

# Staying Alive: A Contemporary Rejuvenation of the *Biji*

A Dissertation Submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

To the Department of Communications

In the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

at

The University of Technology

Sydney

2015

By Dave Drayton

Primary Supervisor: Dr Sue Joseph



### **Certificate Of Original Authorship**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

Dave Drayton

Date: 20/08/2015

### **Acknowledgements**

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the help of the following people:

Sue Joseph, for guiding me through Honours and into post-graduate study, being a resounding sounding board, and a source of energy when it all seemed too much.

Jo and Nicky, for encouraging and facilitating my love of learning and this gargantuan undertaking.

Dr Jack George James Rudi McLean Tsonis, for his support and encouragement from within the deep height of the Atterton Academy.

Justine Keating, for her patience and support.

The following people and institutes were also extremely helpful in their suggestions, recommendations, clarifications, translations, and inspiration: Tim Kinsella, Dr Esther Klein, Daniel Levin Becker, Chinese Studies Association of Australia, Marcel Benabou, Dr Carrie Reed, James Mackay.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Certificate Of Original Authorship.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>10</b>
Justification of Scholarly Interest	16
<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	
<b><i>Biji</i> .....</b>	<b>22</b>
A Brief History of <i>Biji</i>	25
Existing Scholarship	32
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	
<b>Oulipo .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Anoulipism	40
Sonnet	46
Sestina	48
Oulipopo	49
Oufinopo	50
Anoulipism & Genre	53
Oulipo in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	56
Contemporary Critique of Oulipo	59
Oulipian Engagement with Asiatic Forms	65
<b>CHAPTER 4</b>	
<b>Critical Analysis.....</b>	<b>69</b>
Douglas Coupland	73
Owen Kelly	83

Ouyang Yu	85
The Genre-ness of <i>Biji</i>	88
The Influence & Traces of <i>Biji</i> in Contemporary Fiction	91
Contemporary <i>Zuihitsu</i>	97
Kimiko Hahn	102
Anthony Peck	108
Donald Richie	110

## CHAPTER 5

<b>The Contemporary Form</b> .....	113
Why <i>Biji</i> Here & Now?	120
Unintentional <i>Biji</i>	138

## CHAPTER 6

<b>Creative Component (or: How I wrote one potential contemporary <i>biji</i>)</b> .....	167
What's In A Name?	167
Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness	169
Nomenophobia	182
Omegaphobia	183
Docerophobia	184
Aibohphobia	184
Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia	185
Futuraphobia	186
Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Oulipo	186

## CHAPTER 7

<b>Reflection</b> .....	193
-------------------------	-----

## **CHAPTER 8**

<b>Conclusion.....</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear &amp; Loneliness.....</b>	<b>228</b>

## Abstract

Staying Alive: A Contemporary Rejuvenation of the *Biji*

Dave Drayton

2015

In 1998 John Minford and Tong Man attempted to transpose to contemporary English an excerpt from the Qing era *biji* *Liao-chai chih-yi* [*Strange Stories From A Chinese Studio*], by Pu Songling. In the wake of this attempt Douglas Coupland, Ouyang Yu, and Owen Kelly have all published contemporary English language *biji*. This thesis will analyse, and contextualise, the most recent development in this centuries-old form. Following analysis of the four contemporary *biji* above I will propose a selection of texts that could be included within this budding corpus.

The creative component of this thesis, titled *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness*, offers another potential example of contemporary English language *biji*. Reflecting the influence of the Paris-based writing group Oulipo on the methodology used during the theoretical research, *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness* explores the potential for the *biji* as a textual site conducive to constraint and experimentation.





## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*Is it possible to construct a contemporary long-form narrative in the style of a *biji* collection through a process of *anoulipism*? And what form does the contemporary English language *biji* take?*

The exegetical component of my doctorate will be comprised of eight chapters, in order: Introduction, *Biji*, Oulipo, Critical Analysis, The Contemporary Form, Creative Component, Reflection, and a Conclusion. This introduction will clarify terms and the framework through which I will be conducting my study; justify the need for such scholarship; and provide an overview of the contents of the thesis.

But first: what is the Oulipo – or more accurately, ‘who’? And what is a *biji*?

Oulipo and *biji* are both, if nothing else, chronically miscategorised, often misunderstood, and perpetually intriguing elements of international literature.

Oulipo is a French writing group – openly eschewing the labels of a ‘movement’ or ‘literary school’ (Queneau [1965] 1986, p.51) – that originated in 1960 through the efforts of Noël Arnaud, Jacques Bens, Claude Berge, Jacques Duchateau, Latis, François Le Lionnais, Jean Lescure, Raymond Queneau, Jean Queval and Albert-Marie Schmidt.

Its name is a shortening of *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* or ‘workshop for potential literature’ in English, and the group’s five-and-counting decade existence has seen it pursue potential literature and literature written to various constraints. A personal favourite description of the group and its exploits is offered by Philip Howard, columnist for *The Times* in London, who references it as: “The French avant-garde

coterie famous for its masturbatory and literary experiments” (in Levin Becker 2012, p.7).

‘Constraint’ in this instance refers to self-imposed restrictive systems that aid the construction of texts. Such constraints can vary in intricacy from sonnets to complex mathematical algorithms dictating sentence structure, syllable count and more. As Oulipian Harry Mathews defines it: “...a form that makes you write something that you wouldn't normally say, or in a way that you would never have said it. The form is so demanding that you can't get around it” (Mathews in Ashbery 1987, p.43).

As for *potentielle*, its meaning in the oulipian<sup>1</sup> sense is best described by founder Raymond Queneau:

The word ‘potential’ concerns the very nature of literature, that is, fundamentally it’s less a question of literature strictly speaking than of supplying forms for the good use one can make of literature. We call potential literature the search for new forms and structures which may be used by writers in any way they see fit (Queneau in Arnaud 1986, p.xi).

The more learnt about *biji* – or ‘pen-notes’ in English – the harder it is to present a definitive description. Chan offers a brief but encompassing overview of the genre, but not without also noting the difficulty of classifying the form, a common scholarly dilemma. Chan states that the *biji* genre:

...was characterized in particular by entries on a wide range of topics – tales of the supernatural, notes on barbarian lore and customs, incidents of historic significance, brief remarks on literature and art, short treatises on geography, and so on. Hybrid as it already was, the *biji* continued to expand its scope in

---

<sup>1</sup> In accordance with French standards of demonymy, the word *oulipian* will only be capitalised when it refers to a person.

later dynasties, and while some collections evince a certain degree of thematic specialization, the typical *biji* often turns out to be no more than a smorgasbord of historical, literary, and philological writings. It is partly for this reason that the *biji* has been described (albeit in a rather exaggerated way) as an ‘anti-genre’ that flaunts the established, more clear-cut categories (Chan 1998, p.8).

This dilemma has been grappled with most recently by Gang Liu, and I add my own theories to his classification of *biji* in my thesis, with a focus on the authorial act of prescribing genre and how that classification can aid our understanding of the limited number of contemporary English language *biji*.

In order to answer these questions I am required to define in a manner clear enough that investigation can proceed uninhibited both the genre of *biji*, and the pursuits of Oulipo, with special concern given to their anoulipic research.

The *Biji* chapter (chapter 2) examines briefly the history and variety of extant *biji*, providing an overview of the genre, its foundations, developments, complications arising from conflict in definition, and some seminal texts in the vast corpus available. The chapter also examines existing scholarship of the *biji* form and proposes new areas of study covered in this thesis. A brief analysis of *zuihitsu*, a Japanese form that came to prominence during the Heian period (794-1185), commonly associated and comparable to *biji*, will also be included. A history of *biji* and scholarship on the genre will be provided in chapter 2, with specific focus on Gang Liu’s doctoral dissertation on Liu Yiqing’s Song-era *biji* collection *Qiantang Yishi* [*Anecdotes of Qiantang*] (2010).

Chapter 3 on Oulipo provides a brief history of the French writing workshop and its governing philosophies of potential and constraint. Looking briefly at some seminal texts, I will examine how these philosophies manifest in the construction of oulipian texts. The chapter includes an analysis of the process of anoulipism – one of the two

branches of Oulipo's work (the other being synthoulipism) – drawing on critical analysis of select texts. An examination of groups like the Oulipopo (or workshop for potential detective fiction) will be used to look at the treatment of genre as a governing constraint. Analysis of Clute and Edwards' *The Maltese Touch Of An Evil* (2011) is likewise included as it presents the most thorough and sustained published attempt by non-Oulipians to apply the mode of anoulipism to an existing set of texts, in this instance linked by their classification in the genre of film noir.

The chapter draws on extensive research of original oulipian texts – such as excerpts from the *Bibliothèque Oulipienne*; the *Oulipo Compendium*, compiled and edited by Harry Mathews and Alistair Brotchie; and works by Perec, Queneau, and others – as well as scholarship on the group, notably book length contributions made by Warren Motte, Daniel Levin Becker, and David Bellos.

The Critical Analysis chapter (chapter 4) features an analysis of three contemporary English language *biji*: Douglas Coupland's 'Survivor' (2009) (this will be accompanied by an analysis of the novel that was developed from it, *Worst. Person. Ever.* (2013)); Owen Kelly's 'Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*' (2010); and Ouyang Yu's *On the Smell of an Oily Rag: Speaking English, thinking Chinese and living Australian* (2007). After extensive research these three texts represent, to my knowledge, the only examples of contemporary English *biji* where the author has explicitly claimed affinity with the genre.

To bolster these analyses, an investigation of three contemporary English language *zuihitsu* (the forms continue, even across languages and history, an oblique parallel) – Kimiko Hahn's *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (2006); Anthony Peck's *Pillow Book of a Manic Depressive* (2011); and Donald Richie's *A Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics* (2007) – is also included. *Zuihitsu* is a Japanese genre that emerged during the Heian

period (794-1185 AD), its fractured form and mix of registers and styles bears a remarkable resemblance to the Chinese *biji*. Of interest, the revival of the *zuihitsu* form seemed to garner more interest in that genre than has thus far been exhibited in response to the three *biji*. As the focus of the present study is contemporary English language *biji*, prominence will be given to the analysis of these contemporary texts. As Le Lionnais declares: “Analysis must precede synthesis” (Le Lionnais in Levin Becker 2012, p.266).

Reflecting on this analysis, I examine notions of genre, Asian and Western, in order to posit a definition of the contemporary take on this ancient written form. Further to that this chapter examines points of contact and comparison between oulipian philosophy and the *biji* form, and prior oulipian engagement with Asian writing.

The Contemporary Form chapter (chapter 5) will use the analyses of chapter 4 to propose a potential definition of contemporary *biji*, and will identify a number of texts as such. This chapter also investigates the act of titling a work to establish affinity with others in the genre, and the historical trajectory and effect of this act. The work of David Shields<sup>2</sup> is investigated and responded to as a result of the similarities between his literary collage method and the practice of composing *biji*. Brief analyses of the identified texts will explicate the reasons for their inclusion, and will expand, ever so slightly, the size of this budding form.

Working with Chance’s theory of formless form (*Formless In Form: Kenkō, Turezuregusa, and the Rhetoric of Japanese Fragmentary Prose*, 2007) Chapters 4 and 5 will be used to establish a corpus of texts that either unconsciously represent or consciously align with contemporary *biji*.

---

<sup>2</sup> Shields’ literary collage work includes *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (2011) and *How Literature Saved My Life* (2013).

The Creative Component Reflection chapter (chapter 6) examines how my *biji* collection has taken shape through the process of anoulipism. I describe the proposed model for a contemporary *biji*, *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness*, which is the creative component of this PhD. This chapter also reveals the broader organisational structure that has allowed the construction of the creative component, and dissects some of the other oulipian techniques – isovocalism, anaphora, lipograms – in the creative text.<sup>3</sup>

A brief examination of texts such as *Soul Mountain*, by Nobel Prize winner Gao Xingjian, and the short stories of Yu Hua and Yoko Ogawa also feature, as they are benchmark contemporary examples of how the Chinese literary tradition of the supernatural and the strange has morphed and been adapted recently. Similarly, discussion of late-Qing era author Wu Jianren's novel *Ershinian muduzhi guaixianzhuang* [*Vignettes From The Late Ch'ing: Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*]<sup>4</sup> is used to exemplify how a *biji* collection, and the construction of the *biji*, can be framed within a broader narrative framework. A similar theory is applied to the narrative constructed through the authorial commentary in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai Zhiyi* [*Strange Tales From A Chinese Studio*].<sup>5</sup>

Chapter 7 will provide a reflection on the research and creative processes, examining how the project and written product developed throughout my candidature.

---

<sup>3</sup> Isovocalism is a process by which a new text is composed around the vowels, remaining in sequence, from an existing source text; anaphora here refers to the literary technique of beginning successive lines with the same word or phrase to create a repetitious parallelism; a lipogram is a text composed with the conscious omission by the author of one or more letters.

<sup>4</sup> Hereafter *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*.

<sup>5</sup> This portion of the research is indebted to theories proposed by Judith Zeitlin in her *Historian Of The Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale* (1993).

The final chapter will present the results of my anoulipic investigation into the contemporary English language application of traditional Chinese *biji* and attempt an answer to the proposition that began this inquiry: Is it possible to construct a contemporary long-form narrative in the style of a *biji* collection through a process of anoulipism? And what form does the contemporary English language *biji* take?

### **Justification of Scholarly Interest**

My own investigation is concerned mainly with literary theory, as opposed to a theory of literature, as defined by James J. Y Liu.<sup>6</sup> As such, while parallels are occasionally drawn between the function and nature of *biji* literature, past and present, the crux of my investigation rests on aspects of the literature being examined: its form, genre, style, and technique. Scholarly investigation of extant *biji* texts is most frequently concerned with the former – how the form functioned socially and historically; what geographic, anthropological, societal, and historical information can be mined from them. I am more interested in the literary potential of the form in contemporary writing, particularly in English.

While one Australian has been elected to the ranks of the Oulipo, Ross Chambers in 1961, he is no longer involved in the group's activities (amongst other things, monthly luncheons) and only ever contributed limited texts during his active tenure: namely an essay on inadvertent (i.e. erroneous) translation that has since been disqualified as 'oulipian' due to a lack of intention (Mathews 2005, p.161). Now based at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he is Emeritus Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures, Chambers considers himself a 'pseudo-Oulipian'.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Liu differentiates between 'theory of literature' and 'literary theory' as follows: "[T]he former being concerned with the basic nature and functions of literature, the latter with aspects of literature, such as form, genre, style, and technique" (1975, p.1).



Add to that the fact that Georges Perec – one of the better known Oulipo members alongside Italo Calvino – first experienced warning signs of the lung cancer that would eventually take his life while posted as a writer in residence at the University of Queensland.<sup>8</sup> He was in Australia throughout 1981, at work on the unfinished *53 Jours* [*53 Days*]. Australia can hardly be blamed for Perec's deteriorating health upon his return from Brisbane; he was, after all, a heavy smoker his entire adult life. However, it can clearly be seen that, despite engagements on the fringes of the group, Australia's track record with the Oulipo is far from extensive and less than positive.

It is my hope that this thesis will serve to reignite Australian consideration of oulipian writing and writing to constraint in general.<sup>9</sup> The oulipian sphere of influence is slowly expanding. Just as the members of the notoriously shy collective have steadily grown from their initial ten to forty-one at last count, so too has the number of writers employing constraints in their work, even if they are only loosely, if at all, associated with the Oulipo. Texts like Canadian Christian Bök's *Eunoia* and the work of contemporary British performance poets Tim Clare, Ross Sutherland and Joe Dunthorne<sup>10</sup> all represent this increase.<sup>11</sup> A collection of oulipian-inspired texts written by people who are not members of the group (with the exception of Ian Monk and Paul

---

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting, for interest's sake if nothing else, that once one is elected as a member of the Oulipo they remain so for life, regardless of their participation. In fact, members even remain so in death, and the only official way to leave the group is to commit suicide for no purpose other than to leave the group, and to do so in the presence of a notary.

<sup>8</sup> While in Australia appearing at the Sydney Writers Festival in 2014 Jacques Roubaud joked that he had been put off from visiting the country previously because of Perec's unpleasant experience.

<sup>9</sup> A tweet by Scottish Australian academic and short story writer Ryan O'Neill that proposed a 'kangaroulipo' suggests at least some existing interest.

<sup>10</sup> Audio recordings of the group's work and interviews with all three members can be heard in Schott 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Further, Lauren Elkin and Scott Esposito go so far as to suggest that it is these authors, who use oulipian tropes while not being official members of the group, are producing more interesting work than the group itself.

Fournel) is assembled in *The /n/ouliplan Analects* (Wertheim & Viegner 2007). An alphabetical survey of constrained writing in modern English, it features contributions from the likes of Bök, Johanna Drucker, and Rob Wittig. The unknown variable *n* reflects the myriad ways that oulipian techniques have infiltrated and informed an increasingly large scope of potential.<sup>12</sup> The influence of the Oulipo in North America is so substantial that Louis Bury has dedicated a book to it.<sup>13</sup> Since 2010 no less than ten books have been published in English by members of Oulipo (Elkin and Esposito 2013, p.6) yet, sadly, this growing global interest in the group is not reflected in the Australian writing community. Jacques Roubaud's appearance at the 2014 Sydney Writers Festival, however, reflects a burgeoning shift in the group's recognition in English speaking countries. But beyond what this study offers with regard to the limited Oulipo scholarship in Australia, is what it contributes to broader Australian engagement with Chinese, and more generally, Asian written culture.

According to Ouyang Yu: "China purchases a total of 50,000 titles annually from the West while the West only buys an appalling 2,000 titles per annum from China" (Ouyang 2007, p.xi). It's a dire statistic, and while Ouyang cites no source for the numbers, similarly dire statistics appear elsewhere.

The Index Translationum, a searchable online database maintained by UNESCO, the cultural arm of the United Nations Organization, tracks the flow of translated works internationally. In his erudite and enjoyable examination of the act of translation David Bellos claims the database "can be used as a rough measure of the huge imbalances in

---

<sup>12</sup> Since the foundation of groups such as the Oulipopo (*Ouvroir de Littérature Policière Potentielle* or Workshop of Potential Mystery Fiction, founded by François Le Lionnais) and the Oupeinpo (Workshop of Potential Painting, also founded by Le Lionnais) it has been common practice for similar upstart groups in various fields – cooking, film-making, mathematics, tragic-comedy – to use the Ou-x-po formula; *Workshop for Potential X*.

<sup>13</sup> Bury, L. 2014. *Exercises In Criticism: The Theory And Practice of Literary Constraint*, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign, London, Dublin.

translation in the world today” (Bellos 2012, p.209). From the 2000-09 statistics available on this site it can be seen that during that time, 5,794 books were translated from English to Chinese; in the reverse direction, a mere 134 titles (Bellos 2012, p.210).

Concern stems not just from reading figures among a literate public, but from much earlier stages in the development of reading habits of the Australian public. In its recent submission to the Australian Government White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century, the Asia Education Foundation<sup>14</sup> uses the term ‘Asia literate students’. The term implies a population that is educated across all facets of Asia, not only through the learning of a second language, but also through an educated engagement with business, history, geography, and, most pertinent to my own study and discussion, the arts. The submission states: “Being ‘Asia literate’ means possessing knowledge, skills and understandings of the histories, geographies, arts, cultures and languages of the diverse Asian region” (2012, p.i). The Foundation further concedes: “The challenges to progress studies of Asia are not as complex or seemingly intractable as those facing Asian languages” (2012, p.8). It is an observation that, while bleak, suggests there is a place for Asian literature in English.

Australia is now in what has been dubbed the Asian Century (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011), and while as a nation we have successfully engaged with Asia, and nations like China particularly, in the fields of business and technology, our cultural engagement continues to lag behind.

In its *Australia In The Asian Century 2011* issues paper, the Australian Government cites as a point of necessary discussion the ways in which Australia has engaged with Asia recently, and the need to strike a balance with this engagement, asking: “Have

---

<sup>14</sup> A Foundation with more than two decades of work promoting and supporting Asia literacy in Australian schooling, advising on policy and implementation and facilitating educators’ engagement in program innovations.

Australia's social and cultural links with Asia kept pace with our economic integration?" (Commonwealth of Australia 2011, p.14). I would argue that they have not. When discussing the preparations for the White Paper it has commissioned on *Australia in the Asian Century*, the Australian Government acknowledges this imbalance and says that the paper will consider "opportunities for a significant deepening of our engagement with Asia across the board, including in the economy, science and technology collaboration, clean energy, education, business-to-business and people-to-people links and *culture*" (Commonwealth Of Australia 2011, p.16, italics my own).

My views are in line with those of the Australia China Council, which also states the need for Australia to engage more culturally with China. In its 2011-14 Strategic Plan the Australia China Council outlines its goals:

- i. to foster perceptions of contemporary Australia in China as scientifically, technologically and educationally advanced, economically enterprising and *culturally diverse*;
- ii. to increase awareness and understanding in China of Australian society and culture; and
- iii. To increase Australians' capacity to effectively engage with China (Australia China Council 2011, italics my own).

The Strategic Plan goes on to cite as a main theme – alongside Education and Science, and Economics and Trade – Society and Culture, signifying an attempt to achieve its goals through promoting "mutual understanding through the arts, intercultural communication and cultural heritage" (Australia China Council 2011). The contemporary English language *biji* will provide a gateway to Chinese written

20

culture that can be accessed by a unilingual English speaking audience. It is heavily informed by China's literary cultural heritage and presents itself as a form of intercultural communication as a result of that fact.

Just as the contemporary *biji* of Douglas Coupland, Owen Kelly and Ouyang Yu ignited in me an interest in this small branch of China's vast literary history, a small interest that then snowballed, the long-form fictional *biji* my doctorate presents in the creative component offers a similar entry point. As Idema and Haft claim: "While the Western academic's concept of Chinese literature has changed beyond all recognition within the past forty years, for much of the general public, Chinese literature still remains pretty much what it always was: exotic, potentially fascinating, but practically unknown" (Idema & Haft 1997, p.61).

I plan to turn this potential fascination into potential literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### *BIJI*

As the focus of the present study is potential contemporary *biji*, I will not recount in full detail the various incremental progressions of the form and its classification in ancient times. For a more detailed study of this, I refer the reader to Gang Liu (2010, pp.3-20), and with specific focus on classification to Laura Hua Wu (1995, pp.52-53). Rather than focusing on the socio-political/historical development of the form, I will be theorizing the *biji* as a model for contemporary writing practice in general.

*Biji* have historically been known by a number of names, including *bitan* [brush talks], *congshan* [collected chats], *conghua* [collected talks], *xinyu* [new talks], *suichao* [casual excerpts], *suibi* [casual writing], *suilu* [casual records], *suowen* [trifles overheard], or *yishi* [remnant events].<sup>15</sup> Haunted by a long history of misclassification, *biji* is today described and defined with various degrees of non-commitment and forewarnings of assorted, near innumerable, variations. The problem of the *biji* could be stated broadly as the difficulty of classifying the transgeneric. In the introduction to his translation of Ji Yun's *Yuewei caotang biji* [*The Thatched Study of Close Scrutiny*] Keenan states:

Collections of informal notes, or *pi-chi* [*biji*], may be appreciated on many levels. As a genre, these notes have enjoyed spectacular longevity and afford modern readers unusual access to the private recesses in the official record. Chi Yün's [Ji Yun] collection, perhaps the preeminent example of the genre in late imperial China, is no exception (Keenan 1999, p.xix).

In *The Columbia History Of Chinese Literature* Hargett bemoans:

---

<sup>15</sup> See Wilkinson 2000, p.611.

It is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to define *pi-chi* in precise terms because there are no hard-and-fast rules governing its style and content. This also explains why *pi-chi* [*biji*] does not fit into any single Chinese bibliographic category. Such works are usually assigned to either the *tsa-chia* [*zajia*] (miscellaneous schools) or the *hsiao-shuo* [*xiaoshuo*] (fiction) sections in traditional bibliographies. Since there are no strict prosodic or genre rules governing *pi-chi*, the number of extant *pi-chi* collections in China could easily number in the thousands. The total would vary greatly depending on how one defines the genre (Hargett 2001, p.560).

Before surmising: “Clearly, the defining feature of *pi-chi* collections is their eclectic [*tsa*] content. There seems to be no limitation as far as content and coverage are concerned” (Hargett 2001, p.564).<sup>16</sup> Fu observes similar eclecticism in form:

The standard *biji* structure, unlike a canon or a full essay, has no continuity among various sections or categories, as in a continuous narrative or argument. Nor is there any apparent order or logical connection among various jottings within a single category or section. The only requirement is that all of the jottings in the same category should address issues central to that category (Fu 2007, p.111).

Trying to characterize the literature Dudbridge resorts to sea imagery:

...it was fluid, restless, unstable, pervasive, irregular, and rich, above all, generically unstructured. No aspect of life in China, whether political or social, religious or secular, metropolitan or provincial remained untouched by those waters. The stories would pass between members of society in many different

---

<sup>16</sup> As can be seen, some discrepancies between Romanization of terms like *biji/pi-chi* and *xiaoshuo/hsiao-shuo* occur due to differing use Wade-Giles and pinyin modes – I have kept these as they appear in the cited texts.

forms, both oral and written, they would sometimes take shape in individual collections, then perhaps flow on into others (Dudbridge 2013, pp.34-35).

Chan forewarns of one of these seemingly-too-malleable traits, diversity, before supporting another equally ambiguous one:

...*biji* has been described (albeit in a rather exaggerated way) as an ‘anti-genre’ that flaunts the established, more clear-cut categories. However, one ought to bear in mind that, despite the diversity in content, *biji* collections all share one common formal feature: the brevity of the entries (Chan 1998, p.8).

Ma and Lau also highlight the brevity, calling *biji* an “experience in verbal economy” (Ma & Lau 1978, p.xxi). Liu Yeqiu, in *Lidai biji gaishu* [*A Brief Discussion of Biji across the Ages*], also suggests the *san* [‘loose, desultory’] qualities of a text can identify it as a *biji*, which implies a variable length and focus as a description for the genre’s formal features. He writes:

I feel that the most characteristic feature of *biji* is diversity of content, a lack of links through thematic framing, records of what people heard, while as form is concerned – freedom, lack of ties – the long or the short, free composition (Liu 2003, p.6).

Ma, in the *Indiana Companion To Classical Chinese Literature*, translates *biji* as ‘note-form’ literature and further describes *biji xiaoshuo* in particular as being characterised by their brevity and casualness, and notes that generally, they appear as collections rather than as independent or singular stories (Ma 1985, pp.650-652). He adds, however:

The nature of *pi-chi* collections does not normally render them as sources for quick reference. There is no surer way to fully utilize *pi-chi* collections,



including those with individual indexes, than to read through them entry by entry, book by book (Ma 1985, p.651).

While Ma's definition appears as a cautionary warning to more historically oriented academics glossing such collections for information, his instruction rings true for those looking to uncover the literary potential of the form, too. It is only through navigating an entire text, grasping its topoi, and becoming aware of both the macro and micro contained within – the whole mosaic, and its constituent parts – that the formless form of such texts can be truly appreciated.

### **A Brief History of *Biji***

The inception of the *biji* genre occurred during the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. - 220 C.E.) and it is then that some of the earliest traits of the form were established – the brevity of entries, an apparent looseness in structure, and miscellaneous content. These twin formal features of brevity and casualness as basic tenets of the genre have prevailed among academic investigations.

Louie and Edwards propose that that *biji zhiguai* – or “records of the strange and anomalous” – are the earliest *biji*, and add that the Han dynasty volume, *Shan Hai Jing* [*The Classic of Mountain and Seas*] is the seminal forerunner of this subgenre of *biji*. Similarly, Gan Bao's *Soushen Ji* [*In Search Of The Supernatural*] is regarded as the definitive example of the genre as it had developed as important and popular pursuit of the literati during the Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties periods (Louie & Edwards 1996, p.xxviii).

Chaos is ingrained in the history of the form. Following the Han period, *biji* matured significantly amidst the turmoil of the Six Dynasties (220-589) before entering its halcyon days of development throughout the Tang (618-907) and the Song (960-1279)

dynasties. By the sixth century, the Chinese literary tradition had inchoately established seminal ideas and concepts that would allow the creation of a literary space that supported fluid approaches to both time and meaning to flourish. Critical terms like *congzhi* [literally, double intention, equivalent to multivalence], *fuyi* [literally, multiple meanings, equivalent to polysemy], *wenwai quzhi* [subtle connotations beyond the text], and *bujin zhiyi* [endless meaning, equivalent to unlimited semiosis] were already in use in the sixth century, and helped lay foundations for Chinese theories of reading and writing that would allow synecdochic texts such as *biji* to be further explored (Gu 2005, p.4).

Louie and Edwards observe that the *biji* subgenre *chuanqi* – translated as “recounting the strange” – came to prominence during the Tang dynasty (618-907) (1996, pp.xxviii-xxix). It was during this period of roughly six centuries spanning the Tang and Song dynasties that the miscellaneousness of *biji* truly came to define the genre, as the number of texts and content therein grew. This era saw the publication of famed collections like Duan Chengshi’s *Youyang Zazu* [*Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*], Luo Dajing’s *Helin Yulu* [*Jade Dew in the Crane Forest*], and Hong Mai’s *Rongzhai suibi* [*Miscellaneous Notes by Rongzhai*].

As Gang points out, almost everything that the genre can accommodate can be found in these books and others of the era (Gang 2010, p.17). It was also during this era that the first book to use the term *biji* as its title appeared – a three-chapter book attributed to Song Qi entitled *Song Jingwengong biji* [*Brush Notes of Song Jingwen gong*]. The continuing impacts of this development for both authors and readers will be discussed in more detail in the section of this thesis dedicated to examining explicit and prescriptive titling of texts.

Commenting on the writing practices of the late Ming, Kutcher observes: "People could write with different extents of freedom in different types of texts" (Kutcher 1999, p.21). *Biji* are highlighted here (Kutcher uses the term "jottings", following his translation of *biji* as "jottings" on p.5) as a personally and politically free form to work within: "An official had much more freedom in a collection of his jottings, privately printed and for limited circulation, than he did in a memorial to the throne" (Kutcher 1999, pp.21-22).

During the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), the second period that saw *biji* develop and flourish, the literary potential of *biji* was further explored as Pu Songling blended in elements of vernacular fiction *chuanqi* tales in his *Liaozhi zhiyi* [*Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio*]. It was likewise during the Qing that more academically/exegetically oriented *biji* – predecessors to the types of *biji* written by Qian Zhongshu (1998), and later still, Kelly (2010) – were further developed (Gang 2010, pp.19-20).

The form underwent another transformation as the Qing dynasty gave way to Modern China. Wu Jianren<sup>17</sup> self-reflexively employed the form in *Ershinian muduzhi guaixianzhuang* [*Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*] where the construction of the *biji*, and the text itself, is embedded in a broader, self-referential narrative. In doing so Wu Jianren helped to "exhaust the possibilities offered by [the genre], to contribute to [its] ongoing development" (Idema & Haft 1997, p.3). Originally published serially in Liang Qichao's *New Fiction* journal, Wu Jianren's *Ershinian...* was eventually completed in 1909, when the 108-chapter book was published in eight volumes. Constructed from the recollections of a young man, Silitaosheng, who began his adult life as an aide to an official with whom he later becomes a business associate, *Ershinian...* takes the form of a nested *biji*; that is, a *biji* existing as the book within the book.

---

<sup>17</sup> It was not uncommon for people to have multiple titles or names, particularly writers, and Wu Jianren was also known as Wu Wuyao.

The book's sole translation into English was courtesy of Dr. Shih Shun Liu, then Professor of East Asia Studies, Center of Asian Studies, St. John's University, New York. Published as *Vignettes From The Late Ch'ing: Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*, the abridged translation regrettably omits the text's preamble, called *xiezi*,<sup>18</sup> which depicts a depressed young scholar, Silitaosheng, obtaining a book from a man in the street. Despite this, some essence of the nested *biji* is captured in Dr. Liu's introduction:

In form, the work may not appear to a Western reader to be a novel in the strict sense of the word. It is rather a report on the times, and as such it contains many trustworthy facts cast in the form of a series of interesting episodes. It is the forthright style in which the author presents these facts that proves his high calibre... (Liu in Wu 1975, p.xv).

Finally, in 1999 John Minford and Tong Man proposed a model for a contemporary English language *biji* that possessed the same qualities as the ancient Chinese equivalent in a paper entitled 'Whose Strange Stories? P'u Sung-ling (1640–1715), Herbert Giles (1845–1935), and the *Liao-chai chih-yi*.' Citing the view of Herbert Giles' nineteenth-century translations of Pu Songling's *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio* as orientalist bowdlerisations (Minford & Tong 1999, p.1), Minford provides an erudite examination of the life and times of Giles. Parallels are drawn between the turn of the century Western view of China, and the world of Giles' time, and how it impacted him, and how these informed the version of the tales he wrote his translations of, the *Liao-chai chih-yi*.

---

<sup>18</sup> *Xiezi*, or wedge, is a term borrowed from the theatre, where it denotes a brief introductory or transitional scene.

Comparing these to Pu Songling's original *biji* Minford and Tong propose to construct a contemporary English language translation and presentation of the *Strange Tales* – Minford's reasoning: "Surely original and translation, readings East and West, all reside together with equal legitimacy in that universal imaginative universe" (Minford & Tong 1999, p.5).

The endeavour achieves a particular kind of translation that Ouyang Yu believes is necessary in an age of cultural migration: "If the avant-garde spirit fuels creative impulses, migration itself drives the urge for cultural and linguistic translation; translation that is hinged on ideas of cultural conflicts, non-understandabilities, and non-transferabilities" (Ouyang 2011 p.12).

This type of translation is also defined by David Bellos in his unparalleled study of translation, *Is That A Fish In Your Ear*. He writes: "Translators working in many languages in widely separated cultural fields – manga, subtitles, political jingles, experimental fiction, poetry and popular verse – confront and overcome stringent formal constraints. Moreover, the forms themselves are often transported across historical, linguistic and cultural space" (Bellos 2012, p.147). The latter half of the paper comprises a reconstruction of one of Giles' versions of Pu Songling's tales, 'Miss Lien-hsiang, the Fox-girl [*Lien-hsiang*]', taken apart with reference to the Chinese original and "carefully put back together again, reconstituted in as generous a surrounding medium as possible" (Minford & Tong 1999, p.5).

The Chinese text followed by Tong for the reconstruction is from the *Ch'üan-pen hsinchu Liao-chai chih-i* edited by Chu Ch'i-k'ai et al (Peking: People's Literature Press, 1989). The text for the commentaries is that found in the Chang Yu-ho ed., *Liao-chai chih-i hui-chiao hui-chu hui-p'ing pen* (Shanghai: Ku-chi Ch'u-pan she, 1983 reprint). They use the third revised edition of Giles' translation for the English text (Minford &

Tong 1999, p.5). Minford proposes that the “literary vivi-section attempts to recreate some of the features of an unusual reading experience, to build a new environment that approximates the richness of the original” (Minford & Tong 1999, pp.5-6).

The titles of many classical *biji* allude to place, and in particular, the studio, and this plays an important role in the creation of *biji*:

The literary studio (in its many variations—cottage, hermitage, library, pavilion) was the perfect architectural device for the Chinese writer of fiction. It was a space that could mirror and thus evoke the personality of a character. At the same time it was a space wherein the drama could be enacted that allowed that personality and individuality to enfold (Minford & Roberts 2008).

Minford and Roberts discuss the links between the studios and the identities of those who wrote in them, with a particular focus on the studio of Pu Songling, and studios wherein works of *biji wenxue* were composed. Minford and Roberts go on to propose their concept of the contemporary studio:

...it can be the formless studio of the mind, the personal universe that surrounds the individual, furnished and imbued with that person's favourite words, images, tunes, fabrics, vibrating with their unique scent and aura. It can be present, or past, or both, or neither... We open and close the studio doors. These studios are an extrusion of our selves; they are of us, but do not belong to us (Minford & Roberts 2008).

While they were not published until after the paper reconstructing Pu Songling's tale, Minford's theories on the studio, and how it situates *biji*, provide a greater insight into his research with Tong. The reconstruction by Tong scatters commentary excerpted from 27 different texts, commentary from Tong and Minford, various seals and Chinese

characters, reproduced images of talismans, and various illustrations arranged in different grids on the page; and is divided into sections with window structure lattice patterns taken from Daniel Sheets Dye's *Grammar of Chinese Lattice* (Harvard University Press, 1937). Its structural and formal design was developed with consideration of Minford's theories on the studio, who writes: "This new many-layered textual structure is a re-installation, a new space for reading that seeks in its own way to emulate the environment of a Chinese Studio" (Minford & Tong 1999, p.6).

The main body text, or "central hall" in Minford's literary/architectural transposition (Minford & Tong 1999, pp.6-7), is Giles' translation of 'Miss Lien-hsiang, the Fox-girl'. The centre of the double page spread in Minford's configuration is the "inner chamber", represented on the page by reproductions and images of inkstones, calligraphy brushes, and strange scholarly knick-knacks like charms. The "screens and walls" that divide this text-as-studio are adorned with the aforementioned talismans. The "outer chamber" of the studio is represented in the text as the outer column, a commentary in the traditional Chinese style – "all selected to unravel levels of meaning, to suggest nuances of the story" (Minford & Tong 1999, p.7) – that contains excerpts as varied as Robert Burton's *The anatomy of melancholy* (Oxford, 1621); Maureen Duffy's *The erotic world of faery* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1972); and Keith Thomas' *Religion and the decline of magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1971).

By structuring the story this way, Minford and Tong propose that the peculiarities of text as form and as object, and the mode of reading can be accurately transposed to a contemporary Western audience. They suggest it is a more mobile way of presenting a text in translation (Minford & Tong 1999, p.7), and in the restructuring, successfully construct anew, and for a new readership, the complex sense of openness and discussion, and the manifestations of the strange in these tales. Rather than asking how

a story should be translated, or how it has been translated, Minford and Tong ask: ““What does it really mean, and how is it, and was it, supposed to be read?” ...All of this requires a bold leap of the imagination” (Minford & Tong 1999, p.5).

Where Minford and Tong took this brave leap with regard to Pu Songling’s *biji* collection, this research will enable me to take that leap with a wholly new work.

### **Existing Scholarship**

The *biji* defies classification. Historically, *biji* texts were scattered variously across the *shi* and *zi* branches of the four-fold classification system *sibu fenlei fa*. Despite the near-2000-year history of the form, the first collection of *biji* texts did not appear until early in the 20th century, and the first study to focus specifically on the development of the genre did not appear until the 1980s (Gang 2010, p.8). If we take Campany’s view of genres – that is, ‘fuzzy sets’ where texts are not confined to the law of excluded middle (Campany, 1996, pp.23-24) – we can view *biji* as a fuzzy set comprised of fuzzy sets; one where difference plays a more significant constitutive role internally and externally than similarity in the construction of the sets. Nanxiu, too, notes the role played by difference. He writes: “Because the *hsiao-shuo* classification was designed to house what was *not* a work of an estimable philosophy, it became a catch-all category in which every work found a place, yet at the same time each lost its identity” (Nanxiu 2001, p.96).

*Biji* are often categorised as analogous to, or as a sub-branch of, *xiaoshuo*; the term’s first known use to designate a literary genre is in Huan Tan’s *Xinlun* (ca. 26 C. E.): “Those in the tradition of *xiaoshuo* collect fragmentary and petty utterances, and draw analogous discussions from near at hand, to make short books” (Campany 1996, p.131). Here the seeds that will govern the critical investigation of the form – as brief, as



fragmentary – are sown. I am indebted to Campany also for recognising the significance of the double verb *conghe* used by Huan in the description. *Conghe* [to collect], emphasises the shared characteristics of construction amongst these texts – an assemblage of shorts in the form of collage. This insight into the mode of construction and form of such texts is reinstated close to a century later by Ban Gu, who spoke of *xiaoshuo* in his *Yiwenzhi* [*Treatise on Belles Lettres*], a Han-era taxonomical study of writing – to say that they were “collected [literally stitched] together” (trans. Campany 1996, p.131).

Gang classifies existing scholarship on *biji* since 1930 into four types:<sup>19</sup>

- 1) Collections of *biji* entries: in which entries from a variety of *biji* are compiled into an encyclopedic collection.
- 2) Indexes: providing a reference for various miscellaneous Chinese writings published throughout the history of the genre.
- 3) Studies on the historical development of *biji*: grounded, chronological documentation on the development of the form.

---

<sup>19</sup> For examples of each type of study, see Gang 2010, pp.20-30. Since the completion of this thesis Glen Dudbridge has offered a fresh contribution to the understanding of the memoirs of Wang Renyu (880-956), in particular his *Yu tang xian hua* [*Things Seen & Heard*] and *Wang shi jian wen lu* [*Table Talk from the Hanlin Academy*]. Dudbridge says that his use of the term ‘memoirs’ in reference to the two texts that collect penned portraits, anecdotes, history, and urban myth and legend, “...links them as intimately to the modern world as ‘diary’ links the celebrated ninth-century work of the Japanese pilgrim Ennin” (Dudbridge 2013, p.5).

