it is wielded by a free mind. It is the finest instrument we know for expressing the world of dreams, of feeling, of instinct. The mechanism that creates cinematographic images is, by its very function, the form of human expression most closely resembling the work of the mind during sleep. Film seems to be an involuntary imitation of dream ... the darkness that gradually invades the auditorium is the equivalent of closing our eyes. It is the moment when the nightly incursion into the unconscious begins on the screen and deep inside man. (Carrière 91)

The meaning of a dream is often intense, but usually obscure as well, though dream events are sometimes valuable expressions and re-enactments of actual experiences. The characters in The Floor of Heaven are searching for the meaning of their lives, and of course become proxies for the reader’s various selves.

Some readers, though, saw the dreams as more like nightmares. Two reviewers were unhappy with this book. Cath Kenneally found the multi-layered stories garish and slick and the tone manipulative, and ended feeling cheated:

...studiously plebeian names, ordinary people, players in ordinary yet mythically-resonant dramas. The stories reading almost too easily — the themes writ large and crude — tales of ordinary madness, told with ordinary sensationalism and insensitivity and blindness to the Big Picture, garish and even nightmarish tales running with a chillingly smooth flow. It’s an experiment in pulp; yellow-press poems. [... ] What you’re left with is the shock-value from the content
of the stories, such as remains, and an impression of layer upon layer of pastiche, and of Tranter’s smooth-tongued fluency, which never misses a beat. But it’s a ‘Real Life’ or ‘Hard Copy’ smoothness, which is meant to trip you up; to inveigle you into the same facile responses those false-documentary exposé programmes invite. I felt I’d been taken for a ride, maybe taken for a sucker. (Kenneally 1992)

Alison Croggon objected to what she saw as the way the language of poetry had been dragged down to the level of cheap popular entertainment, and the stylistic ‘trashiness’ that inevitably resulted in a certain ‘crudity of feeling.’ This kind of response, vaguely Leavisite in its leanings, is unexpected in Australia in 1992. Tranter had ‘abandon[ed] poetic speech almost completely,’ she said. She provides a definition of this missing Philosophers’ Stone: ‘Poetic speech is animated language that disrupts habitual and controlling modes of perception and expression; essential to its impetus is a radical act of will in the face of meaninglessness.’ This last formulation seems borrowed from 1940s French Existentialist philosophy as it had developed from Kierkegaard’s reflections on the foundation of morality. In a book of essays published just one year before The Floor of Heaven, C. Stephen Evans quotes Alasdair MacIntyre’s After Virtue, which discusses Kierkegaard’s Either/Or, and (in Stephens’ recounting) states that

The Enlightenment project of giving a rational justification to ethics had failed and Kierkegaard had clearly seen the failure as irremediable … The solution he devised was to abandon the whole notion of a rational justification for morality and substitute for reason a radical act of will as the foundation of morality. (Stephens 73) (My italics)

The book this comes from is Writing the Politics of Difference, in which, its publisher says,

... the authors first focus on the diversity of traditions in continental philosophy in connection with the texts of Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and De Beauvoir. ... Issues surrounding the role of philosophical systems, language, ethical choice, relations with others, the gendered body, socialisation, and the status of philosophy today
constitute the fabric of this book. ²⁶

As indeed they do in *The Floor of Heaven*. In a popularised form, the
Existentialist’s emphasis on radical acts of will is found in some of the fiction in
the 1950s and 1960s in the United States, even to the point of being parodied
in 1971 in Luke Rhinehart’s *The Dice Man*.²⁷ This world-view is specifically
(though superficially) singled out for criticism by one of the characters in
‘Stella’, one of the poems in *The Floor of Heaven*: ‘Oh, the Forties […] Spivs in
flying jackets, dud penicillin / at ten quid a dose, black-market nylons — / a
phoney culture, rotten right through, / that laid the ground for beatniks and
drugs — / jazz, dark glasses, French philosophy’.

Croggon found the writing in *The Floor of Heaven* dull, trashy, bathetic,
sentimental, crude, dated, obscure, nostalgic, dead, clichéd, aphasic and
defeatist, in that order:

*The Floor of Heaven* is very dull reading and gets duller as the trash
novel impetus of the narrative wears away, that is, once you know the
plot. […] Tranter’s dullness presents a fundamental challenge, since
he has decided in his writing that poetry, in what is described in the
book’s blurb as the “post-modern condition”, is no longer possible.
 […] It has, however, certain drawbacks: one being its subversion by
its own dullness, the other a tendency to bathos. […] It is a
sentimentality which has always lurked beneath the surface of
Tranter’s work, a crudity of feeling that gives many of his early
poems the glazed, dated air of 70s airport lounges. As he moved from
obscure experimentalism to a clearer mode of speaking the
sentiment became more obvious — for instance, in the pervasive

²⁶At <http://www.sunypress.edu/details.asp?id=52145>

²⁷*The Dice Man* is a semi-comedic novel published in 1971 by George
Cockcroft under the pen name Luke Rhinehart. In it a psychiatrist (named
Luke Rhinehart) begins making life decisions based on the casting of dice.
The book features sex, drugs and various kind of illegal behaviour, and was
taken seriously by many readers. It was 1971, after all. The book was banned
in some countries.
nostalgia infecting *Dazed in the Ladies Lounge*. [ ... ] The deadness of *The Floor of Heaven* is its acceptance of the dominant modes of discourse. [ ... ] *The Floor of Heaven’s* prosodised clichés and inanimate cultural artefacts create no dissonance in our cultural perceptions. They are, rather, the aphasic expressions of a writing which has retreated from the carnage of the self to the safest refuge. It is a literature of defeat. (Croggon, 1992)

On the other hand, Philip Mead reads the shift from lyric gesture to narrative structure in a complex and positive way, as a strategic move away from the egotism of the lyric voice (which is perhaps the voice that gives us ‘poetic speech’):

"Narrative" poetry then is a shift away from the essentialism of the modernist lyric; "postmodernist poetry” returns to narrative of a less exalted, less egocentric kind, a narrative which is hospitable to the loose, the contingent, the unformed and the incomplete in language and experience. As mentioned, there is an important sense of the category "nation" here — there is a history of the 1960s and 1970s being written in Tranter’s poetry — but it is inseparable from the conventions of poetic language. Because of its debt to understandings of the unconscious (psychoanalysis) it is completely untranslatable into official history, which has no theory of the repressed, the hidden, the misprised. In this sense of poetry and nation, Tranter’s analysand is Australian culture of the post-war period. (Mead, Space 200)

Christopher Pollnitz, too, reacted creatively to the complexity of the narrative:

A dazzling succession of reverse and inverse images, Gloria’s monologue testifies less to a debilitating trauma than to her ferocious narrative energy. This is poetry not of the doppel- but of the multiple-gänger. Gloria scatters alter egos like a spy plane dropping metal foil to fox enemy radar. In Tranter’s ‘thick inlaid’ narratives, even his similes seem alternative careers that the desperately fertile narrators have invented as nests for their nascent egos. (Pollnitz, 1992)

Others found the catalog of calamities wearing towards the end:

The... characters who slip in and out of these tales and the cycle of violence all mark out a vision of our world which, despite its
weirdness, convinces. Only in the final tale does Tranter’s control waver. There the series of extraordinary calamities the characters must endure brought to mind Lady Bracknell’s strictures about dead parents. (Riemer 1992)²⁸

John Ashbery, who launched the book at the Melbourne Writers’ Festival in 1992, called it ‘a rattling good read,’ as good a description as any.

At The Florida, 1993

Again, this book is divided into three sections. A group of sixteen poems — what we might as well call ‘conventional’ poems — welcomes the idle reader, though the focus on form is unusual in contemporary poetry. ‘Storm Over Sydney’ is an obvious homage to Kenneth Slessor’s ‘William Street’. Though the inter-linked rhymes and half-rhymes are unobtrusive, it is a rhymed ‘trenter’, as the note at the back of the book explains.²⁹ Another poem, ‘Journey’, features a dream journey through a clutter of symbols into a dark forest in the mode of 1930s Auden, though as a note tells us it is written in the rhyme scheme of ‘Towards the Land of the Composer’, an early poem by Francis Webb. Tranter is nodding in the direction of his father-figures again.

The group includes ‘Ariadne on Lesbos’ (an unlikely title) in twenty-two metrically-correct unrhymed sapphic stanzas, another rare form in Australian verse.

The second section of eight poems recalls the fragmented mode of ‘Red Movie’ from twenty-one years before, though the mix of narrative and discursive fragments is blended more smoothly; the general effect is like that of

²⁸‘Jack: I have lost both my parents. Lady Bracknell: To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness.’ Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People, First Act.

²⁹The ‘trenter’ is a thirty-line form, with overlapping rhymes. See Appendix 5, page [Bookmark "The TrenterSEITEN" is missing.].
John Ashbery in a reminiscent mood.

The last third of the book is different again; it is made up of thirty ‘reverse haibun’, a form consisting of twenty lines of free verse followed by a short prose paragraph, each poem fitting neatly onto a single page.³⁰

Double Six, 1995

Something entirely different again; in fact, a publication perhaps unique in Australian poetry: a short suite of photographs and prose poems by the same person. ‘Double Six’ is a sequence of six photographs by John Tranter and six accompanying prose poems by John Tranter. The photos are of Australian poet Gig Elizabeth Ryan, poet Bruce Beaver, artist Julie Brown-Rrap, poet John A. Scott, artist Paula Dawson, and poet Susan Hampton. The piece was published in Republica magazine Issue 2, and recently on Tranter’s internet site. It is prefaced by a quote from Proust, who was as obsessed with photographs as he was with train travel and the telephone, though he puts his thoughts into the mouth of his saturnine character Baron Charlus:

He told us how a house that had belonged to his family, in which Marie Antoinette had slept, with a park laid out by Lenôtre, was now in the hands of the Israels, the wealthy financiers, who had bought it. ... ‘I keep a photograph of the house, when it was still unspoiled, just as I keep one of the Princess before her large eyes had learned to gaze on anyone but my cousin. A photograph acquires something of the dignity which it ordinarily lacks when it ceases to be a reproduction of reality and shews us things that no longer exist.’ (Proust 86–87).

The same is true of poems, of course: all poems are essentially elegiac, as their

³⁰The haibun is a form developed in seventeenth-century Japan, consisting of prose and verse mixed; traditionally a short prose passage is followed by a haiku. With the ‘reverse haibun’ Tranter inverted and re-engineered the form for his own purposes.
occasion, topic or subject matter begins to grow old and die as soon as the poem is made. Two years later Tranter quoted this aperçu of Proust’s in a review of Photocopies, a book of essays by John Berger, in which he wrote:

Why did Berger call these brief meditations ‘photocopies’, when another writer might have called them ‘photographs’, or ‘snapshots’? For two reasons, I guess.