Dudbridge compares Wang to Ennin, who authored *Nittō Guhō Junrei Kōki* [*The Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law*] a four volume diary about his experiences as a Japanese monk traveling in China during the ninth century, surmising:

Both these men can be seen as memoirists, even though they produced sharply different types of work. Memoirs as understood here *have no prescribed form*, but they do require two main ingredients: the presence of a central individual, the subject, whose experience and values are implicit in everything that is told, and the ‘things seen and heard’ through which the outside world makes itself known to the subject and is communicated to readers as he perceives it (Dudbridge 2013, pp.6-7, emphasis my own).

4) Literary, Historical, and Religious studies using *biji*: which variously argue for and against the literary/historical/religious intent and/or merit of select collection (Gang 2010, pp.20-30).<sup>20</sup>

In many ways, the study of *biji* by historically-oriented academics – who scour *biji* for individual stories, material, or information to support evidence found in more regarded sources – has prolonged a practice of reading these texts in a piecemeal way that ignores the literary potential of such texts as they are presented. Therefore we need to take care we don't fall into the trap observed by Nair, who suggests we should "...resist the temptation to think about Asian texts as primarily sociological documents rather than literary texts. Literature is *not* sociology" (Nair 2011, p.16).

In brief, the most recent and comprehensive studies of the form (Ma 1985; Liu 2003) categorise *biji* into three types based on content: fictional stories; historical tidbits or unofficial history; and exegesis, philosophy and textual studies. These classifications, as with all of *biji* to date, can at best produce 'fuzzy' sets of texts that can often contain elements of various types of *biji* within a single collection. Liu, for his part, acknowledges the shortcomings of such a classification and lays foundations for my own research and that of Gang by acknowledging miscellaneousness [*za*] as the predominant characterisation of the form (Liu 2003, pp.4-5).

Gang dismisses as inadequate a strictly prescriptive definition on the grounds that the content and form of *biji* are too flexible. Likewise, a bibliographic definition cannot fully encapsulate the miscellaneous nature of *biji* in relation to other types of literature. Finally, Gang rejects a descriptive definition as inadequate given the variety and size of the *biji* corpus (Gang 2010, pp.12-13). Gang believes the answer, then, is to:

---

<sup>20</sup> Gang correctly notes that most 'literary' studies of *biji* texts are of those from the *zhiguai* tradition, and that these studies "...offer us more insight and reflection on the nature and cultural significance of *zhiguai* than the special literariness of the genre of *biji*" such as the implications of particular organisational strategies, textual interplay, and heterogeneity of content (2010, p.27).

...consider our definition of *biji* not as a set of transcendental and unchangeable rules or conventions that constitute and determine the writing and reading of the genre, but rather as an enabling condition of cultural exchange of ideas and values that help the genre continue to grow and expand, without losing its essential identity (Gang 2010, p.13).

In short: miscellaneousness.

As with Gang, in order to encapsulate within a definition of *biji* the genre's diversity, variation, and ultimately, indefinability, I propose to progress with Chance's (1997) theory of formless form as representative of this miscellaneousness, and as a unifying element within the disparate *biji* genre. Chance presented this theory in her investigation of Yoshida Kenkō's fourteenth century *zuihitsu*, *Tsurezuregusa* [*Essays In Idleness*], where she offers the following definition for the apparent paradox:

The formless text is not the text without form, for such is ultimately inconceivable insofar as language is the medium of its being. The formless text has reality and that substance is structured, *but the contingency of that structure is exposed to view*. These moves commend interpretation to the hands of readers who must more than ever assume the burden of untangling the disparities. Furthermore, this is not an unconscious accomplishment of the writer, who *provides for the confusion with an aesthetic scheme of imbalance and discontinuity*. In order to transmit the message of formlessness, the author must allow the reader to participate in its creation. Without the writer, there would be no such content, no such form, but without an audience, the content could not be enacted effectively (Chance 1997, p.43 – emphasis my own).

To borrow a phrase of Kenneth Goldsmith's – to say that there is no "necessary narrative structure so that the fragments can be grouped freely, is not at all to suggest

that it has no conceptual structure” (Goldsmith, 2011, p.114). Of particular interest is that Chance stresses the conscious intent behind this apparent aesthetic of chaos; it is not the result of random writing. As the present study is aligned with oulipian modes of inquiry, it is crucial that elements of chance and the unconscious do not feature.

Similarly, I will depart from Chance’s definition of formless form insofar as it necessitates a reader for its construction. That is to say that, while I do not disagree with Chance’s evaluation of this construction with regard to traditional *zuihitsu* (and by extension, other genres that employ a conscious use of miscellaneousness in their poetics), a reader is not necessary for the construction of this form in an anoulipic contemporary *biji*. This is because – as Clute and Edwards discuss in their evaluation of Mathews’ Algorithm<sup>21</sup> – an oulipian text written to constraint that also speaks of that constraint (thus adhering to principles established by Roubaud in his *Two Principles Sometimes Respected By Oulipian Works* (1988)) is engendered with the necessary tools to self-analyse, allowing it auto-exegetical qualities, and as such, replacing the need for a reader in the equation posited by Chance. Gang’s own analysis of Chance’s theory echoes this, though crucially, does so without links to oulipian theory:

What this formless form, or formed formlessness exemplifies, in my view, is an informing tension within the text. Within this tension, we can see the text’s persistent struggle to reach a definite meaning. Also within it, we can see the text’s inability to induce or unwillingness to settle on a determined reading... The text is like a seemingly amorphous entity that is about to take shape... [and] forces us to face, acknowledge and learn to appreciate its very ‘suspended’ state (Gang 2010, pp.84-85).

---

<sup>21</sup> See chapter 3 of this thesis on Oulipo for a discussion of Mathews’ Algorithm and Clute & Edwards’ theories thereof.

I follow Gang in his attempts to establish the “...rules and patterns in a literary text/genre that is characterized exactly by its lack of, at least in appearance, rules and patterns” (Gang 2010, p.31). Where Gang’s endeavours are grounded in an analysis of Liu Yiqing’s Song-era *biji* collection *Qiantang Yishi*, I extend the parameters of the research, equally paradoxical, in order to establish the governing constraints of contemporary *biji* in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis.

Following his evaluation of existing classifications, Gang posits that it is both possible and impossible to describe the content of *biji*. He writes:

While words like ‘miscellaneous’, ‘casual’, ‘informal’, and ‘desultory’ may give us a general idea of what a *biji* text looks like, the ambiguity innate in these words makes it hard for us to describe the genre in clear and definite terms (Gang 2010, p.6).

Drawing such a conclusion seems perhaps regressive. Despite acknowledging miscellaneousness as a predominant characteristic of the form, Gang continues to view this in a negative light that strips the form of its inherent potential. This pessimistic stance is reinforced by Gang’s denunciation that *biji* is “doomed” to intersect and interweave with other genres of literature (Gang 2010, p.11).

Further, Gang’s declaration that: “In almost every *biji* text there is something that will affect or even challenge our very basic assumption regarding genre” (Gang 2010, p.12) should not be regarded as a conditional setback, but as a definitional insight, as will be evidenced in later chapters. He further writes: “While these kinds of nebulous descriptions may help us identify a *biji* text when we see it, it is far from being enough to delineate a clear-cut picture of what the genre truly is” (Gang 2010, p.7). While Gang acknowledges the historical importance of this nebulosity, in that it afforded the genre a certain adaptability and malleability, he does not progress to an acceptance of this fact

as being of intrinsic value to all incarnations of the form, not just historically, but today. The potential of this definition remains to be exhausted. Certainly, the words, terms, and frameworks historically and currently used to define the genre are equally ambiguous, but this is because the genre itself – or the boundaries thereof – really is limitless: a fixed state of potential. In this way, each identification or re-classification of a text as *biji* expands the inexhaustible boundaries of the genre.

The danger of this is that the definition may become mutually causative (as feared by Hargett (2001, pp.560-564)), and as Gang has illustrated in his discussion of the “abundance” (given there are to date some 3,000 *biji* extant from the form’s 2,000 year history, this term borders on a provocative exaggeration) of *biji* texts (Gang 2010, pp.11-13).

By thoroughly analysing all available examples of contemporary *biji* and *zuihitsu* (explicitly classified as such by their authors) in chapter 4, and incorporating a conscious element of heterogeneity into the definition *before* progressing to assembling a broader list of texts to include in the genre of contemporary *biji* in chapter 5, I hope to avoid the mutually causative expansion of the corpus. In opposition to expansion resulting only from an unconscious or uncontrolled lack of clear definition, I propose a definition that embraces and celebrates the potential in its constraining lack of clarity.

The corpus of contemporary *biji* presented in chapter 4 – at one thousandth the size of that of traditional *biji* – is, by comparison, manageably consumable, and all within its small confines must then be considered representative of the form.

## CHAPTER 3

### OULIPO

In this chapter I will provide a brief history of the French writing workshop, Oulipo, and its governing philosophies of potential and constraint. Building on this, I will provide an analysis of the process of anoulipism – one of the two branches of its work (the other being synthoulipism) – drawing on critical analyses of selected seminal texts. I will examine the argument that Oulipo has become stagnant and dated, and in an effort to broaden the scope of oulipian influence, propose an anoulipic approach to creating a contemporary English language *biji*.

Its name is a shortening of *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle* or ‘workshop for potential literature’ in English – a description, of sorts, of the group’s intentions. Oulipo is like the literary equivalent of MENSA, a collection of the world’s literary-leaning intellectual elite that is so select that today, in its fifth decade of existence, it has only 41 members.<sup>22</sup> Within its ranks, Oulipo has mathematicians, scientists, linguists, philosophers, artists, authors, cartoonists and poets. The majority of members are French, or have completed most of their studies in France. This exclusivity does have drawbacks, especially when combined with the somewhat obscure nature of the work, as its pedagogy has struggled to find popularity outside Europe.

The Oulipo writes within constraints, varying in intricacy from sonnets to complex mathematical algorithms dictating sentence structure, syllable count and more, in an

---

<sup>22</sup> Noël Arnaud, Michèle Audin, Valérie Beaudouin, Marcel Bénabou, Jacques Bens, Claude Berge, Eduardo Berti, André Blavier, Paul Braffort, Italo Calvino, François Caradec, Bernard Cerquiglini, Ross Chambers, Stanley Chapman, Marcel Duchamp, Jacques Duchateau, Luc Etienne, Frédéric Forte, Paul Fournel, Anne F. Garréta, Michelle Grangaud, Jacques Jouet, Latis, François Le Lionnais, Hervé Le Tellier, Etienne Lécroart, Jean Lescure, Daniel Levin Becker, Harry Mathews, Pablo Martín Sánchez, Michèle Métail, Ian Monk, Oskar Pastior, Georges Perec, QB, Raymond Queneau, Jean Queval, Pierre Rosenstiehl, Jacques Roubaud, Olivier Salon, Albert-Marie Schmidt.

attempt to enquire into the possibilities of writing using self-imposed restrictive systems.

Paradoxically, in restriction and constraint, oulipian thought sees not limitation but potential, as Jean Lescure writes: “These constraints are felicitous, generous, and are in fact literature itself” (Lescure [1973] 1986, p.34). Of course, writing within constraints is nothing new – centuries ago people were composing sonnets and rhopalic verse.<sup>23</sup> But outside the Oulipo, such constraints have never before been embraced with such vigour, or so entirely. Oulipo’s employment of intentionally self-imposed constraint as part of a unified exploration of uncharted potential literature marks their advancement from likeminded predecessors.

### **Anoulipism**

When the Oulipo finally went public (taking its findings to an audience beyond its well-stocked luncheon tables) in December 1961, it did so by publishing a dossier titled *‘Exercices de littérature potentielle: Patalégomène à toute poétique future qui voudra bien se présenter en tant que tel’* (also referred to as *‘Dossier 17’*) in the French journal *Cahiers du Collège de ‘Pataphysique*. *‘Dossier 17’* contained, among other things: essays; in-jokes; formal acknowledgement of those that unknowingly preceded proto-oulipian writing techniques; and a collectively authored introduction that laid out the group’s intent. Levin Becker writes: “Materials unconsciously proposed by previous authors... That is, the things that make certain great works great, isolated and distilled into formulae for future use” (Levin Becker 2012, p.135).

---

<sup>23</sup> Rhopalic verse occurs in a text to build incrementally on a letter, sentence, or paragraph scale. For instance, a pyramid text where the first line contains one letter, the next two, the next three, and so on.



In an anoulipic analysis of the *biji* I must pinpoint these elements of greatness, distil them, and reapply them as generative restrictive devices in a contemporary adaptation of the form.

According to Warren Motte, the editor of *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, there are two principal directions of oulipian research: "...analysis, that is, the identification and recuperation of older, even ancient (but not necessarily intentional) experiments in form; and synthesis, the elaboration of new forms" (Motte 1986, p.1). For the purposes of this study, I am predominantly concerned with the analytical arm of oulipian research, the branch that is, according to François Le Lionnais: "...devoted to discovery" (Le Lionnais [1963] trans. Motte 1986, p.28). Le Lionnais writes: "The analytic tendency investigates works from the past in order to find possibilities that often exceed those their authors had anticipated" (Le Lionnais [1963] trans. Motte 1986, p.27).

Anoulipism is the discovery of older forms of constrained writing and the recuperation and exploration of these pre-existing constraints through analysis of such forms. It examines the potential for the future use or ultimate exhaustion of these constraints. The oulipian emphasis on the use of formal constraints in literary production is in reaction to the emphasis placed on *écriture automatique* by the Surrealists.<sup>24</sup> While constraints are frequently mathematical, Oulipo also pays tribute to its literary forbears by declaring all structures and various genres of past eras open to innovation and exhaustion. By working actively with literary history in this manner, Consenstein suggests the Oulipo: "...offer new forms to future writers by elucidating the potential of past literary forms. In essence, they work actively with literary history and do not submit to its domination" (Consenstein 1995, p.1).

---

<sup>24</sup> The partially fictionalized recount of Raymond Queneau's severance of ties with the Surrealist movement can be found in his novel *Odile* (1937, Gallimard).

In his illuminating and personal look at the Oulipo, recent recruit Daniel Levin Becker notes fellow Oulipian François Caradec's enthusiasm for what preceded the group – suggesting he was more interested in where the Oulipo had come from than where it was going – and uses this as a springboard to an important observation relevant to my own work: the idea that “historical consciousness is central to the Oulipo's self-conception” (Levin Becker 2012, pp.29-30). He goes on to discuss the concept of anticipatory plagiarism – where a constraint employed by a member of the Oulipo has been utilised prior to their writing (often by centuries; the lipogram, which dates back to Ancient Greece, is a prime example).<sup>25</sup> It is with the search for such plagiarists in mind, the critical eye turned to texts from centuries past, that I approach *biji*.

What I want to talk about is how the Oulipo, and the principles it incarnates, can make *unlikely pairings* – of people, of ideas, of ways of life – seem not only plausible but also promising, not only interesting but also indispensable (Levin Becker 2012, p.6, emphasis my own).

The pairing of *biji* and oulipian technique seems unlikely at first, but beneath the surface it begins to make sense: one informs the other. These links begin to feel indispensable in my study. Viers suggests that the analytic endeavours of the Oulipo are not undertaken in the belief that “there exists some platonic model of perfect forms”; rather, that this approach of analysis preceding synthesis, “works on the assumption that there are no fixed forms” (Viers 2008, p.2). *Biji* is a genre that hinges on and is defined by a similar assumption.

---

<sup>25</sup> In his essay, ‘*Histoire du lipogramme*’ (1969), George Perec credits Lasus of Hermione as being the most ancient lipogrammatist; he was employing the technique in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Perec's essay is translated to English in Motte 1986, pp.97-108).

While some reflect that anoulipism is a dated term<sup>26</sup> there continue to be writers investigating what anoulipism is today, and how it can be put to use. Viers refers to the analytic aspect of oulipian work as “art as retrieval” (Viers 2008, p.23) and in opposition to claims of the term’s datedness posits this element as central to oulipian activity. He writes:

The discovery or rediscovery of elements in works by other artists, through a careful examination of how artists compose a work on a given topic or theme, in a given form, or via a given procedure, permits the group to identify what already exists, what remains to be done, and what can be improved (Viers 2008, p.30).

Lauren Elkin and Scott Esposito examine the question of what anoulipism is today, and posit some of their own modes of inquiry in their critical investigation of Oulipo’s relevance in contemporary literature, arguing that the group has become stagnant, and that writers not formally affiliated with the workshop are actually producing the most interesting oulipian-inspired work.

Georges Perec was one of the strongest proponents of the anoulipic school of thought; he had a desire to write everything – from children’s books to cryptic crosswords – and once committed to a form, sought to advance or exhaust it. He saw no limit to the literary potential of forms appropriated and recycled. His parodying of scientific language in *Cantatrix Sopranica L.* (1991) reveals the potential for play and for poetry in the alienating, dense, and jargon-heavy category of writing. Similarly, his first published book, a novella entitled *Les Choses* [*Things*] (1965), found literary value in the language of advertising copy. Later he would publish *L’art et la manière d’aborder son chef de service pour lui demander une augmentation* [*the art and craft of approaching your head of department to submit a request for a raise*] (1968) in which

---

<sup>26</sup> Harry Mathews states in the Oulipo Compendium that: “The term is now rarely used” (2005, p.50).

the formal modes of thought and algorithmic structure of computer programming are implemented to literary ends.

When he turned his hand to the lipogram, it was not sufficient for him simply to compose one. He explores the history of the form that had been ‘plagiarised by anticipation’ in an essay entitled ‘*Histoire du lipogramme*’.<sup>27</sup> He writes: “Lexicographers, bibliophiles, historians – the majority of those who have spoken of the lipogram – have generally described it as ‘a puerile game’, ‘an inept tour de force’, ‘foolishly playing-around’, ‘a sad example of silliness’, ‘misplaced ingenuity’, ‘witless foolery’ ” (Perc [1969] trans. Motte 1986, p.99). Perc undertook to explore the potential of the form without bias. The results, *La Disparition*, an *e*-less novel about the disappearance of the letter *e*, speak to Perc’s commitment to advance and exhaust a form that had been in existence for millennia, but upon which no attempts had been made to exhaust its literary potential. Bellos writes of Perc’s work:

The point of the experiment was not to translate into twenty-five-letter French a story that already existed, or could exist, in an alphabet of twenty-six letters...  
Perc’s chief experimental aim was to see if *e*-less French could invent its own story and thus vindicate the potentiality not only of that constraint but of the very principle of constraint (Bellos 1999, pp.398-399).

The rigorously scientific model used by Perc to prepare for *La Disparition* was representative of both his typical practice (informed as it was by years working as an archival assistant in a science laboratory) and the ambitious scope of the work. Just any

---

<sup>27</sup> Raymond Queneau also exhibited attentive interest in the literary history of the pre-existing forms he adapted and employed. For example, citing the triolet, alongside the virely, the rondel and the villanelle (all examples of fixed form poetry) Queneau asks with equal concern and bemusement: “Why has the sonnet alone survived?” (Queneau 1986, p.54). He states that the triolet dates back to the Middle Ages and concludes: “Among contemporary poets, even those interested in fixed forms, I am not aware of anyone who has attempted to restore the triolet to its place of honour” (Queneau 1986, p.54).

lipogram would not provide considerable constraint; the difficulty and interest of the technique lay in the selection of the suppressed letter, and was proportionate to the natural frequency of a letter in a given language. In Spanish, the most difficult letter would be *a*; in German *r*; and in English and French alike, *e*. Ernest Vincent Wright had already written a novel (the term used loosely) without the letter *e* in English, *Gadsby – A Story of Over 50,000 Words Without Using the Letter E* (1939), the braggarty in the title, in stark comparison to Perec’s allusive but aloof *La Disparition* (*A Void* in translation) reveals much about the differing approaches of the two authors. Following his research into the form, Perec produced, alongside *La Disparition*, the following three elementary observations on the nature of the lipogram: the principle of the lipogram is childishly simple; its application can prove to be excessively difficult; its result is not necessarily spectacular (Perec in Motte 1986, p.99).

Like Christian Bök, who would follow in Perec’s footsteps with his lipogrammatic poetry collection, *Eunoia* (2001), Perec scoured dictionaries for *e*-less words, composing a lexicon for his new language. Likewise, an oulipian exploration of other pre-existent forms reveals that the techniques are not simply re-employed, but oftentimes entirely reconfigured, or applied anew. Elkin writes: “Their very reason for existence is to use seemingly arbitrary rules to force themselves to imagine these forms. They push the very limits of what can be novelistic” (Elkin & Esposito 2013, p.16).

Look, for example, at the Oulipo’s treatment of the sonnet and the sestina.

## Sonnet

*There are no exhausted poetic forms, just exhausted versions of forms*

Jacques Roubaud, *Cleaning House* ([1995] 2006, p.156)

Roubaud's sentiment rings optimistically not just for poetic forms, but for all written forms, those already deemed literary and those yet to be rediscovered as such. Le Lionnais expounds on how it applies specifically to the sonnet:

The aim of Potential Literature is to provide future writers with techniques that will give them room for inspiration. Hence the need for a certain freedom. Nine or ten centuries ago, when a producer of potential literature proposed the sonnet form, he left, via several mechanical procedures, room for choice (Le Lionnais [1961] in Bens 2005, p.188).

The Oxford English Dictionary Online offers up the rather indecisive definition of: *a poem of fourteen lines using any of a number of formal rhyme schemes, in English typically having ten syllables per line*. Despite the imprecision in definition (no doubt a hindrance when employing constraint), members of Oulipo have developed, advanced, refined, and experimented with the form, which has origins in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Most famously, Raymond Queneau made a formidable attempt at exhausting the form with the eternally inconsumable *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*]. A masterwork of combinatorial poetic potential, Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*] (1960) occupies 10 pages, wherein each line in each of the ten sonnets is interchangeable with any of the other lines.

Taking the first line, there are 10 alternatives or possibilities for that line, and following that selection, the same can be said for the second line, which sets up  $10^2$ , or 100,

possible combinations of the two lines already. Add to that the third line ( $10 \times 100$  or  $10^3$ )... And so on... By the time the sonnet is completed, there are  $10^{14}$ , or 100 million million, combinations of fourteen lines. More startling still is Queneau's calculation that someone reading the poem for 24 hours a day would require 190,258,751 years to finish reading it in all possible permutations.

Elsewhere in the ranks of Oulipo, Jacques Bens proposes an irrational sonnet, whereby the 14 lines of a traditional sonnet are divided according to the first five digits of the irrational number  $\pi$ , resulting in stanzas of 3, 1, 4, 1 and five lines that employed a similarly adjusted rhyme sequence.<sup>28</sup> Claude Berge describes his procedure for a sonnet of variable length in '*La Princesse aztèque, ou contraintes pour un sonnet à longueur variable* [The Aztec Princess, or rules for a sonnet of variable length]' in *La Bibliothèque Oulipienne* 22 (1983). In *La Bibliothèque Oulipienne* 76 under the title '*D'une petite haie, si possible belle, aux Regrets* [A Bell in the Hay, with due Regrets]' (1995). Michelle Grangaud subjected Joachim du Bellay's famous collection of 191 sonnets, *Les Regrets*, first published in 1558, to a process of slenderisation, rendering each as a haiku in accordance with a series of affiliated constraints. And Mathews explores the potential for eye-rhyming sonnets of both Shakespearean and Petrarchan models in his 'The Poet's Eye' (1995). Eye-rhyming poems are those where an antiphonetabetic<sup>29</sup> lexicon is used to ensure rhyming words of a particular poetic form rhyme only in sight, but not sound.

---

<sup>28</sup> See Mathews, H. & Brothie, A. (Eds.) 2005, pp.163-164 for further exploration of the irrational sonnet.

<sup>29</sup> "The alphabet of sounds represented by different letters than normal to make the sounds. The 'a' sound in 'cat' has the same sound as 'au' in 'laugh'. The 'au' sound is in the antiphonetabet," (Morice 2001, p.23).

## Sestina

The sestina is a 39-line poem composed of six stanzas of six lines each and a three-line envoi. The invention of the form is often attributed to 12<sup>th</sup> century troubadour Arnaut Daniel, who composed the earliest known sestina, *Lo ferm voler qu'el co m'intra*, in Old Occitan around 1200. It requires no specific meter (unless desired by the author) and finds its footing in a series of six repeating end-words (the final word of a line). The end words of each stanza repeat those of the one that preceded it, though in a different order. The organisational sequence for the end-words is referred to as a *retrogradatio cruciata* [retrograde cross] and the progression of the end-words in a sestina will be: 123456, 615243, 364125, 532614, 451362, 246531. The end-words are incorporated into the envoi to various degrees by different poets.

The Oulipo has explored the mathematics central to the form and experimented with the expansion and modification of the permutation employed. For example, in Harry Mathews' *Écrits Français* (1990) he demonstrates the counter-sestina with the introduction of two other sets of end-words in *Rétrovirus: une contre-sextine*. Jacques Roubaud achieved a sestina-like permutation by introducing a seventh stanza in his derivative of the form, the septina.<sup>30</sup>

Jacques Jouet's '*Une chambre close* [A Sealed Room]', a short work published in 1996 in *La Bibliothèque Oulipienne* 78, makes the sestina form into a murder mystery. Raymond Queneau worked with Roubaud towards a general set of rules for the

---

<sup>30</sup> See Mathews, H. & Brothie, A. (Eds.) 2005, p.227 for further exploration of the septina.



permutation with *n*-ina,<sup>31</sup> where *n* = a *Queneau Number*; that is numbers which when they are doubled and one is added, a prime number results.<sup>32</sup>

## Oulipopo

Much of the previous examination reflects anoulipic practice and how it relates to form, the sonnet or haiku. But what about genre? A loose definition would allow something like ‘advertising copy’ or ‘scientific writing’ to be considered genres of writing, but perhaps not literary genres. In order to examine the contemporary application of *biji* through an anoulipic lens, an example of how genre relates to anoulipism is required. The Oulipopo, or *Ouvroir de la littérature policière potentielle* [Workshop for potential detective fiction], offers insight into this process.

The first of the *Ou-x-pos*<sup>33</sup> formed, Oulipopo was created in 1973 by François Le Lionnais, alongside Jacques Bens, Michel Lebrun, Paul Gayot and others, with a mission to investigate potential detective fiction “recognizing that this genre was already an example of constraint-based literature with certain fixed requirements” (Hugill 2012, p.68, italics my own). Anoulipism exists here in the shadow of an entire genre, with its own established constraints whose potential can be further explored or exhausted. Gayot likens the practice of the Oulipopo and its examination of the genre of detective fiction to autopsy.

---

<sup>31</sup> The *n*-ina is often referred to as the Quenina, given the author’s fondness for the form. Jacques Roubaud documents Queneau’s exploration of the form in his paper ‘*N-ine, autrement dit quenine (encore)* [*N-ina*, otherwise known as Quenina (continued)]’ (Roubaud 1993).

<sup>32</sup> For example, 3 is a Queneau Number:  $3 \times 2 + 1 = 7$

<sup>33</sup> Other *Ou-x-pos* include Oucuiipo [Workshop for Potential Cuisine], Ouhistpo [Workshop for Potential History], Outrapo [Workshop for Potential Tragi-Comedy], and more.

Gayot writes:

The experiment was not extended to the sentimental novel, the cloak-and-dagger novel, or the acceptance speech at the Académie Française, although no doubt all these genres could have come under the influence of this same technique – this idiotic, patient unravelling of the web of literature (whether detective or other) into its constituent threads (Gayot 2005, p.255).

In light of Gayot's confidence, there should be no real hesitation to add to his list, alongside the sentimental novel, the cloak-and-dagger novel, or the acceptance speech at the Académie Française, the *biji*. The potential for what can be created from those constituent threads, the building blocks of a genre, is what puts one of the *pos* in Oulipopo. As Gayot writes: "The accumulated strata of the past become inexhaustible provided they are investigated in the light of possibility, of every possibility, and even of the impossible" (Gayot 2005, p.256).

### **Oufinopo**

We could very well add to Gayot's list – of the sentimental novel, the cloak-and-dagger novel, or the acceptance speech at the Académie Française, film noir. Rather, Clute & Edwards already have. *The Maltese Touch Of Evil: Film Noir and Potential Criticism* (2011), a study of film noir and film noir criticism, presents the most thorough and sustained published attempt by non-Oulipians to apply the mode of anoulipism to an existing set of texts. In compiling this contribution, Clute and Edwards created Oufinopo, the *Ouvroir de Film Noir Potentiel*, or, Workshop for Potential Film Noir (2011, p.xvii).

In this way certain broad parallels arise between their investigation and my own. Similarly, the focus of the anoulipic inquiry, film noir, shares with *biji* a marginal

classification, transient or ambiguous definition, and a tendency to be used as a repository for otherwise unclassifiable odds and ends. The similarities between research are apparent from the first page: “More than a style or a genre, ‘noir’ designates a glorious and amorphous body of movies” (Clute & Edwards 2011, p.xv). They believe noir “...transgresses every attempt to assign it a conclusive definition and deftly avoids the final reckoning of even the most conscientious canonizer” (Clute & Edwards 2011, p.8). Just as they stress they will not offer a comprehensive definition of noir, nor shall I claim to do the same for *biji*, and contemporary *biji* more so – I aim to provide an overview of what contemporary *biji* could *potentially* be; may already be, potentially.

As a study of the mode of anoulipic inquiry, *The Maltese Touch Of Evil* is unparalleled, and Clute and Edwards make effort to clearly establish the premise of their research into noir. Examining Le Lionnais’ description of analysis,<sup>34</sup> as it holds for Oulipo, they take care to note the ambiguity in the phrase ‘y rechercher’ (Le Lionnais 1973, p.21). With meanings as varied as ‘to rediscover there’, ‘to attempt to find there’, or ‘to research there’, Clute and Edwards argue this phrase alludes to the difference between most scholarly endeavours – textual interpretation of works past – and anoulipic inquiry; the latter, in finding or re-finding, credits the author as anticipatory plagiarist, and concurrently claims, as a result of anoulipism, new possibilities and potentials already extant in the original work(s). As such, Clute and Edwards propose to reveal the self-consciousness and constraint contained in film noir. They write:

Instead of narrowing our focus on the constraint until it appears a simple game,  
or broadening our focus until we see in the constraint only historical referents  
beyond the text, we must find a way to visualize the complex interplay of

---

<sup>34</sup> “y rechercher des possibilités qui dépassent souvent ce que les auteurs avaient soupçonné” (“to find [in existing works] possibilities that often exceed that which their authors had anticipated”) trans. Clute and Edwards 2011, p.5).

constraint and diegesis in oulipian texts and film noir (Clute & Edwards 2011, p.6).

Clute and Edwards also provide new insight into the Oulipo in this book length academic study, and as such are in the company of Elkin and Esposito (see later in this chapter), in making significant contemporary, academic contributions to the somewhat sparse oeuvre of Oulipo scholarship in English. It should be noted, however, that certain misunderstandings are present in the work.

For one, the classification of the synthetic branch of oulipian research as “synoulipism” (Clute & Edwards 2011, p.4) as opposed to synthoulipism. A minor difference, and perhaps one born only of aesthetic preference, though there is no precedent for using this term. In his translation of Le Lionnais’ two manifestos, in which the dual terms for research first appear, Warren Motte renders them from the French as anoulipism and synthoulipism respectively (Le Lionnais trans. Motte 1986, pp.26-31). Also, a misleadingly tangible link between the Oulipo and literary experiments with computers is drawn and prevails throughout. And finally, an unfounded declaration that all oulipian texts respect the *Two Principles Sometimes Respected By Oulipian Works* outlined by Roubaud (1988)<sup>35</sup> in his essay of the same name, is flawed. It assists a misguided view of the group’s members as homogenised creators of single-purpose texts; a hiveminded literary one trick pony, in prevailing. It also reveals some level of ignorance on the part of Clute and Edwards, as the debate as to whether one must reveal constraint in their work, and the discussion as to whether one must write to constraint

---

<sup>35</sup> “Un texte écrit suivant une contrainte parle de cette contrainte; un text écrit suivant une contrainte mathématisable contient les conséquences de la théorie mathématique qu’elle illustre” (“A text written under constraint speaks of that constraint; a text written under a mathematicalizable constraint contains the consequences of the mathematical theory that the constraint illustrates”) (trans. Clute & Edwards 2011 p.286).

once a member, have continued since Oulipo's earliest days. Both are far too complex to be dismissed, as they attempt, as mere humour (Clute & Edwards 2011, p.286).

Despite this, a rigorously documented large-scale application of the often-neglected branch of oulipian inquiry means this work cannot be overlooked.

More recently Louis Bury and Pablo Ruiz have established the application of constraint not only in writing, but also in reading, criticism, and textual analysis. Though neither is as explicit as Clute & Edwards about the anoulipic nature of their study, this does show a resurgence in this methodology, and an application by an increasing number of non-oulipeans.<sup>36</sup>

### **Anoulipism & Genre**

By acting systematically and scientifically oulipeans focus and clarify, not 'blur', their approach to genre transformation. Although the result may be a certain 'unfixing' of boundaries, it is done in the guise of literary progress, of testing the relationship between expression and construct, and not on ideological grounds (Consenstein 1995, p.2).

Earlier in this chapter I observed that, for the Oulipo, constraints are not a means to an end, but signposts along its ongoing precession through literature, language and words themselves. This idea of precession is central – while the Oulipo is concerned with the potential of literature, its gaze never strays too far from its rich history. They cherish and tug at ties to the past, rather than severing them. As the examination of Oulipopo has illustrated, genre can be treated as constraint, but first it must be made clear what genre comprises of.

---

<sup>36</sup> See Ruiz, P. 2014, and Bury, L. 2014.

Hugh Holman defines a literary convention as: “any device or style or subject matter which has become, in its time and by reason of its habitual use, a recognized means of literary expression, an element of technique” (Holman 1972, p.123). ‘Convention’ in this instance, Lowes writes, “...so far as art is concerned, represents concurrence in certain accepted methods of communication” (Lowes 1919, p.3). Counter to intuition, convention, much like constraint, need not be repressive. Lowes’ emphasis on communication highlights the importance of an understanding between the author and reader, not necessarily of the meaning in a text, but of the author’s intent and chosen form.<sup>37</sup> How then to translate style/form/convention – the inseparable components of genre – across countries, languages, centuries, and creative climates? Bellos writes:

...the translation of style is an exercise in pastiche, the translator’s task being the choice of an existing style in the target culture to serve as a rough match for the ‘other’... But this idea of style as a culturally constituted set of linguistic resources characteristic of an author, period, literary genre or school clashes with another widespread idea of what ‘a style’ is: the irreducible difference of any individual’s unique forms of language. In brief: if style is ‘inimitable’, how can it be imitated? (Bellos 2012, p.294).

Taking his definition of style as the irrefutable difference of an individual’s unique forms of language, it can be argued that it is through particular genres that these forms are best revealed. For instance, any number of vastly different people tasked to write a medical report would produce a largely similar collection of writings, due to the strict rules that must be adhered to when writing within the genre of ‘medical report’. The *biji* genre, however, does not place those kinds of constraints on an author’s voice; the act of note-taking provides a unique personal insight into the author’s thoughts and

---

<sup>37</sup> The implications of this will be discussed in more detail in the section dedicated to *biji* as an expression of authorial intent.

thinking. In this sense, it can be argued that *biji* as a genre is predisposed to effectively reveal the ‘unique form’ of each individual.

Looking at the three contemporary examples of *biji* in chapter 4 of this thesis, each seems to be a pastiche of the vastly varying corpus of *biji*. Pastiche, defined as an artistic work in a style that imitates that of another work, artist, or period, clarifies the role of anoulipism in contemporary application of the *biji*. Reflecting on the early work of the Oulipopo, Gayot also observes the constraint in such technique: “Pastiche is an embryonic form of creation under constraint” (Gayot 2005, p.255). In an Oulipopo publication under the anagrammatic pseudonym *Narcisse Follaninio*, Le Lionnais writes:

We stand every chance of discovering structures, some of them truly original, capable of generating great mystery or suspense. Isn’t this what the mystery writer is looking for in the hope of making a new start – as well as the reader who refuses to believe the genre exhausted? (Le Lionnais 2005, p.264).

This becomes even more interesting when performing a substitution [in a manner inspired by Queneau’s *Les Fondements de la littérature d’après David Hilbert* [The Foundations of Literature after David Hilbert] (1976): ‘*biji*’ for ‘mystery’. The results represent my appropriation of the Oulipopo’s approach to genre as constraint: We stand every chance of discovering structures, some of them truly original, capable of generating great *biji*. Isn’t this what the *biji* writer is looking for in the hope of making a new start – as well as the reader who refuses to believe the genre exhausted?

Mathews and Brotchie write: “Analytic Oulipopo studies the situations and mechanisms that have been used in detective fiction, as well as the possible ways of combining them” (Mathews & Brotchie 2005, p.266). Or, following substitution: Anoulipic *biji*

studies the situations and mechanisms that have been used in *biji*, as well as the possible ways of combining them.

Such a statement suggests, if not an entire movement, at least the kind of text that would be representative of an Oubipo, or Workshop for potential *biji*. Oulipian innovation upon the architecture of genres, in line with Consenstein's theory, acts: "...not to 'blur', 'transgress', and 'unfix' boundaries, but to grasp a genre's potential" (1995 p.2). It is important a contemporary *biji* that emerges from a process of anoulipism does not simply parody or transpose form, but explores the potential of an under-utilised genre.

### **Oulipo in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

But if the Oulipo hopes to avoid exhausting its potential, it is up to its members to stay outside of the mainstream, writing from the margins rather than from the comfortable center of official culture. If an Oulipian leaves the workbench and settles into a comfortable armchair, his worldview narrows, and his work's potential diminishes (Elkin 2013, p.76).

After five decades in existence and an increasingly public profile for many of the group's members, it was inevitable that the Oulipo's small but significant sphere of influence would experience expansion.

Monthly public readings with members from Oulipo now take place in France, and colleges and universities in the United States and UK offer writing courses that focus on oulipian constraints. The Oulipo Listserv, Fatrazie website and Ubuweb provide digital spaces for the practice, development and discussion of constrained writing online. Their reach is now such that, in 2015, for the first time foreigners outnumbered native French



participants at the Récréations de l'Oulipo, à Bourges.<sup>38</sup> This expanding reach has resulted not only in an increased awareness and appreciation of constraint-based literature, but also in a generation of writers, not officially affiliated with the Oulipo whose work resonates with its theories of constraint.

Canadian poet Christian Bök is commonly cited as working in an oulipian mode, despite having no official connection with the group. American author and wine merchant Doug Nufer exhibits a use of constraint that also links his work to that of the Oulipo. Nufer's 2004 novel *Negativeland* is governed by the constraint that each sentence must contain a grammatical or semantic negation, and *Never Again* (2004) displays an oulipian commitment to exhaustion and rigorous constraint; no word is used more than once in the entire book. In his 2008 novella *Let Me Tell You*, Paul Griffiths paints a broader portrait of Ophelia, using only the vocabulary she is allotted in *Hamlet*, repurposed across 140 pages in a monstrous lexical anagram. Other writers progressing or reassessing potential literature in the oulipian sense from the peripheries can be found coddled together in publications like *The /n/oulipian Analects* (2007), or in *Drunken Boat 8*, an Oulipo-themed issue of the online journal guest-edited by Jean-Jacques Poucel.

A handful of authors working within similar modes who have captured the attention of the Oulipo can be gleaned from the newest edition of Queneau's *Exercises In Style* (2012), where current Oulipians alongside the likes of Ben Marcus, Jesse Ball, and Amelia Gray, contribute new exercises.

Even locally, contemporary Melbourne poet Pi. O. exhibits work created under an incredibly difficult constraint – limiting himself to numerical figures – in *The Number*

---

<sup>38</sup> See Herve le Tellier tweet 2 July 2015.

URL: <https://twitter.com/HerveLeTellier/status/616259447661400064>

*Poems and other equations* (2000). At times difficult to vocalise, there is certainly a case for comparison between Pi. O. and other writers in the concrete poetry tradition; Alex Selenitsch, for example. Though Pi. O.'s work is not strictly aesthetic in that sense, he exhibits a playfulness with language that reflects the influence of Oulipians working in poetry, like Harry Mathews (recalling his 'The Poet's Eye'), but also a humour and punning wit in his titling that recalls an Oulipian better known for his art, Marcel Duchamp.