You photograph some person or some moment that you ‘own’, and the snapshot is a personal memento of that moment [...] You photocopy something to keep an image of it, not because you own it, but because you don’t own it — a poem from a volume you’ve borrowed from the library, a recipe in a friend’s magazine, or a document from a file someone has left in your In-tray.

Berger has thought deeply about these things. I was impressed by his analysis of photography in the book About Looking, published in 1980. ‘The camera relieves us of the burden of memory,’ he wrote. ‘It surveys us like God, and it surveys for us. Yet no other god has been so cynical, for the camera records in order to forget.’

In an essay published twelve years later he shifts his position: ‘All photographs are there to remind us of what we forget,’ he recants. ‘In this — as in other ways — they are the opposite of paintings. Paintings record what the painter remembers.’ (in The Australian, 4 January 1997)

Gasoline Kisses, 1997

Basically a British pamphlet publication of the thirty haibun in the previous book, with slight revisions, and two added. Some of the reverse haibun in this booklet and in At The Florida began as first drafts derived from processing another poem through a thesaurus, with various nouns being replaced by near-
synonyms. In ‘The Duck Abandons Hollywood’, for example, the basic structure of the poem is modelled on Wordsworth’s ‘Daffodils’ (hence ‘Daffy Duck’, who is portrayed but not named in the poem), with most of Wordsworth’s imagery replaced by synonyms. Wordsworth’s ‘A poet could not but be gay’ becomes ‘a troubadour could not but be / bisexual’. As the purposes and arguments of the original poems remain concealed behind this technical screen or palimpsest, as it were, the overall meanings of these counterfeit versions must remain obscure.

Different Hands (fiction), 1998

Like The Floor of Heaven, this small book is something completely different again. For a start it’s prose, not verse; and not prose poetry, though it is not straight narrative fiction either. Averaging nine pages each, these seven dense texts are both narrative and discursive, and seem to be short stories with a self-reflective overlay, and with many strange and brief incursions of extraneous matter. In ‘Neuromancing Miss Stein’, the Modernist writer Gertrude Stein undergoes an outlandish cybernetic transformation. In ‘The Howling Twins’, the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg takes the Bobbsey twins on a drug-soaked trip across America. In ‘Carousel’, Henry Miller confronts the enigmatic Master of Go in the mountains of Japan, then visits the brothels of Paris. In ‘Magic Women’, Louisa Alcott’s ‘Little Women’ endure spiritual temptation and hallucinations under the tutelage of a disgruntled sorcerer in the Mexican desert. In other stories, Biggles clashes with what may be his alter ego Radclyffe Hall, the notorious author of the sentimental lesbian novel The Well of Loneliness, and E M Forster’s well-bred British characters wrestle with Sydney’s flamboyant and cynical real estate market. And finally the fastidious French writer Paul Valéry seeks advice from a Canadian backwoods farmer and a handyman who builds outdoor lavatories. All these characters and their cultural baggage are in a sense literary, but the social range from Biggles to Valéry, or from Ginsberg to the Bobbsey Twins, is seldom essayed in a single book.
The contrasting narratives that struggle for control in each story are derived in each case from two previous texts, which have been processed in a computer through the text-analysis engine Brekdown (based on the earlier Unix program Travesty\(^{31}\)) and later blended. The resultant blends have then been extensively revised. The technical procedures are too complex to go into here; a five-page essay by the author outlines some of the mechanisms involved. (Tranter, *Meanjin* 1991)

Philip Mead’s *Networked Language* has a chapter devoted to these texts, with a particular focus on the technological setting and the dialectics of the creative act. As he says:

> Works like *Different Hands* provide a space of poiesis, now poes1s, for experimenting with the genetic make-up of language. By attempting to distance language from its original ‘human’ embodiments, via the assistance of the computer and computer programs, Tranter is tinkering with the central genetic material of symbolic humanity, the DNA code of language, and e-pastiching poetic clones from existing texts with every appearance of poems. As Katherine Parrish observes, rightly I think, ‘those’ — she deliberately avoids the words ‘authors’ or ‘writers’ — ‘who use automatic text generative techniques in their work do so for conflicting ends […] aleatory techniques in literary production are no guarantor nor liberator of

\(^{31}\)Brekdown was inspired by the Travesty program [discussed] in the November 1984 issue of *byte* magazine, by Kenner and O’Rourke (computer scientist Joseph O’Rourke’s colleague was Hugh Kenner, professor of English at Georgia State University, and noted literary critic). They in turn quote an article in the *Scientific American* of November 1983 by Brian P. Hayes, which described an elegant method of avoiding large and unwieldy n-dimensional arrays. They also refer to the work of Claude Shannon, who in 1948 — working with a pencil instead of a computer — developed a simple but tedious method of calculating letter-group frequency arrays, using the text itself as a frequency table. (Tranter, ‘Mr Rubenking’s Breakdown’.)
conscious control of the writing process.’ This explains, perhaps, some of Tranter’s own understandable anxieties about the process, allegorised as we have seen in the contradictory framing of *Different Hands*, anxieties no doubt overridden by the dangerous pleasures of experimentation, and the seductive attractions of freedom-effects. Both of which the reader values. The digital-replicant-depthless-e-pastiche-computationally-generated poetry of *Different Hands* exists as an affront to any serious literary work. Its postmodernism, in Jameson’s specific sense, subsists in its extended degradation of the modernist texts it takes as its arbitrary origin. It has been simulated, not by any ‘human’ construction of meaning, but, significantly, by the dumbly digital combinatorics of letter-frequency analysis and a vibrant post human improvisation. This is what happens to poetry when analogue aesthetics break down. You get poetry as special effects. That these poems should have any appearance of poetic humanness is a travesty. The wonder is that the original fragments of text should have held within them these potentialities, worlds that Tranter is able to release in the seven stories of *Different Hands*.

(Mead 393)

Tranter has spoken of ‘trying to find a new way to write, to escape my own rhetoric.’ (Tranter Hahn 2003) The method he has chosen for this work is extreme, and involves a kind of double ventriloquy, as though speaking through two different masks at once. The artefacts thus constructed apparently have nothing to do with the author’s own creative urges, and seem to escape the perils of authorial ego-identification by plunging into Literature — if we can call this Literature — and leaving the writer behind.

Would John Forbes have approved? We’ll never know: John Forbes — a long-time friend of John Tranter — suffered a heart attack and died suddenly at his home in Melbourne on 23 January 1998, some months before this book appeared. He was forty-seven.

**Late Night Radio, 1998**

This book is a selection of Tranter’s best work at that point, compiled for an
audience in Britain, where his work was generally unavailable. It contains poems mainly from *Under Berlin* and *Dazed in the Ladies Lounge*. It was well received and well reviewed in the UK.

**Blackout, 2000**

With *Blackout*, we are off the beaten track of poetry and exploring new directions once again, this time without the aid of text-analysis machinery. At the impressionable age of thirteen Tranter had enjoyed viewing *Forbidden Planet*, a 1956 science-fiction movie loosely based on Shakespeare's late play *The Tempest* with a Freudian perspective added, and had sometimes expressed a desire to ‘do something’ with Shakespeare's play. (*Forbidden Planet* itself is the subject of a poem in the ‘At the Movies’ section of this thesis, ‘Caliban.’) As a note at the back of the 24-page chapbook says, ‘Blackout consists of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a chapter from Tom Wolfe's [essay] “The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test”, and the article “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream” [an essay] by Joan Didion, 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.’

The idea is not as original as it might appear. In the early 1970s, the US poet Ted Berrigan composed a novel titled *Clear the Range* by using ‘White-Out’ typewriter correction fluid to cover most of the words of an old novel, the remaining words of which made up the story. Tranter’s title is a homage to that work, which — as it happens — he has not read, though he published excerpts from it in *Jacket* magazine at <http://jacketmagazine.com/16/ah-ber1.html>.

*Blackout* was published as a pamphlet by Vagabond Press in Sydney and by Barque Press in Cambridge, UK.

**Ultra, 2001**

A fresh form, again: twenty-four of the twenty-five poems in this book are made up of ten five-line stanzas of loose blank verse, fitting neatly onto a two-
page spread of facing pages. One suspects that the initial poem, ‘Lavender Ink’, a one-page minor paean to the hedonistic delights of Sydney and ancient Alexandria (again), was included to push the next poem onto an even-numbered page, thus ensuring a two-page facing spread for all subsequent poems.

The poems often seem to be spoken in a kind of loose dramatic monologue, sometimes angry, sometimes confused, though there is little point in analysing the various voices for a clue to the speaker’s identity. Carefully building a speaking character in the mode of Browning or Robert Lowell, say, is not on the poet’s agenda. Critic Andrew Riemer wrote

> I cannot pretend to a clear understanding of what — if anything — is supposed to be going on here. But that seems beside the point. Tranter has conjured with great verve a babel of voices — plangent, angry, sentimental, melancholy, at times despairing — which carry the reader into vivid evocations of a feverish kind of urban life, despite the poems’ hermetically sealed refusal to yield conventional sense. (Riemer 2002)

Though the individual poems in the collection found favour (and magazine publication) with editors in San Francisco, Paris, Honolulu, Exeter, Cambridge UK, Northumberland, Michigan, Melbourne, Sydney and Denmark, the collection as a whole didn’t achieve much of a response in Australia, and has since sunk into obscurity.

**Heart Print, 2001**

*Heart Print* was the first of a trio of paperback collections printed as print-on-demand books by Salt Publishing, in Cambridge UK. (The others were *Studio Moon* and *Trio*, which followed two years later). Like the earlier *Late Night Radio*, *Heart Print* is a selection of some of Tranter’s poems which were not available to an audience in Britain. This time the source collections are *Ultra*, the much earlier *The Alphabet Murders* (1976) and the sonnet collection *Crying in Early Infancy* (1977), with the addition of a single (more recent) long poem,
'The Beach', a seven-page poem mainly about Sydney’s Bondi Beach in discursive prose paragraphs, that looks rather like a rambling prose poem, but which is in fact a superhypermetrical sestina.

‘The Beach’ is hypermetrical because all the lines of the six-line sestina stanza are longer than usual. Though there is no formal metrical limit on the length of the sestina line, an iambic pentameter is traditionally used in English. It is super-hypermetrical because the lines in ‘The Beach’ are much, much longer than usual.³² The tone is casual and easy to read, and cynical and sentimental by turns, as Tranter reminisces about his childhood and writes about surf life-savers, Japanese tourists, how to make a proper Martini, the fun he has had in Sydney, and the friends he has lost to death.

The Floor of Heaven, 2000

This is a British reprint of the 1992 Australian edition: see above.

Cartoon: Dan Dactyl and the Mad Jungle Doctor

In 2001 and 2002 Tranter published a piece of writing unlike anything he had done before: a twelve-page cartoon (of 95 panels) titled ‘Dan Dactyl and the Mad Jungle Doctor’, featuring the adventures of Dan Dactyl — a beefy young American with poetic inclinations — and his friends as they search the South American jungles for a drug that ‘turns drivel into beautiful poetry’ (Southerly 26). Here is a sample from the cartoon:

³²The sestina is a form invented by the Troubadours, and consists of a six six-line stanzas and a three-line envoy, originally without rhyme, in which each stanza repeats the end words of the lines of the first stanza, but in different order, the envoy using the six words again, three in the middle of the lines and three at the end. The repeated end-words in Tranter’s gargantuan sestina make up a telling litany of his obsessions: air, drink, fun, death, beach, Sydney. All that’s missing is poetry, and that’s what we’re reading.
Set in San Francisco in the 1940s and 50s and in the town of Porte Gumbeau in an unnamed South American country and in the nearby jungle, the search is quickly derailed when an erratic character (Doctor Verlaine, poet and biochemist) enters the equation. The dialogue veers between tough-guy camaraderie, pensive comparisons between chess and literary criticism, and fragments of poetry and theory from T S Eliot, Arthur Rimbaud and others.

_A sample from the cartoon._

Though the tough-guy cartoon odyssey is unique in Tranter’s oeuvre, the technical mode of construction bears strong thematic similarities to the use of ‘terminals’, treated at length by Brian Henry. In a note appended to the internet version of the cartoon, Tranter explains the genesis and modus operandi:

_In late 2000 I began experimenting with cartoon narratives. My drawing skills are primitive, so I searched for raw material which I could adapt. I settled on a one-volume compilation of daily comic strips (1 June 1945 to 16 May 1946) featuring “Johnny Hazard”, written and illustrated by Frank Robbins. The volume is 60 pages long; the material I purloined came to 12 pages. I threw away the original story with its dialogue (a tangled Second World War tale of fighting the Japanese and later the Vichy French in the tropics) and constructed my own story with new dialogue. I also chose the panels I needed from different places in the original volume, and altered all of the drawings with an image-editing program. The result has nothing in it of the original save the brilliant chiaroscuro ink drawings of the artist, Frank Robbins, and a handful of the characters — their appearance, but not their names, identities, relationships or dialogue, all of which I reinvented. (_http://johntranter.com/00/cartoons.shtml_)._}

Referring to ‘The Anaglyph’, Tranter says (earlier in this text) that each line of his reworked poem “had its beginning and ending given to him; his task was to replace the meat in the sandwich, as it were...” More or less the same is true of ‘Dan Dactyl’: the milieu, the period (more or less), the appearance, dress and manner of the characters, even the weather, are all given, or rather forced on the new art-work.
These constraints are in fact links back to the world of the original, the two-dimensional black-and-white 1940s fantasy world of masculine adventure, and form the pipeline through which those macho, kitsch, nostalgia and gauche joie de vivre effects return and emerge into the present to criticise and reinvigorate the very different world of modern literature.

Borrowed Voices, 2002

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.

While Tranter was Visiting Scholar at Jesus College in Cambridge UK in 2000 and 2001 he embarked on a series of versions of other poets’ works; some were answers to issues raised by other poets, such as his response to the late Veronica Forrest-Thomson, noted below. Some were deliberate mistranslations.

In detail: ‘After Hölderlin’ is a version of Hölderlin’s ‘When I Was a Boy’ (Tranter UM 1); ‘After Laforgue’ (UM 211) was suggested by Laforgue’s ‘Solo de lune’, and other poems; ‘Brussels’ (UM 212) is a version of Rimbaud’s ‘Brussels’. ‘Address to the Reader’ (UM 213) is a response to Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s poem ‘Address to the Reader, from Pevensey Sluice.’ ‘After Rilke’ (UM 214) is a version of the first Duino Elegy. ‘Invitation to America’ (UM 217) is a version of Baudelaire’s ‘Invitation to the Voyage’, transposed to California. ‘On La Cienega’ (UM 218) is a version of Schiller’s ‘A Maiden from Afar’. ‘Festival’ (UM 219) is a version of Max Jacob’s ‘Festival’. ‘Night’(UM 221) is a version of Vicente Huidobro’s ‘Night’. ‘Harry’s Bar’ (UM 222) is a version of Callimachus, Epigram 44. ‘What the Cyclops Said’ (UM 223) is a version of Callimachus, Epigram 47. ‘Where the Boys Are’ (UM 223) is a version of Callimachus, Epigram 42. ‘Notes from the Late Tang’ (UM 224) begins with two lines from Li Po (Li Bai) and incorporates fragments from Tu Fu, Robert Creeley and a lecture by J R Prynne.

Once again, Tranter seems to have been attempting to avoid the trap of his
own earlier rhetorical stances by borrowing and commenting on the lineaments of other poets’ work. The poems were published as a booklet titled Borrowed Voices by John Lucas’s Shoestring Press in Nottingham, and the publication was well received.

Studio Moon, 2003

Like Heart Print, this is a Salt Publishing book and a compilation of previously-collected poems unavailable to a British audience, from Under Berlin, At The Florida and Borrowed Voices, with some new poems, including a version of Schiller’s “A Maiden from Afar”, which here is set in a hamburger joint in Los Angeles, and borrowings from Matthew Arnold and Barbara Guest, an ode, a three-page poem in sapphic stanzas, a computer-based pastiche, two deeply-felt elegies, two sestinas, four haibun, eight pantoums, and dozens of others.

Two themes are clear in this list: a restless technical interest in the forms available to poetry, and a need to borrow, interpret and by implication criticise the work of other, older writers.

An example is the pantoum ‘Rimbaud in Sydney’, which is made up of a mixture of phrases taken from the writings of Arthur Rimbaud, and other phrases taken from an article in the Sydney Sun-Herald, Sunday 25 October 1992. Here are the first two stanzas:

Romanticism has never been properly judged —
it is as simple as a phrase of music.
We grappled and triumphed over the subway map.
What the fuck is going on around here?

It is as simple as a phrase of music,
when you are seventeen. You aren’t really serious:
What the fuck is going on around here?
I’m a fiery passionate woman — I’m not a raving loony.
Again, the work of a noted poet (and a powerful influence on Tranter’s work) is mixed in with the gritty noises of the modern street.

Trio, 2003

*Trio* is the third of the trio of paperback collections printed as print-on-demand books by Salt Publishing, in Cambridge UK. It is another galvanisation of dead matter, but in this case three early volumes entire: *Red Movie* (1972), *Crying in Early Infancy: 100 Sonnets* (1977) and *Dazed in the Ladies Lounge* (1979), all of which were out of print, and again published here for a UK audience.


Tranter’s first *Selected Poems* was published in 1982, when he had been writing poetry for twenty-three years. In 1984, a year after Tranter turned forty, David Carter reviewed the volume in *Scripsi*:

Publishing a *Selected Poems* might be a bit like turning forty. Suddenly, it seems, there’s a past which is yours and yet no longer yours, which is public and yet as intimate and strange as memory or dream. Like these other texts, perhaps, the poems are to be reclaimed, are acknowledged, edited, re-ordered, and then relinquished once more. (Carter 117)

Twenty-three years later he prepared *Urban Myths*, his second selection of those poems he wished to see in print.

Unlike his ill-starred first *Selected, Urban Myths* (uniquely) won three state prizes (New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia) and was generally well reviewed. It contains some of the poems in this thesis: eighteen of the ‘Rereading Rimbaud’ poems and five poems from ‘At the Movies’. As well as masses of early poems, it contains other new poems: nine short, fairly conventional poems written in Britain in 2000–2001, and a group of ten poems titled ‘The Malley Variations’ (*UM* 276–292). Though recent, these rehearsals of the voice of Ern Malley are an extension of a long-standing interest in the
literary strategies of the hoax, and bear examination.

‘Ern Malley’ is of course the hoax poet concocted in 1943 by two conservative young Australian poets, Harold Stewart and James McAuley. Tranter was born the year Malley died; a case of what James Joyce called “metempsychosis”, or the transmigration of souls, perhaps. Many poets of Tranter’s generation looked to Ern Malley as a patron saint of experimental verse, as it were, and found his works more interesting than the serious poetry produced by the hoaxers. When he was twenty-five Tranter wrote a ‘reply’ to

³³Seventeen 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, and Philip Mead’s Networked Language has a chapter on the hoax and trial.)

³⁴As 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).

³⁵Generations of literary readers have agreed: Ern Malley’s oeuvre has been
the Malley poems, ‘On Reading an Electrical Meter at the House of the Rising Son’. (Transit No 1, 22, ‘Yoo Hoo’ 268) This piece, published pseudonymously in the annus mirabilis 1968, argues with Malley’s ‘Petit Testament’, copying the first line exactly, parodying the first quatrain rhyme for rhyme and almost word for word, then branching off into a loose criticism of Australian literary life in the forties.

A common interpretation of the Malley affair is that a combination of collaborative authorship and disguise can free unconscious forces, and the resulting play and free association result in energetic writing. The adoption of a pseudonym and other borrowings can also be seen as a means of avoiding or resisting self-analysis. The desire to create and publish literature can be seen as a canalisation of some other more primitive force or desire, and seems to seek to protect itself from exposure and criticism by disguise, resistance, avoidance, and sublimation, in the same way that the wishes and desires that give rise to dreams do.

Another way of looking at the dissolution of McAuley’s and Stewart’s personalities into the acid bath of Ern Malley’s persona is through the concept of ‘sub-personalities’. Cassandra Atherton brings a consideration of sub-personalities to her study of Australian poet Gwen Harwood’s various masks:

John Rowan, psychotherapist and fellow of the British Psychological Society [....] defines the self-pluralistic development of sub-personalities as ‘a semi-permanent and semi-autonomous region of the personality capable of acting as a person’.36 In his later essay ‘The Normal Development of Sub-personalities’ he underlines that the widely discussed and has remained in print in several different editions in the six decades since his death, and a stage play, a movie, a sequence of paintings (by Gary Shead) and dozens of homage poems have been created based on the drama of the hoax. The poems of Stewart and McAuley are hard to find, mostly out of print, and are now neglected by the young.

development of sub-selves ‘seem[s] to be universal and ... are quite normal’. ³⁷ There does not seem to be any limit to sub-personalities: people develop as many as they require. (pp 134–135)

‘Acting as a person’ was just what ‘Ern Malley’ strove so hard to do: he came provided with a complete life story, including a girl-friend, a bereaved sister, and a final tragic illness.