Since the turn of the century, the newest recruits to Oulipo reflect a broadening vision for the group. The co-option of writer and comparative literature scholar Anne F. Garetta in 2000, as well as telecommunications network expert Valérie Beaudouinin in 2003, and mathematician Michèle Audin in 2009, reflect not only the growing sphere of specialities represented in the Oulipo, but also a growing female contingent. Other recent recruits, American Daniel Levin Becker (the group's youngest member, co-opted in 2009) reflect the group's geographic and linguistic expansion. Levin Becker is the second American and one of a handful of non-native French speakers elected to the group. More recently Etienne Lécroart, co-opted in 2012, became the first cartoonist and comic book writer to join its ranks. In 2014 two new recruits joined the ranks simultaneously (a first in Oulipo's history, and both, coincidentally, are the first in the group to write in Spanish): Eduardo Berti, an Argentinian writer and journalist; and ex-athlete, ex-actor, ex-researcher Pablo Martín Sánchez. These recruits again reflect an expanding vision for the group and where it believes potential literature may lie. Levin Becker writes:

They are aware that potential literature and its associated techniques, public domain and all, are no longer under the control of the Oulipo: that the creature

has grown up and out in ways they can't expect to keep up with and still get any of their own work done (Levin Becker 2012, p.263).

As will be illustrated below, such recruits illustrate a call from both within and beyond the group to continue to progress, to keep proving motion by walking.

### **Contemporary Critique of Oulipo**

In 2013 Lauren Elkin and Scott Esposito published in conjunction two long form essays examining contemporary Oulipo with the punningly and cunningly catty title, *The End Of Oulipo? An Attempt To Exhaust A Movement*. Having entered its sixth decade of existence, Elkin and Esposito see that the Oulipo is overdue for a re-examination. With today's culture of experimental literature they ask where Oulipo can go from here?

A significant portion of the critiques from both is concerned with the stagnation of the Oulipo. Its increased exposure – and the public demands that come with it – are proposed as a potential reason for the stagnation.<sup>39</sup> With two oulipian titles in *Le Monde's 100 Books of the Century* and a collective slew of accolades from France and beyond, it is inevitable that a broader awareness of and interest in the work of the Oulipo followed. As a result of this, regular readings and public workshops have emerged, members of Oulipo spreading their time across different public forums, agog with pedagogical obligations. With a developing public front, Elkin and Esposito suggest the group is “now as concerned with archiving its history, carrying on its traditions, as it is in making new literature” (Elkin & Esposito 2013, p.6).<sup>40</sup>

They go on to suggest this incestuous preservation has resulted in a majority of the most recent work being derivative of earlier successes (salvaging Jacques Roubaud's ongoing

---

<sup>39</sup> Elkin succinctly maps the broad implications of these dynastic transitions, and the shift from intentionally obscured to reasonably adored in 2013, pp.66-68.

<sup>40</sup> Jean-Jacques Poucel's 'Oulipo: Explore, Expose, X-po' (2006) offers a more optimistic reading of the Oulipo's increased self-reflexivity, citing as example the collectively penned cycle of short-stories based on Georges Perec's *Le Voyage d'hiver*.

*great fire of London* (1989- ) series from the dire appraisal), but offer no examples of the work they have deemed derivative. In their individual essays, more elaborate critique of individual texts is presented, though is often grounded in the hazy territory of personal taste.

Cross-examining the corpus of Georges Perec's texts with Shields' *Reality Hunger*, Esposito illustrates how Perec could exemplify the writer Shields demands, one who produces "writing that pursues reality by recycling cultural identity" (Esposito 2013, p.21). The points made by Esposito are interesting in the way they trace the development of elements of Perec's boundless style, and how these manifest in the work of contemporary authors. How, like Perec, David Foster Wallace and Don DeLillo employ negation in their writing; or Tom McCarthy exploring what remains, the void, and memory as Perec did; or the writing of Edouard Levé, which shares with Perec's an exhibited desire for and interest in exhaustion.

But, in most instances, these comparisons between authors are concerned with select elements of Perec's style, none of which, standing alone, could be classified as 'oulipian' in their own right. A philosophy of negation is not a constraint, at least not in the oulipian sense; neither is a general exploration of memory.

The inclusion of Levé is particularly dangerous. While his books *Autoportrait* (2011) and *Suicide* (2012) could certainly be considered experimental texts – a broad classification under which much of the work produced by oulipian constraint could also be classified – the texts themselves do not exhibit constraint. In fact, regardless of results that bear similarities to Perec's *Je me souviens*, Levé's stochastic method of textual construction flirts with constraint's enemy – chance. Levé himself acknowledges his use of the process in *Suicide*, describing the method as akin to plucking marbles from a bag (Levé 2012, p.34).

Similarly, Esposito presents a conflicting theory of oulipian constraint in his analysis of the work by experimental Argentine author Césaire Aira, who is included by Esposito due to similarities in publishing practice with Jacques Jouet; both write brief novels and publish extensively. Discussions of quality aside, in what sense does a prolific publishing presence represent constraint, or demonstrate how oulipian writing is being advanced by non-members? Esposito concedes: “Aira even works within some constraints – he calls them ‘the continuum’ and ‘the constant flight forward’ – both dealing with the fact that he never goes back and revises, instead working within improvisation...” (Esposito 2013, p.38). Here is the misinterpretation or misrepresentation of oulipian constraint.

Consider again how Harry Mathews defines it: “...a form that makes you write something that you wouldn't normally say, or in a way that you would never have said it. The form is so demanding that you can't get around it” (Mathews in Ashbery 1987, p.9). What imposition can a demand for improvisation contain?

Roubaud doesn't apply Aira's 'flight forward' technique; while elements of the work are written and not revised, the whole is ultimately governed by a transposition of Bourbakian mathematics and mathematic prose. Aira's methods seem better assigned to the realm of 'practice' than 'constraint'. The same could be said of Jesse Ball, another notorious non-editor whose brilliant works, certainly conceivable (against the author's expressed wishes) as experimental, still contain and exhibit no constraint in the oulipian sense.

Esposito's inclusion and examination of Christian Bök is the exception in this treatment. While, as with authors discussed above, Esposito uses a comparative reading to illuminate the influence of Perec on Bök, he also illustrates the oulipian nature of the constraint in Bök's work.

*Crystallography* [1994] (2003) is an experimental work of poetry, but is also a work resulting from rigorous construction under constraint; the properties of crystals dictating forms of poems. Likewise, his collection *Eunoia* (2001) could be considered an experimental work in many regards, but is above all else a univocalic one. By using 98 per cent of the words available for each vowel (the result of an extensive research period), Bök has attempted not only constraint, but in a truly oulipian endeavour, its exhaustion. Esposito, though, does not make these distinctions. All members of Oulipo are individual writers in their own right, and not all texts composed by members of the Oulipo are oulipian. Daniel Levin Becker has weighed in on this “complex and debatable” concept most recently in the foreword to Anne Garréta’s *Sphinx* (2015, p.iv), and further distinction between oulipian, an Oulipian, an oulipian work, and a work by an Oulipian author can be found in Roubaud’s ‘Deductions Concerning Marcel Benabou, Oulipian Author (Notes)’ (1999).

In her own contribution, Elkin examines the different spheres of Oulipo Light (wordplay guessing games like Chicago<sup>41</sup>) and Oulipo Hard (Perc’s *Life...*), alongside the politics and suggested sexism of Oulipo, before proposing how they represent the group’s apparent stagnation. She writes:

The problem may be that the group is weighed down by its own past; whereas Oulipo was founded with the twin aims of researching (anoulipism) and producing (synthoulipism) potential literature, today research has won out, and creation takes place in the modes already laid out by earlier generations of Oulipians (Elkin 2013, p.68).

---

<sup>41</sup> Chicago is a guessing game where participants are presented with four sets of words or phrases exhibiting similar syntax, and must decipher from these a fifth set which is also the homophoned name of a city. As Levin Becker gleefully explains; homophonically, Chicago in French sounds like ‘*chie cagot*’, or ‘shit hypocrite’ (2012, p.64).

Elkin's argument suggests, misleadingly, that these two branches exist in binary opposition, as though separate. But the answer is in the manifestos, excerpted and used as the title for Levin Becker's book; between the two there exist *many subtle channels*.

Elkin's argument would be equivalent to saying Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*] is no different from any other collection of sonnets; that nothing differentiates Perec's *A Void* from any run of the mill lipogram. These are unique and groundbreaking texts born from exceptional research. Elsewhere, Elkin dedicates a significant portion of her section to a critique, and at times attack, on Hervé Le Tellier, in an attempt to highlight latent sexism in the Oulipo.

While the line of enquiry is valid, Elkin often resorts to information loosely relevant at best and delivered with condescension.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, while the underrepresentation of women in the ranks of the Oulipo is worthy of investigation, it is sadly not an outlier in the world of writing, or publishing, or just about any profession. Currently, women comprise one third of the Oulipo's active membership. Since the publication of Elkin's essay the translation of Anne Garréta's debut novel *Sphinx* (2015) became the first novel by a female member of the Oulipo to be published in English, a small but by no means insignificant development.

Elkin does at least provide some examination of the machinations of constraint in Le Tellier's *Enough About Love* (2009), and briefly, and even more dismissively, those orchestrating *The Sextine Chapel* (2005), but not without an overwrought attack on the 'constraint' of sexism. A failed attempt at a constrained text does not qualify it as derivative. Indeed, at times both Elkin and Esposito seem hamstrung by nostalgia

---

<sup>42</sup> The following appraisal, for example: "He is known within Oulipian circles for being a 'notorious wit,' which is ironic if you've read his work," (Elkin 2013, p.71) or the impotency quip on pp.72-73.

similar to the one they accuse Oulipo of, and credit to its stagnation. The difference is Elkin and Esposito exhibit this nostalgia from the peripheries of the group, as readers.

The (rightful) idolisation of classic oulipian texts, when not balanced with sound critical enquiry, brings a bias that cannot fairly exist when searching – or experimenting – with new literature. It is one thing to hold up Perec's *Life A User's Manual*, or *A Void*, as exemplar texts constructed under constraint, but these emerge from a process of exploration, of trial and error with a series of constraints – further honed, developed, and manipulated – plumbed to their labyrinthine depths. A personal fondness for Perec or Roubaud, or distaste for Jacques Jouet or Herve Le Tellier is fine, but too often these critiques would be better levelled at Jouet the writer, or Le Tellier the writer, not Le Tellier the Oulipian, for while the member numbers may be small, in no way is one representative of the whole. Nor, for that matter, should grievances with or distaste for one member be cause to lament an imminent demise for the Oulipo. The group has long been plagued by the question of its future – the minutes of the group, published variously in *La Bibliothèque Oulipienne* and *Collective Publications of the Oulipo*, reflect these concerns, and Levin Becker provides anecdotal evidence for remarkably intimate responses to similar enquiries throughout *Many Subtle Channels*.<sup>43</sup> The act of asking these questions and responding to them, with however much uncertainty, has been central to the group's progression and survival for the last five decades; it is just that now, as with so many other facets of the Oulipo, this interrogation, both internal and external, is played out more publicly.

---

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, the responses to a questionnaire sent to all members of the group in 1970 by Le Tellier (p.207); or similar concerns expressed by Bénabou in 2001 (p.244) reproduced in Levin Becker (2012).



## Oulipian Engagement with Asiatic Forms

The section on anoulipism proposed how the *biji* form could function within such a framework. Looking now at past examples of Oulipian engagement with Asiatic forms of writing, and in light of the critique above, I will establish how an oulipian-inspired enquiry into *biji* represents the progression proposed by contemporary scholars and critics of the movement.

At a week-long Oulipo bootcamp in the French town of Bourges, Levin Becker observes his fellow Oulipians Forte and Monk as they ‘tinker’ with what he calls “exotic poetic forms”: the Japanese *tanka* (an extended variant of the haiku); the Malayan *pantoum* (incidentally, another near-forgotten Asiatic writing style revised and revisited in the same McSweeney’s Edition that sees Douglas Coupland turn his hand to the *biji*); and the *haiku* (Levin Becker 2012, p.99).

Michelle Grangaud has developed a constraint called the poème fondu (melted poem), which involves reducing a full-length poem or longer text to the dimensions of a haiku, which marks a further development of Oulipian engagement in poetic redundancy and the slenderising of texts. Oulipian interest in Asiatic written forms has also appeared elsewhere, however briefly. In 1969 Georges Perec, Jacques Roubaud, and Pierre Lusson (who is not a member of the Oulipo, but a mathematician and colleague of Roubaud) published *Petit traité invitant à la découverte de l’art subtil du go*, a jointly authored poetic explanation of and rumination on a Japanese boardgame, Go, that has ancient origins.

There is also Jacques Roubaud’s Mississippi haibun, which combines elements of Jouet’s Metro Poem with the Japanese traditional travel poem: travelling on foot and

composing the poem (in place of the trip between stations), which is retranscribed during halts (when the train would be resting at the platform).<sup>44</sup>

Oulipian poet Michèle Métail has interpreted poems from the pre-Modern Chinese tradition, most famously Lady Suhui's verse puzzle, a poem with palindromic tendencies that can be read not only back to front, but also across other axes to reveal a variety of meanings.<sup>45</sup> Her studies and translations have been published in *Action Poétique* n°170 and *Cahier Art et Science* n° 4.

With influence flowing in the other direction, in the introduction to his study on Chinese theories of literature, Liu, in explaining his analytical inquiry into the often intuitive realm of traditional Chinese criticism, makes a remark that has peculiar resonance with this anoulipic research: "After all, synthesis must be preceded by analysis: without first analyzing natural rubber one would not know how to make synthetic rubber" (Liu 1975, p.5). His choice of words when expressing his intent to pave the way for a more adequate synthesis of Chinese and Western critical frameworks is remarkable. Liu also provides a theoretical precedent for the composition of Chinese forms under strict constraint in the Technical Theories chapter (Liu 1975, pp.88-98). In it he uses the writing of Shen Yüeh, Kao Ch'i, Li Meng-yang, and others to reveal the function of *ko* [form] as governing rules for literary construction, likened to the rules of checkers, or a square and compass. Underlying this, Liu says: "...is the concept of literature as a craft with *definite rules and methods*" (1975, p.90, emphasis mine).

---

<sup>44</sup> Published in part in the journal *in 'hui*, no. 8, 1979.

<sup>45</sup> Métail has shown an interest in the poetry of 4th Century C.E female writer Su Hui, who famously composed a reversible poem (*hui-wen shih*), allowed significant complexity in no small part due to the fact that Chinese characters and writing can, unlike Western languages, be read in any direction. Commenting on Su Hui's poem, *Star Guage*, Hinton's observations bring to mind Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*]: "It is a grid of twenty-nine characters by twenty-nine characters, which goes far beyond the simple 'reversible' poem, for it allows reading in all directions: horizontal, vertical and diagonal... This structure generates 2,848 possible poems," (2008, p.106).

Ultimately, the most interesting proposition that Elkin and Esposito make is this: “Perhaps it is now the case that writers who wish to make their mark by following the creative spirit of the legendary cadres of Oulipians must do so beyond the group’s margins” (Elkin & Esposito 2013, p.6). Though clear links between contemporary authors cited and oulipian practice (beyond a loose tag of ‘experimental’) are often lacking, this theory of peripheral writers resonates.

Never has the Oulipo been about ownership. There is attribution, certainly, in that one could rarely get away with proposing a ‘new’ constraint without being informed that Perec had already thought of it. There was a clandestine element to its research too, but this seems more born of uncertainty than possessiveness. Secrecy is not selfish, but rather a means to ensure the research is exhausted before the findings presented. Jouet clarifies this misconception succinctly (and with a fitting equation):

The Oulipo’s work is first of all this fundamental research: conception and exercise. Sometimes an oeuvre, but only sometimes. There is a current sophistry that could be expressed as follows: *L is a book by A. A is member of the Oulipo. Therefore L is an Oulipian book.* Unfortunately, it is only sometimes true; sometimes it’s false. One also encounters the situation *L is a book by A. A is a member of the Oulipo. But L is not an Oulipian book...* Further, the Oulipian endeavor is a group endeavor, with its concurrent dilution of individuality and its impersonality (Jouet 2001, pp.4-5).

In *Section I - Of Oulipo* of his sustained poetic essaying in *Cleaning House* [1995], Roubaud addresses the theory, history, and practice of the group to which he belongs. It is here he states: “A literary work, mediocre or not, deserving to be called Oulipian may have been composed by a member of Oulipo, but may also be composed by a non-member of Oulipo” (Roubaud 2006, p.212).

From day one, the Oulipo has been about the potential of literature in all forms, for all writers. Queneau writes: “We call potential literature the search for new forms and structures which may be used by writers in any way they see fit” (Queneau in Motte 1986, p.xi). And as Levin Becker writes: “[The Oulipo] does not purport to tell anyone about what literature should or must be; it tells anyone who cares to listen, by speculation or by demonstration, about what literature could *potentially* be” (Levin Becker 2012, p.25, italics in original).

In the Introduction I noted that since 2010 no less than ten books have been published in English by Oulipians (Elkin & Esposito 2013. p.6). Yet, as stated earlier, sadly this growing global interest in the Oulipo is not reflected in the Australian writing community.

With *The End Of Oulipo?*, despite shortcomings discussed above, Elkin and Esposito have represented both in their analysis of other authors, and in their own writing, how a progression of Oulipo must take place at its peripheries. Just as *The End Of Oulipo?* brings critical attention to a startlingly influential writing movement for a new generation of Americans, it is my intention that this contribution will follow in their footsteps in exhibiting that peripheral advancement in Australia, and the broader Anglophone world. Further to this, it will add another form of writing, as yet unexamined for its potential, to the ongoing list of forms subjected to oulipian-inspired exploration and/or exhaustion. The potential for progress with oulipian-aligned- and – inspired- inquiry lies in the attempt to exhaust the potential of the  $x$  in Ou- $x$ -po, the  $n$  in / $n$ /oulipo.

$$x = b_{iji}$$

$$n = b_{iji}$$

## CHAPTER 4

### CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The new text evokes for the reader (listener) the horizon of expectations and rules familiar from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. Variation and correction determine the scope, whereas alteration and reproduction determine the borders of a genre-structure.

- Jauss 1982, p.23.

This chapter will examine how the *biji* form is manifest in contemporary literature. Through a critical analyses of the three 21<sup>st</sup> century English language *biji* – Douglas Coupland’s ‘Survivor’ (2009) (and the novel that was developed from it, *Worst. Person. Ever.* (2013)), Owen Kelly’s ‘Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*’ (2010), and Ouyang Yu’s *On the Smell of an Oily Rag: Speaking English, thinking Chinese and living Australian* (2007); an investigation of three contemporary English language *zuihitsu* – Kimiko Hahn’s *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (2006), Anthony Peck’s *Pillow Book of a Manic Depressive* (2011), and Donald Richie’s *A Tractate on Japanese Aesthetics* (2007), will bolster this set of texts; and the concept of the ‘unintentional *biji*’, I will propose a theory on the form of contemporary *biji*.

Having established throughout these analyses the varying ways through which writers have refound this form in its contemporary application, the next chapter will collate this data in order to propose a method for identifying potential contemporary *biji*. This method is informed by a critical reading of studies and works by David Shields – who, as will be shown, can be considered an anticipatory plagiarist of anoulipic *biji*; Linda Chance, who establishes the concept of formless form; and Ming Dong Gu, whose deft

navigation of Eastern and Western literary theory in establishing openness in texts lays the groundwork for one element of the potential of *biji* to be examined. Accompanying this method is a list of works – by no means exhaustive – of potential contemporary *biji* that include brief analyses to explicate their inclusion.

Hightower states the need for an entire corpus, rather than a mere handful of texts, to establish a genre. He writes:

Genres come into being as a literature develops, not as a single literary work is written. Genre as a class consisting of a single member is meaningless. Consequently even a list of genres has to wait until a literature exists and people are aware of its existence (Hightower 1957, p.512).

Treating an ancient genre as a constraint in and of itself, as I propose to do, then requires the clarification of the characteristics of that genre. To borrow a phrase from Idema & Haft (1997, p.68), my interest in the genre-ness of the *biji* and the potential for that to be revitalised, translated, and presented in a contemporary English language work, is seeking to dissolve the rigid divide between academic and literary interest in Chinese authors.

While historically there is an overwhelmingly rich canon of *biji* – to the point of problematic disparity – contemporary application of the form is significantly harder to come by. Hence, Hightower's conundrum: if there are only three texts of contemporary, English language *biji* – Douglas Coupland's 'Survivor',<sup>46</sup> Owen Kelly's 'Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*', and Ouyang Yu's *On the Smell of an Oily Rag: Speaking English, thinking Chinese and living Australian* – how can the

---

<sup>46</sup> As Coupland's 'Survivor' has now been developed into a full-length novel, *Worst. Person. Ever.* (2013), consideration of this development and the resulting text will also be included.

parameters be drawn or a clearer understanding reached of what links these texts together?

First, it should be clarified what ‘genre’ offers here for scholars, readers, and writers, for all three, consciously or unconsciously, use genre as a guiding principle for comprehension – as Bruner states: “We can speak of genre both as a property of a text and as a way of comprehending narrative” (Bruner 1991, p.14). Bruner expounds this statement later, clarifying the idea of genre as a model, or scaffold for a text and its reception: “Genres seem to provide both writer and reader with commodious and conventional ‘models’ for limiting the hermeneutic task of making sense of human happenings – ones we narrate to ourselves as well as ones we hear others tell” (ibid). In his analysis of the Chinese short story Hanan defines genre as:

...a class of literary works distinguished from other classes by a set of formal and non-formal characteristics...Of course, a genre is not just a convenient concept for the systemizing critic, it is also something real to the writer; when he is writing in relation to a literary tradition, he is almost inevitably concerned with genre, whether he realises it or not. This is what gives the concept of genre value for the critic (Hanan 1967, p.178).

Hanan offers a retrospective analysis that seeks to distinguish ancient Chinese literary forms, in this instance the short story, as distinct genres that can be classified in accordance to defining features, characteristics, form, and content. This critical outline for classification blends traditional Chinese and Western literary models and is an effective theoretical model for classification of other texts not examined in this paper by Hanan, for example, collections of *biji*.

This chapter examines how the ancient tradition of *biji* notebook writing has been applied and appropriated in the 21st century by authors working in the English language. Tracing the journey of this traditional Chinese form of writing is not easy – it is one that spans dynasties, cultures, and languages. Not only this, but there are frequent gaps in this history. But through a critical reading of three such *biji* collections – Douglas Coupland’s ‘Survivor’, a creative non-fiction hybrid that appeared in an anthology of new takes on old forms titled *Vikings, Monks, Philosophers, Whores: Old Forms, Unearthed*; Owen Kelly’s ‘Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*’, a fractured academic essay; and Ouyang Yu’s *On the Smell of an Oily Rag: Speaking English, thinking Chinese and living Australian*, which he defines as *biji feixiaoshuo* or “pen-notes non-fiction” – the evolution of the *biji* form beyond China will be traced and examined.

This gives rise to further questions – how is a *biji* written when the most common definitions are of its miscellaneousness and undefinable nature? How accurately has the genre been appropriated? What form does a ‘contemporary’ *biji* take? What does an interest in traditional Chinese written forms offer writers – of both fiction and non-fiction – today? While there is distant tradition of *biji* for these contemporary authors there remain historical, cultural, and/or linguistic barriers between that tradition and their current practice. In this sense, they are pioneers working to re-establish those characteristics in a radically different written world.

There is, generally speaking, a lack of information available from the authors themselves as to what they consider to be a *biji*; which elements of this ancient literature – stylistic, thematic, organisational – they based their own versions on. Yet all have explicitly stated in their titles that they are examples of this form.



## Douglas Coupland

One interesting development to arise from the complications pertaining to classification of *biji* and *xiaoshuo* is a view of ‘*biji xiaoshuo*’ as meaning “fiction written in the form of notebooks” (Wu 1993). Coupland’s contemporary application of the form seems to fit such a model. His intentions are best garnered from the editors of the collection within which his *biji*, ‘Survivor’, appeared. Curators/editors of the collection, *Vikings, Monks, Philosophers, Whores: Old Forms, Unearthed*, Darren Franich and Graham Weatherly state in their introduction: “After receiving a mountain of printed material devoted to the barely translated form we’d assigned him, Douglas Coupland said ‘I think I was born to *biji*’” (Franich & Weatherly 2009, p.ii).

Coupland’s predilection towards the *biji* genre can be seen in his earlier work. His *Generation X*, a collection of ‘Tales for an Accelerated Culture’ combines brief stories, graphics, statistics, mock-sociological definitions; a seething mass of contemporary forms that blurs boundaries of fiction and non-fiction, contemporary history and unofficial contemporary history. *JPod* (2007) likewise makes use of a fractured form that shifts perspectives, and progresses in brief bursts of lists (of three-letter Scabble words (pp.292-296), of jargon (p.546)), a variety of textual forms and assorted miscellanea – everything from Pi to 100,000 digits (pp.408-463), to online game scores (p.491), conversation transcripts (pp.495-508) and spam emails (p.33).

While it is not clarified which examples of *biji* were presented to Coupland in that mountain of material from Franich and Weatherly, ‘Survivor’ is accompanied in the collection by an excerpt from Duan Chengshi’s *Youyang Zazu* [*Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*], which has been translated by Carrie E. Reed. Reed’s prior study of the *biji* form – apparent in her book-length translation of *Nugao Ji* [*Records from Nugao*] and extensive study of *Youyang Zazu*, evident in her ‘Tattoo in Early China’ (2000) and

‘Motivation and Meaning of a "Hodge-podge": Duan Chengshi's "*Youyang zazhi*"' (2003) – should be acknowledged. Her involvement in the project, in any capacity, imparts some scholarly credibility on this attempt at ‘unearthing’ an old form.

When I contacted Professor Reed to discuss this involvement, however, it was the first she had heard of McSweeney’s use of her translations:

It would be interesting to me to talk to them and find out why they didn't contact me just to have a dialogue if nothing else. I'm wondering if they also did not contact the scholar of religion Rob Campany for example who has done quite a bit of writing on *Zhiguai xiaoshuo*. It is disappointing, if only because I find this an incredibly fascinating subject, and I would have loved to be involved in discussing it (Personal correspondence, 2014).

Franich and Weatherly define the *biji* as “a popular style in China for over a thousand years, composed of miscellaneous observations, musings, and tall tales” (2009, p.i). The layout of the text is also littered with factoids about the *biji* form, run in the margin alongside the story proper. This device is employed throughout the rest of the collection – which also includes pantoums, nivolas, whore dialogues and consuetudinaries<sup>47</sup> – and the contents have been authored by Franich and Weatherly, albeit with the warning: “This is not a research text: this is a paean to the weird, beautiful, missing links of literature” (2009, p.ii).

Of the three contemporary English language *biji*, Coupland’s most closely visually resembles the model proposed by Minford and Tong. The facts included in the margin

---

<sup>47</sup> A pantoum is a poem composed in quatrains, the second and fourth lines of each stanza reoccur, slightly altered, in the first and third lines of the next stanza, and the first and third lines of the first stanza reappear as the second and final lines of the last stanza; nivola is a nonsense-term coined by Spanish writer Miguel de Unamuno to describe the reactionary, modernist and existential plotless stories he wrote in reaction to the prevalence of realism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; whore dialogue, with origins in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, is an early precedent to erotic writing, a saucier *Mills & Boon*; consuetudinaries are meticulous, exhaustive inventories used to document monastic life.

(outer chamber) of Coupland's *biji* are differentiated with red font and cite examples taken most frequently from the work of Duan Chengshi – *Youyang zazu* and *Nuogao Ji* – as well as Ji Yun's *Guwang tingzhi* [*Listen In A Rough Way*] and *Luanyang xiaoxialu* [*Record of Spending the Summer at Luanyang*], taken from his *Yuewei caotang biji* [*The Thatched Study of Close Scrutiny*]. The information included by Coupland ranges from common devices employed in *biji* – the inclusion of health-related advice, folkloric methods for warding off danger, the use of lists, the blunt description of death – to recurring themes, such as birds used as a symbol for death, or mythical or magical creatures, and in all instances include a brief excerpt from the relevant source.

'Survivor' is a *biji* written in the first person, narrated by a member of the camera crew for the reality television show *Survivor*, taking place on islands in the Republic of Kiribati. This form of narration is particularly interesting – often entries within *biji* are not told from first-hand experience, but as a recollection of a tale or story heard from another source, and prefaced as such. The first-person narration allows for an immediacy and cumulative construction of a personality for the storyteller beyond that of a simple narrator who passes on stories, and the technique is also present in older *biji* like Ji Yun's Qing era *Yuewei caotang biji*.

The foreign setting allows for numerous traits of the *biji* genre to be employed: geographical information; observations on weather; and the like. Many early *biji* had elements common with travel diaries – their authors compiling thoughts and impressions of new places they visited while on official postings<sup>48</sup> – and Coupland's remote setting allows him to make use of similar devices. True to the *biji* form, the entries comprising 'Survivor' are notably brief: the longest entry around 500 words; the

---

<sup>48</sup> Alimov has observed a trend of such *biji* during the Song era: "...a separate group of *biji* writings constitute travel diaries and notes made during journeys, which also became widespread under the Song dynasty" (Alimov 1999, p.41).

shortest, as follows, just 15: ‘There’s a part of me that loves the prospect of lawlessness, I have to admit’ (Coupland 2009, p.53).

Other generic qualities are apparent: the use of street language – Coupland’s narrator is colourfully explicit, his slang and curses creative and crass; dream motifs are also present; as are medicinal facts; recipes; and observations that can be viewed as ‘unofficial histories’ or more personal accounts of world events. The use of other texts within the *biji* is also present, in this instance, a transcript of a video message sent from a loved one at home to a contestant on the show, acts as a contemporary version of the letters, poems, or songs that were included in traditional *biji*. Together, there are 49 entries in Coupland’s ‘Survivor’, comprising his central hall; of these, 30 are written in a voice that is distinguishably that of the narrator with personal observations and a flare of character. While others are understandably devoid of personality, standing alone and colouring the world of the story – the inventorying of medicines, the tuna recipes, the flight times for a plane flying from Nauru to Brisbane, for example – there are some entries that appear to be penned by a different hand entirely. These curious banalities act visually as the Chinese lattice, dividing the central space, and textually unravelling different levels of meaning in the story. The overview of the Republic of Kiribati, for example, reads as though it could have come directly from an atlas, including as it does calling codes, Gross Domestic Output, population information and the like. Similarly, an entry explaining the concept of the television show *Survivor*, reads as though it could have been taken directly from the network’s website – I checked; it was not.

In this sense, Coupland seems to pay homage both to *biji* authored with strictly personal accounts, as in the travel diaries alluded to earlier; and *biji* that have been compiled where a large portion of content has been pulled by the author from other sources and reworked, commented on, excerpted, or simply included as is and endowed new

meaning by its very presence in a wider collection. Coupland's assembled miscellanea, presented in this manner, suggest a text with a potential reading akin to that of Roubaud's *The Great Fire Of London* [1989], assembled with his *insertions*: "...in my insertions there is also for the reader, if he so desires, an exercise-like quality: the 'why' of any given interpolation, or bifurcation, is passed over in silence; a 'why' whose answer aims to shed light on the narrative's ultimate aim: its completion and the revelation of what it is" (Roubaud 2006, p.242).

In 2013 Coupland published *Worst. Person. Ever.* a book-length work developed from 'Survivor'. Coupland does not purport that *Worst. Person. Ever.* is itself a *biji*, despite clarifying its origins as such in the book. However, given that the focus of this study is the contemporary application of *biji*, Coupland's attempts to develop his *biji* into a longer-form work requires examination.

Unlike Wu Jianren, who placed a *biji* within the broader narrative network of *Ershinian muduzhi guaixianzhuang* [*Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*] (1909), Coupland does not embed the construction of his original *biji* into the narrative, though does acknowledge the form before with this disclaimer appearing on the page opposite the book's publication information:

This book began, improbably, as an attempt... to reinvigorate the *biji*, a genre in classical Chinese literature. *Biji* roughly translates as 'notebook', and can contain anecdotes, quotations, random musings, philological speculations, literary criticism and anything that the author deems worth recording. The genre first appeared during the Wei and Jin dynasties, and matured during the Tang dynasty. The *biji* of that period mostly contain the 'believe-it-or-not' kind of anecdote, and many of them can be treated as collections of short fictions (Coupland 2013).

While in the original 'Survivor' the foulmouthed, British divorce law-hating, camera-toting narrator/compiler has a companion named Ray, in *Worst. Person. Ever.* the name is now bestowed upon the narrator, Raymond Gunt. The character of his sometimes-informer is now named Neal. Neal is in possession of a colourful past as a homeless man on the London streets, and an undeniable gift with women. For a novel-length adaptation, rather than use a greater number of similarly loosely connected anecdotes and facts, Coupland has for the most part developed elements of 'Survivor' into more traditional narrative segments in order to enlarge the work. For example, the location of the Pacific Proving Grounds play a more significant role in the longer development of the story, as does the bug-eating contest from 'Survivor'. The crass list of character classifications in 'Survivor' (Coupland 2009, p.47) makes numerous re-appearances throughout, providing much of the fodder for chapter 14. This approach results in rendering the abounding miscellaneous entries as purely asides in a broader, more traditional narrative form, rather than being the necessary and intrinsic compounds of form.

Coupland's apparent commitment to traditional narrative forms above a more extensive *biji* is evidenced in the use of Neal. The lowbrow though occasionally insightful philosophical musings that comprise much of Raymond and Neal's shared dialogue often serve simply as a more novelistic device with which to include information that would otherwise appear isolated from the body text. This information is usually presented in distinguishing font, accompanied by a bitterly laconic appraisal or commentary from Coupland/Gunt, and with its own subtitle. This assorted extra text helps to open the space of the work in a manner akin to, but less effective than, the use of varied fonts and different panels of text in 'Survivor'. Instead, in many instances such information is framed as a sequence of he said/I said banter between the two main

characters of the novel. The opening ‘Dear Reader’, provides an epistolary framing that is occasionally returned to, (see Coupland 2013, p.91, pp.279-280, p.303) though never closed, that suggests an awareness of readers for the character of Raymond Gunt. Throughout the text, the narrator also pens letters variously to the Gods and other parties. This framing also establishes another connection between *Worst. Person. Ever.* and traditional *biji*, which commonly began with a preface wherein the author/compiler directly addressed the reader.

However, not all of what comprises *Worst. Person. Ever.*’s miscellaneousness is presented as dialogue. While they account for a significantly smaller percentage of the complete text in *Worst. Person. Ever.* than in ‘Survivor’, the interspersed informational intrusions do suggest an element of miscellaneousness, and generate the type of textual space presented by Minford & Tong (1999).

Aesthetically, the text is far removed from ‘Survivor’, but particularly from the studio-as-text form proposed by Minford & Tong (1999, pp.6-9). However, by incorporating a running commentary, presenting the text in a fractured manner, and making use of the convergence of multiple narrative styles and voices, Coupland creates a text that is both open, and oscillating with tension, making advances towards a sustained sense of strangeness akin to that manifest in the tales of Pu Songling. *Worst. Person. Ever.* comprises 55 chapters/entries, each untitled, that vary in length from less than two, to in excess of ten pages. They occur in chronological sequence and the division between entries occurs at predictable plot points one would expect to encounter in a conventional novel. However, as in ‘Survivor’, the text of *Worst. Person. Ever.* is littered with factual intrusions that rupture the topology of the text, fracturing the otherwise traditional representation of form.

.....

They appear most often closed off from the body text by a line of periods above and below. These **asides** are in a different font to the rest of the text and the focal point of each entry is bolded.

.....

Coupland concludes the text with his own biography, written in a laconic third person, and typographically set in the **style described above**.

.....

To further enhance the subtle chaos of this technique, Coupland varies the location of these asides. In some instances they will appear directly after a trigger in the body text. For example, in chapter 16 the narrator mentions a joke about donkeys behind a Cinnabon, which is followed immediately by description of the American baked-goods chain (2013, p.99). Yet on other occasions, as in chapter 6, an aside about Dexys Midnight Runners' hit "Come On Eileen" appears on page 38, despite the first reference to the song occurring on page 35. Similarly, the first time the protagonist consumes a macadamia nut and has an allergic reaction occurs on page 80, but information on tree nut allergies does not occur as an aside until page 102. This prevents the reader from predicting when or where asides will occur, and what their focus will be, generating a sense of formless form, and opens the text in manner similar to the one described by Minford & Tong (1999 pp.6-9). It is in this practice that Coupland's more subtle engineering to dismantle the form of the work can be found. While the narrative progresses chronologically, many of its individual components are documented in fractured bursts.



Another technique employed by Coupland to destabilise the form is cultural enjambment. While Coupland's corpus is rife with pop cultural references, in *Worst. Person. Ever.* he creates pop cultural portmanteaus that enhance the tension in the text. An example can be found in chapter 16, where *The Matrix* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* are mashed together: "It's like entering the Matrix! I wonder if we'll meet enchanted animals who speak Jacobean English!" (Coupland 2013, p.99).

Twenty-two chapters, that is, nearly half of all entries, do not contain intrusions or asides. Further, of these 22, only six contain elements or blocks of text that appear consistent with material that has elsewhere been cordoned off from the text proper for emphasis. Twenty chapters contain a single aside; six chapters contain two asides; six chapters contain three asides; and chapter 28 is comprised entirely of such miscellanea. There are 57 asides in the text, a handful of which have been recycled from 'Survivor' (2009). Let us compare this to the first incarnation of Coupland's *biji*. Together, there are 49 entries in 'Survivor'. As previously stated, 30 are written in a voice that is distinguishably that of the narrator with personal observations and a flare of character, which means the remaining collected miscellanea accounts for almost 40 percent of the text. The rate is inverted in *Worst. Person Ever.* with 40 percent of the entries containing no asides at all; and where entries do contain asides they often (with the exception of chapter 28) account for an insubstantial portion of the text.

Returning to the initial *biji*, 'Survivor', a fact sheet on *biji* compiled by Franich and Weatherly is also included:

...*biji* can contain legends, short anecdotes, scientific and anthropological notes, and bits of local wisdom... Accounts of everyday life mix with travel narrative and stories of the supernatural; tales of romance and court intrigue are

interspersed with lists of interesting objects or unusual types of food. The unstable styles and irregular content ultimately cohere between fiction and non-fiction, *biji* offer a top-down vision of a culture and its time (Franich & Weatherly 2009, p.39).

Also listed on this page are characteristics of the genre, as noted by the editors: “musings, anecdotes, quotations, ‘believe-it-or-not’ fiction, social anthropology” (ibid). While helpful and informative, this fact sheet is not without its problems. For example, their claim: “True to its polyglot form, the *biji* is known by many names, *xiaoshuo*, *zazu*, *suoyu*, *leishu*, *zalu*” (Franich & Weatherly 2009, p.39), perpetuates a clunky understanding of genre classification and boundaries. While some *biji* are *xiaoshuo*, and vice versa, the two are not synonymous.

The misconception stems from the traditional classification system with *biji*, as a result of its miscellaneous content, placed within the *xiaoshuo* or ‘fiction’ branch (*biji* was widely regarded as ‘unofficial history’). Gang notes: “The writing/compilation of *biji* have been a popular literary practice ever since the third century, but the official acknowledgment of the genre does not appear until very recent times” (Gang 2010, pp.7-8) and adds that:

This delay in bibliographical recognition to a large extent indicates the marginalized status of the genre of *biji* in traditional Chinese literature and literary criticism. However, while this might prevent us from acquiring a better knowledge of the critical reception of the genre in the past, it also grants the genre a chance to expand and develop itself, enabling it to achieve a level of flexibility or versatility that would be otherwise unattainable had the genre become more recognized in Chinese literary history (ibid).

As a result of the niche but fanatic readership of the McSweeney's publishing house, Coupland's *biji* 'Survivor' appears to be the most broadly acknowledged take on the form in recent years, and in English.

### **Owen Kelly**

Owen Kelly, author of 'Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*', states via email correspondence that Coupland's 'Survivor' inspired his own *biji*:

That was the modern *biji* that I read and it reminded me that I had always intended to write one (among the many things that I had always intended to do). I was struggling to find a way of telling the history of the Marinetta project and it seemed the perfect form in that it mixed truth and fiction and contained both lists and lies. Since I didn't want my chapter to be another academic report I seized on the form (personal correspondence, 2012).

The editor of the collection of essays that contains Kelly's *biji*, Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss, describes his text as a "non-linear narrative" written in "the quasi-style of this ancient book type [*biji*]" and proposes that "Kelly paraphrases the original concept that contains anecdotes, quotations, random musings, philological speculations, literary criticism and almost everything that the author deems worth recording" (Sonvilla-Weiss 2010, p.17).

Kelly employs the form in this essay in order to document the results of a five-year project titled *Marinetta Ombro*, in which he, alongside a colleague at Arcada University of Applied Science, created a virtual island, Rosario, in an attempt to examine the potential and functionality of virtual environment education.

Within 'Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*' Kelly's own summary of the *biji* (which he refers to as a traditional Chinese *zalu* or *zazu*) is included: "A notebook not unlike the European commonplace book in form in that it contains many

disparate kinds of content. Unlike the commonplace book, though, the content combines by stealth into a narrative or worldview” (Kelly 2010, p.124). Further to this, ‘Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*’ concludes with a copy of the fact sheet included in McSweeney’s Issue 31 2009, quoted above.<sup>49</sup>

Kelly states that he was struggling to find a way to tell the history of Marinetta and it takes only a brief look at the project to discover why. Students at Arcada, a university of Applied Science in Helsinki, Finland, helped to create Marinetta – the capital city of a fictional island named Rosario – that hypothetically existed just south of midway between Greece and Tunisia, although only really existed on the Internet. The synthetic world was used to explore the theoretical and practical pedagogical possibilities the construction, maintenance and development of such a digital world could offer, and Kelly outlines its evolution in his text.

The idea that earlier *biji* served as unofficial histories for a dynasty, family, or region is interesting considering the task undertaken by Kelly with this text; it is documenting the process of constructing a ‘real’ history for a false locale. Like Coupland, Kelly can be seen to be taking on the role of compiler, as well as author. This *biji* contains citations from texts such as Richard Harding Davis’ *In The Fog*, university program documents, and texts that I’m quite certain do not actually exist – but were translated during the construction of Rosario’s history – such as Dek Manto’s *La Marcharo Vers Hemo*. His inclusion of these citations however is often clunky at best, and while some quotes appear cleanly and clearly attributed, oftentimes they are presented ad hoc, the reader left to establish the connection between the quote or citation (only noticeable as such by its smaller font) and what is being discussed elsewhere in that particular section of the essay. Citations are littered about like epigrams haphazardly scattered amongst the body

---

<sup>49</sup> This lends weight to the argument that Coupland’s take on the form is the most well-known.

text proper, and often mid-argument, or as a non-committal technique for ending a point, where the citation is obscure enough to be potentially relevant, though certainly not clear enough to be taken as serious justification.

In defence of Kelly's technique, there is historical precedent for such a practice. In his examination of *Notes of Master Song Jin-wen*, a *biji* collection composed by Northern Song native Song Qi, Alimov observes: "Far from all of the maxims cited belong to Song Qi himself, but he does not list his sources" (Alimov 1999, p.42).

In other instances, these allusions are used to highlight or elaborate specific themes, just as an author of a more traditional *biji* may turn to a quote from the classics in order to claim the importance of, or justification for, his own content.

Kelly seems eager to associate the text with *zalu* (or *zazu*), a kind of branch of literature synonymous with *biji* that Wilkinson translates as 'miscellaneous records' (Wilkinson 2000, p.611). To this end Kelly has certainly provided a collection of entries that could be construed as 'miscellaneous'.

### **Ouyang Yu**

Ouyang Yu's *On The Smell Of An Oily Rag* is the most indebted of the three to the extensive history of the *biji*. Unlike Coupland and Kelly – whose works, were they not explicitly framed by their authors/editors as *biji*, could potentially be misconstrued as fractured short fiction and essay respectively – Ouyang's collection is closest in form to the traditional *biji* because it is just that: a collection. The concept of a 'collection' is central to *biji*, due to the *cumulative* effect of these stories, or entries, however seemingly disparate.

In the introduction Ouyang clarifies the contents of his text: "It is writing that I intend to be enjoyable, but as fragmentary as when you switch between dozens of television

channels” (Ouyang 2007, p.xi). With this statement, Ouyang has clearly revealed his knowledge of the ancient form he appropriates, the ‘fragmentary’ *biji*, and can readily find a contemporary point of reference for the way in which its contents are organised or laid out, a networked pastiche of information akin to the narratives created when flipping through television channels. Ouyang also goes as far as to offer his own definition of the form he has chosen to appropriate:

In ancient China, there is a fiction called, *biji xiaoshuo* (roughly, pen-notes fiction), a fiction that contains disparate stories with no apparent interconnecting narrative, each on its own, each as short as a paragraph but no longer than a page (Ouyang 2007, pp.xi-xii).

Progressing from the definition, Ouyang proclaims that his *On The Smell Of An Oily Rag*... has been written in the style of a new genre he has created, *biji feixiaoshuo* or “pen-notes non-fiction” that he says is “written in an accessible, readable and deliberately un-academic style” (Ouyang 2007, p.xii). His suggestion that *Oily Rag* is a “seminal non-fictional book” (ibid) that creates its own genre is rather bold. While Ouyang may have coined the term *biji feixiaoshuo*, to suggest that the form of a non-fictional *biji* – even one that “draws references from a range of literary and cultural works going as far back as *The Book of Songs* (1122-256 BC)” (ibid) – is an act of linguistic pioneering, fails to recognise one of the most seminal *biji* collections of all time (and an obvious precedent to the collection Ouyang offers), Qian Zhongshu’s comparatively recent *Guanzhui bian* [*Limited Views: Essays on Ideas and Letters*].<sup>50</sup> Like Ouyang’s *biji*, Qian’s examines “cultural, linguistic and literary similarities” (Ouyang 2007, p.xii) not between China and Australia specifically, but across a broader

---

<sup>50</sup> It should be observed that I have not seen *biji feixiaoshuo* used prior to his book, nor have I seen it used since publication of the book except in reference to *Oily Rag*. Ouyang Yu has since published a second *biji feixiaoshuo* in Chinese, *Yixin diaochong* [*A Translator's Heart Carving the Insects*], published in Taiwan.

scope that shows a profound knowledge of both European and Chinese literature and writing.

Ouyang suggests that his text blends “various genres of diary, fiction, non-fiction, essay, translation and poetry” (Ouyang 2007, p.xii). The diary genre is apparent in the unapologetic, honest and at times crass way Ouyang recalls information for entries, reading without a doubt like a personal account. The non-fiction aspects of the text are a little harder to qualify; while Ouyang often cites ‘facts’ – whether statistical, or merely those borne of ‘common knowledge’, they are rarely quantified or properly cited.

Like the entries in *Guanzhui bian*, Ouyang includes a quote or citation from songs; a Shakespearean snowclone; old Chinese proverbs, such as the Yan Dynasty *Writers: one step higher than beggars*; and myriad other sources, and uses these as launch pads for the entries’ thematic concerns. As Gang’s insightful readings of poems contained within Liu Yiqing’s *Qiantang Yishi* (Gang 2010, pp.242-270) reveal, the inclusion of various literary forms within a *biji* plays a significant structural role in providing signs and clues that allow an anticipation and deeper understanding of what will next be discussed in the text. As explanation for the proliferation of this intertextual practice in traditional *biji* (a practice that has continued through the genres development), Kao states:

Because of the general dominance of the concept of the past in Chinese culture and the Confucian education the literati received, which favored transmission of accepted values over innovation, the kind of literature they produced is heavily intertextual and often larded with instances of self-reference (Kao 1997, p.66).

As other *biji* offer an introduction to a city, or society, crib-notes on an existence, Ouyang’s *Oily Rag* serves as a guidebook to the rocky roads between Australian English and Chinese language, culture, and societal norms. In a 2010 interview about *OTSOAOR* Ouyang says: “The whole thing is an organic growth out of my combination

of daily literary activities, fiction, poetry, literary criticism, literary translation and literary magazine editing, in both languages, a growth bit by organic bit, and by fits and starts” (Ball 2010). And in the same interview reflects:

As for why I chose the style, it was as unexplainable as why a seed took roots in a particular patch of the soil and grew into a tree or a flower but part of the reason is really my disgust with the books published here and elsewhere, big chunks of stuff that I had little patience for while things could be done in fragments that are much more meaningful. It’s what the pace of life demands of us, too (Ball 2010).

Returning to the point of the potential for the Coupland and Kelly *biji* to be misconstrued, it is worth noting titling as a method for classification of *biji* where collections are self-prescriptively labelled suggesting a reading, entry point, or wider collection of works within which to consider the text and better comprehend the totality of its meaning. As Cyril Birch notes: “Expectations of form fulfilled leave us freer to contemplate the total meaning” (Birch 1974, p.1).

For all the discrepancies in interpretation and reapplication of the form that exist in the contemporary examples provided by Coupland, Kelly, and Yu, each at least lay foundations for a more extensive study of *biji* and the potential of its contemporary English application.

### **The Genre-ness of *Biji***

Earlier in this thesis, an analysis of Hightower and Hanan revealed why considerations of genre are integral to understanding *biji*, and its place within the broader history of Chinese literature. Now a proposition of generic defining features common to or occurring in all *contemporary biji* is required. Before proceeding to such a proposition it



is worth noting that even in light of the analyses above, and that of Gang discussed in chapter 2, a truly contemporary definition of *biji*, or even a definition of a contemporary *biji*, is not without its problems.

Commenting on the disparate branch of *xiaoshuo* as a residual classification category alongside the four other bibliographical branches<sup>51</sup> – classics, history, belles letters, philosophy; all canonical by nature – Inglis notes it engenders a critical discourse where “textual reception became more important than considerations of form – in contrast to Aristotelian theory in the West” (Inglis 2006 p.108). After a summation of existing scholarly consideration of the genre-ness of *biji* – informed by Franke’s *Some Aspects of Chinese Private Historiography* and Ma’s entry in Nienhauser’s *History Of Chinese Literature* – Inglis concludes:

... given that brevity and casualness are the essential hallmarks of this genre [*biji*] according to both Franke and Ma, *biji* would seem impossible to define as a genre in its own right; indeed, Ma himself observes that there are no hard and fast rules for defining *biji* literature. And if it is not possible to define clearly what *biji* literature is, neither is it possible to distinguish *biji* from *xiaoshuo*, or from *zhiguai* for that matter (Inglis 2006, p.109).

Similarly, Birch has noted the problematic nature of genre study in Chinese literature “in the identification of generic types, probably more work remains to be done in the field of Chinese fiction than in any other branch of literature” (Birch 1974, pp.5-6). Huntington, too, observes these difficulties in her study of *biji* from the Ming/Qing dynastic transition, and how the genre was used by authors to reflect the chaos of the times. She states that *biji* is: “A genre which fits uneasily into contemporary generic

---

<sup>51</sup> Hsun provides a concise and easy to follow analysis of the four branches of literature in classical Chinese bibliophilia, and the history of *xiaoshuo* classification in *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction*, 1959, pp.3-9.

divisions because of its brevity, miscellaneous content, and problematic relationship to history and fiction” (Huntington 2005, p.61). As can be seen from the analysis above, her observations ring true in the three contemporary examples of the form that have been examined.

That Huntington shows some awareness of the potential for contemporary examination of the form is refreshing, and allows for her study of traditional *biji* to inform an analyses of their contemporary counterparts. Reflecting on Huntington’s study, Struve observes:

Huntington points out the accord between the typically fragmentary, discontinuous entries in *biji* and the episodic nature of individual memory, especially of experiences so bewildering and horrendous that they are difficult to narrativize coherently. But she also suggests that the (at least simulated) unpretentiousness of the genre allowed authors relative freedom to choose the degree to which they lent their own memories to the construction of bigger stories of communal or national travail (Struve 2005, p.4).

The connection between the episodic form of the *biji* and the bewildering, fragmentary individual memories that inform their content – simulated or not – is reflected in a majority of *biji*. Inglis writes: “The term *biji* itself suggests that form is more important than topoi” (Inglis 2006, p.109), and through an analysis of the three contemporary *biji* at hand, it does become apparent that all three share more in common in regards to form – that is, the ‘outer form’ proposed by Wellek & Warren<sup>52</sup> – with their fitful entries and loosely referenced, scattered intertextual allusions employed as narrative breakpoints or signposts, than topoi.

---

<sup>52</sup> Wellek & Warren define genre as “as a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose – more crudely, subject and audience)” (1962, p.231).

Ouyang Yu is bewildered by the co-existence of two disparate cultures; Australian and Chinese. The protagonist of Douglas Coupland's *biji*, 'Survivor', is placed in an isolated life-or-death situation, no doubt horrendous. And Kelly attempts to straddle unstable ground between real and artificial worlds. Similarly, in the extensive collections of *biji* from Yuan Mei, the Qing dynasty author of *Zi Bu Yu* [*What The Master Would Not Discuss*], and his contemporaries the central characters experience bewildering or horrendous interactions, often with beings from other realms (the spirit or ghost worlds) that are so bizarre or inexplicable that a broader sense of meaning can only come not from attempting to narrativise the short tales in a more traditional sense, but through compiling records – fictionalised or not – of such occurrences to allow common themes or motifs to be revealed en masse.

Looking then once again at 'Survivor', *On The Smell Of An Oily Rag*, and 'Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*', is there brevity, casualness, and miscellaneous content apparent in all three? Yes. Though, is this enough to move beyond the resigned realm wherein a *biji* is only defined by, or in relation to, what it is not?

### **The Influence & Traces of *Biji* in Contemporary Fiction**

While *biji* are nowhere near as prevalent as they had been during the Tang and Song, elements of the form have been adapted for contemporary use, and the *biji* form itself has been utilised by writers in acts of bricolage. Inglis writes: "When the term *xiaoshuo* is linked with *biji* (as in *biji xiaoshuo*) in regard to works which emphasize characterization and narrative, a conflict with the supposed essential characteristics of *biji* as being both brief and casual thereby arises" (Inglis 2006, p.109). The solution to this conflict can be found in the *mise-en-abyme* technique employed by Wu Jianren in *Ershinian muduzhi guaixianzhuang* [*Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two*

*Decades*] where the construction of the *biji*, and the text itself, is embedded in a broader, self-referential narrative.

Originally published serially in Liang Qichao's *New Fiction* journal, Wu Jianren's *Ershinian...* was eventually completed in 1909, when the 108-chapter book was published in eight volumes. Constructed from the recollections of a young man, Silitaosheng, who began his adult life as an aid to an official, later becoming a business associate with the same man, *Ershinian...* takes the form of a nested *biji*.

As mentioned, Liu's abridged translation regrettably omits the text's preamble, or *xiezi*, which depicts a depressed young scholar, Silitaosheng, obtaining a book from a man in the street. The neglected *xiezi* does hold interest for Paola Zamperini, however, who examines *Ershinian...*, alongside Yu Da's *Qinglou meng* [*A Dream of Green Bowers*], in a paper about books-within-books in late Qing literature, that focuses on the economic factors of a burgeoning book market and how they influence writers to fictionally represent their practice. While the economic and publishing elements of Zamperini's 'Elective Affinities: Literary Soul Mates and the Marketplace in late Qing Fiction' (2007) holds little relevance for the present study, her examination of the effect of *mise-en-abyme* employed by Wu Jianren reveals the potential of *biji* when nested in a larger work. She writes: "The book-within-the-book then becomes the site of a very complex and emotional encounter, invested with many layers of meanings, past and present. The result is... a re-invention and re-inscription of the lore of literary elective affinities in a more contemporary, perhaps somewhat prosaic... guise" (Zamperini 2007, p.64). Zamperini justifies her paper on the basis that, despite a very healthy culture of consuming and studying literature in China, there remained a dearth of detailed studies of the ways writers fictionally depicted their negotiations with literary genres and their own ambitions (Zamperini 2007, p.65).

In light of the Le Lionnais' decree that a text composed under constraint speaks to that constraint, and an extensive history of writing about writing in the oeuvre of the Oulipo (from Bénabou to Perec), Wu Jianren's text is of even more interest as a stepping stone between traditional *biji* and a contemporary oulipian approach to the form. If the *biji* is nested within a larger work, some explication of the parameters of constraint governing the text's construction can be incorporated into that larger framework. The *xiezi* contains a crucial scene, set outside the city walls, where a man who...

was holding a volume, on which was pasted a sign, surrounded by people looking at him. The fellow stood there upright and fearless, book in hand, and spoke not a single word. Silitaosheng parted the crowd and stepped forward to ask him if the book was for sale, and if he could look at it. To which the fellow replied: 'This book is for sale, and yet it cannot be sold.' 'What do you mean?' Silitaosheng asked him. 'If we are talking about selling it, it must be sold for ten thousand *liang* of silver!' replied the man. 'And how about the 'not-selling-it' bit?' 'If [I] encounter a zhiyin, I will not ask for a penny and I will offer him the book with both hands!' (translated Zamperini 2007, p.73).

Having proven his worth as a reader, or literary soul mate of the volume's author, Silitaosheng secures the book and reads its title: *Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*. Turning to the first page, he discovers it to be a handwritten notebook which begins: "*Juisiyisheng Biji, Personal Notes of One-life-amidst-five-deaths*" (translation Zamperini 2007, p.74). The procuring of such an obscure volume bears remarkable resemblance to the set up in Georges Perec's famed short story '*Le Voyage d'hiver*'. Considering the subsequent oulipian texts Perec's '*Le Voyage d'hiver*' has spawned (20 at the time of writing), and the effect achieved by Wu Jianren, the

application of the *mise-en-abyme* can be seen as a tool to engender potentiality in a text.

Individual stories from the *Le Voyage d'hiver* series will be examined in chapter 5.

As in *Ershinian...* where the reconstruction of the textual history of the fictional books reflects in part, that of the real text, the subsequent Journeys establish an elaborate network to conflate the limitless potential history of the source text; the series self-actualises itself repeatedly. In *Ershinian...* the bookseller, recognising Silitaosheng's intrinsic appreciation of the volume, bestows it to him and requests that he "find a way to make it known" (Zamperini 2007, p.74). The second chapter begins by informing the reader that what is to come is the text originally published by *New Fiction*, though this too is absent in the Liu Shih Shun translation. This narrative structure, Zamperini observes, presents us with two concurrent books:

One is the actual text we have in our hands, whose author is clearly presented to us as Wu Jianren. The second is the fictional *biji* authored by Jiusiyisheng, divided into chapters and commented on by Silitaosheng, and published by the 'real-life' New Fiction Society (2007, p.75).

Liu's abridged translation concludes as the original does, though without the *xiezi*, the full effect of the nested *biji* is lost, relegated to an afterthought:

At the same time I could not forget the diary that I had kept for the past twenty years, which contained the records of the strange happenings during that period. I believed the best thing to do with this diary was to leave it with Shu-nung so that he could get some friend who was interested in it to have it published. So I wrote down the title, *Episodes Eyewitnessed Over Two Decades*, with the subtitle, *Notes of Someone Dead Nine Times Out Of Ten*.

After I handed the book to Shu-nung, he agreed to my request... Wen Shu-nung sent my book to *New Fiction* in Yokohama, Japan. After *New Fiction* was discontinued, the book was transferred to the Kuang-chih Bookstore in Shanghai, which continued to publish it. With this I bring my story to an end (Liu 1975, p.408).

Strangely, the title is translated differently here than for the publishing title of the translation. Also worthy of note, though unsurprising, is the mention of the diary, the only cryptic clue to the origin of this work that remains in its translation.

In her examination of Yu Hua's short stories, Liyan Shen observes an oulipian, or rather, Perecian, tendency in his practice: "Yu Hua's endless preoccupation with narration is motivated by his efforts to *exhaust the numerous possibilities of storytelling* in traditional Chinese culture" (Shen 2008, p.74, emphasis my own). He further writes: "At first glance, the reader may find a loss of logic in 'World like Mist' which seems to be a collage of all the abnormities one can learn from the folktales available even today in any place in China" (Shen 2008, p.79).

Elements of *biji* and *zhiguai* writing are also present in the work of Japanese writer Yoko Ogawa. As illustrated in the brief comparative study of *zuihitsu* (a Japanese equivalent of *biji*), the ongoing cultural exchanges between China and Japan have left indelible marks on the literature of each. It is with this in mind that Ogawa's writing is included here, and not in the next section.

While her short story collection of 'eleven dark tales', *Revenge*, is not a *biji* collection, there are obvious comparisons that can be drawn between Ogawa's brief snippets of macabre and *biji* obsessed with the strange, compiled by the likes of Pu Songling. While investigating the potential for nesting a *biji* collection within a larger narrative network, it is worth briefly examining the narrative technique employed by Ogawa,

given the similarities between her contemporary collection of writing and traditional *zhiguai biji* stated above.

Ogawa has inverted the nesting concept, instead threading traces of a larger story web through the collection. Each new entry contains shadows of one that precedes it, or equally eerie premonitions that are only distinguishable once the collection has been consumed as a whole.

In this manner, Ogawa reflects the organisational capacity of *biji* collections (the eleven short stories are unified in their examination of strange occurrences) but adds another level of narrative with recurring characters and fragmented, but continuing, plotlines that are present throughout the entirety of the collection.

The book itself less explicitly makes an appearance in the final story, 'Poison Plants', in which a promising young composer reads excerpts from an earlier tale, 'Old Mrs J', to his infatuated elder patron. The same tale is referenced in passing in 'The Little Dustman'.

In her examination of the contemporary application of *zhiguai* techniques and themes in modern Chinese literature, Wedell-Wedellsborg cites the short stories of Yu Hua as benchmark examples. Highlighted is the resemblance to the traditional tales matter-of-fact depiction of blood and violence, which at the time reflected the conviction of the populace on matters of religion and retribution. Similarly matter-of-fact depiction is present in Ogawa's 'Lab Coats', an interaction of two workers in a hospital laundry where the nameless (and as such brimming with potential) *She* plainly reveals murder: "That's why I killed him, she says. Her voice is low and cold" (Ogawa 2013, p.57); and our equally nameless narrator calmly pictures the event: "*the knife in her pretty hand; the blade slicing into him again and again; skin ripping, blood spurting*" (ibid); and with the eerily unfettered ending to the strange account, a lab coat: "It's his. I shake it



and out falls a tongue. It's still soft. Maybe even warm" (ibid). This nonplussed tone is employed to great effect in the short story 'Welcome To The Museum Of Torture', a story filled with eerie eccentricities that opens, appropriately:

Lots of people died today. In a city to the north, a tour bus tumbled off a cliff, killing twenty-seven and badly injuring six more. A family of three, weighed down with debt, committed suicide by turning on the gas – and when the house exploded, six more died next door. An eighty-six-year-old man was killed by a hit-and-runner driver; a child drowned in an irrigation ditch; a fishing boat capsized; some mountain climbers were swept away by an avalanche. There was a flood in China, a plane crash in Nepal, and in Niger a religious cult committed mass suicide (Ogawa 2013, p.77).

The nameless victim from 'Lab Coats' – who is identified, hardly, as Dr. Y from Respiratory Medicine in passing in yet another story, 'Sewing For The Heart' – has an ephemeral memorial: "He was stabbed more than a dozen times in the neck." They say he was nearly decapitated. And not even animals are saved from the frank and fretless description of gore, a dead hamster moving: "...hundreds of maggots were worming into its soft belly" (Ogawa 2013, p.78).

### **Contemporary *Zuihitsu***

This section on *zuihitsu*, a Japanese written form that bears a remarkable resemblance to the Chinese *biji* and emerged during the Heian period (794-1185 AD), will examine three contemporary English language *zuihitsu*. As will be illustrated, the similarities in these two genres justify the inclusion of this analysis as a means to expand the limited corpus of contemporary *biji*. It will begin with a cursory examination of the form, by way of Sei Shōnagon's *The Pillow Book*. Shōnagon's text has been chosen as

representative as it is perhaps the most well known, both historically in Japan, and in a wider contemporary audience.

A forerunning scholar on premodern examples of the form, Linda Chance defines the “quintessential nongenre” of *zuihitsu*: “as a critical term *zuihitsu* has a power beyond its amorphousness, for to label a work thus is to put it outside the customary boundaries of narrativity, persona, fictivity, meter and countless other limiting constructs” (Chance 1997, pp.35, 27).<sup>53</sup> Similarly, DiNitto argues that this nongenre-ness “allowed the genre to open up a new literary space within the confines of modern narrative and that cultural commodity known as ‘modern life’” (DiNitto 2004, pp.252-253).

Interestingly, the word *zuihitsu*, literally ‘following the brush’, is of Chinese origin, dating back to Hong Mai’s *Jung-chai sui-pi* [*Five Collections of Miscellaneous Notes from the Tolerant Study*], a miscellany of more than 1200 essays compiled during the last forty years of his life. However, DiNitto argues there is no proof of direct transmission of *biji* to those works considered to be early exemplars of the Japanese *zuihitsu* (2004, p.256). DiNitto proposes that differences in premodern and modern *zuihitsu* (those from the era two decades prior to World War II) is linked to shifting relationships with the Chinese literary tradition: “The former were influenced by Chinese models, especially during the Edo period, the major age for premodern *zuihitsu* composition” (DiNitto 2004, p.256).

In contrast to the contemporary English language authors employing the form, who establish varying degrees of influence and adaptation to traditional examples; the

---

<sup>53</sup> Counter to this, my own work is placed outside broader customary boundaries such as narrativity, genre, or fictivity, but strictly bound to meter and “countless other limiting constructs” by virtue of the metaconstraints governing individual entries.

modern *zuihitsu* writers investigated by DiNitto less-strongly resembled *zuihitsu* from before 1800. She writes:

Despite the resurgences of classical forms, modern *zuihitsu* writers made few visibly conscious efforts to base their works on premodern examples, or to associate themselves with their premodern counterparts, be they Shōnagon, Kenko, or Edo period (1600-1868) writers. This does not imply that they were unaware of their predecessors, but rather that they chose not to place themselves in this literary tradition” (DiNitto 2004, p.255).

However, in literary studies and scholarship since, *biji* and *zuihitsu* have been considered comparable, and in an examination of the influence of a contemporary setting, can likewise be considered equally comparable.

Gang Liu, whose 2010 doctoral thesis has been examined extensively throughout this study, also makes the connection between the forms of *biji* and *zuihitsu* in his second chapter, ‘Formless Form’, acknowledging each form’s similar origin and development, and the common characteristics of heterogeneous content, fragmentary format, and prosaic style (Gang 2010, p.83).

A critical examination of three contemporary English language *zuihitsu* – Kimiko Hahn’s *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (2006), Anthony Peck’s *Pillow Book of a Manic Depressive* (2011), and Donald Richie’s *A Tractate On Japanese Aesthetics* (2007) – will follow.

Given the sparse sample of contemporary English language *biji* available for analysis, and the similarities between *biji* and *zuihitsu* (which will be further illustrated throughout this section) an investigation of how the latter has been appropriated and

adapted for contemporary English language use is a crucial aid to this study. Marleigh Ryan made a plea for a similar investigation decades ago. She states:

It is now perfectly apparent that we must finally come to grips with the conscious artistry of the authors of the *nikki* and *zuihitsu*. We must examine each work both as a whole and in terms of its parts; the use of every image and metaphor, the system of inclusion and exclusion, and the very texture of the language demand further study (Ryan 1976, p.250).

With three English language *zuihitsu* published this century, we must ask how these authors view the form. Donald Richie translates *zuihitsu* as “an essay that ranges somewhat formlessly; *hitsu* means ‘brush’, and *zui* indicates ‘following’ or ‘pursuing’, thus, literally, ‘following the brush’,” (Richie 2007, p.73). The closest Hahn comes to revealing the contemporary definition of *zuihitsu* she has formulated for herself is to write: “...the *zuihitsu* feels *encompassing*. That a fragment might be synecdoche, or excerpt. Or scrap” (Hahn 2006, p.4). Peck seems content to include, before the introduction, Ivan Morris’ definition of a pillow book as it appeared in the ‘Introduction’ to *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*, translated by Morris for Penguin Classics in 1967, and thus establishing the text within its kin.

### **Sei Shōnagon**

Sei Shōnagon was a gentlewoman who resided in the court of Empress Teishi. *The Pillow Book* contains anecdotes and observations alongside 164 lists compiled throughout and based upon her life in the court. Believed to have been completed in the first years of the 11th century, *Makura no soshi* [*The Pillow Book*] is considered by many representative of the *zuihitsu* form, a personally inflicted patchwork of writing that marries intimacy with insight. Paul Zumthor developed the concept of *mouvance* in the second chapter of his study of medieval French poetry, *Essai de poétique médiévale*

(1972). *Mouvance* describes the element of movement and mobility contained in works that are assemblages of textually various elements.

This notion of *mouvance* is particularly illuminating when considering *The Pillow Book*, the original manuscript of which had disappeared before the end of the Heian period. As Morris states:

...by the beginning of the Kamakura period (twelfth century) numerous variants were already in circulation. Except in the unlikely event that a Heian manuscript of *The Pillow Book* is discovered, we shall never be sure which version is closest to the original... The structural confusion of *The Pillow Book* is generally regarded as its main stylistic weakness; yet surely part of its charm lies precisely in its rather bizarre, haphazard arrangement (Morris 1967, p.13).

Morris' sentiments are echoed in Dudbridge's appraisal of Wang Renyu's memoirs, another argument wherein the concept of *mouvance* can help us better understand the potential embedded in these lost manuscripts (Dudbridge 2013, p.6).

As social obligations of the time required, Sei was knowledgeable about the classical poetic canon, and saw to weave numerous intertextual allusions to such works throughout her own in order to display this knowledge. In the introduction to her translation of the text, Meredith McKinney provides some insight to the contemporary reception of this text:

One of the most striking aspects of *The Pillow Book* as we have it is that it is an extraordinary jumble: some sections are brief while others can be many pages long; there are lists, personal reminiscences and anecdotes, and the author's own thoughts and opinions on all manner of topics, while sections seem to be snatches

of scenes from a romantic tale. Sometimes some or all of these flow in and out of each other within a single section (McKinney 2006, p.xx).

In the way that it offers space for personal reflection and anecdote alongside social or cultural commentary, and in range of styles and contents often contained within it is clear why Shōnagon's text is largely regarded as indicative of the genre, and the formal qualities that *zuihitsu* share with *biji*.

### **Kimiko Hahn**

Kimiko Hahn's *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (2006) begins with an epigraph from Matsuo Bashō's text of the same name and opens with 'Compass' (pp.3-4) an ambiguously addressed letter that functions as a key to her experimental text, a reflection of her life as a poet, mother, and lover straddling the boundaries of Eastern and Western tradition – the daughter of a Japanese American mother and German American father. She recounts her unfulfilling search for an appropriate definition of *zuihitsu*, the form she has chosen for this collection, where none seemed especially scholarly (perhaps a good thing in this instance, she notes) but nor do they reflect the sense of disorder she feels is so integral to the form.

By including what few definitions she has rejected as unsuitable, and following these with her own contemporary take on the form, Hahn establishes briefly what the form is not, and then, across the following 100-or-so pages, what it potentially could be, but never what it *is*. As with *biji* the lines are blurry, form is only established in opposition, but the reader is presented with the duty of assembling the puzzle by way of Hahn assimilating her text into the albeit occasionally aleatory corpus of *zuihitsu*. This oppositional mode of definition is asserted in 'The Orient', where Hahn cites Said's<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Said, Edward. 1978, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London.

theories of the manifestation of the ‘Other’ before proclaiming: “This is where I write. This is where I write *zuihitsu* – for the permission, the blur, the rooms created by the little blocks of text” (Hahn 2006, p.65). The definitions included by Hahn in ‘Compass’ (2006, p.3) are replicated below:

[L]iterally, “following [the impulse of] the brush,” and consisting of brief essays on random topics – Donald Keene, *Seeds in the Heart*

[Miscellany]... partly of reminiscences, partly of entries in diary-form – Arthur Waley, *The Pillow Book*

[S]tray notes, expressing random thoughts in a casual manner – Makoto Ueda, *Principles of Classical Japanese Literature*, Earl Minder, ed.

Elucidating the reasons for her rejection – and in doing so further constructing the boundaries of her contemporary *zuihitsu* – Hahn observes:

None suggests an organizing principle – what we might call a *theme*. None comments on structural variety – list, diary, commentary, essay, poem. Fragment. None offers that a sense of disorder might be artfully ordered by fragmenting, juxtaposing, contradicting, varying length or – even within a piece – topic... None states that these essays are closer to poetry – in my mind (Hahn 2006, p.3).

All of this structural variety is present in Hahn’s *The Narrow Road to the Interior*, and it is bolstered with more contemporary variety, textual forms like email and college course notes. She returns to the investigation of this form in ‘Pulse and Impulse’, fleeting poetic assemblages ordered by date like a diary. Herein she writes:

With or without fluency [in Japanese], I can still love the *zuihitsu* as a kind of air current: and what arises is very subjective, intuitive and spontaneous – qualities I trust. Also a clear voice... It is by its own nature a fragmented anything... Not

obliged to stay with a rational line of thought. I mean – I do not need to compromise a train of thought and, in such a way, can really explore raw material (Hahn 2006, p.49).

The impact this (in)formal constraint has on her writing, as Hahn reflects, bears resemblance to the methods used by Roubaud in writing his *Great Fire* series, and to the science of 'pataphysics. Hugill, in his examination and documentation of the science of imaginary solutions, 'pataphysics,<sup>55</sup> proposes a new way of sequencing data that he is developing with leading scientist James Hendler. "'Patadata is to metadata as metadata is to data," explains Hugill (2012, p.36). A semantic web created from 'patadata attempts to reintroduce a serendipitous element to the process of the search. The *biji/zuihitsu* resulting from the search through a particular topic or field, by its very form – miscellaneous, cobbled – presents data in such a manner. Information becomes the "breadcrumb trail" that Hugill alludes to, the compiler providing unique navigations and offering "new insights into relationships between information that are not based simply on chance or even oppositional encounters, but rather on a more poetic sense of unity" (Hugill 2012, p.36). As will be seen, the unifying poetics in my own *biji* collection is the language of the navigation of fear. 'Patadata in this way can be seen as an organisational principle for the miscellany of *biji*.

Delving deeper into this process, and its resultant effects on the act of writing and assembling this text, the composite pieces of the puzzle, Hahn asks:

Where to cut? What makes sense? What is not fragmented? What is whole?

Obviously if whole, the object embodies potential fragments. And in each fragment, the whole –

---

<sup>55</sup> The Oulipo was once more formally (and remains loosely associated as such) a sub-committee of the Collège de 'Pataphysique.



– which, speaking of poetics, we know from that impossible-to-pronounce figure of speech, synecdoche (Hahn 2006, p.50).

She also reflects on the space that a *zuihitsu* inhabits, suggesting it: “...includes all those traits women have been assigned, usually with negative connotations: subjectivity, irrationality (what short essays or lack of a form structure might suggest). What is wrong with subjectivity anyway? My facts. The facts of my experience” (Hahn 2006, p.49).

The last two sentences of this sentiment situate Hahn’s contemporary *zuihitsu* within the realms of unofficial history. Her history. The history of her experience.

Hahn’s hypothesis on contemporary *zuihitsu* is perhaps found, appropriately, in a fragment from this entry: “It is lovely when a fragment can be a whole. Not just suggest entirety” (Hahn 2006, p.50). Hahn’s investigation of her chosen form – the analysis that necessarily precedes and remains infused with synthesis – continues in ‘The Orient’: “The *zuihitsu*, spatial in every way, differs from the *nikki*, a ‘poetic diary’ which differs from the Western – that is, differs from documenting fact unless we mean an emotional fact. Differs from what is really *true*” (Hahn 2006, p.66). Even so, these layers of difference make her concluding statement ambiguous – is it the *zuihitsu* that differs from what is *really* true, or the Western proclivity for privileging historical fact over emotional truths?

McKinney too sees reason to distance the *zuihitsu* from *nikki*, which were largely written by men, and dryer than the looser, more subjective and psychologically penetrating record of lived experience that female writers forged while pushing the boundaries of the diary genre (McKinney 2006, p.xxvi). In this section Hahn returns once again to where she finds the appeal of the *zuihitsu*. She writes:

Maybe I am attracted to this *elegant mongrel* because it blurs categories: those ‘grade B’ forms of the Western canon: letters, diaries – even gossip. Plus lists, fiction, criticism, online sites. I love blurs... The form suits this desire to blur (Hahn 2006, p.68).

Hahn seems more certain evaluating the emotional impact and proximity the form allows: “I love the unabashed first person – it almost risks the confessional quality that a diary exudes, or that diary-like information can contain in a conventional poetic form. *Even the tone becomes altered by the form*” (Hahn 2006, p.67). I have italicised the last sentence of this observation to highlight the impact of the chosen form on the content of the text. This sentiment, I believe, supports my own theory that writing a contemporary *biji* (or in this case, *zuihitsu*) places significant enough constraint upon an author that they are forced to write or say things in a manner that they otherwise would not have were the constraint not used – thus justifying my broad governing constraint of writing within a particular genre. In the Acknowledgments, Hahn appropriately refers to this collection as “trials of form” (Hahn 2006, p.109).

Following the brush, Hahn explores the poetry of language and its thematic, homophonic, linguistic, and semantic construction and connections. She writes: “That’s what the heart was – swollen – like a mother weeping for something. *A pier.*

*Appear missing*” (Hahn 2006, p.8).

And later, in ‘Opening Her Text’, in which reading notes on *The Tale Of Genji* are interspersed with observations on the shifting relationship between Hahn and the eldest of her two daughters: “Remove. Approach. (Reproach?)” (Hahn 2006, p.9).

In ‘Cuts from the Zuihitsu on My Daughter’ Hahn writes:

the steam

the esteem

to wear those transparent blouses (Hahn 2006, p.15).

Hahn's exploration of language, the trajectories she follows, are marked on the page and reveal the text's construction. In 'Sparrow', where short, fully-formed poems are interspersed with essayistic fragments of commentary and personal reflection, she reveals yet another layer in this act, writing: "Note to myself: jot down words like, *warming* and *warning*. *Cloister* and *cluster*" (Hahn 2006, p.30).

Hahn's contemporary appropriation of the *zuihitsu*'s lists take the form of poetically inventoried memories or moments. These contemporary *tanka* organised according to location, season, year, and assigned a number in the disordered and incomplete selections – 'Wellfleet, Midsummer (2000)' (pp.17-19, 24-25); 'Cranberry Island, Late Summer (2000)' (pp.33-35); 'Gowanus, Late Summer (2000)' (pp.36-37); 'Brooklyn, Late Winter (2001)' (p.44); 'Brooklyn, Early Summer (2001)' (pp.45-46); 'Great Barrington, Spring to Summer (2001)' (pp.52-54); 'Wellfleet, Late Summer (2001)' (pp.62-63); 'Boerum Hill, Late Summer (2001)' (p.64); 'Boerum Hill, September (2001)' (pp.72-73); 'Boerum Hill, March (2002)' (pp.84-85); 'Boerum Hill, Late Summer (2002)' (p.94).

Curiously, the number 23 remains absent from all lists. Accompanying these are more traditional lists, positioned beside each other towards the back of the text: 'Firsts in No Particular Order', 'Things That Make Me Cry Instantly-', 'Things That Are Full Of Pleasure-'.

Besides the reading notes already mentioned, Hahn includes readings and responses to Abe Kobo's *Suna no onna* [*Woman in the Dunes*] ('Radio and Mirror', pp.20-23) and Kawabata Yasunari's *Yukiguni* [*Snow Country*] ('The Tunnel', pp.39-43) as well as

poetic allusions to or interpretations of Basho ('Sparrow' p.26) and a collection of *tanka* inspired by Shikishi in 'Conspiring with Shikishi' (pp.102-104). Poetically distilled experiences from the days following 9/11 collected in 'Trading Words' (pp.74-77) act like a contemporary written record of the strange.

Intriguingly, constraint played a role in the construction of yet more elements of Hahn's *The Narrow Road to the Interior*. Originally published by XCP with a different series of poems about bridge-crossings inserted throughout, 'Sparrow' was re-worked by Hahn before inclusion as a result of feeling 'too literal'. As such, the original poems were substituted with a series that used Charles Wright quotes as triggering lines that have since been obscured to the point of removal from the final poems (Hahn 2006, p.107).

### **Anthony Peck**

Anthony Peck's *Pillow Book of a Manic Depressive* (2011), as the title suggests, was written as a way to reflect on Peck's progression living with manic depression. Like Richie and Hahn, Peck establishes the form the text takes in his introduction: "When I sat down to write this it was with no particular end in mind. I had just re-read Sei Shōnagon's pillow book and wondered what a twenty-first century pillow book might be like" (Peck 2011, p.5). Here Peck establishes not only a way to read the text, as discussed earlier, but also reveals a similar line of enquiry as my own. He has also observed the inherent potential in such a reading, and then by necessity in his own writing: "There was a deliberateness in the writing to leave mental room for the reader to have their own Mindful reflections" (Peck 2011, p.6).

In his appraisal of The Pillow Book form, and in particular Shōnagon's lauded contribution, he says that *zuihitsu* paint a picture of a place and time that "no regular history could capture", reflecting a common definition and classification of *biji* as unofficial history (Peck 2011, p.5). Further to this, the entry 'Proof-reading has become

a lost art' (Peck 2011, p.49) appears to contain an allusion to the appeal of the present presence of thought in writing that follows the brush, when Peck writes: "A proofed sheet can look quite artistic in its own way, so that you can be tempted to publish with the marks left on" (ibid).