Atherton quotes Harwood on the disjunction between the character constructed inside the poem and the poet writing the poem:

‘I am horrified at the tendency of people to identify the I with the author ... I keep saying that the I of the poems is not the I making jams jellies pickles and chutneys’ ³⁸ and ‘The I that writes down the things on the page is certainly not the one who sits talking about writing and the things on the page’. ³⁹

The two Malley hoaxers would have been equally horrified to be identified as the authors, but only while the hoax was still a secret. Once the cat was out of the bag, they were prompt to claim authorship, as a pulpit from which to preach against their hapless victims. And Harwood’s remark that ‘The I that writes down the things on the page is certainly not the one who sits talking about writing and the things on the page’ is an understatement in their case; the tragic Ern Malley was definitely not either of the triumphant hoaxers, though they were the ‘onlie begetter of these sonnets’, and they went on talking ‘about writing and the things on the page’ as long as there were reporters to write down what they said, though now without the masks. The sub-personality they created was denied any life or authenticity of its own, once it


had done its powerful and destructive work. The energies it had released were
cast out like devils, and never reappeared.

There is a piquant addendum to Atherton’s story. She quotes Gwen
Harwood, ian interview with John Beston⁴⁰, saying that ‘One doesn’t ever
like to hurt the living. I do agree with Jim McAuley that it is better
that the finest masterpiece should remain unwritten if it causes
human pain.’ (Atherton 137)

Apparently the Malley poems were not serious work, in McAuley’s view.
Masterpieces were powerful creatures and had to be restrained lest they cause
pain, but satire was not art, and as long as it was righteous could cause whatever
harm was needed in a good cause.

In its use of masks, disguise and borrowed lines from other poets, the
construction of Ern Malley has much in common with Tranter’s various
strategies involving borrowings and mistranslations. It is interesting in this
context because it borrows, quotes, parodies and uses literary models such as
Shakespeare, because it fakes and thus annuls its motivations, and because it
avoids the pitfalls of Romantic personal expressionism on the part of McAuley
and Stewart while flaunting an exaggerated version of it in the arms-length
persona of Malley. In a sense the project takes the literary talents of its two real
authors, adds an intention to humiliate and a collaborative exuberance to
energise them, and allows absolute license of vocabulary, theme and topic.

As a method of avoiding the anxieties attendant on the exposure of one’s
literary talent it is hard to fault. If the Malley poems are judged to be brilliant,
the real authors can claim the credit. If the poems are judged to be drivel, they
can claim the credit for that too: it takes a very talented poet to fool an editor
with drivel, though there is a contradiction involved in that argument. The
Malley hoax is analysed perceptively by Philip Mead in his book Networking
Language (87–105), where he points out that

⁴⁰John Beston, ‘An Interview with Gwen Harwood’, Quadrant, vol 19, no 7,
1975, pp 84–8.
The double bind for McAuley and Stewart was that, as hoaxes, they were in danger of appearing as impostors, while Ern Malley appeared coherently ‘genuine’ and believably authentic from the moment of his creation, if only fictively so. (105)

Mead also makes another point about the Malley affair: the distinctly Australian character of the project.

... Malley can be read as an extension of the ‘dispersed’ Shakespeare of contemporary scholarship and criticism, the name we currently give to a loose collectivity of linguistically uneven, authorially disunified, collaboratively produced, often plagiarised and always reconstructed textuality. ... This is the sense in which Ern Malley is a national poet, or, even, Australia’s Shakespeare. (185)

Tranter called the ten poems of ‘The Malley Variations’ votive verses, and claimed that they were written in or through the ‘voice’ of Ern Malley, speaking in turn through the voices of other writers. The computer program ‘Brekdown’ was brought into the equation to distance or alienate the initial draft text, a strategy that foreshadows the general approach to the poetry produced for this thesis, though computer translation rather than letter-group analysis has been used for the thesis poems.

Brekdown created the first rough drafts for ‘The Malley Variations’, analysing and recording the linguistic characteristics of the Ern Malley oeuvre as well as those of particular texts from nine other writers, then blended the Malley data with each of the nine chosen literary partners in turn, scrambling, blending and producing ten drafts, each of which spoke with a double voice.

The ‘Ern Malley’ material is course itself the false ventriloquy of two other poets, McAuley and Stewart, and these new texts are thus a triple ventriloquy: McAuley and Stewart speaking through Ern Malley, speaking through one of nine other writers, speaking through John Tranter. The texts and their ‘collaborating’ authors are:

Cancer.


At the close of ‘Year Dot’ Ern Malley’s ghost makes a plaintive farewell appearance among the thickets of real estate jargon:

Now, a plausible future: in a

family home with ample furniture

I shall live as an imprisoned ghost.

Slow riot, enough sleep. Fate in my left

pocket, purple sky above: the rear lane

access allows my adieu. Adieu!

The thoroughness and vigour with which McAuley and Stewart went about constructing their experimental modernist poems gives pause for thought: what if they had published them as John Tranter has published his ‘Malley Variations’, as serious experimental writing, fully labelled, acknowledged and
supported by their real authors? The enthusiasm that first greeted the appearance of the oeuvre in the pages of *Angry Penguins* magazine would seem to promise the pair of unpublished young writers a fame like Dylan Thomas's.

**Cartographical constraint: By Blue Ontario’s Shore**

Tranter has always been interested in maps. As a child he used to wander for miles through the rough and unpopulated Australian bush around his farmstead home, using an Army Ordnance Survey contour map to guarantee his safe return (see Appendix 7). His long poem ‘The False Atlas’ was translated into German by Hans Magnus Enzensberger mainly because he too liked the peculiar two-dimensional world of maps. In 2004 Tranter wrote a cartographically-constrained poem (a new literary device?) titled (after Whitman) ‘By Blue Ontario's Shore’ which he dedicated to John Ashbery, mainly because the area where John Ashbery had spent his youth, the farming country around the town of Sodus beside Lake Ontario in upstate New York, provided the dozen or so town-names that litter the poem. The linking of Ashbery and Whitman is geographically fortuitous. The poem is printed here as Appendix 8.

**Editorial projects**

By 2005 Tranter had published one and a half thousand printed pages of poetry and experimental prose. He had been employed in many other paying jobs over the years, from mail boy to typesetter to printer to working in a coffee bar at night to driving an art gallery owner’s Bentley by day, but apart from occasional teaching, most of his professional training had been as an editor — with the Australian Broadcasting Commission as a play reader and radio drama producer at various times, as an education book editor for Angus and Robertson 1971–73, and as an editor of distance learning materials with TAFE in 1983. On many occasions he focussed this set of editorial skills on the field
of contemporary poetry, and ended up producing several issues of divers poetry magazines and, in four very different books, over a thousand pages of poetry by other hands.

In 1976 Martin Duwell asked Tranter to compile an anthology of contemporary poetry to be published by Makar Press, the kind of forward-looking poetry by younger writers that had been featured in Makar’s series of ‘Gargoyle Poets’ pamphlets and in Makar magazine (both edited by Martin Duwell) through the early 1970s. Tranter agreed, and the 330-page book was published in 1979. It featured the work of twenty-four poets, and a long and argumentative Introduction by Tranter which was as much resented by the poets included as by those left out. Martin Harrison:

For John Tranter’s intentions are quite clear, and should be clearly stated. By selecting the work of some of his generation’s poets, he has attempted to begin establishing an Australian version of modernism. I suppose one could say that, historically, The New Australian Poetry is an attempt to reverse the barbarous work of Stewart and McAuley in the late 40s — though they as mere writers may, to be fair, have been the least responsible for the intellectual strait-jacketing which followed the [Second World] war in most Western countries. Tranter has, in other words, produced a book which questions polemically a certain kind of imperviousness in Australian poetry to innovation overseas and which quarrels deeply with the increasingly out-dated British academic and poetic tradition invoked in defence of that insularity.... What’s more, it’s even a retrospective anthology in which most of the poems come from the early 70s, for Tranter himself (and I agree with him) sees this period of overhauling “that began around 1968... [as] now drawing to a close.” (Harrison 1980)

Not all critics were so understanding. In a review of The New Australian Poetry, poet Peter Kocan says the book is a symptom of a ‘general retreat from sanity in the West’. Then he says ‘When, say, Ted Hughes writes of a hawk, we experience not the poem but the hawk’. (Kocan 76)

In 1988 the ABC (the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, previously the Australian Broadcasting Commission) and The Australian Bicentennial
Authority offered a number of poetry prizes, for short, mid-length and long poems. Tranter was asked to be one of a group of judges for the mid-length poems. When the judging was over he suggested to ABC Enterprises (who published ABC Books) that they publish a print collection of the best poems. They agreed. Tranter read through some six thousand poems by people from all walks of life. The resulting collection, *The Tin Wash Dish: Poems from Today's Australians*, is a very eclectic anthology: from poems by skilled professionals with international reputations like Les Murray, Gig Ryan and John Forbes, to people in country towns who had never had a poem published before, from the sophisticated to the naïve, from the cynical to the sincerely heartfelt.

In the late 1980s Tranter approached Susan Ryan, then head of Penguin Australia, with the suggestion that Penguin publish a list of small poetry volumes. Ryan demurred — the list would lose money, and would soon be closed down — and proposed a poetry anthology instead as a starting point for such a list: a book which stood a chance of breaking even. Tranter asked Philip Mead to co-edit, and a few years later *The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry* appeared: 474 pages long, with the work of eighty-six poets from Kenneth Slessor to John Kinsella. After the initial and immediate success of this volume (it had sold some fourteen thousand copies by 2006), Penguin did issue a list of poetry paperbacks under the editorship of Judith Rodriguez which lasted some years.

Tranter had known the poet and novelist Martin Johnston (b.1947) since they met at the University of Sydney in the late 1960s. They often talked, drank and shared meals together, they read and enjoyed each other’s work, and they wrote a sequence of (unpublished) collaborative poems. Martin Johnston died in 1990; in 1993 the University of Queensland Press published Tranter’s 290-page edition of his friend’s work: poems, reviews, translations, interviews, and photographs. An account of how that came about is given in Tranter’s Introduction to that book (xii–xvii).

Tranter assisted in the editing of many small magazines, and published over forty book reviews, mostly during the 1970s when the issues revolving around
the new poetry were being debated. But perhaps his more significant literary
endeavours (apart from his own poetry and his four print anthologies) were
the hoax magazine *Free Grass* (1968), the ‘Preface to the Seventies’ issue of
*Poetry Australia* (1970), the four poetry volumes published by Transit New
Poetry (1980–83), *Jacket* magazine (begun in 1997) and the APRIL Internet
project (started in 2004).