A concise example of this movement of the brush can be found in the organisation of content by Peck. The entry 'I have always liked' (Peck 2011, pp.106-110) concludes with an imagined campfire around which sit some of Peck's longest and most loved friends. The entry that follows, 'Camping' (Peck 2011, p.111) picks a fleeting reference as its tangential touchstone and moves on. In this form, the mind of the writer is connected to the brush, and the brushes' movement marked on the page, as if to suggest or reveal the 'that reminds me...' or 'while we're here...' moment that spurs the writer, and thus their pen, on yet again.

Aesthetically, Peck's book is similar in form to the contemporary English language *biji*, comprising of a mix of short and longer entries, varying from a few lines to a page or two. It incorporates travel notes, as in entries like 'It's hard to know' (pp.12-13), 'The people of Papua New Guinea' (p.52), 'It was years ago' (pp.155-156), or 'Cigarettes are bad for you' (p.89), a quick guide to Kava in Vanuatu.

In 'Having a heightened sense' (pp.113-114) Peck looks at peripheral spiritual and medicinal practices, his firsthand guide to rebirthing and Breatharianism serve as contemporary equivalents to the recording of shamanistic or ritual practices in traditional *biji* and also suggest – alongside the over-arching theme of mental illness – something that could be construed as a contemporary equivalent of the strange in a similar manner to Hahn's 'Trading Words' (Hahn 2006, pp.74-77). There are reflections on the hierarchical strata of social and business worlds as in 'You always have a boss' (p.16). Similarly, Peck offers insight into legal proceedings in 'Legal cases' (pp.77-78),

and ponders notions of nationhood from the perspective of the average citizen in ‘Australia is the only country I know’ (p.122). Peck includes typically Australian observations that paint the unique street-level view of society here and now – notes on a kookaburra’s laugh, the rainfall of jacaranda leaves as summer approaches, the flies once it arrives, or the elements of test cricket – a reflection of his desire to create a 21st century pillow book as an Australian writer.

As in *biji* and other contemporary *zuihitsu*, Peck includes poetry – allusions to and citations of better-known poets, but also his own free verse, like ‘I rarely remember a face’ (pp.62-63) or ‘Is there a book?’ (p.116), and the brief ‘Salt dried on the skin’ (p.72). He also includes thoughts on his favourite writers (p.149), and reflections on books like Lawrence Durrell’s *The Avignon Quintet* (pp.159-160). There are further allusions to civilized luxuries of art and culture afforded to a certain class – as in ‘Vinyl is best’ (p.94) – that act like contemporary reflections akin to those on the leisure time and pursuits of the literati in traditional *biji*.

Employing one of the most commonly adapted traits of *zuihitsu* – thanks in no small part to the popularity of those included in Sei Shōnagon’s *Pillow Book* – lists are used in ‘Things you can’t hide’ (Boredom... deceit... ignorance... longing... youth (2011, p.85)), ‘Things that can be broken’ (Bones... Hearts... Glass... China...) (p.127), ‘Annoying things’ (Waking too early... Pages missing from a book...) (p.154) and ‘Things that you do but don’t know if they work’, which decisively frames some contemporary lifestyles with the inclusion of vitamins, crystals, diets, car tune-ups, aftershave, detoxing, eating carrots, and punctuality (2011, p.91).

### **Donald Richie**

Donald Richie uses the *zuihitsu* form in his succinct examination of the aesthetics of Japanese art and related notions of beauty. Justifying the use of this form in his Preface,

Richie observes that conventions of Western discourse – specific to this instance – order, logical progression, and symmetry – impose alien aspects upon the subject. Attempting to use a structure that is inherently indecisive and contains a controlled ambiguity – both traits that align with potential – he employs the *zuihitsu*. He concludes his Preface: “I have sought to approximate this neglect of logical method, this dismissal of linear structure, and both in text and its place on the page I have attempted to give some idea of the progression of a *zuihitsu*” (Richie 2007, pp.11-13).

In this final statement we find an unintentional double meaning. Richie seems to suggest this text, in taking the form of a *zuihitsu*, reveals the way the text progresses, as though in real time ‘following the brush’. However, this text also reveals the *progression* of all *zuihitsu* – of *zuihitsu* as a form. Richie establishes his text alongside those of Kimiko Hahn and Anthony Peck as examples of contemporary English language *zuihitsu*.

It is worth noting that like these writers, and others of contemporary English language *biji*, Richie draws the reader’s attention to the form he has selected, a way of suggesting a particular reading, one that is open and able to fathom the inherent potential in such texts.

Richie’s tractate on Japanese aesthetics takes the form such an aesthetic proposes – suggestive, allusive. Formally it is composed of one large text, the tractate, that is broken up with interjections of varying nature, not unlike a *biji*, and remarkably similar to Kelly’s ‘Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*’ (2010). He cites directly from Kamo-No-Chōmei’s (1153-1216) *Hojoki* [*An Account Of My Hut*]; includes paragraph sized, stand-alone observations on the work of Donald Keene, Michael Dunn and others littered throughout; paraphrases poets like Basho and Saigyō,

or quotes them directly, finding new readings or renderings of their verse to support his tractate.

Having analysed the above texts individually, and as a corpus indicative of contemporary *biji* and *zuihitsu* in English, the study will progress to an identification and analyses of texts not yet considered *biji* that exhibit similar traits.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE CONTEMPORARY FORM

As the genre of *biji* developed a practice of explicitly titling texts to assign them a place within it emerged. The first to do so was a three-chapter Song-era book, *Song Jingwengong biji* [*Brush Notes of Song Jingwen gong*], attributed to Song Qi (Gang 2010, pp.17-18). Prior to this, and indeed, after, compilers/authors of *biji* used allusion or direct comparison to other writers in order to situate their works alongside other *biji* text. Gu writes:

The title of any text plays a significant role in conveying the theme and subject position of that text...[A] title not only implies a subject, a theme, an attitude, a context, or a style, but also gives the reader a subject position... (Gu 2005, pp.213-214).

Gu argues that without a title, meaning remains in an indeterminate state. However, when this indeterminate state is incorporated into the work itself, as in *biji*, the titling of a work can offer, rather than a definite position, the potential for numerous subject positions, all open, performing what Ming calls a “disorienting function” (Gu 2005, p.214).

It is important to observe the act of prescriptively titling texts as *biji* as a means to demonstrate to a reader both a sense of the text’s construction and potential/suggested modes for reading. The three elements commonly attributed to the genre are brevity, fragmentary nature, and casualness. The impact of the latter is eruditely evaluated by Gang in a way that reinforces the importance of the act of prescriptive titling:

In many ways, the claim to casualness is used by the *biji* writers/compilers to free their texts as well as to free their readers’ minds. It is only when we become as

accommodating and versatile as the texts themselves that we will be able to fully appreciate the vivid description, witty comments, and thoughtful perceptions in them that are often too idiosyncratic or too extraordinary to be understood in a conventional way (Gang 2010, p.81).

In the introduction to his translation of Ji Yun's *Yuewei caotang biji* [*The Thatched Study of Close Scrutiny*] Keenan observes that, through the titling of the text, Ji Yun explicitly associates himself with authors of similar collections of ghost stories (*biji zhiguai*) – T'ao Yuan-ming, author of *Sou-shen hou-chi* [*Sequel to Assembling the Spirits*]; Liu Ching-shu, who penned *I-yuan* [*Garden Of Anomalies*]; and Liu I-ch'ing, author of *Yu-ming lu* [*Records of the Living and the Dead*] – and in doing so “gives his readership a sense of where he would have them believe his work fits in the literary tradition” which aids their understanding of how Ji Yun would desire his *Notes* be read (Keenan 1999, p.xv). Keenan here inadvertently observes the potential for the prescriptive titling of *biji*. And Huang writes: “Works such as *Sanguo yanyi* have always been considered to belong to the genre of historical romance *partly because of the tag of yanyi in their titles*” (Huang 1994, p.67, emphasis my own). Here Huang has acknowledged the potential for titling of written works to act as a prescriptive method of classification ordained by the text's author.

In his discussion on the development of a governing discourse for genre theory in pre-modern China, Hightower writes: “...form is created by the writer's awareness of a series of similar compositions which he consciously imitates”, going on to cite as example Hsiao T'ung's Tang dynasty literary anthology *Wen hsüan* [the Anthology]. *Wen hsüan* includes the genre *Tz'u* and Hightower remarks: “*Tz'u* is actually no form at all; at least the two specimens in the *Anthology* have nothing in common except the term *tz'u* in the title of each” (Hightower 1957, p.532). It is clear then, that titling is an

important tool used by composers of *biji* and *zuihitsu* to claim affinity with a particular genre. A formula for generating such titles will be explicated in the next chapter.

***Biji* that claim affinity:**

Xue Cai - *Xue Xiemeng xiansheng biji* [*Jottings of Mr. Xue Xiemeng*]

Ji Yun – *Yuewei caotang biji* [*The Thatched Study of Close Scrutiny*]

Ji Yun – *Huaixi zazhi* [*Miscellaneous Records from Huaixi*]

Jinbu Shuju – *Biji xiaoshuo daguan* [*A Great Compendium of biji Xiaoshuo*]

Song Qi – *Song Jingwengong biji* [*Brushnotes of Song Jingwen Gong*]

Lu You – *Laoxue an biji* [*Jottings from the Study of an Old Learner*]

Li Chengzhong – *Genzhai biji* [*Notes from Genzhai*]

Yu Yue – *Yutai xianguan biji* [*Anecdotes of Yutai Fairy Lodge*]

Yu Yue – *Quyuan biji* [*Brush Sketches of Qu Garden*]

Tan Sitong – *Shijuying Lu biji* [*Notes from the Studio of the Chrysanthemum-Inkslab's Shadow*]

He Mengchun – *He gongjian gong biji* [*Miscellaneous essays by He Mengchun*]

Liu Yiqing – *Qiantang yishi* [*Anecdotes of Qiantang*]

Chen Yuanqi – *Yongxianzhai biji* [*Notes From The Studio Of Idleness*]

Tang Weikang et al – *Shanghai yishi* [*Shanghai Anecdotes*]

Dong Han – *Chunxiang suibi* [*Writings from Chun Village*]

Wu Chenyan – *Kuangyuan zazhi* [*Kuangyuan miscellaney*]

Wang Xian – *Qiudeng conghua* [*Collected discourses under the autumn lamp*]

He Bang'e – *Yetan suilu* [*Casual Records Of Night Talks*]

Chen Kangqi – *Langqian jiwen* [*Records of Things Heard by the Lowly Official*]

Li Boyuan – *Nanting biji* [*Random Jottings at Southern Pavilion*]

Weixinzi – *Xinbian fenmen gujin leishi* [*Categorised Stories Past and Present*]

Song Qi – *Song Jingwengong biji* [*The Book of Song Qi*]

Lu You – *Laoxue'an biji* [*Brush notes from the Study of an Old Man Learning*]

Wu Chuhou – *Qingxiang zajii* [*Random Notes from a Green Box of Knowledge*]

Hong Mai – *Rongzhai suibi* [*Miscellaneous Notes by Rongzhai*]

Ye Sheng – *Shuidong riji* [*Diary from East of the River*]

Having exhausted the available examples of contemporary English language *biji* and *zuihitsu*, the results from these analyses can now be used to identify texts exhibiting similar qualities in order to establish the first taxonomy of contemporary *biji*. The unintentional *biji* are texts that exhibit the qualities found in both the traditional and contemporary *biji*, the traditional and contemporary *zuihitsu*; or, and often, finding resonance and equivalence with all of the above.

These are texts that have not been explicitly claimed or presented as *biji*, and where no clear evidence exists for the author's knowledge of, or intention to use, the form. In this exploration of potential contemporary *biji*, the texts on this list act like the 'e' in Perec's *La Disparition* – never appearing explicitly as *biji*, and at the same time figuring as an object of unrelenting attention, all the more intriguing for their not being named. This marks the end of the rope – from the most ancient *biji* we have progressed to the masters like Pu Songling; onwards again to Wu Jianren's *Ershinian muduzhi guaixianzhuang* [*Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*], an example of early experimentation with the *biji* form in post-May Fourth Movement China; up to the recent additions to this long heritage, Coupland, Kelly, and Ouyang. What follows are just some of the places we could tether the rope that frays infinitely.

Since the texts in this list are not accompanied by explicit generic labels affixed to them, classifying texts as belonging to this particular genre, a necessary if preliminary step in understanding this inchoate form, is an interpretive enterprise. Nevertheless, the brief critical analyses attached to each text should provide the necessary evidence to support inclusion.

Campany argues that authors' and audiences' participation in genres need not be fully conscious to be recognised as such in hindsight, and it is this varying degree of consciousness that separates the following texts from those more thoroughly examined

earlier (Campany 1996, pp.22-23). Campany's illustration of some of the distinct, routinised formats for the presentation of such disparate materials (Campany 1996, p.25) are also helpful in selecting texts for inclusion in this group. For instance, Lucas Cooper's 'Class Notes' (1986) is reminiscent of the biographical or 'arrayed lives' [*liezhuan*] format; David Eagleman's *Sum* (2009) echoes the evidential arrangement employed to document religious or moral claims.

I am not suggesting that all contemporary *biji* must, or even should, be classifiable into such categories as those concerned with political or otherworldly affairs, or those that have been geographically or topographically structured in line with the classics. I am acknowledging that none of our extant forms or systems of generic classification exhaust the potential of *biji*. So, this list is by no means exhaustive – attempting to give a quantitative set of such texts would only be bested in absurdity by attempting something similar with traditional *biji* – but employs a more oulipian mathematics by asking how many potential contemporary *biji* there are or might be, and allowing this question to remain open. To paraphrase Mathews and Broatch (2005, p.213), when the first *biji* were compiled thousands of years ago, what counted most were not the collections themselves, but a new potentiality of future *biji*.

In his discussion of Roubaud's use of formal language and generative grammar Poucel observes an implicit 'epigenetic landscape' – a term he borrows from Conrad Waddington for a model that attempts to "imagine all the possible genetic transformations of a given organism or form..." Thus, proposes Poucel: "In offering an analysis of actually attested sonnets, Roubaud provides an abstract environment in which the various possible but not actual developments of the sonnet may be imagined, thereby diversifying our understanding of the sonnet tradition and its remarkable mutability" (Poucel 2006a, p.116).

This chapter acts as a similarly abstract environment in which the various possible but not actual developments of the *biji* may be imagined, thereby diversifying our understanding of the *biji* tradition and its remarkable mutability.

### **Why *biji*, here & now?**

Language is a medium for the transmission of information, but the medium can become a goal in itself if the receiver's attention is focused not on the information but on the enjoyment of the specific way in which it is presented. That enjoyment can be of many kinds; it need not at all imply the perception of 'beauty' (Idema & Haft 1997, p.3).

The global reputation of Pu Songling's *Strange Tales From A Chinese Studio* is such that an edited English translation by John Minford was published in 2006 by Penguin Classics. Pu Songling's famed *biji* collection has been translated numerous times, into numerous languages, but a Penguin Classics' paperback is a far cry from the largely academic texts otherwise in circulation. It suggests that there is, or rather could be, a broader appeal for the form. More importantly, what does the *biji* form offer writers using it today? Why make use of this form? As Gang writes:

To fully appreciate the... cultural function of the *biji*, we need to examine not only what message the *biji* text tells us, but also how the message is told and how it interacts with the messages that we may receive from other sources... (Gang 2010, p.30).

In his paper 'A Literary Miscellany and Sung Intellectual History: The case of Chang Lei's *Ming-tao tsa-chih*' (1995) Peter Bol argues that during the Song, the form enabled literati to write more easily or fluidly on topics that ordinarily required more rigorous



organisation of thought, allowing them to engage in the ongoing political, ethical and intellectual debates of the time.

Christian de Pee has argued that *biji* – by its nature a marginal form – was utilised by writers during the Song to serve the cultural function of criticising the centre of the society from its peripheries, making use of the appropriately peripheral genre (de Pee 2007, pp.5-6). The *zuihitsu* – less rigorous and more emotional than *nikki* – traditionally provided a space and form for female writers in Japan. Hahn suggests this function still exists in contemporary literature, and that it impacted her decision to make use of the form (Hahn 2006, pp.65-71). As McKinney writes: “Men wrote diaries (*nikki*) too, but they were largely dry notations in Chinese of date and event. Women took the diary form and made it a looser, more subjective and psychologically penetrating record of lived experience” (McKinney 2006, p.xxvi). Hahn illustrates McKinney’s observation in an interview with *Bomb* magazine about *The Narrow Road to the Interior* (2006). She says: “Of course the Japanese also used artfully composed diaries – *nikki* – that included poetry. My pieces that resemble a diary are from a record of whatever I was doing that day” (Hahn in Sheck 2006).

Coupland’s contribution – placed within the broader collection of forgotten historical forms in which it appears – is more an act of literary-historical investigation than an example of a writer making use of the form for reasons they have decided upon themselves. He was, after all, tasked with the duty of writing a *biji* by the editors of that collection (Franich & Weatherly 2009).

Ouyang and Kelly make more explicit their use of the form.<sup>56</sup>

In a comprehensive study of the different forms that Xue Cai’s, *Xue Xiemeng xiansheng biji* [*Jottings of Mr. Xue Xiemeng*] has been published or recorded in (through cross-

---

<sup>56</sup> See chapter 4 of this thesis.

examination of numerous editors' and compilers' notes and forewords) Struve reveals the potential of the *biji* genre, due to its fractured form, to display an author's thought and consciousness, a quality of the genre that is lost/changed once the form or order originally intended by the author is shifted.

As Xue Cai's *biji* was posthumously published by a variety of parties that were using as source material differing extant versions (that had been simultaneously circulated and as such had equal claims to legitimacy and originality) some shuffling of the order of the journal's contents was inevitable. Also contributing to this was the perilous political conditions under which the journal was kept by the Xue family, which endured amongst other things the Republican Revolution and the devastating effects on libraries encountered during the book destruction that occurred alongside the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). Examining these differing versions, Struve notes the "transpositioning (of content) implicitly devalues aspects of Xue Cai's thought and consciousness that he himself did not discriminate against... as a writer of *biji* (jottings)" (Struve 2007, p.53). By doing so Struve highlights the revealing of an intimate thought process or construction of narrative, the workings of which are inherently laid bare or made more apparent by the fractured and visibly constructed form of the *biji* genre.

Similarly, in her examination of Duan Chengshi's (800-843) *Youyang Zazu* [*Miscellaneous Morsels from Youyang*], which comprises some 1300 entries, Reed observes: "It is clear that, whatever the motive, the ordering of at least of the *juan* is not accidental; a conscious plan by the compiler is clearly evident" (Reed 2003, p.140).

Allowing, for now, the definition of *biji* as, ultimately, miscellaneous, a form that mixes fact and fiction, what does such a form offer contemporary writers? What is behind this miscellaneousness? Or, what supports it?

For Gang, formless form is generated by veiled tensions – contesting view points, tensions between forms – at play in the text. And a tension on behalf of the reader, whose efforts to view at once and in constant states of flux both the larger, kaleidoscopic image of *biji* and the smaller portions of the mosaic. In this way formless form invokes differing and conflicting modes of reading that highlight the inherent potential contained within. As Bruner writes:

We can speak of genre both as a property of a text and as a way of comprehending narrative... Genres seem to provide both writer and reader with commodious and conventional ‘models’ for limiting the hermeneutic task of making sense of human happenings – ones we narrate to ourselves as well as ones we hear others tell (Bruner 1991, p.14).

It is therefore important to consider the potential *biji* offers the reader, as well as the writer/compiler. Incorporating the act of reading into the generation of formless form in *biji*, as Gang suggests, supports the view Mathews uses to begin the essay positing his algorithm (and provides further connections between Oulipian endeavour and *biji*):

From the reader’s point of view, the existence in literature of potentiality in its Oulipian sense has the charm of introducing duplicity into all written texts, whether Oulipian or not... The results yielded by existing works can be used in two ways: either as a means of commenting on those works or as materials for inventing new ones (Mathews 1986, pp.126, 138).

Gang’s study reveals that Liu Yiqing’s Song-era *biji* collection *Qiantang Yishi* [*Anecdotes of Qiantang*] – and by extension of their definitive miscellaneous poetics, other *biji* – already contain duplicity. An anoulipic analysis of this form through potential reading allows a new line of investigation into the existing works, the

invention of a scaffolding (albeit Escherian) to support new *biji*. Ultimately, it enables the shift from duplicity to potential within *biji*.

While Gang's doctoral study focuses on the ten-chapter book *Qiantang Yishi*, the findings are relevant to innumerable *biji*, and by extension, all texts that employ a conscious miscellaneousness in their poetics. For this reason, the theories evidenced from his research will also be applied to my own in regards to texts classified as *zuihitsu*, and by myself as potential/unintentional contemporary *biji*. Gang's own translation of *biji* – literally, “brush notes” (Gang 2010, p.2) – highlights the importance of the brush in the form, and strengthens its ties to *zuihitsu* established earlier.

We can now ask: what does formless form offer contemporary writers? Why is it now being re/created? Campany writes:

Whenever a new *genre* is created – usually a momentous event in the history of a culture's literature – we should suspect that the new genre must have allowed some sort of cultural work to get done that was not getting done in the genres already available? (Campany 1996, p.199).

We must ask what work are contemporary English *biji* particularly aiding? What does this genre offer that writers have found wanting elsewhere? Perec predicts, or rather observes, the first stirrings of such a movement. He says: “We are heading toward an art form that we could call ‘citational’, and that permits a certain progress because we start from what was the end point of our predecessors” (in Bénabou & Marcenac 2009, p.18). Collage, or compiling *biji*, brings together limitless endpoints and arranges them anew to allow equally limitless start-points for further inquiry.

A recent study by Tao Min and Liu Zaihua (2003) that promotes differentiating *biji* as a style of writing from *biji* as a genre of literature establishes yet another link between

citational art and the *biji* form. Both ‘*biji*’ and ‘essay’ have duplicitous meaning as a noun and/or verb, however, establishing a partition between the two only serves to further obscure the application of the form.

David Shields suggests collage offers a cultural panacea. His *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* argues for a shift toward increasing artistic engagement with the reality of contemporary life through the exploration of hybrid genres such as prose poetry and literary collage. It is this idea of collage that is most intriguing in the current discussion. *Reality Hunger* consists of 618 numbered passages divided into twenty-six chapters, each titled alphabetically. Approximately half of the book’s words come from sources other than the author, making it a working sample of Shield’s declarations rejecting the laws governing appropriation and the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, in pursuit of a modern form of art. Shields’ is art that seeks to explore the artistic product via the elements of which it is composed and with an understanding and display of the solutions put to use by its composer.

While Shields makes no mention of *biji* – I do not wish to put words in his mouth – the art, or literature, best befitting contemporary existence as championed by him shares remarkable similarities with what we define as *biji*. Are these fragments not the same desired by Ouyang Yu? Shields’ reuse of passages (which themselves may have been recycled in the ‘first’ instance) throughout his books (the most recent of which are pursuing the one story, the contemporary art form that Shields promotes) likewise has similarities to the constantly revised, updated, and reissued versions of popular traditional *biji* collections.

While authors such as those listed below have produced texts that seem to fit the albeit broad description of *biji*, they have done so with no stated knowledge of the form or intent. Nevertheless, if a form of writing best befitting contemporary existence has so

much congruence with a Chinese written form that predates it by centuries, is there not some duty to examine and explore the predecessor, even if it may be one only unintentionally? Bök illustrates how this unintentional inspiration may occur in his examination of the process of anoulipism. He writes:

Influence becomes an act of ‘plagiarism by anticipation’<sup>57</sup> in which, by some swerve, a past style merely replicates what a future style has already originated. What Lionnais calls ‘anoulipism’ (the analysis of a past constraint) may inspire what Lionnais calls ‘synthoulipism’ (the synthesis of future potential) – but this subsequent potential in turn revises its precedent constraint through a kind of ‘pataphysical retroversion (Bök 2002, p.68).

Shields’ *Reality Hunger* serves as a sample for the kind of literature he heralds, a pastiche that borrows/steals/cites an exhaustive corpus of texts – from novels to soft news – liberally. The work is instructive, revelatory, baring its construction and as such, readily mineable for intention and thus operates in a manner that edifies both the work and the practice of the form of which it serves as an example. “I’m interested in the generic edge, the boundary between what are roughly called nonfiction and fiction” (Shields 2011, p.65). Chan observes a similar state of affairs historically for *biji*. He writes:

The understanding of Chinese narrative has suffered under a rather limiting view of generic categorization, and nowhere is this seen more clearly than in the strict separation of ‘historical’ from ‘fictional’ narratives. More recently, Western historiographers have noted the overlapping between the two (Chan 1998, p.43).

---

<sup>57</sup> Plagiarism by anticipation as defined by Roubaud: “Beyond the paradoxical and provocative character of such a label... it is an attempt to show that one part of the literature of the past can be read with new eyes by considering it ‘from the point of view constraint’” (2006, p.214).

For this reason all citations – even those lifted by Shields – will be attributed to Shields as their inclusion within this text, and the lengths taken by Shields to obscure their origins, suggest his application of them in this context is an act of claiming the content as his own, or as representative of his own thoughts and theories.<sup>58</sup> *Reality Hunger* is an argument about form, in form, and Shields addresses this fact in his most recent work, *How Literature Saved My Life* (2013). He writes:

I realized how perfectly the appropriated and remixed words embodied my argument. Just as I was arguing for work that occupied a bleeding edge between genres, so, too, I wanted the reader to experience in my mash-up the dubiety of the first person pronoun (Shields 2013, p.127).

His work, like the books that most interest him, would sit on a “frontier between genres” (Shields 2011, p.69). Shields acknowledges his formulation necessitates an uncertainty on behalf of both writer and reader in regards to form; but what if the lines within which the work is coloured are blurred, or unclosed, allowing potentially endless editions? What if, as discussed in relation to the act of prescriptively titling *biji*, an awareness of form imbues both writer and reader with the knowledge that what is to come is formless, and thus, guarantees such elusive and exciting qualities.

Shields writes: “The word *novel*, when it entered the languages of Europe, had the vaguest of meanings; it meant the form of writing that was formless, that had no rules, that made up its own rules as it went along” (Shields 2011, p.13). This view of the novel as text that constructs and adheres to its own set of rules seems particularly oulipian. Though, now that this definition has been superseded, should we not return to a literary

---

<sup>58</sup> “Most of the passages in this book are taken from other sources. Nearly every passage I’ve clipped I’ve also revised, at least a little – for the sake of compression, consistency, or whim. You mix and scratch the shit up to the level your own head is at...” (2011, p.103).

form whose vaguest of meanings remains unsullied, a form where in such ambiguity we can find potential? A form like the *biji*?

Shields also finds precedent or ancestry for the new form he champions, albeit not in the traditional *biji* and *zuihitsu* it so closely resembles. He finds it in Emerson, who in 1830 named the new literature he desired – one in which everything was admissible, from philosophy, ethics and divinity, to criticism, poetry and anecdote, and all were combined – a ‘panharmonicon’ in tribute to Johann Maelzel’s cacophonous invention (Shields 2011, p.16); in Plutarch’s bulleted essays (2011, p.9); in the orderly miscellanies of Richard Stern (2011, pp.73-75), which thrust together fact and fiction, news and memoir, a refined mess that draws on all facets of Stern’s existence in order to reproduce it on the page; in the collage of Renata Adler’s *Speedboat*, where paragraphs are miniature stories (2011, pp.115-116); and in Robbe-Grillet’s not-quite memoir, *Ghosts In The Mirror*, mixing flash-fiction with flash philosophy in a field of intimate reflection (2011, p.121). Having assembled with this list a trajectory of texts that support his vision of writing the new form presented itself to Shields. He writes:

I had the sudden intuition that I could take various fragments of things - aborted stories, outtakes from novels, journal entries, lit crit – and build a story out of them... I just knew I needed to see what it would look like to set certain shards in juxtaposition to other shards (Shields 2011, p.172).

This concept of collating the unused, the peripheral literary scraps (alongside his borrowings and citations), was noted by Alimov in his succinct but erudite essay on Song era *biji*. He writes:

Some of them [*biji*] are significant in size and required substantial time and effort from their authors: the material is strictly organized into sections according to the author’s interests. Others are small and chaotic, reminiscent of a scholar’s



preliminary thoughts, observations, notes, and information not included in other works (Alimov 1999, p.39).

Alimov adds that these miscellaneous and otherwise unused texts, when collected and included in *biji* – “fundamentally open texts, absorbing the most varied materials” (Alimov 1999, p.46) allowing a reader to “...notice some overriding themes which reflect the author’s main interest and to which he repeatedly returns” (Alimov 1999, p.42).

Shields argues that in a society of filesharing, up and downloading, where free copies of art proliferate abundantly, value is no longer placed on the copy, but in the links and connections between artifacts, the relationships that the act of collage reveals and distills. He writes: “Value has shifted away from a copy toward the many ways to recall, annotate, personalize, edit, authenticate, display, mark, transfer, and engage a work. Art is a conversation, not a patent office” (Shields 2011, p.29). This suggests values displayed by the compiler of a collection of *biji*, engaging other works through annotation and criticism, personal commentary, select edits.

As further proof of the unrealised (by Shields) commonality between the type of work Shields’ manifesto favours and *biji*, section ‘M’ of *Reality Hunger* is subtitled “in praise of brevity” (Shields 2011, p.126). Of the innumerable vague descriptors attached to varying definitions of *biji*, there is nothing that occurs more frequently than references to brevity, and to a casual tone. He addresses this favourable view of brevity directly in entry 376: “The merit of style exists precisely in that it delivers the greatest number of ideas in the fewest number of words” (Shields 2011, p.127). And addresses tonality in the first entry of section ‘M’:

Even as they’re exploring serious and complex material, short-short writers frequently use a certain mock modesty to give the work a tossed-off tone and

disarm the reader. The reader thinks he's reading a diary entry, when in fact it's a lyric essay or prose poem. Short-shorts remind me of algebraic equations or geometry proofs or lab experiments or jigsaw puzzles or carom shots or very cruel jokes. They're magic tricks, with meaning (Shields 2011, p.127).

It is worth noting, too, that what this fragmented literature reminds Shields of – algebraic equations or geometry proofs or lab experiments or jigsaw puzzles – is in fact terms the Oulipo have used to describe their own writing and investigation. In the following section, 'N', Shields addresses genre:

It might move by association, leaping from one path of thought to another by way of imagery or connotation, advancing by juxtaposition or sidewinding poetic logic. It often accretes by fragments, taking shape mosaically, its import visible only when one stands back and sees it whole. It partakes of the poem in its density and shapeliness, its distillation of ideas and musicality of language, and partakes of the essay in its weight, its overt desire to engage with facts, melding its allegiance to the actual with its passion for imaginative form... It may, though, meander, making use of other genres when they serve its purpose, sampling the techniques of fiction, drama, journalism, song, and film (Shields 2011, p.130).

While Shields' views show a remarkable resemblance to those expressed by John D'Agata and Deborah Tall<sup>59</sup> in regard to the lyric essay, it also serves as a more poetic and literary description of *biji* than any thus far offered academically.

What are the markers of this movement that Shields seeks to unify with such a manifesto? Of the list Shields provides, a majority of the key components are reflected in *biji* writings. Raw material, randomness, spontaneity, reader/viewer participation, a

---

<sup>59</sup> See the publication of lyric essays under their editorship at *Seneca Review* (for more <http://www.hws.edu/senecareview/lyricessay.aspx>)

tone that suggests the author is viewing a strange culture, plasticity of form, pointillism, criticism as autobiography, self-ethnography, self-reflexivity, anthropological autobiography, a blurring between fact and fiction (Shields 2011, p.5) – all these composite elements and traits have been found in – and found to be demonstrative of – *biji* writings already examined.

As with other contemporary examples of the form we have examined, lists, particularly literary accretion, abound in Shields' *Reality Hunger* – entry 145 compiles secular Jewish writers with verboten thematics (2011, p.50); entry 189 brings together David Foster Wallace, Leonard Michaels, Kurt Vonnegut, and others, as examples of writing that's only an inch from life (2011, p.64); entry 368 lists Cyril Connolly's *The Unquiet Grave*, Eduardo Galeano's *The Book of Embraces*, Richard Brautigan's *Trout Fishing in America*, Sven Lindqvist's *A History of Bombing* – works here grouped ambiguously beneath a sentence from Eliot's *The Waste Land* ('These fragments I have shored against my ruins'); entry 447 commences with the unusually explicit "What I Love": before enumerating texts ranging from Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat* to William James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* (2011, pp.146-147). Shields goes one step further in his analysis, tracing the literary list employed in such writings to its historical root in the composition of aphorisms catalogued by theme. His analysis of this early practice reveals the historical literary precedent for the synecdochic mode of such writing. He writes:

When read together, these collections of sayings could be said to make a general argument on their common themes, or at least shed some light somewhere, or maybe simply obsess about a topic until a little dent has been made in the huge idea they all pondered (Shields 2011, p.8).

Is this not the stated intended effect of *biji* collections by the likes of Pu Songling, and indeed more recently by Ouyang Yu? Shields himself suggests Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* is a direct descendent of such practices (Shields 2011, p.8).

While the creative component of this dissertation will explore, in detail, one potential application of the results presented through an anoulipic examination of *biji*, Shields unintentionally proposes another. In entry 455 of *Reality Hunger*, when critiquing and commenting on *Hamlet*, Shields compares Shakespeare's play to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, arguing that the entire play functions merely as a vehicle for Hamlet – in an effort similar to Nietzsche's in the aforementioned text – to give his opinion on everything and anything. Shields' proposition that the play could easily be divided into smaller sections with headings like Hamlet on Friendship, Hamlet on Sexual Fidelity, Hamlet on Suicide, Hamlet on Grave Diggers, suggest a way of re-ordering existing texts as *biji* or other similar forms. The observation thus provides another promising development in the deconstruction of genre and pursuit of anoulipic reconstruction. According to Shields, the thematic investigation of collage is manifest from the beginning. He writes: "...[Collage] teaches the reader to understand that the movements of the writer's mind are intricately entangled with the work's meaning... *are* the work's meaning" (Shields 2013, p.176). What, if anything, separates this definition from that of the *zuihitsu*, in which author, and by prescience of form, reader, can *follow the brush*, the movements of the writer's mind. And by the same token, consider the act of editing, or compiling that Shields stresses throughout *Reality Hunger*, where collage is the trump medium in his denunciation of other art; this act reflects that of compiling *biji*. All three approaches, sharing many facets of their construction, resulted in formally similar fully realised texts. Shields writes:

We're outside genre and we're also outside certain expectations of what can be said, and in this special space – often, interestingly, filled with spaces – the author/narrator/speaker manages, in hundreds of brief paragraphs, to convey for me, indelibly, what it feels like for one human being to be alive, and by implication, all human beings (Shields 2013, p.179).

In analysing the various components of his collage, Shields further strengthens the connections between his ideal work and traditional *biji* by establishing 'fraudulent artifacts' (texts I view as analogous to building blocks of unofficial histories) as crucial to the method. He writes:

In the extremely bureaucratized culture in which I now live, I'm inundated by documents: itineraries, instruction manuals, lectures, permit forms, advertisements, primers, catalogues, comment cards, letters of complaint, end-of-year reports, accidentally forwarded email, traffic updates, alumni magazine class notes. What I call 'fraudulent artifacts' – pseudo-interviews, faux lectures, quasi-letters, 'found' texts, etc – exact/enact giddy, witty, imaginative revenge on the received forms that dominate our lives (Shields 2013, p.198).

Gang's evaluation of Liu Yiqing's *Qiantang Yishi* is pertinent to my examination of Shields' work: "If the text is indeed a product of sloppy editorship marked by uncovered traces of plagiarism, how can it also display the level of perceptiveness that clearly indicates a thoughtful mind and a well-conceived plan behind its composition?" (Gang 2010, p.89). Both authors, despite leaving traces of the origins of borrowed texts, act carefully and with innovation, employing a writerly effort to redeploy these texts in a new series that creates new perspectives. As Nanxiu observes, inauthenticity (stemming from Confucius' critical appraisal of *xiaoshuo*) was a common stigma for

works, like *biji*, categorised under the *xiaoshuo* rubric (Nanxiu 2001, p.91). It is a stigma Shields' battles with to this day.<sup>60</sup>

These questions surrounding authorship establish another level of tension within such texts. The issue becomes more complex with contemporary *biji* as they are constructed in a post-modern literary field. As writer and author can now be considered as two distinct concepts (the former one who actually writes the text, the latter as its formal cause) how should we view compilers of *biji* in a contemporary setting? Are compilers, like Shields, who make use of unacknowledged appropriation of existing texts merely compilers, are they curators, or do they become writers by virtue of the fractions of the text they have composed, and the writerly effort employed in redistributing borrowed material? Viers makes a case for the latter in her doctoral dissertation examining acts of copying<sup>61</sup> in the works of Calvino, Mathews, Perec, and Queneau: "Borrowing a line or passage, word for word, from another literary work, what we generally refer to as intertextual citation, is a form of copying that results in a version; the reuse and displacement of the "original" text allows for re-creation in a new context" (Viers 2008, p.42).

\*

"I was thinking that, yes, it's true, I do borrow from people in some of my texts, but I  
always try to pay them back with interest"<sup>62</sup>

\*

---

<sup>60</sup> The concerns leveled at Shields' in regards to the authorship and authenticity of these collages are reminiscent of those expressed by the editors of the SKQS in their evaluation of Liu Yiqing's *Qiantang Yishi* (for translation, see Gang, 2010, pp.86-88).

<sup>61</sup> Viers considers copying in three modes: procedural (borrowing a method, form, or procedure from pre-existing literary works), literal (word for word lifting of passages or phrases from pre-existing literary works), and translational (where there is a modification in word for word lifting from pre-existing literary works)" (2008, p.15).

<sup>62</sup> le Tellier, H. [1997] (2011, p.95).

Coupland overcomes this hurdle by producing the very ‘texts’ he borrows, but framing them in the context of his *biji* as found or borrowed source material. As an example of this, see the entries on the television show, *Survivor*; the transcripts of contestants; the information on the Republic of Kiribati. Likewise, Kelly’s inclusion of translations from Dek Manto’s *La Marcharo Vers Hemo*.

In these instances the author creates falsified factual documents to draw from – presented only as excerpts – in order to achieve heterogeneity of content that constructs formless form. While these sections are creations of the author, they are presented as anything but in order to establish the author as simultaneously compiler and writer. However, they also safeguard the author from the kind of criticism leveled at Shields, who operates in a method more in line with Chinese tradition, where the lines between writer/compiler/editor are significantly less distinct.<sup>63</sup>

Authors of contemporary *biji* from the Coupland school simulate a diversification of content in order to artificially bedim the distinction between writer and compiler and achieve a similar effect, where the transitory roles of the author as writer/compiler can further enhance tensions and formless form. A fitting terminology for such texts, or text fragments – ‘fraudulent artifact’ – is provided by Shields & Vollmer in *Fakes: An Anthology of Pseudo-Interviews, Faux-Lectures, Quasi-Letters, "Found" texts (and other fraudulent artifacts)* (2012). By their definition, a fraudulent artifact is a text purporting to be a particular form of writing:

...a journal entry, a note, a yearbook letter, an e-mail, a transcript of a speech, a grocery list, a musical score, a screenplay – which also tells a story, stirs thought and emotion, inspires inquiry, initiates action, and/or calls into question that which is – or has purported to be – real (Shields & Vollmer 2012, p.13).

---

<sup>63</sup> For more on the blurring of these roles in traditional Chinese practice, see Gang 2010, p.115.

Hahn has been explicit about this fact in interviews about *The Narrow Road to the Interior*:

This might be a strange analogy, but I like to think of the *zuihitsu* as a fungus – not plant or animal, but a species unto itself. The Japanese view it as a distinct genre, although its elements are difficult to pin down. There's no Western equivalent, though some people might wish to categorize it as a prose poem or an essay. [Some of its characteristics are] a kind of randomness that is not really random, but a *feeling* of randomness; a pointed subjectivity that we don't normally associate with the essay. The *zuihitsu* can also resemble other Western forms: lists, journals. I've added emails to this mix. Fake emails... The technique of collage is really compelling to me. Letter writing, diary form – real and invented – I like to use within the *zuihitsu* itself... So that's what I'm trying to do: mix up genres within the *zuihitsu* and sometimes include fabricated material (Hahn in Sheck 2006).

Gang's evaluation of the effect of this fragmentary assemblage recalls Calvino's *If On A Winter's Night A Traveler*. He writes:

We know that the text is leading us to somewhere, but in leading us to that destination, the text also constantly draws our attention to other numerous variables, bifurcated paths, conflictive or even contradictory entrances that challenge our wishful search for a linear, stable and unified reading (Gang 2010, p.126).

This purposefully unfinished quality and aesthetics of *biji* establish a further connection to oulipian modes of writing. Consider, as one example, Georges Perec's *Life A User's Manual* (2008). Despite its rigorous governing mathematical constraints the final text presents only 99 of the 100 chapters. In the final moments Bartlebooth dies clutching a



puzzle piece shaped like a W that will not fit amongst the all-but-complete 439<sup>th</sup> puzzle before him.