*Free Grass* splashed into the pond of little underground magazines in
Australia in 1968. Like most of its brethren — *The Great Auk, Ourglass, Mok, Cross-currents, Transit* and *Free Poetry* — it was roneod (that is, mimeographed,
or printed on a Gestetner brand rotary silk-screen duplicator, developed in the
1890s). The editorial standards were loose, and there was a strong counter-
cultural flavour to the thing. It was greeted enthusiastically, but when the
magazine’s readers tried to contact the editor, they discovered that no editor’s
name was given, and there was no postal address. The truth leaked out: one
morning in late 1968 John Tranter had composed the whole of the nineteen
poems of *Free Grass* on five foolscap pages in nine different personae ranging
from ‘an ex-professor of English Lit. from the UK’ to an ‘ex-intimate of Bob
Dylan’ to a young and naïve female art student. He typed it directly onto
mimeograph stencils, interspersing his spontaneous lyric effusions with
nonsense sentences and fragments from a list of cryptic crossword clues in the
daily paper. He ran it off the next day, and mailed out the copies.

Was this hoax meant to wreck the underground poetry scene of the time, as
the Ern Malley hoax had ridiculed and damaged the experimental poetry of the
mid–1940s? Tranter claimed that the magazine was meant as a gentle parody of
the underground magazines of the day, and in the more flexible and tolerant
Australian society of the late 1960s, it had no apparent effect.

Why so many personae, and so many different ‘experimental’ styles? Was
this a collection of incompetent verses supposedly written by weak-minded
hippies and poetasters, or perhaps an escape from the severe demands of
‘Literature’, a playful set of exercises that explored a range of different voices?

Tranter had published a number of poems in Grace Perry’s *Poetry Australia*
magazine during the late 1960s, as had many of his friends. In 1969 he talked Grace Perry into devoting a special issue of her magazine to the work of new or younger poets, with Tranter as the editor. He commissioned work from dozens of poets, and articles from Rodney Hall and Thomas Shapcott, the editors of an earlier poetry anthology *New Impulses in Australian Poetry*. ‘My one regret,’ wrote Tranter later, ‘was rejecting some poems by a young poet which Bruce Beaver had sent on to me. Years later, I realised they were by John Forbes.’ (Tranter, Preface, SETIS) The collection was published in February 1970 as the ‘Preface to the Seventies’ issue of the magazine.

Tranter also had input into another issue of *Poetry Australia*. Nearly forty years ago, just before he left Australia to work in South-east Asia as a publisher’s editor, he commissioned an article on computers and poetry from the University of Sydney linguistics lecturer Alex Jones which appeared in the April 1971 issue of *Poetry Australia*, edited by Grace Perry.

The Travesty computer program mentioned earlier did not exist when Alex Jones researched his piece, and he could not have forseen the elegant method it provides for avoiding the need for dictionary lists and grammatical rules. But he does outline something of the method Tranter has used with Travesty’s successor, the Brekdown program, and some of the theory that might lie behind the reception of such ‘writing’:

A poem or any other piece of language always looks outside itself, and I have suggested that if randomly assembled it will only be acceptable to the extent that the random assemblage allows us to impose a meaning on it. (61–62)

Tranter and his wife Lyn, who at that time worked in a type design and print bureau called Rat Graffix, published four books of poetry in the early 1980s: first books by Susan Hampton and Gig Ryan, and books by John Forbes and Alan Jefferies.

In 1997 Tranter was researching various email programs on the Internet for the literary agency he and his wife owned when he noticed the HTML code that underlay the web pages he was browsing: it was almost identical to the
Compugraphic typesetting codes he had learned twenty years before at his wife’s typesetting business. He had trained variously as an editor, a typesetter, a printer, a print designer and a photographer, and had studied art in 1961 under Lloyd Rees. With his newfound ability as a HTML coder he realised he happened to have all the skills needed to compile, edit, design and publish a literary magazine on the Internet, which he proceeded to do, calling the magazine Jacket for no particular reason other than that it was easy to spell, easy to pronounce, easy to grasp and contained the unusual letter K.

By late 2006 the magazine’s homepage had received over half a million visits. Most of its readers as well as most of its contributors are from North America or Britain. In the Guardian in 2002 Peter Forbes wrote ‘The prince of online poetry magazines is Jacket, run from Australia by the poet John Tranter. It has never been a print journal. The design is beautiful, the contents awesomely voluminous, the slant international modernist and experimental.’ (Peter Forbes 2002.)

When The Penguin Book of Modern Australian Poetry was published it was 474 pages long, and included eighty-six poets. Penguin’s brief to the editors was to produce a book around 300 pages long, but they graciously accommodated the fifty per cent extra material that landed on their desk. There was no room, though, for author notes, which would have added around thirty more pages to the book; or, more likely, thirty pages of poetry would have to be cut to accommodate the notes.

By late 2004, Tranter had built a research Internet site for his own early work, and a site featuring the collected works of three earlier Australian poets, both hosted on the University of Sydney Library’s SETIS site.⁴¹ His experience

⁴¹ Over 200 pages of material relating to Tranter’s early writing is hosted at <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/tranter/index.html>. You can read complete books by Christopher Brennan (Poems 1913), Lesbia Harford (Poems), and Kenneth Slessor (Selected Poetry 1975), grouped with an introduction by John Tranter at <http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/ozpoets/
with these projects and with Jacket magazine led him to think of the Internet as the ideal repository for those missing Penguin author notes, and in 2004 he began to build a site to host them. Before long he had hundreds of pages of material on some seventy poets, and he realised that he had bitten off more than he could chew.

In 2005 he approached the University of Sydney’s English Department, who (with the University of Sydney Library) agreed to partner an Australian Research Council (ARC) grant application with the Copyright Agency Limited as a ‘Linkage’ partner. In mid 2006 the ARC awarded a grant of over half a million dollars over three to four years to fund further development of the project, with Professor Elizabeth Webby as the Chief Investigating Officer, a staff of one full-time and some part-time researchers as well as two or three staff from CAL and two or three staff from the University of Sydney Library, a PhD student researcher, and John Tranter as a part-time advisor, and an overall budget costed at one and a half million dollars. The prototype site has been named Australian Poetry Resources Internet Library (APRIL) and was relocated to the University of Sydney Internet server as <april.edu.au> in 2008.\textsuperscript{42}

The Matter of Motivation

Tranter has now gathered, edited and published more work by other writers than all his own extensive output added together: over a thousand pages of Australian material, and over seven thousand pages of mainly British and American poetry, prose, reviews and interviews in Jacket magazine. Why?

There are certainly rewards: a few royalties, a more salient reputation, lots of new friends, and the pleasure of a job well done; but these are hardly enough to justify a lifetime’s effort on behalf of others.

\textsuperscript{42}<http://april.edu.au/2home/about.shtml>.\textsuperscript{42}
There are clues, perhaps, in his relationship to his father, who had been a dedicated and much-appreciated primary-school teacher in a country town for many years, and in later life part-owned a company that managed three dairy farms and a soft-drink factory.

When Tranter was nineteen his father died, disappointed in his son’s failure to follow in his footsteps as a farmer. Perhaps Tranter is still trying to make up for inflicting that disappointment; or perhaps the father’s concern for helping others to learn and grow has found a faint reflection in his son’s career.
Exegesis, part 3: Dream-work

Precursors

This thesis began with mention of a triad, the three important literary models in the development of Tranter’s writing: Arthur Rimbaud, the hoax poet ‘Ern Malley’, and the contemporary American poet John Ashbery.

The link between Rimbaud and Ashbery is obvious; Ashbery’s main influences are French, and he spent a decade in Paris, though Rimbaud hardly figures overtly in his work except perhaps as a precursor to Surrealism and some other twentieth-century French writing. The links between Ern Malley and Rimbaud, Ashbery, and Tranter are more subtle and perhaps more interesting.

When Ashbery was first a student at Harvard he discovered

a wonderful bookstore there where I could get modern poetry — which I’d never been able to lay my hands on very much until then — and they had the original edition of The Darkening Ecliptic [a collection of Ern Malley’s poetry] with the Sidney Nolan cover. I always had a taste for [a] sort of wild experimental poetry — of which there really wasn’t very much in English in America at the time — and this poet suited me very well. I agree whole-heartedly with Reed’s [Sir Herbert Reed’s] revised estimate of it. I just wish there were some more of his books around. (laughs) Mr Malley, that is.⁴³

When Tranter suggested that, to make up this lack, perhaps Ashbery could write some sequels to the Malley oeuvre, Ashbery replied ‘I think perhaps I have. (laughter)’ He has taught Malley’s work (at Brooklyn College, New York) and has published two poems written in the voice of Ern Malley: ‘Potsdam’ and ‘Aenobarbus’.⁴⁴

⁴³John Ashbery, 1988 interview with John Tranter.

⁴⁴In Jacket magazine number 17.
Tranter’s interest in Malley, which finds a particular focus in the ten ‘Malley Variations’, has been discussed earlier in these pages.

Rimbaud and Malley? Rimbaud, in his ‘Lettres du voyant’ mentioned earlier, outlined a method for achieving the kind of literary enlightenment he wished to pursue:

The poet makes himself a seer [voyant] by a long, prodigious, and rational disordering of all the senses.... He reaches the unknown; and even if, crazed, he ends up by losing the understanding of his visions, at least he has seen them! Let him die ... other horrible workers will come; they will begin from the horizons where he has succumbed! (Rimbaud 11)

The process of manufacturing the Ern Malley poems — rapid collaborative writing, ransacking half a dozen disparate books for words and phrases, deliberate nonsense and clumsy rhymes, erasure of the individual ego, disguise and forgery — seems very like a rational disordering of the poetic imagination, or at least an acting exercise or free rehearsal for just such a method; minus the drugs, it should be added. In a sense, Malley can be thought of as one of the many ‘horrible workers’ who toiled in Rimbaud’s long shadow in the century since his death.

Tranter discovered Rimbaud and Malley at the start of his career. In their analysis of The Alphabet Murders (Tranter, 1976) Fagan and Minter find traces of a genealogy:

By passing as illegitimate within The Alphabet Murders — an experimental outsider in strategic thrall to anti-establishment rhetoric — John Tranter enacts a drama of family selection. He asserts a freedom to choose his poetic-cultural parentage, rejecting “some long and boring poem by Matthew Arnold” and instead laying desirous claim to the “absolute modernism” of a French-American queer male line of innovators: Arthur Rimbaud, John Ashbery, Frank O’Hara. This adoptive evolution is emphasised in a larrikin rewrite of T. S. Eliot’s ubiquitous ‘Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’ — “the smoke
that ‘wipes its arse upon the window-panes’. (Par 14)⁴⁵

Tranter studied Matthew Arnold’s long poem ‘Sohrab and Rustum’ as a schoolboy and has acknowledged its influence⁴⁶, and has gently parodied Arnold and his use of Homeric similes in the poem ‘The Great Artist Reconsiders the Homeric Simile’, which borrows a long and noble simile from ‘Sohrab and Rustum’, and updates it and sets it in the world of contemporary junkies and police. But Matthew Arnold, inspector of schools, was perhaps too much like Tranter’s own father, a school-teacher, to be suitable as a model for a rebellious youth.

Tranter discovered Rimbaud a few years later, when he was seventeen, and devoured everything he could find by or about the poet. The model is here apt enough, and Tranter’s circumstances were very like Rimbaud’s in many ways: he grew up over a hundred miles from the nearest city, his parents owned a farm, he was bright at school, he went to the city at sixteen, he identified with the more bohemian beliefs of his generation, he felt a strong obligation to renovate the poetry he inherited, he wrote a very contemporary kind of poetry himself, and he travelled the world. To Tranter, Rimbaud must have seemed like a smart and scornful older brother, a rival perhaps, rather than like a parent.

⁴⁵At <http://jacketmagazine.com/27/faga-mint.html>

⁴⁶A teacher called Brian Stibbard taught me (and my class of thirty country town boys and girls) Matthew Arnold’s “Sohrab and Rustum”, a long heroic narrative poem first published in 1853, at school when I was thirteen or fourteen. It’s taken me years to realise how important the poem was to me. It’s the story of a Persian warrior who has a son, but is not aware that the son survived childbirth. In late life, at the head of his army, he faces a young challenger and slays him in single combat, only to discover just as the young man dies that it is his own son he has killed. The narrative is tragic, the tone noble yet doubting and self-aware, and the ending is almost pure Cinemascope. He invented the long rising crane shot before they’d invented the movies!’ John Tranter. (Interview, excerpt.) In conversation with Lance Phillips, internet, October 2004.
But Rimbaud had been dead for over fifty years when Tranter was born. Ashbery was another matter, even though he too shared all the common characteristics listed above: the farm, the distant city, travel, and so on. One could read Rimbaud with some difficulty, ensconced as he is in a foreign language and in a foreign country and in a hard-to-imagine past: but one could write a letter to Ashbery, talk to him on the phone, or meet him for lunch. The friendship that has developed between the two poets over the last twenty years puts the problems of influence in a slightly different light.

Tranter had been reading Ashbery since the mid 1960s, that is, for most of his writing life. The traffic was not entirely one-way: Ashbery said he had been influenced to some extent by an early volume of Tranter’s (Red Movie) which he had read in 1973, though the sheer volume, power and variety of Ashbery’s cumulative work had a much stronger influence on Tranter.

It is clear that Ashbery (Ashbery the ‘brand’, or the ‘Transcendental Ashbery’, that is) is father figure to more than one generation of younger poets. In an introductory essay in 1994 on Ashbery’s career, Tranter pointed out that the older writer’s arrival in poetry’s hall of fame was connected with a generational transfer of power:

(T)he Tertiary or Transcendental Ashbery.... gradually solidified out of the mists of personal obscurity into a glittering nodule of recognition around 1970, helped by the publication of An Anthology of New York Poets. This collection, edited by the younger poets Ron Padgett and David Shapiro and published in June of that year, mounted his writing at the prow of the so-called ‘New York School’ and placed him as father-figure to a generation, along with Edwin Denby, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler and the recently-dead Frank O’Hara. (‘Three John Ashberys’)

The word ‘prow’ occurs only once in ‘The Anaglyph’, not a borrowed word from ‘Clepsydra’, at the start or finish of a line, but as part of Tranter’s own

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\(^{47}\)John Ashbery in conversation with the present author, New York City, circa 2000.
...it was

Like standing on the prow of a moving ferry in the morning

With the spray bursting all around

And a feeling of nausea mixed with ecstasy washing over me.

(119–21)

Such are the contradictory physical manifestations of the anxiety of influence.

Harold Bloom sensibly points out that ‘Every poet is a being caught up in a
dialectical relationship (transference, repetition, error, communication) with
another poet or poets.’ (Bloom, 91). He further notes, with a nod to Freud, that
‘these revisionary ratios [the tactics of poets… that misinterpret or
metamorphose precursors] have the same function in intra-poetic relations
that defense mechanisms have in our psychic life.’ (Bloom, 88) Geoff Ward
picks up this essential tactic of Bloom’s:

Most readers of Bloom have been impressed but unconvinced by the
rhetorical subdivision of the anxiety of influence into clinamen,
tessera, kenosis, daemonization, askesis and apophrades. They tend
to turn into each other. The force of his case lies in its application of
Freudian psychodrama to the dynamics of poetic influence. (Ward
117)

Bloom’s main point, though, is clear:

What matters most (and it is the central point of this book) is that the
anxiety of influence comes out of a complex act of strong misreading,
a creative interpretation I call “poetic misprision.” [...] The strong
misreading comes first; there must be a profound act of reading that
is a kind of falling in love with a literary work. That reading is likely
to be idiosyncratic, and it is almost certain to be ambivalent, though
the ambivalence may be veiled. (Bloom, xxiii)

But what to do with a strong influence, and how can it be safely absorbed?

Tranter’s essay on the three John Ashberys is one creative way of redirecting
the energies so encountered; of deflecting the ju-ju, or externalising and
reifying the anxiety, as it were. Bloom talks of various defences and corrective measures:

Poetic Influence [...] always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence [...] is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature, of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist. (Bloom, 30)

Tranter is primarily a poet, though any response to Ashbery’s writing has to be an act of criticism. As one of the ‘critically interested writers/ readers [asked] to respond to John Ashbery’s poem “Clepsydra”,’ Tranter had a number of options open. One was to formulate a critical response to Ashbery’s poem in the form of another poem. He had the example before him of Ken Bolton’s 1996 critical article in the form of free verse on contemporary Australian poetry, for example:

I feel I should say something totalizing about

Theory

though one can’t of course (step out of it /
look down from above.)

But Theory is obviously the context
in which this occurs. “I am no theorist”

is true, & yet I’m unwilling to acknowledge

an ascendancy of theory over what I do           (Bolton, 130)

From the early 1970s Harold Bloom has engaged positively with Ashbery’s poetry. Geoff Ward says that the claims Bloom has made for the poetry of John Ashbery over the years have been massive,
...and form an argument, partly on his behalf, against the whole notion of a New York school of poets. [...] Bloom has had to deafen and blind himself to Ashbery’s wit, and to his significant debts to Auden and to Surrealism, in order to make the poet fit the particular laurels and toga that the critic has in mind, and which were designed only for tragic statuary. (Ward 4)

Bloom has this to say about the criticism of poetry:

All criticisms that call themselves primary vacillate between tautology — in which the poem is and means itself — and reduction — in which the poem means something that is not itself a poem. Antithetical criticism must begin by denying both tautology and reduction, a denial best delivered by the assertion that the meaning of a poem can only be a poem, but another poem — a poem not itself. (Bloom 70)

So perhaps the meaning of ‘Clepsydra’ is ‘The Anaglyph.’ Or is it the other way around? Ward warns us of the dangers of conflating two very different kinds of writing (and therefore thinking):

Of course, although poetry and theory may never actually touch, intercourse between them is constantly pictured in books of criticism. Poem and prose are thrust into an embrace which it is a distinguishing mark of recent criticism to have begun to acknowledge as its own creation. The relationships between poet and critic, text and text, have therefore been likened to the ambiguous clinging of parasite and host. [...] But no matter how complex or shifting these relationships, poetic and critical language remain as different in kind as ivy and bark. The one may cling to the other for dear life, but the distinction between poetic and critical language is far from ‘delusive’. (Ward 69)

Todorov addresses this question more thoroughly, framing it as a philosophical dilemma:

_How to read?_ In attempting to answer this question, we have been led to characterize several types of critical discourse — projection, commentary, poetics, reading. Different as they are among themselves, these discourses also share one feature: they are all
heterogeneous to literary discourse itself. What is the cost of this choice to read one language through another, one symbolic system by the intermediary of another? Freud has remarked that the dream cannot say "no"; might not literature, in its turn, have certain elements which ordinary language cannot say?

No doubt there is an untheorizable element in literature, as Michel Deguy calls it, if theory presupposes scientific language. One function of literature is the subversion of this very language; hence it is extremely rash to claim we can read it exhaustively with the help of that very language it calls into question. To do so is equivalent to postulating the failure of literature. At the same time, this dilemma is much too inclusive for us to be able to escape it: confronted with a poem, we can only resign ourselves to the impoverishment caused by a different language, or else (a factitious solution) write another poem. Factitious because this second text will be a new work which still awaits its reading: an entire autonomy deprives criticism of its raison d'être, just as a submission to ordinary language affects it with a certain sterility. There remains, of course, a third solution which is silence: we cannot speak of that.

Since the metaphor of the itinerary is particularly current in any description of reading, let us say that one of the possible paths leads us beyond the text; another leaves us on this side of it (the third solution consists in not setting out). To bring the two paths as close to each other as possible: does this not already hold out the hope that they will someday converge? (Todorov 244–46)

In overlaying ‘Clepsydra’ with its corrupt twin ‘The Anaglyph’, Tranter seeks to effect just such a convergence.

**Triads**

There are a number of other triads that it might be useful to consider in relation to Tranter’s oeuvre. First, Freud, whose work Tranter had studied in his three-year Psychology major for his 1971 Arts degree. Freud had initially posited that the structure of the mind was binary: there was the unconscious mind and the
conscious mind. The binary structure is useful: child-adult, sleep-waking, man-woman, light-dark. But a tripartite structure is more useful. Ancient Greek drama only developed tragedy proper when a third actor was introduced:

As of old tragedy formerly the chorus by itself performed the whole drama, and later Thespis invented a single actor to give the chorus a rest and Aeschylus a second and Sophocles a third, thereby completing tragedy... (Diogenes Laertius III. 56)

Freud's 1921 volume *Group Psychology* presented the beginnings of a systematic study of the ego, and in 1923 he published *The Ego and the Id*, a 'largely revised account of the structure and functioning of the mind with the division into an id, an ego and a super-ego.' (Strachey 29). Freud was sixty-seven years old: past the age at which most men retire.

Freud developed another triad: he links desire with wishes and dreams. A dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish. (Wollheim 66). We have already seen how Tranter links the three creative productions of poem, dream and film in terms of an overlapping area of function, strategy and meaning.

A third triad: a creative artist can also be seen as a tripartite structure. First, as a person, a human being growing from child to adult; second as a creative artist, identified as a creator of art, music or literature; and third as the work itself, a more or less reified version of the material work produced by the writer, a kind of brand name: for example, Shakespeare, Picasso, Hitchcock, Yves St Laurent, Beethoven.