In his evaluation of Liu Yiqing's *Qiantang Yishi* Gang resolves: "In reading the text, our experience is somehow like wandering through a maze" (Gang 2010, p.126). I propose to design and escape from such a maze. The following list will highlight some more select contemporary texts that, like those of Ouyang Yu et al., employ the formless form of *biji*. These will assist me in the construction of my own maze.

## Unintentional *Biji*

- ‘Class Notes’ – Lucas Cooper

With its unifying arc of one once-student’s fading star of a life, this parodic anthropological collection echoes as a contemporary equivalent for the often bitterly-tinged accounts of scholarly life that are commonly found amongst *biji*. It paints a pointillist portrait of an educated Reagan-era class of still-whoopie capitalists, and softens it with the reflections of a once student, and his self-inflicted comparisons to peers. It is not difficult to see the similarities between this text and John Minford’s description of Pu Songling’s *biji* collection as “a timeless prism affording a view into the inner world of the traditional Chinese scholar-gentleman” (Minford 2006, p.xx).

- *Children of the Days: A Calendar of Human History* – Eduardo Galeano<sup>64</sup>

Galeano hints at one of the elements that suggest *Children of the Days* belongs on this list in the acknowledgements that precede the text proper, recounting the progression of the book from “early drafts, which yearned to be final drafts” to its current state, where it “turned out to be almost final” (Galeano 2013). Galeano’s appraisal of its current state suggests the intent of a purposefully unfinished quality and aesthetic, like that of *biji*.

In the pictorial collages (also by Galeano) that mark the start of each new month in this book of days, another hint is hidden. The image of a parrot conversing with a hippopotamus marks September, and a speech bubble connected to the mouth of each proclaims: “I’ll be brief” (Galeano 2013, p.267).

Galeano includes poetry – the verse of Nazim Hikmet (p.8); an ode to silence by Paul the Silentiary in the year 563 (p.58); brief remnant excerpts of verses by John Donne, a

---

<sup>64</sup> Galeano’s *El libro de los abrazos* (1989) [*The Book Of Embraces*], which combines memoir, anecdote, polemic, fantasy, drawings by the author’s own hand, and parables that recall the strange tales of traditional *biji*, could also be considered on this list. Its nucleus; an investigation of terror and imagination.

contemporary of Shakespeare (p.99); ‘The Poet King’ of Texcoco Nezahualcóyotl (p.175); of Chinese poet Li Po, and his reflections of the moon (p.193); Léopold Senghor’s *Colored Man* (p.263); and *The Encounter*, from the 12th century Persian poet Farid al-Din Attar (p.386); a brief poem on travel from Matsuo Bashō (p.393).

There are recounts of unusual legal proceedings or precedents: ‘The Man Who Executed God’, wherein judge Anatoly Lunacharsky presided over a Russian court that judged God, a bible on a chair as his stand-in (p.19); ‘General Smooch’, a brief journalistic report of the pouty protest enacted by residents of Sorocaba, Brazil, where a court ruling outlawed kisses that undermined public morals, punishable by jail sentence (p.44); the courtroom transcripts recreated in ‘Susan Didn’t Pay Either’ (p.186); and the English jurist John Cooke, who in 1649 successfully charged King Charles I of tyranny (p.316).

Information on traditional celebrations and festivals are likewise included – ‘The Goddess is Celebrating’, about tributes paid on February 2 to the mother goddess of all fish, Iemanyá (p.38); the pagan origins of ‘Saint John’s Eve’ (p.191); the sun festival known as ‘Inti Raymi’ (p.192); and the ‘Day of the Dead’ (p.336).

Lists, the mainstay of miscellaneousness, are also utilised. ‘Day of the Disappeared’, for example, contains a list of things that have too: the taste of fruit, secure jobs, the right to breathe (p.264).

Galeano’s brief marvellous tales – like that of Virginian Roy Sullivan, who survived being struck by lightning on seven different occasions in ‘The Eighth Bolt’ (p.43); Jonathan Tilove’s coffee stain Virgin Mary in ‘Apparitions’ (p.140); Signora Girardelli, ‘The Incombustible Lady’ who swallowed flame and belched metal (p.165); and the flying felines that filled the sky of Borneo in 1960 in ‘It’s Raining Cats’ (p.226) – are reminiscent of traditional *zhiguai* tales.

Galeano incorporates religious information – reports on heaven and hell in ‘Hell’ and ‘The Great Heretofore’ (p.196, p.197); the prayer of the Tojolobal Mats of Chiapas to Mother earth (p.235); and traditional customs and sayings – the Maya greetings explained in ‘They Knew How to Listen’ (p.85); the Guatemalan worry dolls in ‘Night Crossing’ (p.108); the symbolism of garlic, salt, wine and bread at the Mafia’s table (p.310). There are reports of traditional healing practices, miracle workers and shaman – presidential advisor Edward Bernays is scathingly caricatured as a contemporary worker of miracles in ‘Manufacturing Public Opinion’ (p.104); or the chanting and painting employed by Navajo Indians to cure ills (p.322). There is a discordant polyphony of political voices – King Louis XIV, Ghandi, Che Guevara – in an assemblage larger in scope but similar in affect to that recognised by Gang in Liu Yiqing’s *Qiantang Yishi* (2010). There are parables from a variety of cultural origins – the African ‘Day of Light’ (p.107); the Argentinian ‘Distances’ (p.12); musings on the power of dreams and dream interpretation as in Calpurnia’s dream of Caesar in ‘Voices in the Night’ (p.83) and the dream-as-prophecy of nuclear apocalypse in ‘Sleep Knows More Than Wakefulness’ (p.80).

As with many lauded traditional *biji*, philosophy is included: the gloss of historical philosophy on women that comprises ‘Homages’ (p.76); the observations of ancient sages born at the source of the Orinoco River in ‘To Sing, To See’ (p.147); or Socrates and Glaucon’s musing on a magic ring that cloaks its bearer in invisibility (p.319). Brief portraits of famous and historical people are as broad in scope as the collection en masse – media mogul Rupert Murdoch in ‘The Left is the University of the Right’ (p.79); Albert Einstein in ‘Keep an Eye on This Guy’ and ‘Earth Day’ (p.120, p.124); former President of Iran Mohammad Mossadegh in ‘Don’t Save Me, Please’ (p.127);

and SS officer and US space scientist Werner von Braun in 'The Other Astronaut' (p.221).

Galeano also employs social analysis and amateur anthropology, as seen in 'World Day of Social Justice', an anecdote of train travel with a barely-concealed commentary on class (p.56). Alternate or unofficial history is presented in the 'The World Upside Down', where the actions of the United States and Iraq in 2003 are inverted to suggest confronting and conflicting ulterior narratives (p.88); in 'The Mystery Explained' where the US war against Afghanistan is addressed from the Latin American perspective (p.180); in 'The Visitor' the 'official history' of the Millennium Declaration is positioned alongside the 'unofficial history' of its impact and reception as found on a Santo Domingo chicken farm, the entry thus illustrating De Pee's formulation of centre and periphery in traditional *biji* accounts (De Pee 2007, pp.5-6); or the recounts of women who lived in silence, went on to oblivion, and were forgotten by history in 'Mexico's Women Liberators' (p.285). As in traditional *biji*, and in *Soul Mountain*, old songs are recorded: an Ona Indian verse accompanying a eulogy for language and Angela Loij in 'The World Shrinks' (p.57); some lines penned by labor activist and songwriter Joe Hill (p.353); a song attributed to Boadbil, the last king of Muslim Spain (p.396).

Galeano also constructs a mosaic portrait of himself as author/compiler, drip-feeding facts through out the text – including an unsigned letter received while he was in exile (p.194); a passing reference to his own baldness in an entry about German hairdresser and inventor of the curler, Karl (Charles) Nessler (p.303). Geographic topological arrangement, while seemingly possible is also avoided; the constraints of the timeless chronology employed by Galeano results in scattering entries from the same locations

across the months. There are five entries that concern London;<sup>65</sup> the same count for Buenos Aires;<sup>66</sup> Paris eight;<sup>67</sup> Moscow four;<sup>68</sup> Rio de Janeiro seven.<sup>69</sup> Yet these entries are not grouped together. Not by city, nor by country – despite 13 entries explicitly mentioning Brazil;<sup>70</sup> 11 concerning Spain;<sup>71</sup> and 19 (!) for the United States.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, an alphabetic organisational method is not employed by Galeano. Despite the chronological organisation of entries – the text progresses through a calendar leap year – Galeano retains a spatio-temporal tension by spanning millennia between entries – some two thousand years separate the events described on the entry of March 24; the 1976 establishment of General Jorge Rafael Videla's military dictatorship; and those of March 25, when archangel Gabriel visited the Virgin Mary.

While some entries – confirmable recorded dates of births and deaths, internationally or nationally sanctioned official days (12 February World Breastfeeding Day; 22 March World Water Day; July 30 International Friendship Day; September International Literacy Day) – are fixed dates, other entries could occur on almost any day of any calendar year – March 16, for example, entitled 'Storytellers', and beginning: "Around this day and others..." (p.84). More still, like 'When', a brief anaphoric biography of Linus Pauling (p.65), are not fixed specifically to any date and cram decades into a single entry.

---

<sup>65</sup> (pp. 24, 47, 82, 99, 271).

<sup>66</sup> (pp. 177, 178, 198, 247, 294).

<sup>67</sup> (pp. 87, 106, 145, 179, 229, 257, 259, 295).

<sup>68</sup> (pp. 19, 257, 260, 345).

<sup>69</sup> (pp. 24, 39, 71, 138, 139, 219, 361).

<sup>70</sup> (pp. 9, 24, 39, 44, 56, 71, 103, 209, 211, 215, 216, 361, 373).

<sup>71</sup> (pp. 46, 51, 73, 116, 123, 177, 253, 259, 307, 329, 340).

<sup>72</sup> (pp. 18, 64, 77, 88, 105, 125, 127, 173, 201, 252, 255, 301, 327, 329, 330, 335, 343, 353, 385).

At times, tension is also established on the level of individual entries – for ‘World Day for Cultural Diversity’ Galeano’s entry about the perverse treatment of Congo pygmy Ota Benga operates in enmity with the title (p.155); a recount of the impact of the New York Stock Exchange collapse of 2008 is given the comically concerned satirical title of ‘Adopt A Banker!’ (p.283).

There is also evidence of ‘following the brush’ – a unifying theme of ‘jungle’ binds the entries for March 28 and 29, though their content is miles apart; the former, ‘Manufacturing Africa’, anecdotal proof of a recent hypothesis surrounding the origins of Tarzan’s Hollywood howl; and the latter, ‘The Jungle Was Here’ a brief essay on Texaco Petroleum Company’s work in Lago Agrio (pp.96-97). ‘Sacrilege’ governs June 8 to 10, with everything from Michelangelo’s David to the 2010 debates on gay marriage in Buenos Aires discussed (pp.176-178). Similarly the entries from July 12 to 16 are all concerned, to some degree, with soccer, though their focus ranges from sport, to dreams, to payment in the form of cattle (pp.212-216). While the dates progress uninterrupted (even the illusive February 29) Galeano’s chronological topology folds upon itself, is fractured and recursive, and, ultimately, can be seen to be ordered only by the disorder that prevailed throughout the expansive history he documents.

- ‘Calendar’ – Michelle Grangaud

Grangaud’s ‘Calendar’ is “...a collection of real or imaginary events found, with their precise dates, in books” (2006, p.71). This is a fractured historical narrative blending fact and fiction in her attempt to write a book that was already written. There are obvious similarities between the content of such a text and the ‘unofficial histories’ contained in traditional *biji* and the dated format (progressing through December, and spanning a broad historical trajectory) is reminiscent of personal notes or a diary. Despite this, Grangaud, like Galeano, achieves two separate chronological trajectories.

The first is fixed, events presented in sequence, clustered together according to the date on which they occurred – though no information is provided for the years in which these events, spanning centuries, occurred, allowing for the second, erratic trajectory. The result is a complex temporal construction that exists as an underlying tension in the work. Similarly, the brief fragmented entries often read like the anecdotal inclusions commonly found in *biji*. This entry, from December 4, for example:

“Joubert just read Plato. He notes that the resulting feeling is similar to that caused by mountain air: though not nourishing in itself, it gives one an appetite for good food” (Grangaud 2006, p.72).

As the above entry also alludes to, another trait that Grangaud’s ‘Calendar’ shares with traditional *biji* is the frequency of commentary on poetry or literature – an element of the genre that was discussed in more detail in the examination of Ouyang Yu above. In ‘Calendar’, Dostoevsky, Stein, Machiavelli and others are all examined in varying degrees.

- *Sic* – Davis Schneiderman

The title of this work, the second instalment of Schneiderman’s Dead/Book trilogy, gives the first clue to its inclusion.<sup>73</sup> *Sic* is the shorthand for the Latin *sic erat scriptum* [thus it was written], and reveals two things about the text: *sic* marks an element of attribution and of a prior existence of the works included;<sup>74</sup> and, as the marking which shows a quote may have misspellings or nonstandard formatting, it suggests the broad scope of Schneiderman’s textual repurposings.

---

<sup>73</sup> The Dead/Book trilogy began with *Blank* (2011) (filled only with evocative and well-worn chapter titles and blank pages) and will conclude with *INK*. (2014) a book hand-dipped in ink that erases, redacts, and overwrites itself.

<sup>74</sup> Schneiderman dedicates a page to the etymology of the word ‘from’ (p.13).



Schneiderman's collection, vast and seemingly disparate, is unified by his claim to authorship on all the works therein. While some individual entries address issues of authorship explicitly – the heavily translated appropriation of Borge's 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' (Schneiderman 2013, pp.92-98) for example – the collection as a whole serves as a vehicle for Schneiderman to pose questions about the role of authorship.

The book is timed to coincide with the release of 25 free, full-text e-books — including *The Red-Headed League* and *Young Goodman Brown*, now marked with Schneiderman's name – and liberal use is made of existing texts within, everything from *The Canterbury Tales* to a transcription of the moon landing; from *Ulysses* to the Emergency Broadcast Test; from a recipe for victory cake to Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*.

[SIC] also includes works in the public domain after 1923, and so includes Wikipedia pages, intellectual property law, a transcript of the first Youtube video, and the very first Tweets in history. Fascinatingly, also included is the DNA map of mitochondrial vertebrate, and the original source-code of David L. Smith's 1999 internet-killer, the now infamous Melissa Virus.

Schneiderman's collection does not examine a particular location or history, but the act of authorship itself. The entire work is a sustained application of what Borges terms "fallacious attribution" in 'Pierre Menard, Author of the Quixote' [1939] (Borges 1998, p.95).

• *Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlives* – David Eagleman

Eagleman's brief tales – indelibly inflicted by his work as a neuroscientist – offer descriptions, most frequently in the second person, of potential afterlife scenarios. It is

strange and scientific, a rigorously straight-faced report of what lies beyond and as such, serves as a strong link between traditional strange or marvellous tales – particularly those dealing with the underworld, or realms of spirits – of traditional *biji*. The disparity of claims of these afterlives, the numerous potential variations, also create tension; in ‘Egalitaire’ (pp.5-7) God is a woman; in ‘Mary’ (pp.17-19) God is a man with a profound appreciation for Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. In one afterlife you relive your experiences in the total sum of their parts – seven months of sex, thirty years of interrupted sleep, eighteen months of waiting in line; in another, ‘The Cast’ (pp.20-22) you form part of the cast of extras that populate others’ dreams; in another still, ‘Prism’ (pp.72-74) you are split into your multiple selves at all possible ages upon reaching the place after death.

- *Soul Mountain* – Gao Xingjian

*Soul Mountain* is included here for two reasons. Despite being published more than a decade before the contemporary English language *biji* examined earlier, it is not classified by *biji* explicitly by Gao – despite containing numerous allusions to the form, and various appropriations of traditional *biji* tales. Secondly, it was written in Chinese, and as such shows a further development in line with Wu Jianren. Nevertheless, as it appears widely in translation, and this investigation is tentatively navigating new land, it will be included.

Gao’s intent in writing *Soul Mountain* [1990], more ambitious than simply exploring the potential of a contemporary *biji*, was to explore the potential of the modern Chinese language to fully express the feelings of modern citizens (Gao 2007, p.84). Gao employs a similar technique to that of Wu Jianren – embedding *biji* fragments within a larger text.

In the novel, the author travels broadly around modern day China, visiting remote and forgotten villages gathering oral history, and his nomadic existence and subsequent documentation is reminiscent of travel diary type *biji*. Further to this, the narrator includes the kinds of lists or inventorying often encountered in *biji*, as well as songs, commentary on poetry, folkloric remedies and other miscellanea representative of the genre. More explicitly, the narrator presents *biji* tales, beginning chapter 48: “You want to tell her a *biji* tale of the Jin Dynasty. It’s about a powerful and overbearing Grand Marshall and a mendicant nun who comes to his mansion seeking alms...” (2001, p.282) before proceeding to recite the *biji* tale in full. Concluding his tale, the narrator makes an observation on the potential of the story: it is a political warning, but also can be considered as a religious tale favouring Buddhism, or a philosophical treatise for getting on in society. “Or the story,” the narrator says of the *biji* tale, “could be developed into numerous intricate and complex theories” (2001, p.285). While this theory applies only to this particular tale, it also represents the aims of this study; the development of a contemporary *biji*. The form of Gao Xingjian’s *Soul Mountain* is again thrown into question in chapter 72, where the narrator (the fictionalised Gao) interrogates himself and metafictionally sheds some light on this theory:

“This isn’t a novel!”

“Then what is it?” he asks.

“A novel must have a complete story.”

He says he has told many stories, some with endings and others without.

“They’re all fragments without any sequence, the author doesn’t know how to organize connected episodes.”

“Then may I ask how a novel is supposed to be organized?”

“You must first foreshadow, build to a climax, then have a conclusion. That’s basic common knowledge for writing fiction.”

He asks if fiction can be written without conforming to the method which is common knowledge. It would just be like a story with parts told from beginning to end and parts from end to beginning, parts with a beginning and no ending and others which are only conclusions or fragments which aren’t followed up, parts which are developed but aren’t completed or which can’t be completed or which can be left out or which don’t need to be told any further or about which there’s nothing more to say. And all of these would also be considered stories (2001, p.452).

And later in the same chapter chastises himself: “You’ve slapped together travel notes, moralistic ramblings, feelings, notes, jottings, untheoretical discussions, unfable-like fables, copied out some folk songs, added some legend-like nonsense of your own invention, and are calling it fiction!” (2001, p.453).

While Gao Xingjian has not prescriptively titled *Soul Mountain* as a *biji* the unapologetic self-assessment excerpted above suggests it is as much a contemporary *biji* as those presented by Coupland, Kelly, and Ouyang. In fact, given the extensive collection of brief entries – Mabel Lee’s lauded English translation is more than 500 pages – *Soul Mountain* is, in its exhaustive scale, more representative of traditional *biji*. Despite not being titled or presented as a *biji* explicitly, *Soul Mountain* has been examined here as Gao Xingjian exhibits a knowledge of the form intimate enough that he can successfully manipulate and interrogate its conventions throughout his text.

The Chinese language does not indicate tense, and this affords writers in this mode the ability to have, identically and indistinguishably actualised in language, all three tenses – only the psychological process of the narrator and reader are involved (Gao 2007, 148

p.84). While these nuances are difficult to reflect in English, I have sought to pay tribute to them in the oscillating tense of narration employed throughout my own contemporary *biji*.

Gao argues that the effect of this is that reality and imagination, memory and thought are not strictly demarcated; rather, they are integrated within the process of narration (Gao 2007, pp.90-91). “The ancient Chinese language does not distinguish between tenses, and what emerges... could be called a psychological state that transcends time and space” (Gao 2007, p.111). Perhaps this inbuilt function of language is partially responsible for Shields – an author at the fore of experimental Western literature – to be demanding a thoroughly contemporary mode of writing that mimics, practically mirrors, one that has existed for centuries as literary marginalia in Asian cultures; one that blurs reality and imagination and memory and thought.<sup>75</sup>

Intriguingly, (or maybe just reassuringly) the seemingly far-fetched notion of lumping Gao Xingjian in amongst these writers by way of an anoulipic investigation into *biji* finds him in company he’s been compared to before – in ‘Literature & Metaphysics: About *Soul Mountain*’ Gao speaks of the comparisons his book drew from readers to the work of Georges Perec (Gao 2007, p.88).

• *Cambodia: A Book For People Who Find Television Too Slow* – Brian Fawcett

In a bifurcated text, a collection of parables – in turn fantastic, journalistic, essayistic, philosophical – addressing the impact of mass media on American culture run atop a book-length footnote about the Cambodian war.

Fawcett’s seemingly objective heteroglossia recalls similar techniques used by Liu Yiqing in *Qiantang Yishi*, as evidenced by Gang’s investigation of the text, where he

---

<sup>75</sup> Gu (2005) also traces the history of the serial form (similar to that employed by Shields), by way of Pound, to its ancient Chinese ancestry. See ‘Serial Form and Oriented Openness’ in Gu, 2005, pp.227-233.

observes that discordant details – uncertain signification, dialectics of textual voices, ruptures in coherence, and contrast in similarity (Gang 2010, p.33) – offer multiple perspectives for looking into a text. Such discordance can constitute a mosaic wherein the collage of numerous smaller images need not conform to each other or the bigger picture.

- *This Is Not A Novel* – David Markson

The title tells us what the book is not, but what could it potentially already be? Like much of Shields' recent work, Markson's *This Is Not A Novel* is constructed from a series of borrowings – some attributed, many not. Also like Shields' work, far from being a hodge-podge collection of notes and errata, there exists, partially concealed, a nucleus unifying Markson's fragmentary excerpts – the timelessness of art, and the absurdity of such timelessness. It drifts 'genre-less' somewhere in between fiction, nonfiction, and psychological memoir. In the opening pages of the text a narrator, called only Writer, announces that he is tired of inventing characters, contemplating plot, setting, theme, and conflict. What follows are pages crammed with short lines of astonishingly fascinating literary and artistic anecdotes, quotations, and cultural curiosities. Its extensive allusions, brief segments, and synecdochic construction of argument place it – perhaps parallel to the works of Bénabou – in the list of unintentional *biji*.

- *20 Lines A Day* – Harry Mathews

Its end-dated entries and personal tone align with the genre of diary writing, but there is so much more at play than that. For one, its governing constraint commands brevity, nothing longer than 20 lines a day. The content comprises a vast assortment of forms – confession, short essay, memoir, open letter, anecdote, automatic writing – and beside

these, too, a bevy of other forms that have come to represent some common grounds between the texts selected in this collection. Among them, critical readings of a variety of texts from Borges to Gregory and Elizabeth Cowan; lists (1997, p.44); songs, like the optimistically peaking ‘Junkie’s Ballad’ (1997, p.67); street vignettes (the scattered and recurring short tales of Billy Bodega); poetry, like the playful and ambitious untitled verse on p.89; and obituaries of literary figures, among them Perec, Francois Le Lionnais, and Italo Calvino.

- ‘Various Journeys [*Divers voyages*] – Etienne Lécroart

With its journal like format, shaped by brief excerpts of a paragraph or so in size, and containing travel information, anthropological notes, lists, a collage of drawings and text, and apparently no-longer extant instalments of the collection, this fractured and fragmentary incomplete collection is nested so as to position its author/compiler Lécroart as the redactor (as defined by Campany 1996, p.25).

- ‘Yvert’s Journey [*Le Voyage d’Yvert*] – Paul Braffort

Another potential contemporary *biji* is found in Paul Braffort’s contribution to the Oulipo’s various Journeys. Presented initially by Braffort as an “auto-, hetero- and pseudo-biographical narrative in 4,939 words and 8 images” (2013, p.304), the collection includes amongst its brief entries: poetry – Michel Petrovicht’s ‘*Le Voyage (dix vers)*’ (p.307) and a brief verse by V. Rémy (p.318); lists of objects of refinement amongst a literary elite (p.308) and of works included in a specific library (p.319); essaying; mathematical illustrations (pp.310-311); travel notes (p.313); songs, and lists of songs (p.315); the reproduction and interpretation of philosophical texts (p.317; pp.321-323); religious tales (p.318); reproductions from stamp catalogues (p.306, p.324); and anthropological observation (p.320).

It also provides another example of following the brush, which leads Braffort variously from entries on Francois Le Lionnais, to rare stamps, to the mysteries of Ellery Queen, to (somewhat self-referentially) homophony and semantic ambiguity as imaginary and imaginative solutions. In closing the collection, Braffort makes an explicit reference to the work as “essay” (p.324) and the assembled collection certainly appears to represent Shields’ view of essay as both noun and verb.

Of equal interest, Braffort also takes care within the text itself to suggest potential alternate organisation/readings of the collection (p.321), thus highlighting its form as paratactic series that generates multiple choices. In a self-evaluation that further strengthens ties between ‘Yvert’s Journey’ and the literary form Shields heralds and *biji*, Braffort establishes as metaphor the library as universe. In this instance, library is not to be taken literally as a building or room containing collections of books, but as, literally, any collection of texts – such as one assembled through an act of collage and assemblage, like ‘Yvert’s Journey’ (2013, p.321). This universal model of the form both echoes Bénabou’s ‘nucleus’ and the fractured cosmography of *biji*, and Braffort follows it with his own theory of chaos and confusion within the formless. Like Shields, Braffort’s theory is governed by the pursuit of a more truthful realism: “...this is why any given preceding pages, in their heightened realism, might create an impression of disorder, and even confusion” (2013, p.321).

- *The Age of Wire and String* – Ben Marcus

It has already been discussed elsewhere in this thesis how *biji* can provide a pointillist portrait of a culture or society through the accretion of fragments. In *The Age Of Wire & String* Ben Marcus constructs anew a world like our own but askew, just slightly, and all but obscures it from view. This society is presented in mosaic text comprising a mixture of a jarring, new syntax and an almost stoic, religious tone. It is rigorous in its



almost-lifelessness, a religious tract recited by rote, rules for existing. It is as though Marcus has taken this world, and realigned frequencies, bringing different elements of existence so sharply into focus that they become almost unrecognisable.

The entries of his text are collected under the titles ‘Sleep’; ‘God’; ‘Food’; ‘The House’; ‘Animal’; ‘Weather’; ‘Persons’; and ‘The Society’. Each branch contains five entries, these generally only a page in length; alongside a final entry for cataloguing Terms. The branches proceed in the order listed above, following on from an opening ‘Argument’, which begins:

This book is a catalog of the life project as prosecuted in the *Age of Wire and String* and beyond, into the arrangements of states, sites, and cities and, further, within the small houses that have been granted erection or temporary placement on the perimeters of districts and river colonies (1995, p.3).

Marcus continues to describe his task as “cataloging a culture” and situates himself/the narrator as many compilers of *biji* have been stationed, peripherally, “in-gazing” the culture (1995 p.3). Instructively, Marcus’ Argument later states: “...that for accurate vision to occur the thing must be trained to see itself” (1995, pp.3-4), revealing a method with which the reader may attempt to infiltrate his prose. He concludes: “It is under such terms that *The Age of Wire and String* sets forth to present an array of documents settling within the chief concerns of the society, of any society, of the world and its internal areas” (1995, p.4). That Marcus views the text as a collected array of documents suggests something of its construction and assemblage – artfully imitated or cleverly cloaked – and friction inherent in its composite structure. The temporal tension on which many traditional and contemporary *biji* and *zuihitsu* thrive is embedded in Marcus’ world, where: “The morning is an extensive period and will often outlast the entire sentence” (p.63) and where “no one can sleep for more than one dream” (p.81).

In ‘Intercourse with Resuscitated Wife’, an entry under the ‘Sleep’ branch explaining the superstitious act of intercourse with the resuscitated wife in order to ensure safe operation of household machinery, the plain tone and pacing of Marcus’ prose, as well as the entry’s content, recalls strongly a sense of *biji* by the likes of Pu Songling: “She must be found, revived, and then penetrated until heat fills the room, until the toaster is shooting bread onto the floor, until she is smiling beneath you with black teeth and grabbing your bottom” (p.7). These similarities are found elsewhere too, as in the definition of “Choke Powder”, found in the Terms for ‘Food’: “When the member is collapsing or rescinding, the powder may be retrieved by gripping the member’s neck tightly and driving the knee into its throat” (p.41). Elsewhere in the ‘Sleep’ branch, in the entry titled ‘Snoring, Accidental Speech’, similarly *biji*-esque superstitious remedies are found: “The snoring person can be stuffed with cool air to slow the delivery of its language” (p.8). ‘Leg Of Brother Who Dies Early’, an entry in the ‘Persons’ branch, is presented in a similar tone and explains how a dead brother may communicate through a still-living sibling (pp.117-118). ‘Sky Destroys Dog’, the third entry of the ‘Sleep’ branch introduces the theme of religious practices, prevalent throughout the *Age of Wire and String*, and often including descriptions of rituals or festivals – for example, ‘The Festival of Garments’ (p.136); ‘Half-Man Day’ (p.139); and ‘Subfeet Walking Rituals’ (p.138).

The Terms entry of each branch takes the form of a list, which is used to identify and further define or explain terms found within the syntax of the *Age of Wire and String*. The words are from the existing English lexicon, but are used in a manner that can only result from the complete deconstruction and re-composition of a language. Marcus uses these lists to accrue subtly disarming phrases and their definitions, or the meaning for common words in the context of the *Age and Wire of String*. There are Leg Initiations

and Professional Sleepers, Sleep Holes and Wind Bowls, A Shirt Of Noise... Sadness is defined in the Terms section of 'Sleep' as: "The first powder to be abided upon waking. It may result in tools or garments and can be eradicated with more of itself, in which case the face results as a placid system coursing with water, heaving" (p.13). Salt as: "An item that comprises the inner and outer core of most to all animals. An animal may be licked free of this salt, or an animal may be hosed clean or scraped" (p.14). A coffin is aptly recast as a "Western Worship Box" in the Terms for 'God' (p.27), and even proper nouns aren't spared from Marcus' rewiring of language – see Albert p.13; Jennifer p.15; Carl p.41; Gervin, p.43; Monica, p.48; and Ben Marcus, p.76. Similarly, place-names are re-cast: Ohio, p.63; and familial relations are also reconfigured – The Mother, p.64. Each instance of this different application of the word, a word, causes us to stumble, reassess the linguistic terrain, locate ourselves within Marcus' world, and then continue. Its fragmented and fractured form is mutually causative and conducive. He provides further potential clues to unlocking it. In the Terms segment of the 'God' branch a description of the "Treasure of Possible Enunciations" is listed. It is a "catalog of first, last, and intermediate lexia. It includes all possible words and their unutterable opposites" (p.24).

Yet another clue to the strange form this text takes is given in the Terms section of 'Animal'. Included in the list is "REPRESENTATIONAL LIFE" – which, given the text's strange, concise syntax, could be construed as 'representation of life', so that the definition that follows can be considered in regards to form. It "strives as well as it can to be quick" (1995 p.77), in other words, for brevity. What ignites Marcus' text is the tension that exists between language as we know and expect it, and Marcus' application of the same building blocks in wholly new ways. It is not as though our words have

been stolen or borrowed, for they exist with such seriousness and solemnity, and as so integral to the very fibre of the *Age of Wire and String*.

In a 2002 interview with *Bookworm* Marcus pulled the curtain back a little on the processes used to write *The Age of Wire and String*, and in doing so made even more apparent the connections between this text and traditional *biji* collections:

I read something that was very potent to me, it was *The Folk Motif Index* by a writer named Stith Thompson, who essentially culled motifs from every folk tale, fairy tale, that he could get his hands on and it's a multiple volume set. So some of the stories in that book [*The Age of Wire and String*], like 'Intercourse With Resuscitated Wife' – I think that phrase exactly – is just from Stith Thompson's Index. And you can then go and look up a story where someone has sex with a wife who's dead, and it might be a minor aspect of the fairytale as whole, but it's a motif. And this became my source book, it would give me an image and I would just essentially try to create a story around them (Marcus in Silverblatt 2002).

This process echoes that of Pu Songling, as presented by Kao in his study of his *Strange Tales*. He writes:

Many are layered texts resulting from the rewriting of old texts and superpositioning, grafting, and juxtaposing of texts (or motifs). The significance of an old text is often left visible, not entirely 'erased', as it is interconnected to other texts by expansion, intersection or accretion (Kao 1994, p.203).

In the Silverblatt interview, Marcus is also explicit about his practice of collage, and, like Shields, refers to his literary assemblage as 'sampling'. He explains:

Another thing I did was read in the encyclopaedia and... deliberately misread it; so, I'd read a couple of sentences, possibly transcribe them and then continue. This was a way of exerting control over what I read so that I became the writer of it and I could finish it the way I wanted to. It was a revisioning of texts that are already in the world and saying, 'No, no, this is how it should be, listen to it my way'. So it's like sampling, a little bit, sampling from what's out there (Marcus in Silverblatt 2002).

While originally published in 1995, the 2013 Granta edition of *The Age of Wire and String* incorporates a series of illustrations by Catrin Morgan. Morgan first began her illustrations of the text as part of a project while at the Royal College Of Art, London but continued the interpretations in her own time (Gibbs 2013). Given that Morgan provided these illustrations – an aesthetically rendered commentary on Marcus' text – prior to any form of contact from the publishers and well before any contractual agreement, her role can be seen as a contemporary equivalent to that of a scholar or archivist, who would have added their own commentary to traditional *biji*. Her additions also contribute to a polyphony of voices that generates its own kind of strangeness, and conjures a contemporary sense of the dense but compact classical *biji*.

As Marcus wields his own form of language with a stern confidence, so too Morgan's illustrations – schematics and diagrams, so many pieces of wire and string fixed to a page – have a confident aesthetic coherence that belies how little they actually aid our reading of Marcus. With aesthetic touchstones that include weather maps, electrical manuals, and geography textbooks, alongside more informal pencil sketches that suggest a more personal insight into the workings of the commentator, Morgan makes the bland and scientific into the strange, through a similar manner of dislocation as used by Marcus in his manipulation of language. The inclusion of Morgan's illustrations

further fractures Marcus' text, and adds another dimension to the aesthetic, formal qualities of the book. In this way, Morgan's contributions create an even stronger alignment between *The Age of Wire and String* and Minford and Tong's proposed *biji* model. Illustrator Catrin Morgan explains her process for generating a subversion parallel to that of Marcus' prose. She says:

...the images I created aimed to respond to the tone and construction of the text and to behave in a similar way. The text subverts our expectations of familiar patterns of language, and so I created images that appear familiar but in fact are always doing something that belies their appearance, so what appears to be a map is in fact composed of sleeping figures, and a circuit diagram is based on the floor plans of a building (Morgan in Atterbury 2013).

In the illustrated edition, following the opening 'Argument', a restructured periodic table is stained with inkblots and has removed and replaced many of the elements – it now contains Wi<sup>188</sup> (Wire), Fr<sup>39</sup> (Frusc), H<sup>106</sup> (Horse), and Ark<sup>170</sup> (Arkansas), among others (2013, pp.18-19). The table included that lists all the Terms from the 'Sleep' branch alphabetically acts to further rupture Marcus' unique cataloguing. While they are assigned a place in the alphabetical sequence (2013, pp.30-31), it differs from the order in which the definitions occur on the following pages (pp.32-33).

The placement and size of Morgan's illustrations constantly varies in order to prevent a fixed sense of form from becoming established. At times they will occupy a two-page spread (as with all illustrations that plot Terms before the definitions are listed); at other times they cover a single page, and are presented companioned with entries, as with the static-littered graph like image that accompanies 'Bird To The North, Act Of Wind' in the 'God' branch (2013, pp.36-37); or the head in profile amidst mapped continents which accompanies 'Circle Of Willis' in the 'Animal' branch (2013, pp.104-105); at

other times an image will be presented on the same page as the text (as in ‘Died’ (p.38) and ‘G-D’ (p.39) within the ‘God’ branch; or, similarly, will run concurrent to a longer entry, bisecting the page with an illustrated sequence across the top half, accompanied by a textual sequence below, as in ‘The Golden Monica’ of ‘The House’ branch (2013, pp.72-76). It is these instances where the illustrations and text are in such close proximity that they blend, or one ruptures the other, or each (text and illustration) simultaneously informs the other while demanding its own reading, that *The Age of Wire and String* most strongly resembles a progression of the form presented by Minford and Tong. Elsewhere still are entries that leave blank space for illustrations that do not appear, like ‘First Green’ in the ‘Food’ branch (2013, pp.54-55), and these also enhance the sense of formless form.

• *Jacob, Menahem, & Mimoun: A Family Epic; Dump This Book While You Still Can;* and ‘The Forthcoming Journey [*Le Voyage disert*]’ – Marcel Bénabou

In ‘One Always Writes The Same Preface’, the introduction to Steven Rendall’s English translation of Bénabou’s *Jacob, Menahem et Mimoun: Une épopée familiale* [*Jacob, Menahem, & Mimoun: A Family Epic*] (1995), Motte writes: “Bénabou is truly persuaded that a writer’s work is necessarily iterative, that a writer’s books cohere mutually in a sort of palimpsest arrangement” (1998 p.viii). It is a trait openly shared with, and one evidenced in the work of David Shields. It is a form that works for Bénabou because as he himself admits:

...my mind was much too abstract, much too attracted to systems and combinatory games, to be able to give birth to flesh and blood characters; moreover, instead of limiting myself to showing, I inevitably yielded to my penchant for telling, for explanation and commentary (1998, p.215).

As the following analysis will reveal, this is not the only thing Bénabou's books share in common with Shields'. I believe they are also representational of the fractured and highly citational<sup>76</sup> contemporary form Shields heralds – and as such, a necessary inclusion in this selection of unintentional *biji*, particularly in light of Bénabou's membership in the Oulipo.

The Bénabou who writes is the Bénabou who reads; his pages are like literary archives where the classification system for the near-endless collection of citations and excerpts is constantly reconfigured and reconsidered. Motte writes: “Bénabou frets about the issue of genre, wondering aloud on the page how the various disparate directions he feels compelled to pursue can be made to cohere in what he can only term, provisionally, an ‘oeuvre’” (1998, p.ix). This fretting is manifest when Bénabou investigates his subconscious: “One of my oldest dreams had been a book in which several series of texts, different from each other and yet related, would be juxtaposed, or rather interlaced” (1998, p.93). Later, reflecting on Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet* as a novelistic transposition of Einstein's theories, Bénabou again grapples with this concept

---

<sup>76</sup> A close-to-complete catalog of such citations and allusions invoked across the just 600 or so pages of Bénabou's three books has been assembled by Motte: “Ecclesiastes, Homer, Aesop, Pythagoras, Sophocles, Euripides, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Epicurus, Cicero, Virgil, Livy, Seneca, Martial, Tacitus, Tertullian, Apuleius, Plotinus, St. Augustine, Moses Maimonides, Dante, Abraham Abulafia, Annus of Viterbo, Rabelais, Bonaventure des Périers, Scève, Ronsard, Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Shakespeare, François Maynard, Hobbes, Descartes, Corneille, La Rochefoucauld, La Fontaine, Pascal, Spinoza, Boileau, Racine, La Bruyère, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Lessing, Chamfort, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, Sade, Louis-Sébastien Mercier, Goethe, Joseph Joubert, Jean Paul, Chateaubriand, Hölderlin, Walter Scott, Novalis, Schelling, Schopenhauer, Stendhal, Alfred de Vigny, Heinrich Heine, Delacroix (the painter's *Journal*), Balzac, Hugo, Dumas *père*, Gogol, Poe, Michel de Guérin, Musset, Thackeray, Herman Melville, Henri Amiel, Baudelaire, Flaubert, the Goncourt brothers, Jules Verne, Edmond About, Emile Zola, Thomas Hardy, Odilon Redon (his *Journal*), Mallarmé, Henry James, Nietzsche, Verlaine, Lautréamont, Huysmans, Pierre Loti, Isaac Leib Peretz, Rimbaud, Joseph Conrad, Sholem Aleichem, Jules Laforgue, Jules Renard, Miguel de Unamuno, Israel Zangwill, Rudyard Kipling, H. G. Wells, Julien Benda, Gide, Proust, Valéry, Alfred Jarry, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Raymond Roussel, Apollinaire, Amédée Achard, Jean Jalabert, Max du Veuzit, the Tharaud brothers, Edmond Fleg, James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Jean Paulhan, György Lukács, Maurice Sachs, Pierre Benoit, Pierre Jean Jouve, Pierre Reverdy, Franz Werfel, Jean Cocteau, Walter Benjamin, Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, Jorge Luis Borges, Henri Michaux, Michel Leiris, Raymond Radiguet, Raymond Queneau, Jean-Paul Sartre, Paul Nizan, Maurice Blanchot, René Char, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean Genet, Malcolm Lowry, Cioran, Lawrence Durrell, Edmond Jabès, Maxence Van der Mersche, Albert Camus, Roland Barthes, Louis Althusser, Josefina Vicens, Italo Calvino, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, and Georges Perec” (Motte 1999, *The Rhetoric of the Impossible*, pp.11-12).



of text comprised of seemingly disparate parts: “The whole work would be merely a transposition or projection, in the form of anecdotes selected precisely for their emblematic character, of this basic theoretical nucleus” (1998, p.115). Such a description could be applied to any number of *biji*, assorted fragments variously grouped together to synecdochically reveal the nucleus of investigation or reflection that supports the individual elements. In her study of Duan Chengshi’s *biji* miscellany collection, *Youyang zazu*, Reed observes that it may be seen as an eclectic collection of attempts to teach about one thing or another. She writes: “Each such attempt has its own characteristic flavour, created by a complex set of variables, and each part derives some of its meaning from its relationship with the elements surrounding it” (Reed 2000, p.375). Later still, Bénabou asks: “Wasn’t this the ideal model for me, that of a book in which were juxtaposed, or rather interlaced, several series of texts, differing and yet related?” (1998, p.117). Agonising over the best way to bring together these disparate elements and texts, Bénabou asks:

Was I going to be able to endure seeing my notes gradually dissolve, become paragraphs, pages, chapters? Besides, I knew they themselves would not go along without protest. Every time I tried to combine them, sort them, assemble them, they all – the simplest as well as the most sophisticated – resisted me in the strangest way: they literally rejected unity and cracked open like nutshells, one after another, all the forms – whether rigid or flexible – into which I was trying to fit them. As if their true vocation were to remain, obstinately, in exile and dispersion (1998, pp.203-204).

While in pursuit of a literary form befitting his endeavours Bénabou twice touches on extant forms of particular relevance to this study. In the first instance, he discusses adopting the “Oriental Style” as a method for cataloguing the numerous players he must

include in his family epic, appropriating the style of traditional tales of the strange to compose vignettes. His proposed but unrealised inclusions – ‘The Story of the Saintly Man Who Saved His Community by Making the Body of the Slain Prince Talk’, ‘The Story of the Rabbi Taken Down from the Gallows by Five of his Students Disguised as the Sultan’s Soldiers’, and ‘The Story of the Goldsmith Who Made a Gold Bracelet to Confound the False Prophet Persecuting the Jews’ – are heavily indebted to similar tales included in traditional *biji*, and draw heavily on Jewish lore and folktales. Bénabou himself writes: “This was the classical schema of the ‘just man saved’ or the ‘wicked man punished’ through supernatural intervention” (1998, p.140).

Nor is it the first time Bénabou has snuck into one of his books a reference (or perhaps, in my case, a clue) pertaining to the *biji* form. In the book that preceded this one, *Jette ce livre avant qu’il soit trop tard* [*Dump This Book While You Still Can*] (1992), Bénabou draws attention in passing to a recent scholarly undertaking of his friend Gustave de Flauzac to translate sections from Pu Songling’s *Extraordinary Tales* (2001, p.42).<sup>77</sup>

In the second instance, Bénabou turns his interest to Sei Shōnagon’s *The Pillow Book*, which, in his view “made such original, and... moving use of enumerations” (1998, p.179) and thus conspires to create lists of his own. These lists, like almost all other of Bénabou’s explicitly stated intentions, remain in their potential, unrealised state.

Eventually, after much fretting and circumspection, setting in words the quest for a cure for his oligraphia – the book he could or should write – Bénabou supposes that,

---

<sup>77</sup> Inverting our investigation. It is interesting to note how closely Barr’s description of Pu Songling’s *biji* resembles overviews of Bénabou’s oeuvre by Motte (in Bénabou 1997, 1998 and 2001). The special nature of Pu Songling’s authorial role, operating usually within self-imposed limits, repeatedly producing subtle variations on a restricted number of favorite themes, alternating the most sophisticated fiction with the simplest anecdote in a seemingly haphazard process of accretion (Barr 1985, p.202) is not dissimilar to Bénabou’s practice.

perhaps, his impossible book could become “a genuine literary genre with its own norms and rules” (1998, p.220). This is similar to what has historically been observed with *biji*: it is a catchall genre that generates its own evolving norms and rules. Motte, in his introduction, offers an evaluation of that feat: “*Jacob, Menahem, & Mimoun: A Family Epic* performs just that sort of literary alchemy” (1998, p.xvii). The formless form of *biji* confers some sense of order on the otherwise disordered set of literary styles and techniques trialled by Bénabou.

Having arrived upon this epiphany, Bénabou makes a case for all fragmentary collections of writing, and finds his precedent for such a claim through a wonderfully oulipian act of an anagrammatic replacement. The first word in the Kabbalist Genesis is *Bereshit*, ‘In the beginning’, which, replaced with *Besheerit*, ‘from the remains’, suggests to Bénabou that all creation “is made only from debris, fragments, residues” (1998, p.222).

As Motte notes, one always writes the same book, and so it is that in *Dump This Book While You Still Can!* we find Bénabou once again wrestling with a text that could be classed as impossible, but as Jouet retorts *until proved otherwise, the impossible is not Oulipian!* Confounded and confused, Bénabou recounts his attempts to make meaning from the mysterious book before him, and with typically deft wryness, allows a similarly provocative and baffling story to emerge from his efforts. Within this we once again find Bénabou making an argument for the type of literature, fractured and homologous, that Shields heralds, and Ouyang Yu, Kimiko Hahn, and others, have put into practice. He writes:

[T]here are books like painted landscapes: they don’t need to be filled out in order to be striking; a few strokes, which might at first be taken for a sketch, are sometimes enough to represent what needs to be represented... The other

distinctive mark of these pages... was their dispersed, disjointed, in sum, their heterogenous character (Bénabou 2001, p.140).

While this illusive text is never presented to the reader – Bénabou’s role as mediator ensures this – there are yet more clues that tie this mysterious book to the category of *biji*. Finding in the miscellany fragments of poetry, fiction, confession, interior monologues and apostrophes, dream accounts, erudite commentary, maxims, moral reflections, truisms and paradoxes; diversity in content, tone, register and even grammatical genders, Bénabou declares the book “a receptacle in which the most diverse materials were jumbled together” (2001, p.141).

Another major element of such writing – the composition and inclusion of lists – is also identified by Bénabou in this book. He observes that the personal notes disregard both chronology and logic (a technique employed and investigated elsewhere already), and suggests that these lists are more oulipian than most, making use of anaphora to guide the content within.

Two of these lists – the first with each entry beginning ‘Is it mere chance if...’; in the second each entry commencing, ‘Perhaps you are one of those who...’ – are partially recreated by Bénabou, who cites three or four examples from each, and recall prior works by Oulipians like Georges Perec’s *Je me souviens* [*I remember*], and Herve Le Tellier’s *A Thousand Pearls (For A Thousand Pennies)* (2011). In his assessment of this technique, Bénabou states: “The author seemed to have found a convenient device for composing, through successive strokes and by emphasizing the features that distinguished him, a sort of fragmented portrait” (2001, p.145). In doing so he echoes McKinney’s view of the form as a “floating portrait” (2006, p.xxiii).<sup>78</sup>

---

<sup>78</sup> The wild chronological confusion of the entries in *The Pillow Book* ensures that the text permeates a synecdochic representation of life – McKinney calls it a “floating portrait” (2006, p.xxiii) in the

Further analysing this oeuvre of odds and ends, Bénabou's line of investigation follows a similar trajectory as much contemporary scholarship on extant traditional *biji*, giving rise to questions about explicit authorship, the selection of included fragments of other works, and the role perhaps played by friends, family, or a colleague in posthumously publishing such a scoria (Bénabou 2001, pp.146-147).

Bénabou's contribution to the Oulipo's ongoing *Winter Journey* meta-novel, 'The Forthcoming Journal' (published originally in French as '*Le Voyage désert*' in *Bibliothèque oulipienne* 212 in 2012), is of a length comparable to Coupland's 'Survivor'. Once again it makes use of the techniques and forms found in other, already-examined works of his, and deserves inclusion in this list.

In brief fragments Bénabou arranges intertextual allusion and citation – Stendhal, Joseph de Maistre, Lucien Febvre; brief essaying; critical reading notes – Perec, of course, appears, but also an interrogation of all the texts to precede Bénabou's in the *Winter Journey* hyper-novel; interpretation of the classics – Pindar's proclamation that *Happiness does not blossom for those who follow an oblique path* (Bénabou 2013, p.271); lists – of homophonic and paronymic potential titles for responses to '*Le Voyage d'hiver*' (complete with an explanation not dissimilar to the algorithm used to title my own *biji*)<sup>79</sup> which he implies could also, to some extent, generate content (Bénabou 2013, pp.277-280).

---

introduction to her translation of Sei Shonagon's *Pillow Book* – where fragmentary depiction emphasises affect, malleability and potential.

McKinney observes: "As we read, we are always deep inside the moment of experience that comes to us off the page; Sei Shonagon seems intent on presenting these moments simply for their own sake, not as part of some larger story that we will return to after these present pleasures or irritations have been savoured" (2006, p.xxiii).

<sup>79</sup> For more information on this algorithm see chapter 6 on the creative component.

Within the text, Bénabou even makes allusions to a project, since deserted, with Perec, in which a framework would be created to allow the recycling of fragments from classic texts (on occasion slightly modified) (Bénabou 2012, pp.272-273).<sup>80</sup> Bénabou also posits, with a similarly obscure opacity, a view of '*Le Voyage d'hiver*' (this meta-series' nucleus) as "the centre of a circuit" (Bénabou 2013, p.277).

The list above is far from exhaustive, however, from short fictions to sustained memoirs the accrued genre defying/defining texts represent a faction of contemporary writing potentially representative of the contemporary English language *biji*.

---

<sup>80</sup> Of interest, Benabou goes on to note that the fragments of this unfinished project in fact formed the conceptual basis for '*Le Voyage d'hiver*', which in turn, as we know, formed the conceptual basis for 'The Forthcoming Journey' (2013, p.273).

## CHAPTER 6

### CREATIVE COMPONENT

#### **or: How I wrote one potential contemporary *biji***

In this chapter I will examine how the *biji* form has taken shape through the process of anoulipism, building on what has been discussed in the Oulipo and *Biji* chapters. I will explain how my own *biji*, *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness*, which will comprise the creative component of the PhD, illustrates the proposed model for a contemporary *biji*. This chapter will also reveal the broader organisational structure that has allowed the construction of the creative component, and dissect some of the other oulipian techniques – isovocalism, anaphora, lipograms – in the creative text.

#### **What's in a Name?**

*Fine titles are true procurers of books* (Furetière 1981 p.233).

The prefaces to traditional *biji* often contained a statement of intent in which the author/compiler explained their use of the form and justified their application of it. Of the three contemporary *biji* examined, Coupland's and Kelly's both included the form '*biji*' in their title; none of the contemporary *zuihitsu* examined have done so, though Peck does include an often associated English rendering of *zuihitsu*, pillow book, in the title of his work. All, however, make use of prefaces and introductions to establish the parameters and/or some history of the form that text that follows will take. In *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing*, Ming Dong Gu writes:

The Preface is not just a random treatise in Chinese literary thought; it is the first milestone in the development of Chinese literary theory. Since it attaches great importance to the signifying mechanisms of discourse, it may also be considered

an embryonic form of open poetics, the underlying principles of which are multidimensional semiosis and intertextual dissemination (Gu 2005, p.206).

Campany, too, stresses the importance of considering properties such as the intrinsic markers placed in texts to signal the ways the author wanted it understood and placed in relation to other texts. This is of particular importance when attempting to examine a genre from a great historical, cultural, and linguistic distance, and consequently, with more clarity than contemporary commentators of the form did (Campany 1996, p.22).

While markers within the text (the short instalments, variety of forms, etc.) can indicate to readers an affinity with other texts that may be considered *biji*, there are other, more explicit methods. Campany best describes the importance of titling in such texts, while providing material necessary to construct a set from which any number of potential titles can be generated. The effect of this titling method was to subliminally link each of these miscellaneous texts with their equally uncategorisable kin. This structure consists of the following:<sup>81</sup>

- A word roughly equivalent to the English verb, meaning, variously, *narrate, set forth, array, collect, record...* or equivalent concepts suggesting the inquest into or thorough penetration of a topic, or its manifestation or clarification.
- A noun indicating the topic of investigation.
- A noun translatable as something equivalent to records or notes – commonly *ji*, as in *biji* – that implies written (and often historical) documents.

When applied in English, re-sequencing this set 1, 3, 2 aids fluency, and this final step completes an algorithm that can be used to construct titles for such texts. It is through

---

<sup>81</sup> Adapted from Campany, 1996, p.28.



this process that I arrived at the title of my own contemporary *biji*: *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness*.

### ***Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness***

Proposing the research the Oulipo wished to undertake in their ‘First Manifesto’, Le Lionnais states: “The analytic tendency investigates works from the past in order to find possibilities that often exceed those their authors had anticipated” (2007, p.28). Reflecting on this statement of intention in regards to the practice of anoulipic rejuvenation of the *biji* form, what is revealed? Had authors of traditional *biji*, for instance, considered the potential for governing permutations (as in Georges Perec’s *Life A User’s Manual* or Italo Calvino’s *If On A Winter’s Night A Traveler*, for example) inherent in the division of texts into bite-sized morsels that are then categorised according to topoi?

It is my intention that the subtle channels Le Lionnais later refers to will be reflected in the creative component. Beyond the broader anoulipic undertaking of rejuvenating and contemporising the *biji* form, there will also be a larger governing constraint that mediates the structure of the text, and, further to that, individual *biji* entries will be written to a variety of constraints. My practice of not only contemporising the form of the *biji*, but the content of pre-existing *biji* texts, is an attempt to achieve what Levin Becker eloquently describes as being at the heart of the earliest anoulipic texts (when the synthetic and analytic branches of the group’s study were not so clearly defined). These texts “...balanced creative thrust with data culled from known syntactic or lexical quantities” (Levin Becker 2012, p.139).

As discussed earlier, *biji* served many purposes, both in their contemporaneous environment – as political commentary, entertainment, education, a vehicle for religious or philosophical musings – and now, as historical texts. The heterogeneous qualities of

a bastardised genre mean that the potential application of the knowledge contained within these assorted texts – notes on customs, on crops, on weather or politics – is incredibly broad. I have already shown the variety of ways in which contemporary scholarly analysis of these ancient texts is employed and, despite – or perhaps because of – the fact that a minority of these studies are focused on the literariness of the form, and of the contemporary potential for a similar genre, we should not discount its potential. Levin Becker too acknowledged the importance of this potential for unusual texts in his study of the Oulipo’s early years and the work produced therein. He writes:

These are works based on preexisting texts only insofar as a phone book or a dictionary or Bescherelle’s grammar manual can be considered a text – but the most inspiring idea to come from this period is: Why shouldn’t it be? (2012, p.139).

Jacques Roubaud’s first collection of poetry *€* (1967), a combinatorial suite of sonnets that is presented with four different suggested approaches to its reading, was described by Levin Becker as “a series of poems, but also a work on the *potential* of the sonnet” (2012, p.163, emphasis in original). Poucel argues *€* “...does not simply rehearse the sonnet in its different historically attested forms but begins to imagine ‘toutes les formes possibles de sonnets’, introducing many that are entirely new” (Poucel 2006a, p.95).

Queneau’s *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*], is a similarly two-fold work of poetry that both acknowledges the rich history of the form and simultaneously proposes techniques for its advancement. In line with such texts, I want to create a *biji* collection that honours the patchwork history of the form while examining the potential for its expansion. The creative component consists of a nested

*biji* collection i.e. one that exists within a broader narrative network. The story follows Scott Dolan, or ‘Juan’, through his life following the suicide of his closest friend, James. James was the dominant person in the relationship, and while never taking advantage of this position to any great extent, his power over Scott, and Scott’s consequent reliance on James’ leadership, was undeniable.

Following James’ death, which occurs early on in the story, Scott proactively goes about legally changing his name to Juan Juan, as both a coping mechanism, and tribute to his deceased friend. This brief period of action is followed by a severe slump in Juan’s life. He never leaves the house, eats the same meal for days, and is emotionally and physically lethargic. When his mother is notified that he has legally changed his name she becomes concerned, and coerces Juan into attending a meeting with a psychiatrist. After hearing Juan’s story and gaining an insight into the intimate relationship he shared with James throughout numerous consultations, the psychiatrist reaches a tentative diagnosis. He believes Juan’s hermit-esque behaviour following Juan’s death is due to the lack of leadership and friendship in his life. Juan had relied on James so much during their time together, that his death put Juan in a position of permanent, if subdued, fear. Fear of the unknown. Fear of a life in general without Juan. Fear of everything.

The psychiatrist, Dr Gleeson, then proposes an unorthodox solution to overcoming these fears. He writes down twenty-eight fears, each on individual slips of paper. The fears range from a fear of ants, to a fear of clothes, to a fear of infection, to a fear of the letter “o”, to a fear of beards, and so on. These fears are in turn placed in twenty-eight individual envelopes, each dated chronologically from the day following their meeting. He instructs Juan to place these envelopes beside his bed. Each morning, upon waking up, Juan is to open the corresponding envelope and focus his energy entirely on that fear

for that day. He must, to the best of his abilities, not allow that fear to interrupt his day-to-day goings on. Dr Gleeson believes that in order to overcome his fear of everything Juan must tackle the fears one at a time: either until he has overcome them all; or, as Dr Gleeson believes will be the case, he realises the ludicrous nature of these fears. In order to gain a better insight into his patient's mind, and reach an accurate diagnosis after the first month, Dr Gleeson instructs Juan to religiously document his struggles with each of these fears in a daily diary. Following this, each subsequent chapter of the book is comprised of the dated diary entries made by Juan. The central character is charged with the responsibility of authoring a contemporary *biji* collection that represents his experiences of fear and loneliness.

Why 'fear'? In his beautifully curated *The Infinity of Lists* (2009) Umberto Eco suggests that fear is the driving force behind the creation of lists – a fear of being unable to say everything when faced with an infinity (2009 p.67). The response is to list some of that infinity; an exhausting but by no means exhaustive selection of that infinity in order to imply an etcetera. By making fear the subject of this *biji*, and making fear subject to lists, both cause and effect of the writerly process are positioned parallel to one another. Comparing the differing traditions of note-taking in Chinese and European literary development, Fu notes:

The action of 'note taking' in the Chinese textual form of either *biji* or *leishu* would usually result in publication including their communications with readers. This seems quite different from the Renaissance and early modern European form of 'note taking'... where most notebooks of various forms remained unpublished and private (2007, p.122).

The nested *biji* structure strikes a balance between the two traditions: as a work of fiction written by me for public consumption, it follows the Chinese tradition of

publishing for an audience; as a collection of experiences and observations recorded by Juan for Dr Gleeson, it draws on the European tradition of note taking. Just as “the stories of the strange that circulated among the mid-Qing muyou can be seen to reflect the psychological fears of a group who shouldered heavy legal responsibilities” (Chan 1997, p.55),<sup>82</sup> my contemporary *biji* reflects psychological fears of a contemporary society where fear is propagated and self-diagnosis is rife. In this way I have embedded the most prevalent constraint I am working within – that of writing a collection of *biji* – into the work.<sup>83</sup> The governing constraint of constructing a *biji* is inscribed as a thematic consequence of the story in a manner that nods its head to the oft-debated Oulipian requirement that a work written to constraint speaks of that constraint.<sup>84</sup> I have found a precedent for the paradox – generating formless form – such a constraint presents in Jacques Jouet’s explanation for his Metro Poem: “...it’s a matter of making, paradoxically, free verse under constraint, and of making, paradoxically, a fixed form that is variable (the number of lines and stanzas depend upon the trip itself) (2001, p.13).

Zamperini (2007) provided a cogent examination of the economic and market-driven forces that influenced writers of the late Qing to employ the book-within-a-book structural device. My own application of the *mise-en-abyme* stems from the Oulipian notion that a text written to constraint should reflect that constraint. One of the

---

<sup>82</sup> As illustrated with reference to *zhiguhai* and *biji* by Xue Fucheng, Yuan Mei and Zhao Yi, among others.

<sup>83</sup> If any doubt remains as to whether the genre of *biji* constitutes constraint, refer to Birch: “Critics and historians of past ages drew precise distinctions and established fixed rules for literary composition... But our recognition of generic characteristics is of prime importance. These are the *restrictions* within which the writer chose to work, or against which he found himself struggling in his act of creation. If it is true that any new art involves breaking through old restrictions, then our understanding of Chinese literature must depend heavily on those genre studies which can more clearly illuminate this process as it was repeated over and over again by the great creators of the past (1974, pp.6-7, emphasis my own).

<sup>84</sup> Oulipian Jacques Roubaud is perhaps the most vigilant in supporting this notion (Thomas 2006, p.118) going as far as to demand: “A text written to a constraint must speak of this constraint,” (Roubaud 1988, p.90).

governing constraints of my *biji*, as illustrated elsewhere, is that of genre, of composing a *biji*. As such, that constraint is embedded in the text's structure via the *mise-en-abyme*. I use structure in its second sense as applicable to Oulipian endeavours discussed at the meeting of the Oulipo on Tuesday 23 August 1966.<sup>85</sup>

In the same manner – that is, the way in which the *biji* is embedded within a larger narrative network – the creative component of my PhD will pay homage to other works that I believe serve as stepping stones between traditional and contemporary representations of the *biji* form: Pu Songling's *Liaozhai Zhiyi* [*Strange Tales From A Chinese Studio*]; and Wu Jianren's *Ershinian muduzhi guaixianzhuang* [*Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*].

Part 1 of *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness* reflects a modern adaptation of the branch of Chinese autobiographical writing identified by Yves Hervouet as “the preface or the chapter of the work that the author has fashioned as a parenthesis to the rest of the work to recount his life therein” (Hervouet 1972, p.111). Zeitlin suggests that Pu Songling's preface to his *biji* collection, taken as a whole, reflects this branch of writing too:

Constructed as an entryway into the stories, Pu Songling's preface above all reveals the author's attempt to control or influence the reading of his book by fashioning himself into a lens through which the book would be refracted for his readers. This is an account of a life written in a particular context with a particular agenda: it aims not merely to explain who the author is but to explain how he

---

<sup>85</sup> The minutes of this meeting were originally published as *Bibliothèque oulipienne* 042 in 1990 under the title ‘*Le dernier compte rendu (inédit)*’ and later in English translation as part of the *Oulipo Compendium*. The oulipian definition of structure is as follows: “The notion of structure, which is for us not the same as it is for certain perfectly honourable non-Oulipians, needs to be (re)clarified. It must simultaneously be understood as (1) structure in the mathematical sense of the word; (2) any adopted restriction; and (3) any algorithm similarly chosen,” (Le Lionnais in Arnaud (1990) 2005, p.194).

came to write the book in question and, on a deeper level, how the book embodies his secret ambitions and aspirations (Zeitlin 1993, p.53).

Interestingly, in his *Six Memos for the next Millennium* (1988), Calvino talks of a kind of literature not dissimilar that seems custom made for a true portrayal of self:

Who are we, who is each one of us, if not a combinatorial of experiences, information, books we have read, things imagined? Each life is an encyclopedia, a library, an inventory of objects, a series of styles, and everything can be constantly reshuffled and reordered in every way conceivable (Calvino 2009, p.124).

As has been discussed, *biji* were often written by literati and members of the scholar class. The lifestyle of the literati, one with a focus on learned reading, education, and with enough downtime afforded to these somewhat wealthy individuals so as to allow them the time to write and take notes on their reading, was well suited to the construction of such texts.

In the creation of *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness* I needed a character whose life mirrored these circumstances in a contemporary setting. It was with this in mind that Juan was created as a university student. Juan's engagement in the university lifestyle ensures that he be well-read and regularly reading; that he would be accustomed to making notes on those readings, and that the practice of critical and academic note-taking would not be foreign to him; and that (reflecting a view held by some members of the public, often in hyperbolic levels) he would have enough down time to be maintaining a regular notebook.

Similarly, the frequent use of sobriquets by *biji* authors – Pu Songling, for example, adopted the literary title of *Yishi shi* [the Historian of the Strange] – is paid tribute via

the central act of renaming undertaken by Scott Dolan, who becomes Juan Juan, before undertaking the construction of his own *biji* collection. Next, Juan required a place in which to compose his contemporary *biji*. As the titles of many classical *biji* allude to place, and in particular, the studio, plays an important role in the creation of *biji*:

The literary studio (in its many variations—cottage, hermitage, library, pavilion) was the perfect architectural device for the Chinese writer of fiction. It was a space that could mirror and thus evoke the personality of a character. At the same time it was a space wherein the drama could be enacted that allowed that personality and individuality to enfold (Minford & Roberts 2008).

Minford & Roberts discuss the links between the the studios and the indentities of those who wrote in them, with a particular focus on the studio of Pu Songling, and studios wherein works of *biji wenxue* were composed. In *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness* Juan's house – his studio – replicates this device. The house, its memories and contents evoke the extremes of Juan's personality during his examination of fear. It enabled his discoveries. Minford & Roberts go on to discuss their concept of the contemporary studio, one that has been incorporated into both the form of this text, and to Juan's way of being during this period of deep introspection:

...it can be the formless studio of the mind, the personal universe that surrounds the individual, furnished and imbued with that person's favourite words, images, tunes, fabrics, vibrating with their unique scent and aura. It can be present, or past, or both, or neither... We open and close the studio doors. These studios are an extrusion of our selves; they are of us, but do not belong to us (2008).



With the governing constraint of my own contemporary *biji* established – that of formless form – I sought to employ a series of metaconstraints.<sup>86</sup> These metaconstraints perform three chief functions:

- Aiding the construction of the individual entries.
- Sustaining internal tension of the text (and thus reinforcing the governing constraint).
- By using a series of differing metaconstraints the heterogeneity of the content is strengthened and further diversified, in turn reinforcing the governing constraint of formless form.

The metaconstraints provided reconciliation between the incertitude of a genreless genre and the rigour that accompanies texts written to constraint – they were crucial to constructing this textual gallimaufry. In order to achieve this formless form on the macroscopic scale of the entire collection and not just the individual entries, I sought to employ a fragmentary chronology that would reinforce the innumerable potential organisational schema contained within the text. Given the Oulipian mode of writing, and thus unable to leave this redistribution purely to chance, an algorithm was formulated in order to redistribute each individual entry and fracture the chronology of the text.

As Campany illustrates, in many cases with extant *biji* we do not know with any certainty by what principles these lists were organised in the original texts, “since their present arrangement is often, even in the case of texts that have survived relatively intact, the work of a redactor standing somewhere between the author’s time and our own” (Campany 1996, p.25). In Part 3 of *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear &*

---

<sup>86</sup> Metaconstraint is defined by Bénabou as a “constraint that governs another constraint” (2004, p.32).

*Loneliness*, Dr Gleeson operates as this redactor; he grapples with the best way to fracture the organisation of Juan's collected notes in order to obscure his role as redactor, and present the collection as chaotic. I have included below the scene in which Dr Gleeson attempts to establish a suitable model for chaotic organisation.

***From Part 3:***

There needs to be an organisational model for the chaos, but which one?

The shape of the final organisation should suggest its own construction, hint at answers or the potential for and of them, without actually producing them. 28 entries, but how to arrange them? What does the number 28 offer?

It's a perfect number i.e. it is the sum of its proper divisors.

$$28 = 1+2+4+7+14$$

It is the sum of the first five prime numbers.

$$28 = 2+3+5+7+11$$

It is the third Granville number, the second being 24, and the first, six.

It is a Størmer number, alongside 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 before it.

It occurs in the Padovan sequence: 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 16, 21, **28**

How would the properties serve to aid Dr Gleeson's arrangement though? With each there is an outlier, or a remainder. But what if Dr Gleeson were to take ownership of those outliers, wield them as worked as the other numbers, as clinamen?

Earlier, in the Oulipo chapter, I explained the progression of the sestina form by the Oulipo. While the algorithm used to create formless form in Juan's *biji* is not revealed in *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness* it is in fact a modified septina.

The septina was discovered by Jacques Roubaud<sup>87</sup> after performing erasures on an octina (thus adding a seventh endword and increasing the sestina in length from six to seven stanzas) revealed the alignment required for a septina:

1 2 3 4 5 6

7 1 5 2 4 3

6 7 4 1 2 5

3 6 2 7 1 4

5 3 1 6 7 2

4 5 7 3 6 1

2 4 6 5 3 7

This particular form caught my eye as a potential and suitably inelegant solution after reading Mathews' summary of all N-ina forms in the *Oulipo Compendium*: "All the solutions proposed by the author have the quality of 'ordered disorder' that are part of the sestina's charm" (2005, p.98).

The sestina has been adapted and used various times by members of the Oulipo to organise and sequence various works – Jacques Roubaud's *Hortense* novels, Mathews' *Cigarettes*, to name two better known examples. What better way to craft broad, organisational formless form than by employing a modified equation that generated ordered disorder. This is how the chapters in Part 2, Juan's contemporary *biji*, were ordered.

First I plotted the weeks chronologically into four groups of seven, beginning on a Saturday. I then created a new set of four weeks (listing days 1-7 rather than days of the

---

<sup>87</sup> See Mathews & Brotchie 2005, pp.96-98.

week) for the original chronological sequence to be transposed into using the following rules.

Friday = X. A malleable, variable joker. The four Friday's had to occur chronologically, one per week. This was the first modification to the septina form, as the additional seventh element (Friday/X) was present, but fixed.

	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
<b>WEEK 1:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	X
<b>WEEK 2:</b>	6	1	5	2	4	3	X
<b>WEEK 3:</b>	3	6	4	1	2	5	X
<b>WEEK 4:</b>	5	3	2	6	4	1	X

To complete the cycle, you begin each rotation in the corresponding week 1-4. After each numeral is the sequence is located in that week, find the next day numerically in the next week to place the next day. Thus, the new structure begins with Day 1 from Week 1: Saturday 2 April.

Following this, take Day 2 from Week 2: Tuesday 12 April.

Then Day 3 from Week 3: Saturday 16 April.

Then Day 4 from Week 4: Wednesday 27 April.

As there is no 'Week 5', the fifth step is a return to the beginning of the cycle. So, Day 5 Week 5 is Wednesday 6 April. Likewise Day 6 of Week 6 is Saturday 9 April.

In the second cycle, Week 5 is thus Week 2; in the third Week 5 is Week 3 and so on. If at any point a number is already displayed or occupied in the sequence, move forward by one week.

The use of Fridays as a variable ruptured the sequence to create a further tension, but paradoxically, as Fridays needed to occur within their set weeks, they were only a fixed point of reference across the seven days. So while two Saturdays can occur only a day apart, rupturing the chronology, the fixed Fridays hinted at a more traditional sequencing.

Formal regulations such as these have existed, in one form or another, for as long as writing in China. In Liu's translation of excerpts from Weng Fang-kang's Qing-era essay *Shih-fa lun* [*On The Rules Of Poetry*], he writes:

When literature is formed, then rules are established. In the establishment of rules, there are those which are established at the beginning or at the center: this is the way the rules establish the correct basis and trace its source. Then there are those which are established about the details, about the flesh texture or the seams: this is the way the rules exhaust all forms and all possible changes (Weng in Liu 1975, p.95).

By Weng's formulation, the genre of *biji* is my first set of rules – a formless form traced to the sources of the *biji* that precede it. With the algorithm for structuring my formless form established, I set about furnishing this structure with further constraints. The metaconstraints – those established about the details, about the flesh texture or the seams – enable and assist an attempt at exhaustion, while remaining open to change. Weng continues:

...the rules that exhaust all possible changes, from major ones concerning the principles of beginning and ending, down to such details as the grammatical nature of a word or the tone of a syllable, as well as those governing continuation or transition, development or conclusion, normalcy or deviation, must all be sought from the ancients (Weng in Liu 1975, p.95).

The Chinese language does not indicate tense, and this affords writers in this mode the ability to have, identically and indistinguishably actualised in language, all three tenses – only the psychological process of the narrator and reader are involved in distinguishing between them (Gao 2007, p.84). While these nuances are difficult to reflect in English, I have sought to pay tribute to them in the oscillating tense of narration employed throughout my own contemporary *biji*, and in doing so, have added to the tensions of its formed formlessness. Beyond this, more explicit constraints were employed across individual chapters in order to apply syntactic and semantic constraints so as to affect material aspects of language (letters, words, syntax) as well as its subject, content, or meaning. A brief explication of some of these is included below:

### **Nomenophobia**

This constraint was found in a Jorge Luis Borges short story: ‘Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’.<sup>88</sup> An encyclopedia article about a mysterious country called Uqbar is the first indication of a massive conspiracy of intellectuals to imagine (and thereby create) a world known as Tlön, a fabled world or region with its own physical and metaphysical laws in which the epics and legends of Uqbar literature are set. In the course of the story, the narrator encounters increasingly substantive artifacts of Tlön; by the end of the story, Earth is becoming Tlön. Borges reports that for the people of Tlön, the world is successive, temporal, but not spatial, and as such, there are no nouns in their language or dialects. There are impersonal verbs, modified by monosyllabic suffixes (or prefixes) functioning as adverbs, and nouns are formed by stringing together adjectives. For ‘moon’ Borges gives the examples of “aerial-bright above dark-round” and “soft-amberish-celestial” (1998, p.73), where a complex of adjectives corresponds to the object.

---

<sup>88</sup> First published in Spanish Argentine journal *Sur*, May 1940, I refer to Andrew Hurley’s English translation included in *Collected Fictions* (1998), pp.68-81.

In this entry, Juan's fear of nouns results in a constraint of writing in the language of Tlön, an attempt at a nounless grammar.

### **Omegaphobia**

The lipogrammatic constraint involves writing a text with the occlusion of one, or several, letters, as Larousse defines: "Literary work in which one compels oneself strictly to exclude one or several letters of the alphabet" (Larousse in Perec 1986, pp.97-98). The compulsion is important, for any work could be an accidental lipogram. The sentence preceding this one, for example, is a lipogram in J, Q, V, U, X and Z, though it was not written with that intention. The act of compelling oneself to write lipogrammatically heightens the importance of the void left by a letter removed from the alphabet. Perec, who wrote one of the most well-known and extensive lipogrammatic texts,<sup>89</sup> says of the lipogram: "...the suppression of the letter, of the typographical sign, of the basic prop, is a purer, more objective, more decisive operation, something like constraint degree zero, after which everything becomes possible," (Perec 1986, p.107). As mentioned in chapter 3, Perec makes three elementary observations on the nature of the lipogram: the principle of the lipogram is childishly simple; its application can prove to be excessively difficult; and its result is not necessarily spectacular (Perec 1986, p.99). A risk is taken with results, certainly, and even elementary lipogrammatic exercises quickly become notably difficult and complicated to navigate, though the merits of the constraint cannot be ignored, as James rightly points out: "Although this constraint imposes draconian restrictions on authorial choice, it in fact heightens the importance of this choice by forcing the author to reflect on every word to be used" (James 2006, p.135).

---

<sup>89</sup> Perec's *La Disparition* (later translated to English from French by Gilbert Adair as *A Void*) is a 300-page novel that does not use the letter 'e'.

In order to heighten the effect of the void, and ensure an adequate level of constraint from the technique, I needed to select a vowel. In the end, O was selected as a fear of the letter could occur for Juan as a result of more abstract representations of the sign – just about any circle, for instance, or a zero.

### **Docerophobia**

The rule for the Jacques Jouet Constraint is simple enough: whatever the piece of writing, the body text cannot appear. I posited the constraint in *Proving Motion By Walking* (Drayton 2011, p.41), a collection of new and adapted Oulipian constraints.<sup>90</sup> The name for the constraint comes from a Jouet quote: “Constraint can serve to produce a lot. It can serve to write very little. Rest assured that if need be, constraint can result in a blank page” (Jouet 2001, p.7).

Paul Fournel’s ‘Suburbia’ (1996) – ‘*Banlieue*’ in the original French – achieves as much through the use of footnotes, a table of contents, an index, a supplement for school use and more. It exists as paratexts that will only go as far as to suggest that the story remains untold. Other examples that preceded my own and fit the brief for a text written to the Jacques Jouet Constraint include: the invisible sonnet, “a sonnet that has a title and no lines” (Morice 2001, p.94); the no-letter poem, defined as “the blank page” (Morice 2001, p.128); and Jenny Boully’s *The Body*,<sup>91</sup> a text comprised entirely of footnotes.

In this particular entry, Juan’s fear of documentation results in a blank page.

### **Aibohphobia**

The palindrome is yet another example of an extant constraint pushed to new limits in the hands of the Oulipo. In 1969, long before computers could be used to aid

---

<sup>90</sup> For an example of this constraint see Drayton, D. 2014, ‘Can’t Won’t Don’t’ in *Literary Bondage*, ISMs Press, London, pp.149-150.

<sup>91</sup> Boully, J. 2007, *The Body*, Essay Press, Ithaca.



composition, Perec composed his “Great Palindrome” ‘9691 Edna D’nilu’. At 500 words long in each direction, in 1983 it earned him a spot in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

While constraint required I employ palindromes in this entry, I chose to use palindromes that were not only linguistic, but also functioned to progress the narrative. Hence gateman/nametag, the eventual-love interest Hannah, numerical palindromes occurring as Juan observes the time, and elements of the constraint that shaped the broader world of the text – like Juan’s house as the momentarily inhospitable number 22. Likewise, Hannah, for the latter part of the entry, speaks in palindromic riddles and faux-aphorisms: *Er, God? Ash-self time defiled, O! De-lifed, emit flesh sad ogre; He stole big noose, soon gibe lots, eh?; Drat such custard!*.

### **Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia**

The solution to this fear, or rather, the solution to avoiding its confrontation, as Juan needs to, was to compose his entry on this day monosyllabically, exclusively from single syllable words.

Investigating the precedent for the task before me as an example of constrained writing I came across the anticipatory plagiarist and 19<sup>th</sup> century British writer Lucy Aikin. Under the pseudonym Mary Godolphin, Aikin rewrote in words of one syllable classic texts like Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Wyss’ *Swiss Family Robinson* and Aesop’s *Fables*.

While the technique appeared somewhat popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in order to transpose texts into a lexicon more suitable to and manageable for a younger audience, I use it in order to reflect the arresting capacity of Juan’s fears. A further metaconstraint

was employed on this chapter, to include a pangram<sup>92</sup> comprised of single syllable words. My single-syllable pangram was completed in 37 characters, and is contained within this entry.

### **Futuraphobia – Fear Of The Future**

The challenge of this constraint is to create a text that temporally discounts itself. While the methods used are explicated in the entry itself to a large extent, it is, in brief, an attempt on as many planes (textual, aesthetic, narrative...) as possible to render the future as the present, or better yet, the past, even in cognitive processes.

### **Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Oulipo**

While the allusions to traditional *biji* text are numerous, I will briefly explicate two as specific examples of how the two literary traditions of *biji* and Oulipo were woven into the text.

### **The 'pataphor**

American writer Pablo Lopez coined the term 'pataphor to describe a literary device based on the science of Alfred Jarry (a known plagiarist by anticipation of the Oulipo). Just as 'pataphysics is situated as far from metaphysics as metaphysics extends from regular reality; the 'pataphor creates a figure of speech that exists as far from metaphor as metaphor exists from non-figurative language. Lopez says: "The 'pataphor seeks to describe a new and separate world, in which an idea or aspect has taken on a life of its own" and gives the following example:

#### **Non-figurative**

-Tom and Alice stood side by side in the lunch line.

---

<sup>92</sup> A pangram is a sentence which contains all the letters of the alphabet, the most common of which is *the quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog*, which achieves this in 36 letters.

### **Metaphor**

-Tom and Alice stood side by side in the lunch line, two pieces on a chessboard.

### **Pataphor**

-Tom took a step closer to Alice and made a date for Friday night, checkmating.

Rudy was furious at losing to Margaret so easily and dumped the board on the rose-colored quilt, stomping downstairs (Lopez 2007).

The bizarre world created by the 'pataphor is a contemporary equivalent to the 'strange' and 'supernatural' worlds that existed in traditional *biji*, and specifically *biji zhiguai*.

In her dissertation examining re-creative practices (such as 'art as retrieval', copying, and translation, and the notion of plagiarism by anticipation) Viers establishes connections between oulipian modes of copying and how they could be employed to write within a particular genre:

I would call this a form of procedural copying. For instance, in order to write a gothic novel, a writer might turn to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and copy certain scenes, settings, images, language, etc associated with the gothic. The literary work of our gothic-novel writer, however, will not 'plagiarize' Shelley or Stoker. Rather, it will copy certain features that we attribute to the gothic novel, like dark and dreary settings, to create a new work of art. This is very much in line with the art as retrieval and copying strategies I have identified as Oulipian practices (Viers 2008, pp.38-39).