In 1994 Tranter wrote an introductory piece on the work and career of John Ashbery, based on this three-part view. The first of the hypothesised three John Ashberys is the 'Primary or Mundane Ashbery':

... the boy who grew into the man who became a scholar and artificer of words. After a youth spent on a fruit farm in upstate New York he attended college and then Harvard University. He gradually turned into the poet who wrote all those poems, plugging on year after year, one sheet of paper after another rolling through the Remington, until
some sixteen of his works stand there on the shelf to entrance and puzzle us.

When this man is writing poems he is no longer just a man. This ‘Secondary Ashbery’, as I shall call him, is the gifted angel and the golden goose who produces and spins the threads that the reviewers and critics are obliged to untangle and weave into their own explanation of its pattern. He is never met with, never seen, never spoken to. Friends have only caught a glimpse of this elusive creature, who even as they enter his study is invisibly, swiftly and silently replaced by a simulacrum. For when Mr Ashbery is meeting, seeing others and being seen by them, listening and speaking, eating and drinking and sharing a joke, he is not that poetry writing person, that literature machine, but once again the man who used to be the boy who grew up on a remote farm, the Primary or Mundane Ashbery. When he reads from his books, in that vague and charming drawl that asks you not to take this stuff too seriously, he looks at certain moments as the Secondary Ashbery might look, hesitant under the reading lamp, searching for the right word.

Then there is the Tertiary or Transcendental Ashbery. That’s the Ashbery people refer to when they say ‘Have you read the latest Ashbery?’ or ‘What do you think of Ashbery? Better than Wallace Stevens, huh?’ The Transcendental Ashbery is usually presented as just the surname, a complex image at one remove from the human: it has little to do with either of the other Ashberys, and leads a largely independent life. (Three John Ashberys)

In the context of this thesis, we could posit a different triad again, beginning with the Primary Tranter: the author of twenty books of poems and dozens of other projects prior to 2005, all of which belong to the past of this thesis (and indeed to literary history) and hang behind it like a stage backdrop.

Then there is the Secondary Tranter: the older poet who, from early 2005 to late 2008, wrote the poems that make up the creative component of this thesis, much of which forms a running commentary on, as well as a further development of that forty-year tract of literary history, bringing its themes and arguments from the past into the present continuous time of this discourse.
Then we have the Tertiary Tranter, or ‘Third Man’: the critic casting his net over that field of action labelled by the gerund ‘writing’ and chloroforming it into the still and silent noun ‘literature’, which forms this exegesis of both those earlier writers’ work.

There is yet another more theoretical triad to be considered. Kate Lilley has suggested that Tranter is ‘a double agent, working for both the modernists and the postmodernists’. (Lilley, ‘Tranter’s Plots’) But there is one more dimension to add to this analysis.

It is no accident that Tranter is attracted to the work of Alfred Hitchcock; he too occupies a liminal position in the Venn diagram where three fields of theory overlap:

If there is an author whose name epitomizes this interpretive pleasure of ‘estranging’ the most banal content, it is Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock ... is a ‘postmodern’ phenomenon *par excellence*. .... Yet is Hitchcock, for all that, a ‘postmodernist’ *avant la lettre*? How should one locate him with reference to the triad *realism-modernism-postmodernism* elaborated by Fredric Jameson with a special view to the history of cinema, where ‘realism’ stands for the classic Hollywood — that is, the narrative code established in the 1930s and 1940s, ‘modernism’ for the great auteurs of the 1950s and 1960s, and ‘postmodernism’ for the mess we are in today — that is, for the obsession with the traumatic Thing which reduces every narrative grid to a particular failed attempt to ‘gentrify’ the Thing?

For a dialectical approach, Hitchcock is of special interest precisely in so far as he dwells on the borders of this classificatory triad — any attempt at classification brings us sooner or later to a paradoxical result according to which Hitchcock is in a way *all three of them at the same time*: ‘realist’ (from the old Leftist critics and historians in whose eyes his name epitomizes the Hollywood ideological narrative closure, up to Raymond Bellour, for whom his films vary the Oedipal trajectory and are as such ‘both an eccentric and exemplary version’ of the classic Hollywood narrative), ‘modernist’ (i.e. a forerunner and at the same time one in the line of the great auteurs who, at the margins of Hollywood or outside it, subverted its narrative codes —
Welles, Renoir, Bergman ...), ‘postmodernist’ (if for no other reason, then for the above-mentioned transference his films set in motion among the interpreters). (Žižek 2–3)

Dreams

The word ‘dream’ occurs frequently in Tranter’s poetry, sometimes specifically identified with poetics. ‘[T]his book’s a catalogue of dreams,’ he writes in one poem, continuing with an origami metaphor: “Waking up” is just like / going to sleep in reverse, / if you need a simile / dreams are similes of life / whose dreams are double images / reflecting everything’ (Crying, 17).

Addressing the four narrative poems that make up The Floor of Heaven, Philip Mead suggests a cinematic, feminist and psychoanalytic reading:

One of the equations at work in these poems is the tripartite analogy between dreams, life-stories and film. They are life-stories that sound like dreams that have the narrative style and structure of films. That is why I am suggesting here a frame of reading that is cinematic, feminist and psychoanalytic:

“In psychoanalysis, a patient comes to the analyst with a story to tell. But the story is incoherent, full of gaps, chronological reversals, mistaken causal relations. It is untherapeutic because it doesn’t explain. It does not put the driving force of unconscious desire into useful relation with the patient’s life narrative. Together, analyst and analysand [or writer and reader] must attempt to construct the better story, one that will account not only for the recollected “facts”, but also for the thrust of unconscious desire that speaks through recollection and repetition. Analyst works with analysand towards the making of a narrative whose syntax and rhetoric are more plausible and convincing, more adequate to represent the weight of the past on the present and the present’s capacity to reorder the past, than the ragged discourse originally presented
Freud reminds us that ‘Every dream has at least one point at which it is unfathomable; a central point, as it were, connecting it with the unknown.’ (Interpretation, 24) And despite the fact that most dreams are highly visual, we find that ‘…one scarcely finds a dream without a double meaning or a play upon words.’ (Interpretation, 268). Language is the lock, and play is the key, for dreams, films and poems.

As with any dream, an explicator may be needed. As in psychoanalysis, so in literary criticism. An outsider can often see the meaning of a dream more clearly than the dreamer can, because no resistance is involved. An apple for teacher, it is said: a patient will sometimes provide a dream that seems to have been put together to satisfy the symbolic structure of the analytic session and that will please the psychoanalyst: so the poet (the Secondary Tranter, here) may provide a poem (‘The Anaglyph’ is perhaps an example) to satisfy the reader, in this case the Tertiary Tranter or Third Man.

The Quest

Tranter’s first published poem was a lyrical description of a country landscape⁴⁹. Though his early models had been loose free verse⁵⁰, this poem featured Tranter’s trademark alliteration, assonance and trochaic meter: ‘The

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⁵⁰In… my last year at high school [a] teacher… gave me various books, including… some poetry books: Chinese poetry [The Penguin paperback selection edited by Professor Davis], of which I liked Li Po (Li Bai) and Tu Fu especially; Gerard Manley Hopkins, D H Lawrence. They were clever choices on his part: they look easy, none of them rhymed, and they’re full of gorgeous images and lovely verbal music. (Slade interview, 1998)
far-off silent mountains are / dusted blue with distance... ”

By the time a decade had passed, Tranter had lived overseas and had traveled widely through Europe and across southern Asia, and in his first book (Parallax, 1970) several landscapes — now urban and international — alternate with character studies or portraits, and with more self-referential and experimental work. This pattern of thematic alternation and gradually increasing experiment is followed through his first ten books, up to and including At The Florida (1993).

After that, the more conventional poems give way to a range of very disparate experimental works: long narrative poems with a melodramatic tone, experimental prose pieces, computer-generated experiments, variations on other writers’ poems and environments, including other writers’ poems with most of the words removed, poems with various constraints, and parodies and cartoons.

Some poets, and Robert Gray is an apt Australian example, settle on a topic, style and tone of voice early in their career and see no reason to strive after change or experiment. Tranter is not one of these, and his career seems to embody Charles Olson’s dictum ‘What does not change is the will to change.’

There are complex shifts in Tranter’s first thirty years of writing, but the basic tendency involves a turning towards and then away from the lyric mode. The early writing in Parallax sought a poetic form for a quasi-religious role, aiming for a lyrical insight or a personal epiphany of some kind. The landscape was interrogated as a meaningful counterpart or projection of the soul’s desires, with echoes of Platonic philosophy and Zen Buddhism.

But the landscape, however widely sought and however persistently queried, failed to say much. The poem ‘Kabul’ is an example of a fragment of insight

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brought back from foreign travel: ‘From the broken, moving window / you see them alone in the desert afternoon / mad and burnt in a chorus of camels / walking somewhere invisible... / They dream their legacy of light / whatever the season.’ The Afghan tribesmen he focusses on here — the year was 1967 — were more likely to have something military in mind than any ‘legacy of light’.

However ‘poetic’ the imagery in his first poem, Tranter had grown up on a farm, where landscape was something you either made a living out of, if you could, or ignored. In 2005 he outlined his later (that is, more mature) objections to the use of landscape as an obliging provider of poetic insights:

The idea that a landscape has any poetic significance seems bizarre to me. I remember quite distinctly — one day in the early 1980s — hearing the British art critic Peter Fuller, on the radio, saying ‘of course, some landscapes are more meaningful than others’, and I laughed so hard I hurt a muscle in my jaw. Of course when you think about a landscape with any degree of nostalgia, it seems to glow with meaning, but usually that’s just your own nostalgia being reflected back at you.

As the sixties cross-faded into the seventies, Romanticism was in the air. We have seen how Tranter queried and tested Rimbaud’s place in myth and history in ‘Rimbaud and the Pursuit of the Modernist Heresy’ published in New Poetry in 1974. A later issue of that magazine (v 24 n 3, 1976) claimed on its front cover that “Romance Is Taking Over”, yet when Tranter came to review (New Poetry’s editor) Robert Adamson’s 1977 book Cross the Border for Meanjin in 1978, he attacked Adamson’s insistence on romantic myth, calling the middle section of the book ‘a catalogue of pretensions’ and attacking the final section, the ‘Grail Poems’, as ‘titillating decoration’. Rather than seat Adamson among the great Romantics such as Shelley and Keats, Tranter compared his art in this


sequence to the ‘Pre-Raphaelite painting it so much resembles.’ To Tranter, Romanticism offered more of a pose than a role.

The four long narrative poems in The Floor of Heaven (1992) can be seen as romantic tales — they involve quest elements involving arduous travel, doomed passion and struggle with powerful opponents — though the brushwork is more Expressionist than Pre-Raphaelite, and the odd blend of crude realism (milieu, décor, dialogue) clashes with the urge to melodrama (plot, character) to push the work more in the direction of film noir. There are lyric moments, but they are not voiced by the writer, rather by the characters, who themselves are hardly poets. The book found an audience, but Tranter turned away from the genre and never used it again.

He now developed a different kind of story-telling utilising the computer-assisted deconstruction and reconstruction of texts, both poetry and prose. A key part of the process was the extreme constriction of the constraints imposed by the method. A small book of seven tales (Different Hands, 1998) was produced, then Tranter put the technique aside.

In Blackout (2000) the constraint consisted of using only words from three prior texts, and in the word-order of the original texts, though interleaved. Again, the technique — having been exercised and exemplified — was not used again.

Ultra (2001) saw a return to a freer form of writing. The narrative drive and rapid character construction of The Floor of Heaven is visible from time to time, and so too is a cavalier attitude to decorum and tone, perhaps derived from the more experimental work of the previous decade. Proust is mentioned in one of the poems, and if one could imagine À la recherche du temps perdu torn to shreds and boiled down to a couple of pages of free verse, a kind of Proustian ambition on a small scale — a drift towards social commentary, and character seen as the plaything of fate — is visible here and there. There are portraits in Ultra, but they are are fragmented

and multi-dimensional; the tendency to attempt well-formed subjects has been abandoned. The trajectory from *Parallax* (1970) to *Ultra* (2001) is beginning to look like that from Degas to the late Picasso.

A six-month stay in Cambridge England resulted in the publication of *Borrowed Voices* in Nottingham in 2002. The dozen poems are free translations, mistranslations, versions of or answers to various poems by other writers. They are precursors to the poems in the first half of this thesis, though the methodology is looser and more conventional, and provides space for commentary, critique and parody.

At a further remove from conventional verse is ‘The Malley Variations’, a group of poems based loosely on the work of hoax poet Ern Malley (2005). Here the lyric urges of a dozen prior texts are mutilated by computer analysis and reconstruction, blended with the fake lyric voice of the hoax poet, then rewritten and tidied up for public consumption.

The role of the poet in society has grown ever more difficult to define and justify. The Romantics strove to find a role for poetry that might ameliorate, distract from or make up for the social depredations of the Industrial Revolution and perhaps place Nature on the throne left vacant by religion. In the two centuries since, the role of public conscience and public entertainer has been comprehensively taken over by the novel, cinema and finally television and video. John Ashbery has denied one function for poetry: ‘There is the view that poetry should improve your life. I think people confuse it with the Salvation Army.’ ⁵⁵ John Forbes could say with some bitter justification that ‘society has elected me / to decorate / its falling apart with a useless panache’.

So just what is Tranter aiming at with this roundabout journey towards then away from the lyric, a path that eventually turns towards a series of experimental texts that are abandoned as soon as built? Perhaps the poems themselves are enough, and hardly want explicating: ‘a poem should not mean,

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but be’, as Archibald MacLeish wrote in ‘Ars Poetica’, 1926. But Tranter’s poems are full of references to the world they live in, and gain a large part of their energy from the linkages they forge between poetry, narrative, literature, movies and life itself: if anything, they mean too much.

In his well-known story ‘The Figure in the Carpet’ (1896), Henry James tells how a young critic seeks to unravel the secret theme or key that the famous author Hugh Vereker says lies at the centre of everything he has written. It’s visible, Vereker says, but hard to discern, like a subtle pattern woven into a carpet. Alas, after many plot twists and turns, no secret is found. Todorov comes to an enlightened conclusion about this quest:

If Henry James’s secret, the figure in the carpet of his work, the string which unites the pearls of the separate tales, is precisely the existence of a secret, how does it come about that we can now name the secret, render absence present? Am I not thereby betraying the fundamental Jamesian precept which consists in this affirmation of absence, this impossibility of designating truth by its name? But criticism too (including mine) has always obeyed the same law: it is the search for truth, not its revelation, a treasure hunt rather than the treasure itself, for the treasure can only be absent. Once this ‘reading of James’ is over, we must then begin reading James, set out upon a quest for the meaning of his oeuvre, though we know that this meaning is nothing other than the quest itself. (177)
Appendix 1: A D Hope: ‘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.
Appendix 2: ‘Australia Revisited’⁵⁶

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

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.

⁵⁶(by John Tranter, with apologies to Professor A D Hope).

The poem, written circa 1963, is previously unpublished.
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.
Appendix 3: John Forbes: ‘Serenade’

Walking home down King St past
the Sunshine discount house
the sky to the west was glowing
like the windows full of Italian furniture
& thanks to its low rent coloratura
or a style suggesting its own collapse
for a moment I felt *le sang des poètes*

— Tonight Show version —
coursing through me, natively brilliant
& removed completely from that inertia
you cancel your career with
& make this gaudy stuff
revert to just the junk it is
as the negro beauty holding the globe
gets switched off
by Dis reclaiming her / & this evening
like the rest, becomes a blank myth
you ask a question of
& then stay up all night avoiding the answer
with your deft imitation of electricity
& speed, convincing you like a parade.

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Appendix 4: Some of the Sources for ‘Rereading Rimbaud’


‘Anguish’: Derivation unknown.

‘Antics’: Derivation unknown.

‘Barbarians’: Derivation unknown.

‘Bottom of the Harbour’: Derivation unknown.

‘Childhood’: Derived from Rimbaud’s ‘Enfance’ (Bernard, 235).

‘Dawn’: Derived from Rimbaud’s ‘Aube’ (Bernard, 268).


‘Eighteen Fairies’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Fairy’ (Bernard, 288).

‘Flowers’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Fleurs’ (Bernard, 269).

‘Genius’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Génie’ (Bernard, 289).

‘Horticulture’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘H’ (Bernard, 284). Published in *Urban Myths, 2006.*


‘Marinara’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Marine’ (Bernard, 271). Published in *Urban Myths, 2006.*

‘Martian Movie’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Chanson de la plus haute tour’ (Bernard, 215).

‘Metro’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Métropolitain’ (Bernard, 274). Published in *Urban Myths, 2006.*

‘Movements’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Mouvement’ (Bernard, 281). Published in *Urban Myths, 2006.*

‘New Beauty’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Being Beautous’ (Bernard, 244).
‘Ornery’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Ornières’ (Bernard, 258).


‘Phrases’: Derivation unknown.


‘Scenes’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Scènes’ (Bernard, 278). Published in Urban Myths, 2006.

‘Shames’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Honte’ (Bernard, 229). Note: ‘Honte’ (‘shame’) is the last poem of the series ‘Fêtes de la Patience’ (‘Festivals of Endurance’) and does not belong to the ‘Illuminations’. Published in Urban Myths, 2006


‘Story’: Derivation unknown, possibly ‘Conte’ (Bernard, 240). Published in Urban Myths, 2006.


‘Tenure Track’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Guerre’ (Bernard, 289).


‘Winter Maps’: Derived from Arthur Rimbaud’s ‘Fête d’Hiver’ (Bernard, 272).
Appendix 5: The Trenter

*Trenter* — The form was first given formal recognition by the critic Ernst Dreizig, in the early thirties. In his article ‘Thirty Years of German Expressionism: Poetics and Perversion’ he traced the use of this form to the French poet Jean-Claude Trentignant, who in 1830 published (only thirty copies of) a small volume of 30-line poems, in Alexandrines, with the rhyme scheme:

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   a b a c b d c e d f e g f h g i h j i k j l k m l n n o
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the interlinked rhymes of which (except for the first *aba* and the last *ono*) look alternately forward and backward three lines at a time. Trentignant regarded this pattern as psychologically superior to the couplet, which he claimed was ‘monotonous and contaminated by English pragmatism’, and to the standard *abab* quatrains. It could be claimed to extend the range of discourse available to the sonnet without falling into garrulity. It is now rarely met with. Its name comes of course from the French *trente*, for ‘thirty’. 
Appendix 6: 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.⁵⁷ Here’s John Tranter poem ‘An Absolutely Extraordinary Recital’.

The word goes round Repins,  
the murmur goes round Lorenzini’s,  
at Tattersal’s, 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.

⁵⁷The poem is previously unpublished.
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;
and 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 withen 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, 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 with an oddly similar unusual central event. His poem is titled ‘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, 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 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.

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.

Thanks are due to Edmund Keeley for noting the Seferis poem, and for pointing out this similarity.
Appendix 7: Contour map: Kiora district

The Tranter home farm (‘Glendoea’, in the Kiora district, near Moruya, on the south coast of New South Wales) is shown just below and to the right of the centre of the map. The dark horizontal line is a crease in the paper. The map from which this image was copied was prepared by the Australian Section, Imperial General Staff, and printed in 1943, the year of John Tranter’s birth.
Appendix 8: By Blue Ontario’s Shore

I listened to the Phantom by Ontario’s shore,
I heard the voice arising demanding bards [...]  
Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill’d from poems pass away,  
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes [...]  
The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr’d ...
— Walt Whitman, ‘By Blue Ontario’s Shore’ (from *Leaves of Grass*)

*Marion* owned a van from which  
the *Sunset View* was portable and thus  
perennial; his pal *Homer* had a mobile home  
in whose polished sides a swarming universe  
waivered and slipped from future to past tense  
along a wobbling strip of two-lane blacktop.  
Could they, twain, yet be one, in the hamlet  
of *Sodus*? Homer and his buddy Marion  
came to a *Huddle* by the *Owls’ Nest*;  
the *Mud Mills* turned *Yellow* in the sunset  
and a noble thought struck them both  
both near the *Noble Corner*, though their motives  
were muddled. Marion was a Morrison  
and had a twin brother, name of *Clyde*,  
who had brought down a fog of shame  
on the elder branch of the clan. When  
the torpid fifties leered over the horizon,  
*Clyde*, like many an anxious Communist  
before him, had fled to torrid *Mexico*  
and wallowed there in a mess of memories,  
then hove north to the city of the Angels  
in search of *Joy* and a *Fair Haven*. There he rose  
like a *Phoenix* from *Furnaceville*, ashes  
in the fume and updraft of the sixties, lost  
like the snapshot of a girl he had been dating,
name of Little Egypt, Gypsy Queen, and in a name-change (to Wayne) found his soul's Center and his future waiting. ⁶⁰

⁶⁰Names in italics are the names of towns in upstate New York by the shore of Lake Ontario. John Ashbery grew up there, near the hamlet of Sodus. John Wayne claimed that his real name was Marion Morrison. This poem suggests that his identity was ambiguous. First published in Jacket 27, April 2005.
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