This oulipian mode of copying is employed in recreating the strange.

Zeitlin's discussion of Pu Songling's techniques for generating strangeness in his writing are similarly reminiscent of the 'pataphor: "One of Pu Songling's most common mechanisms for generating fantasy, [is] the literal realization of metaphoric language.

Through this device, Pu Songling restores the shock of immediacy to a dead metaphor, reinventing language itself with a new strangeness” (Zeitlin 1993, p.145). See, for instance, the literal realisation of the figurative expression that time passes ‘in the blink of an eye’ that occurs in Pu Songling’s *Gu Sheng* [*Mr Gu*]. In this *Liaozhai* tale Mr Gu plays a part in an opera that exists in a dream world, a single act taking 70 years in reality to unfold. When he returns, Mr Gu has aged “in the twinkling of an eye, the young became old” (trans. Zeitlin 1993, p.274). When used appropriately, a ‘pataphor can evoke a similar sense of the accepted otherworldly. The ‘pataphor also serves to generate tension, which as has been illustrated, is crucial to maintaining formless form within the text.

One use of the ‘pataphor within the text pays homage to a traditional and often recycled *biji* tale. The entry where Hannah crawls into Juan’s head (‘Aibohphobia – Fear of Palindromes’) is an homage to the Tang-era tale ‘The Young Student of Yang-hsien’, a babushka doll tale of lovers-within-a-lover attributed to Wu Chün (Liu 1966, p.142), and appropriated in many strange tales and *biji* collections since. Adopted to reflect physically Hannah’s infiltration of Juan’s thoughts, the story also employs the use of ‘pataphor.

The two literary traditions are again brought together in the ‘Fear of Originality’ chapter. It was common practice for compilers of *biji* to rework, adapt, or even include word for word a tale already in circulation should it fit the themes for their own collection. This practice was particularly prevalent in *biji* collections of supernatural tales. In the introduction to his *Tales Of The Supernatural* Dr Chang observes this practice. He writes: “Often the same tale survives in more than one version; also the same tale is sometimes attributed to more than one collection” (Chang 1984, pp.5-6). The Originalitophobia, or ‘Fear Of Originality’ entry in my own *biji* collection pays

homage to this practice. The entry is an appropriation of the unexceptional tale that anchors Raymond Queneau's seminal *Exercises In Style*. The book comprises a brief tale: a narrator on a crowded bus observing an altercation, and later at a different location seeing the perpetrator of the altercation told by a friend his overcoat should bear one more button, (re)written in more than one hundred different literary styles: Free Verse, Haiku, Logical Analysis, Onomatopoeia, and so on.

In the recently published 65<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, still more exercises were added to the list by contemporary authors: Lynne Tillman's 'Contingencies'; Enrique Vila-Matas' 'Metaliterario'; Jesse Ball's 'Instructions'. The Originalitophobia entry joins these and countless others on literary forums and websites that add to the list of new forms and genres into which the tale has been transposed. It also reflects a method of Oulipian collage, born of constraint. Seaman writes:

In some Oulipian works, a suggestive rule-based methodology is applied to selected subject matter to arrive at a new approach to the media material – a skewed understanding, an alternate perspective, a differing navigation, a re-defined configuration, a new reading, each of them constituting a reterritorialization (Seaman 2001, pp.425-426).

Obviously, given the extensive role of ghosts in the *biji zhiguai* tradition, the Juan who killed himself was required to have a returning role. In her 1998 thesis examining Hong Mai's *Record Of The Listener*, Kerr observes:

Exhortations from the spirit world are a recurring feature in Hong Mai's tales of reciprocity. The stories frequently include a communication sequence: a dream or a near-death or hallucinatory experience during which some sort of message is relayed. Characterized by underworld officials, disembodied voices, articulate

animals and strange apparitions, this sequence is often the means by which the point of the story is conveyed (1998, p.114).

That is why the 'Fear Of Consciousness' chapter offers the revelatory return of Juan; his ghostly presence represents not only the *biji* tradition, but also that of Oulipo. In a dream like state, Juan conjures the kind of space Zeitlin identifies in Pu Songling's *Liaozhai zhiyi*:

Ghosts can be accepted as both psychologically induced *and* materially present, just as a sequence can be cast simultaneously as dream *and* as a real event. As we will see, the strange often results when things are paradoxically affirmed and denied at the same time. In other words, the boundary between the strange and the normal is never fixed but is constantly altered, blurred, erased, multiplied, or redefined (Zeitlin 1993, p.7).

Huntington's examination of *Yuewei caotong biji* likewise provided reference points for the reunited Juans: "Literary ghost tales commonly involve the ghost's narration of her death and the communication of the unfulfilled wish that compels her to contact the living" (Huntington 2010, p.56). As did Idema & Haft's *Guide To Chinese Literature*: "Another novel feature is that in many of these *chuanqi*, ghosts of departed persons appear for the specific purpose of correcting or adding actual details to the current versions of their life stories" (Idema & Haft 1997, p.62). Julian Barnes' 'Gnossiene', a short story included in his *Cross Channels* collection (and also appearing in *Granta* 50), follows an author, Clements (very possibly Barnes himself), as he goes against his better judgement and prior inclinations and accepts insouciant invitation to a literary conference. In the context of the story the Oulipo feature peripherally, acknowledged fleetingly, and a shadowy sense of its playful writing is evident in the short story itself. I wished to include the Oulipo in a similar manner in my *biji* collection.

A single use character found buried in Rabelais's *Gargantua*, QB signed his initials to the minutes of the Oulipo meetings in his position as definitive secretary for a few months before quietly disappearing into the background. It seemed that Le Lionnais' argument for the inclusion of fictional figures in the Oulipo was, like QB, all but forgotten until 2008, when Hugo Vernier (of '*Le Voyage d'hiver*') made an impassioned reading to the Oulipo for his inclusion (Levin Becker 2012, p.310).

In the 200<sup>th</sup> fascicle of the *Bibliothèque oulipienne* (Vernier 2013) Hugo Vernier<sup>93</sup> appears as an unannounced guest of honour at a meeting of the Oulipo to declare: "I exhort you to co-opt me as a full member" (2013, p.239) and adds: "I am fully aware that QB stands as a precedent" (2013, p.240). With this request as yet unrealised, I sought to include QB within *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness*.

Assigning numerical values to the letters of QB's name, one point of each place in alphabetical sequence, and adding these together we get 19 ([Q = 17] + [B = 2] = 19): hence Juan's suicide, fixing him at the age of 19, and providing a clue to his identity as QB. As Juan/QB explains in the 'Fear Of Consciousness' chapter entry:

*One may relinquish membership of the Oulipo under the following circumstances: suicide may be committed in the presence of an officer of the court, who then ascertains that, according to the Oulipian's explicit last wishes, his suicide was intended to release him from the Oulipo and restore his freedom of manoeuvre for the rest of eternity.*

The story of QB, a tragedy that cannot end, is the untold parrallel to the living Juan's anguish. Distanced from the Oulipo and all but forgotten, QB is eager to sever ties from the group, but as a result of that instance, has forgotten the necessary steps to

---

<sup>93</sup> Who, by most accounts (see Levin Becker 2012, p.310, and Vernier 2013, p.235) bears a remarkable resemblance to Valérie Beaudouin, though smells slightly more distinctively of hommus.

adequately do so. Taking his own life without the presence of a notary, Juan/QB has ended his life, but not his membership with the Oulipo, and in his return expresses as much to Juan, revealing the terms of his potential purgatory.



## CHAPTER 7

### REFLECTION

In her 1998 thesis examining Hong Mai's *Record Of The Listener*, Kerr translates his preface to the volume *zhijia*:

Some people think that records in this collection have much in common with other stories from the past, and that the story-lover has merely embroidered on stolen works for his subject matter. This isn't so. As always, while nothing is limitless or inexhaustible, there are ten thousand variations, subtle and minute, and on separation and analysis they are never quite the same (1998, p.13).

I took Hong Mai at his word and further explored the inexhaustible potential of *biji*. This chapter will include a reflection on my practice and process throughout the writing of the creative component and dissertation. Writers before me – Coupland, Kelly, Ouyang – had proven it possible to write a contemporary English language *biji*, though none had yet endeavoured to create a novel-length narrative using the device. Ouyang's collection was book-length, as opposed to the others, which appeared in multi-author edited collections, but was written in a creative non-fiction mode. Two years into my research, Douglas Coupland turned his *biji*, 'Survivor', into a full-length novel, *Worst. Person. Ever.*, but this too was not constructed through a process of anoulipism.

In this regard, the work done by Clute and Edwards in establishing their Oufinpo provided a precedent of how one could approach a canon of work, a genre, from an anoulipic mode of enquiry. Nevertheless, throughout the early stages of my research, and incrementally there on, I had moments of doubt as to whether there was substance in the example of Levin Becker's 'unlikely pairings' that I had proposed to myself. Shields' manifesto, and the collected unintentional *biji* displayed that there was a desire

for form that exhibited the qualities of *biji* amongst contemporary authors, and perhaps, more intriguingly, a scattered trail of breadcrumbs hinting at Oulipian interest in the form also emerged. As I grappled with establishing the parameters required to assemble a potential collection of works that could be classified as unintentional *biji* I found similar cautious enquiries expressed by Bénabou: “Wasn’t this the ideal model for me, that of a book in which were juxtaposed, or rather interlaced, several series of texts, differing and yet related?” (Bénabou 1998, p.117).

Bénabou hints at the genre of *biji* more explicitly in *Dump This Book While You Still Can*, wherein he draws attention in passing to a recent scholarly undertaking by his friend Gustave de Flauzac to translate sections from Pu Songling’s *Extraordinary Tales* (2001, p.42). Aside from being a nominally-formed portmanteau (of Flaubert and Balzac), I could hardly convince myself that I have managed to comprehend all facets of the function of Flauzac in *Dump This Book*... nor can I say what significance this reference holds. No further clues can be gleaned from the academic institution at which the research apparently took place, for Flauzac, we are led to believe, was affiliated with Fitchwinder University, a fictitious place of education that crops up variously in Perec’s *53 Days* (1992), in Mathews’ ‘The Dialect of the Tribe’ (in Mathews 2002, pp.7-14), in Mathews & Perec’s ‘Roussel and Venice: Outline of a Melancholy Geography’ (in Mathews & Perec 2003, pp.123-146), and in various instalments of *Le Voyage d’Hiver* (Perec et al. 2013). The solution to the riddle these references create remains, like the final piece of Bartlebooth’s 439<sup>th</sup> puzzle, misformed – a formless form.

While the creative component of this dissertation explores in detail one potential application of the results presented through an anoulipic examination of *biji*, this research also found Shields to unintentionally propose another.<sup>94</sup> The observation thus

---

<sup>94</sup> See page 132 of this thesis.

provides another promising development in the deconstruction of genre and pursuit of anoulipic reconstruction. Limitations on space and scope prevent this proposition to be adequately and thoroughly realised here, though the potential for such a copy of *Hamlet* strengthens Hong Mai's claims for the inexhaustibility of the genre.

Discussing Queneau's literary technique Campbell-Sposito talks of his "subverting fossilized structures" – something I believe stands as an eloquent and concise description of my own application of the anoulipic process – to create: "a literature ever aware of itself as a genre, guided by great works from the past, always evolving, and capable of incorporating the subversion into new combinations" (Campbell-Sposito 1997, pp.14-15). As the research drew to a close and I felt I had managed to uncover some of the many potential paths connecting anoulipism and *biji*, it was fitting that an Oulipian de-throning should bring me back down to earth.

It is commonly joked that newly recruited Oulipians would excitedly exclaim that they had discovered a new constraint, only to be tiredly told that 'Perec had already done it'. The breadcrumbs led me to such a realisation, and a whole potential corpus of texts to add to my contemporary examples of the form. The seeds for Perec's appreciation of *The Pillow Book* were planted by Bénabou when both had been working together on a project called "Automatic Production of French Literature", or PALF for short, during the 1960s in Paris. The ultimate goal of PALF, at its inception, was to show that the famous line of Gaston Leroux: "The presbytery has lost none of its charm nor the garden its splendour" was but a translation of a Bolshevik rally cry: "Workers of the world, unite!" PALF was driven by a procedure of inflation, where words were replaced by their dictionary definitions. The project was eventually abandoned in 1966, before the two were able to prove their hypothesis (see Bellos 1999, pp.340-343). It was during

this time that both Perec and Bénabou began reading and discussing Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*, as Bénabou explained to me via email correspondence in 2014:

About Sei Shōnagon: Perec and I found the book at about the same time, in 1966, at a time when we met every week to work on our PALF project. During these sessions, we exchanged information about our current readings, and that is how we have been led to speak of Sei Shōnagon, who immediately filled us with admiration (personal communication 2014).

Interestingly, both Perec and Bénabou turned to this form when writing, or attempting to write, most explicitly about family history – Bénabou, somewhat peripherally and analytically, in *Jacob, Menahem, and Mimoun: A Family Epic*, and Perec in his unpublished project *L'Arbre*, on which he began work in 1967 (Bellos 1999, p.366). Bellos describes the contents of the work-in-progress as tragic and concise life histories (1999, p.367), much like Pu Songling's tales. Like early *biji* collections, Perec maintained the ledger that served as a repository for *L'Arbre* throughout the 1970s in private.

'*Notes Brèves sur l'art et la manière de ranger ses livres* [Brief Notes on the Art and Craft of Sorting Books]' is an extract from a contemporary *zuihitsu*, or pillow book, that Perec had planned to write. It was originally published in *L'Humidité* no. 25, Spring 1978 (pp.35-38) and was accompanied with the subtitle '*Extrait des Notes de Chevet, en preparation*'. It was subsequently republished in the *Penser/Classer* collection, in 1985 by Hachette; and in English translation by John Sturrock in *Species Of Spaces and Other Pieces* (2008a), and more recently and considerately by David Bellos in *Thoughts of Sorts* (2009a). The subtitle in the original publication refers to the larger project envisioned by Perec to which this excerpt belonged. *Notes de Chevet* was to be an "attempt to transpose to the world of today the pillow book of Sei Shōnagon" (Perec in

Bellos 1999, p.583). The first preserved reference to the text occurred in December 1976, when Perec presented his publisher Paul Otchakovsky-Laurens with a document titled ‘An Attempt at a description of a schedule of work for the years to come’, which contained, under section 4. ‘*Les Choses Communes* [Common Objects]’ – a section which also included the as yet unpublished *Je Me Souviens* – a work titled *Notes De Chevet*, with the brief explanation cited above.<sup>95</sup>

It can thus be deduced that Perec had conceived of the work in 1976, or some time prior, though never completed it.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the ensuing years prior to his death in 1982 Perec made mention numerous times to the influence Sei Shōnagon’s famed *zuihitsu* *The Pillow Book* had on him, and his desire to reproduce the form in a contemporary manner.

For a radio broadcast by France-Culture in 1977 Perec recorded excerpts from his *Pillow Book* project (see Bellos 1999, p.592) – amongst other works and an interview with Bernard Noël – before written evidence emerged in public the next year. The excerpt that appeared in *L’Humidité* could easily be classified alongside *biji* like Du Wan’s *Yunlin shi pu* [*Stone Catalog of Cloudy Forest*], Mi Fu’s *Shu shi* [*A Genealogy of Calligraphy*], and Ouyang Xiu’s *Liu yi shi hua* [*Notes on poetry from the Six-One Hermit*] in the classification system proposed in Dai Fu’s 2007 paper ‘The Flourishing of Biji or Pen-Notes Texts and its Relations to History of Knowledge in Song China (960-1279)’. The final of her three categories is “*biji* with jottings that are entirely on a single subject (e.g., ‘stone’, ‘bamboo’, ‘calligraphy’, or ‘notes on poetry’, usually called *pu* – catalogue, *lu* – register, *shi* – genealogy or history, and *shi hua* – notes on poetry)”

---

<sup>95</sup> The original document is reproduced in *Cahiers Georges Perec I* (Proceedings of the Colloque Perec at the Centre Culturel International de Cérisy-La-Salle, 1984; © P.O.L. 1985), and is translated, slightly abridged and annotated in Bellos’ *Georges Perec: A Life in Words* (1999, pp.582-585).

<sup>96</sup> The preeminent Perec scholar, Bellos explains in the list of Unfinished Works contained in his biography of the writer that *Notes de Chevet* was “Conceived before 1976” (1999, p.749).

(2007, p.104). In this instance, the subject is libraries, though it is uncertain whether this would have been sustained, or what the broader subject may have been for Perec's envisioned project. Of interest when considering Perec's chosen subject – his own theory of a library – and the larger project, is the conception of a library as the contemporary equivalent of the ancient studio, linked so intrinsically to traditional *biji*. As with other contemporary examples of the form, it is littered with lists. These occur within entries – as in 1.1. 'General Considerations' (2009b, p.23), or 2.1. 'Ways of sorting books' (2009b, pp.27-28), 2.2. 'Books which are very easy to sort' (2009b, p.28), and also 2.3. 'Books which are not too hard to sort' (2009b, p.29) and 2.4. 'Books which are well-nigh unsortable' (2009b, p.29); or as stand alone entries, as in 1.4. 'Things which are not books but which are often encountered in libraries' (2009b, p.151), the title of which bares a remarkable resemblance to such entries as 'Things that a house should have' or 'Things that are near yet far', found within Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*.

Through entries such as 2.2. 'Books which are very easy to sort', 2.3. 'Books which are not too hard to sort', and 2.4. 'Books which are well-nigh unsortable', Perec is able to establish his knowledge of classical and canonical texts, presenting himself as well read and knowledgeable about literature, and situating his own text within an historical context. Perec also cites, across two pages, excerpts from Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book* in the essay '*Douze regards obliques* [Twelve Sidelong Glances]' (2009c, pp.31-42). But 'Twelve Sidelong Glances' is more than just another opportunity for Perec to profess his fondness for Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*.

I propose that Perec's '*Douze regards obliques* [Twelve Sidelong Glances]' – first published in 1976 in *Traverses* no.3 (pp.44-48), two years prior to 'Notes Brèves sur l'art et la manière de ranger ses livres' but conceivably after Perec had begun his pursuit

of a contemporary equivalent of *zuihitsu* – can be considered alongside the latter work as another example of his attempts at working within the form. ‘Twelve Sidelong Glances’ is also mentioned by Perec in his prospectus to Otchakovsky-Laurens, included in a list of ‘Miscellaneous texts suitable for publication in book form’ as an article (Perec in Bellos 1999, pp.584-585).

Where ‘*Notes Brèves...*’ was concerned with book collections, or more specifically, the art of arranging such collections, ‘*Douze regards obliques*’ is focused on fashion. Consisting of twelve numbered entries, the first of these, ‘Off the Peg’ (2009c, pp.31-32), takes the form of a list of clothing articles and their prices that reads like an excerpt from Perec’s first novel, *Les Choses* [*Things*]. It is followed by commentary from Perec, the compiler, explaining that the information included had been taken from bus shelter poster-site advertisements (2009c, p.32). The commentary is further used to reflect on the textual cultural debris collected earlier in the entry. Here Perec shows the developing role of *biji* author/compiler, and how the act of collecting existing texts and commenting on them to reflect modes of thought can operate in a modern setting. The critique and commentary on the fads and moral of the surrounding society that is common to traditional *biji* also finds a place in ‘Twelve Sidelong Glances’ in entry 2, ‘Leather Goods’ (2009c, p.32). Likewise, anecdotes, a common component of traditional *biji* and the *zuihitsu* that so charmed Perec, make their way into the text in the appropriately titled fourth entry: ‘In Brackets: an anecdote’ (2009c, p.34). Similarly, the fifth entry, ‘Quotations’, brings together lengthy passages from previous canonical (in their own way) texts: among them Bachelot and Dezobry’s *Dictionnaire Général des Lettres, des Beaux-arts et des Sciences Morales et Politiques* (1882); and Bouillet’s *Dictionnaire Universel des Sciences, des Lettres et des Arts* (1854) (2009c, p.35). These serve to establish a global and local [Parisian] framework for the investigation of Paris,

and assimilate Perec's text within a canon of citationists (a practice that pervaded other elements of Perec's oeuvre and practice as writer). The separation of entries 6 and 7, 'Questions, 1' (2009c, p.35) and 'On the Other Hand...' (2009c, p.36) respectively, allow the prominent inquisitive, and at times accusatory, narratorial voice to neighbour one of optimism, one capable of envisioning a utopic fashion. This presentation of conflicting voices, as we have seen elsewhere, serves to generate a necessary tension in the text.

As with the citations discussed earlier, Perec also tellingly includes lengthy excerpts from Sei Shōnagon's *Pillow Book*. In fact, his borrowings of her thoughts on fan handles, Chinese jackets, outerwear, skirts, and materials comprise all the content of entry 11, 'The Pillow Book' (2009c, pp.40-41). Of most interest in regards to the reading of 'Twelve Sidelong Glances' as an example of Perec's attempts with the *zuihitsu* form is the last entry, 'Or else, finally:', which begins:

Instead of trying to get to grips with an elusive object, I would rather have begun telling, in the wake of that lady-in-waiting who died around the year 1000, the stories of some of the objects on the desk where I work (Perec 2009c, p.41).

Perec then begins his final list of the piece, enumerating the objects occupying his worktable. He concludes, the paragraph indented: "Those stories, no doubt, have been marked by fashion. But they will not have been *exhausted* by contact with it" (Perec 2009c, p.42, emphasis mine). The closing statement can be read not in reference to the stories of those objects, but to the stories already presented in the text, written in that fashion, about fashion. Those stories, and Sei Shōnagon's stories (as Perec's prove) and their manner of presentation circumvent fashion, and are more than simply that.

Further support for this hypothesis can be found elsewhere in Perec's writing of 1976. In January of that year, an essay of his titled '*Lire: esquisse socio-physiologique*'

200



[Reading: A Socio-physiological Sketch]’ was published in *Esprit* (1976 no.1, pp.9-20). ‘Reading...’ was likewise included on Perec’s prospectus, alongside ‘Twelve Sidelong Glances’, as an article (Bellos 1999, p.585). The introduction to this essay serves as a remarkable description for what contemporary *biji/zuihitsu* may potentially be:

The following pages make no pretence of being more than notes – an intuitive, rather than an organized, compilation of disparate facts which (with a few exceptions) pertain to no constituted body of knowledge, but rather to the ill-mapped, unfarmed fields of descriptive ethnology... those kinds of facts usually referred to as “miscellaneous,” because all we know about them is that we don’t know very much, apart from the intuition that a good deal could be gleaned from them if we decided to pay more attention (Perec 2009a, p.87).

In fact, the influence of the Pillow Book form, as Perec seems to have viewed it, is present to varying degrees in many of the works composed during the last seven years of Perec’s too short life. Many of these were gathered together in the *Penser/Classer* collection published by Hachette in 1985. Beside the more prominent examples already discussed above, consider the essay from which the collection draws its title. ‘Thoughts of Sorts/Sorts of Thoughts’<sup>97</sup> is an alphabetically classified, but non-alphabetically catalogued collection of thoughts on the act of thinking and classifying. In the second entry, ‘(N) Methods’, Perec explains: “Obviously, at different stages in this paper’s development – notes scrawled on pads or on loose sheets, transcribed quotations, ‘ideas’, see, cf. etc. – I accumulated little lists, small b, ROMAN I, thirdly, part two” (Perec 2009d, p.119). What emerges from this practice, which has so much in common with the traditional methods of compiling *biji*, is described by Perec as being fuzzy, shapeless, and he admits to abandoning all pretence of writing an article with a

---

<sup>97</sup> This is David Bellos’ translation of the title; see Perec 2009d, p.119.

conventional beginning, middle, and end, instead opting to retain the “shapeless scraps” (Perc 2009d, p.120).

Elsewhere in this thesis the argument has been made for texts that are engendered to destabilise themselves in order to generate tension or chaos, and the importance this plays in achieving formless form. In ‘*Penser/Classer*’ Perc, with varying degrees of nuance and subtly, systematically undermines himself in such a manner.

In entry ‘T) The World as a Jigsaw’, Perc acknowledges the flaws of attempting to distribute the world in terms of a single code: right left, up down, north south, 12 months, 52 weeks, twenty-six letters, six vowels, five senses, four seasons... He concludes: “Unfortunately, it doesn’t work, it’s never even had the slightest hope of working, it will never work” (Perc 2009d, p.122). This classification of classifications is governed from the outset by the author’s refusal to accept classifications as sufficient. Later, in ‘L) The Alphabet’, Perc proposes that the alphabetic code in fact only really has three elements: A = excellent; B = less good; Z = hopeless. And concludes: “...that doesn’t stop it being a code, nor from superimposing a hierarchy onto a sequence that is inert by definition” (Perc 2009d, p.126). In defiance of this, as alluded to earlier, Perc’s own sequence does not adhere to such hierarchy, but, as is revealed later, adopts its own, based on the order in which the letters appear in the seventh story in the French translation of Italo Calvino’s *If On A Winter’s Night A Traveler*.<sup>98</sup> Until this revelation, the reader, even the reader who chose to read not page by page, but following the

---

<sup>98</sup> Perc explains, somewhat: “The title of this story, ‘*Dans un réseau de lignes entrecroisées*’, contains this alphabet up to its thirteenth letter, O” (2008d, p.204). Perc goes on to cite the line number of each line thereafter that presents another letter of this alphabet, concluding that Z can be found in line 41. This schema is kept in Sturrock’s translation. However in Bellos’, the schema reflects the translation by William Weaver, the title in question thus rendered in English as ‘A Network of Lines that Intersect’. While the order of entries in both the Sturrock and Bellos translation remain the same, the letters used to number the entries differs between each translation. For example. Summary is I) in the Bellos translation, and D. in Sturrock’s.

alphabetical hierarchy Perec has attempted to dismantle, will be made to scramble through a dissembled sequence.

Likewise, Perec makes note in entry ‘V) The Dictionary’, of the typical distribution of space allocated to letters in dictionaries and encyclopaedias, noting, as example, that in Lalande’s *Biographie Universelle* entries for the letter C proportionately occupies significantly more space (Perec 2009d, p.134). By contrast, entry ‘C. How I Sort’, in ‘Thoughts of Sorts/Sorts of Thoughts’ appears purposefully brief, shorter than L), and even Y).<sup>99</sup> As with other texts in Perec’s oeuvre, Sei Shōnagon is paid tribute with an entry in *Penser/Classer*, with section H bearing her name as its title. In the entry we are given an insight into how Perec viewed her method of writing and textual construction: “Sei Shōnagon does not sort; she lists, and begins again. One theme sets off one list, of things or anecdotes. Later, an almost identical theme will produce a different list, and so on; you end up with a series you can divide into groups” (Perec 2009d, p.130), these groups, as the differing translations hint at, can be regrouped again and again.

In an attempt to explain how he thinks, to describe accurately and realistically the mechanics of his thinking, Perec reflects on the process of the essay at hand: “meandering among words: I don’t think but look for my words: somewhere in the heap of words there must be one which will give shape to this vague, hesitating excitement, which later on, will ‘mean something’” (Perec 2009d, p.136).

As has been examined, by definition *zuihitsu* alludes to the act of ‘following the brush’ – this could have been the illusive word Perec rhetorically requested, that encapsulates his drifting towards potential solutions. He continued to voice his desire to complete *Notes de Chevet* even after the publication of the excerpt in *L’Humidité*. In a 1979

---

<sup>99</sup> The effect of this is diminished in the Bellos translation, as the order of signifying letters is shifted by his use of William Weaver’s English translation. In Sturrock’s translation, entry ‘C. Classification’, is even briefer still (Perec 2008d, p.195).

interview with Frank Venaille, Perec alludes to the enormous appeal and influence of *zuihitsu* as a form of realist writing held for him. He says:

My mentor in this vein was a Japanese woman, Sei Shōnagon, whose *Pillow book* is a collection of thoughts about nothing in the end, about waterfalls, clothes, the things that give pleasure, the things that have refined grace, the things without value, and so on. For me that's true realism: to rely on a description of reality divested of all presumptions. It seems so to me anyway! (Perec with Venaille, 2008c, p.132).

In a 1980 '*Questions/Réponses*' he filled out for *Action poétique*<sup>100</sup> he again mentions the potential work, "a 'pillow book' inspired by Sei Shōnagon" (Perec in Bellos 1999, p.680) when answering the question 'What is your plan of work for the next ten years?'

While the brief extract of *Notes de Chevet* is all we have of Perec's explicitly stated experiments with the form, its influence is rife throughout his oeuvre and is succinctly encapsulated by Bellos' assessment of Perec's use of collage, borrowings and fragmentary assemblages: "Why should a writer not work like a carpenter, building a finished object from pieces prepared for him beforehand... Why should Perec not take pieces of wood that had already been turned and reassemble them in his own marquetry?" (Bellos 1999, pp.310, 362). From his first published book, *Les Choses* [*Things*] Perec displayed a preference and aptitude for collage and fragmentary text; Bellos details at length the borrowings buried just beneath the surface of things in his biography (Bellos 1999 pp.360-363). Sei Shōnagon provided an epitomised model for such fragmentation in Perec's later years. Finally, in regards to the potential of this form, or its relation to potential literature, Bénabou had this to say in another personal

---

<sup>100</sup> *Action poétique*, no.81 (May 1980), pp.38-39. It appears in translation by Bellos in *Georges Perec*, pp.680-681.

exchange via email: “I think this form, which is a variant of the form ‘list’, so dear to Perec and Oulipians generally, is still usable” (Personal communication, 2014).

## CHAPTER 8

### CONCLUSION

This thesis began with an investigation into the contemporary English language application of traditional Chinese *biji*, framed with an anoulipic approach to methodology. The analyses of explicit contemporary *biji* and *zuihitsu* in chapter 4 revealed that these modern adaptations of the form are modeled on similar theories of formless form. Each straddles generic boundaries, and grapples with its own form and construction despite its 'fixed' status on the page.

As with traditional examples of the form, these authors still use *biji* to write from the margins, to write unofficially, to write of and to existing texts, and to inscribe a polyphonic presentation in their writing. As is to be expected, given the diverse extent of extant *biji*, each of these texts would seem drastically different compared individually to any other. Taken as a whole, however, this small corpus provides a starting point from which other implicit contemporary *biji* could be identified.

This identification commenced in chapter 5, but is not confined to the texts listed there, nor is it confined to this thesis. That list simply marks an expansion on the initial set of texts, that, when coupled with the analysis provided and justification for inclusion should enable the ongoing growth of that list. The list, then, operates in a manner similar to the 'noiremes',<sup>101</sup> presented in chapter 5 of Clute and Edwards' *The Maltese Touch Of Evil* (2011), which is representative of and an introduction to their Oufinopo. Like them, I believe that the structure I have provided will support and enable ongoing research into future *biji* (aiding those trying to make sense of these congeries) and the identification of more existing implicit *biji*.

---

<sup>101</sup> See Clute & Edwards 2011, pp.46-48.

The creative component illustrates how this research can be applied as a constraint that will enable the construction of texts with formless form. In writing *Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness*, I showed how a contemporary, English language novel length *biji* could be constructed through an anoulipic framework.

I will conclude this thesis with a brief anecdote, taken from Professor Victoria Cass' foreword to the Tuttle English translation edition of *Strange Tales From A Chinese Studio*:

When Pu Songling died on February 25, 1715, in the seventy-first year of the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911), the collection of tales he called *Strange Tales of the Make-Do Studio* was given over to his sons in a stack of one hundred and ten loose-leaf sheets, hand-written and unpublished. Now, almost three centuries later, there are hundreds more versions of *Strange Tales* than there were of original pages: from the many editions in the nineteenth century, to the modern printings throughout Asia, and then the favorite tales recreated in varying media: plays and storyteller, performance, films and their sequels, television shows and serials: as well as, finally, the approximately forty versions in translation. The one hundred and ten pages have replicated like a magic trick: the ghosts and shape-shifters, lovers and demons emerging confidently from those simple hand-written origins into the modern world (Cass 2010, p.9).

This anecdote seems to unintentionally suggest the compatibility of *biji* with potential literature. Pu Songling's *Strange Tales* morphed from their initial 110 pages into numerous incarnations and continue to do so; likewise, the 10 pages of Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* [*A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*] contain just that, and like Pu Songling, its potential readings remain far from exhausted.

I hope this thesis has found one point of collision between these two endless lines.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alimov, Igor. 1999, 'Song *Biji* Authorial Collections: Preliminary Observations', *Manuscripta Orientalia*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp.39-48

Arnaud, Noël. 1986, 'Foreword: Prolegomena to a Fourth Oulipo Manifesto – or Not', in W. Motte (ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer Of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp.ix-xiii

——— 2005, 'Minutes of the Oulipo 2, Meeting of Tuesday, 23 August', in Mathews, H. & Brotchie, A. (eds), *Oulipo Compendium: revised and updated*, Atlas, London, pp.192-195

Asia Education Foundation. 2012, *Submission to the Australian Government White Paper on Australia in the Asian Century*, in A.E. Foundation (ed.) Asia Education Foundation, Melbourne, pp.0-25

<[http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/policy\\_and\\_research/white\\_paper\\_responses\\_pr.html](http://www.asiaeducation.edu.au/policy_and_research/white_paper_responses_pr.html)>

Commonwealth of Australia. 2011, *Australia In The Asian Century*, D.o.t.P.M.a. Cabinet, Commonwealth Of Australia, Canberra, viewed 20 July 2012, <[asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au](http://asiancentury.dpmc.gov.au)>

Ashbery, J. 1987, 'A Conversation With Harry Mathews', *Review Of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 7, no. 3, pp.21-52

Atterbury, D. 2013, 'Pinning Down: A Conversation With Catrin Morgan', *The Paris Review*, viewed 20 March 2014,



<<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/06/05/pinning-down-a-conversation-with-catrin-morgan/>>

Ball, Magdalena. 2010, 'Interview With Ouyang Yu', *The Compulsive Reader News*, vol. 11, no. 5

Barr, Allan H. 1985, 'A Comparative Study of Early and Late Tales in *Liaozhai zhiyi*', *Harvard Journal Of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, pp.157-202

Bellos, David. 1999, *Georges Perec*, Revised Harvill Press Edition, The Harvill Press, London

——— 2012, *Is That A Fish In Your Ear? The Amazing Adventure Of Translation*, Penguin Books, London

Bénabou, Marcel. 1997, *Why I Have Not Written Any Of My Books*, trans. D. Kornacker, University Of Nebraska Press, Lincoln

——— 1998, *Jacob, Menahem, and Mimoun: A Family Epic*, trans. S. Rendall, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London

——— 2001, *Dump This Book While You Still Can!*, trans. S. Rendall, University Of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London

——— 2004, 'From Jewishness to the Aesthetics of Lack', in W. Motte & J.J. Poucel (eds), *Pereckonings: Reading Georges Perec*, vol. 105, Yale University Press, New Haven, pp.20-35

——— 2013, 'The Forthcoming Journey [*Le Voyage disert*]', in Oulipo (ed.), *Winter Journeys*, Atlas Press, London, pp.276-81

——— 2014, Email Correspondence, personal communication, February-April 2014

Bénabou, Marcel & Marcenac, Bruno. 2009, 'Georges Perec Owns Up: An Interview', *The Review Of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp.17-30

Bens, Jacques. 2005, 'Minutes of the [Oulipo] Meeting of 28 August 1961', in H. Mathews, H. & Brotchie, A. (eds), *Oulipo Compendium: revised and updated*, Atlas, London, pp.186-191

Birch, Cyril. (ed.) 1974, *Studies In Chinese Literary Genres*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles

Bök, Christian. 2001, *Eunoia*, Coach House Books, Toronto

——— 2002, *'Pataphysics: The Poetics of an Imaginary Science*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston

——— 2003, *Crystallography*, 2nd revised Edition, Coach House Books, Toronto

Bol, Peter. 1995, 'A Literary Miscellany and Sung Intellectual History: The case of Chang Lei's *Ming-tao tsa-chih*', *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1, pp.121-51

Booth, Wayne. 1961, *Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago University Press, Chicago and London

Borges, Jorge Luis. 1998, *Collected Fictions*, trans. A. Hurley, Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition, Penguin Books, Camberwell

Braffort, Paul. 2013, 'Yvert's Journey [*Le Voyage d'Yvert*]', in Oulipo (ed.), *Winter Journeys*, Atlas Press, London, pp.303-324

Bruner, Jerome. 1991, 'The Narrative Construction Of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp.1-21

- Bury, Louis. 2014, *Exercises In Criticism: The Theory & Practice of Literary Constraint*, Dalkey Achive Press, Champaign, London, Dublin
- Calvino, Italo. 1993, *If On A Winter's Night A Traveler*, Everyman, London
- 2009, *Six Memos for the next Millennium*, Penguin Classics, London
- Campany, Robert F. 1996, *Strange Writing*, State University of New York Press, Albany
- Campbell-Sposito, Mary. 1997, 'Canis Major: Introducing Raymond Queneau', *The Review Of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. XVII, no. 3, pp.7-15
- Cass, Victoria. 2010, 'Foreword', in H.A. Giles (ed.), *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, Tuttle Publishing, Tokyo, Rutland, Vermont, Singapore
- Chan, Leo Tak-Hung. 1997, 'Text and Talk: Classical Literary Tales in Traditional China and the Context of Casual Oral Storytelling', *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 56, no. 1, pp.33-63
- 1998, *The Discourse on Foxes and Ghosts: Ji Yun and Eighteenth-Century Literati Storytelling*, The Chinese University Press, Sha Tin, N.T., Hong Kong
- Chance, Linda H. 1997, *Formless In Form: Kenkō, Turezuregusa, and the Rhetoric of Japanese Fragmentary Prose*, Stanford University Press, Stanford
- Chang, H.C. 1984, *Tales of the Supernatural*, vol. 3, Columbia University Press, New York
- Clute, Shannon S. & Edwards, Richard L. 2011, *The Maltese Touch Of Evil: Film Noir and Potential Criticism*, Dartmouth College Press, Hanover

Consenstein, Peter. 1995, 'Memory and Oulipian Constraints', *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 6, no. 1, viewed 1 April 2012, <<http://www.pomoculture.org/2013/09/22/memory-and-oulipian-constraints/>>

Cooper, L. 1986, 'Class Notes', in R. Shapard & J. Thomas (eds), *Sudden Fictiom*, Gibbs Smith Publisher, Salt Lake City, pp.122-125

Coupland, Douglas. 2007, *JPod*, Bloomsbury, London

——— 2009, 'Survivor', in D. Franich & Weatherly, G. (ed.), *Vikings, Monks, Philosophers, Whores: Old Forms, Unearthed*, McSweeney's, San Francisco, pp.43-58

——— 2013, *Worst. Person. Ever.*, William Heinemann Ltd, London

De Pee, Christian. 2007, *The Writing of Weddings in Middle-Period China: Text and Ritual Practice in the Eighth through Fourteenth Centuries*, State University of New York Press, Albany

DiNitto, Rachel. 2004, 'Return of the "Zuihitsu": Print Culture, Modern Life, and Heterogeneous Narrative in Prewar Japan', *Harvard Journal Of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 64, no. 2, pp.251-90

Drayton, Dave. 2011, 'Proving Motion By Walking: A Collection Of Contemporary Australian Oulipian Works ', Honours thesis, University Of Technology Sydney, Sydney

——— 2014, 'Can't Won't Don't', *Literary Bondage*, ISMs Press, London, pp.149-150

Dudbridge, Glen. 2013, *A Portrait Of Five Dynasties China: From the Memoirs of Wang Renyu (880-956)*, Oxford University Press London

Eagleman, David. 2009, *Sum: Forty tales from the afterlives*, Canongate, London

- Eco, Umberto. 2009, *The Infinity Of Lists*, trans. A. McEwen, Rizzoli International Publications, New York
- Elkin, Lauren. & Esposito, Scott. 2013, *The End Of Oulipo? An Attempt To Exhaust A Movement*, Zero Books, Winchester, Washington
- Fawcett, Brian. 1989, *Cambodia: A Book For People Who Find Television Too Slow*, Prentice Hall, Hemel Hempstead
- Fournel, Paul. 1996, 'Suburbia', in H. Mathews, White, I. (ed.), *Oulipo Laboratory: Texts from the Bibliotheque Oulipienne*, Atlas, London, pp.i-16
- Franich, Darren & Weatherly, Graham. (eds.) 2009, *Vikings, Monks, Philosophers, Whores: Old Forms, Unearthed*, vol. 31, McSweeney's, San Francisco
- Furetière, Antoine. 1981, *Le Roman bourgeois*, Gallimard, Paris
- Fu, Daiwie. 2007, 'The Flourishing of *Biji* or Pen-Notes Texts and its Relations to History of Knowledge in Song China (960-1279)', *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp.103-30
- Galeano, Eduardo. 2013, *Children of the Days: A Calendar of Human History*, trans. M. Fried, Nation Books, New York
- Gang, Liu. 2010, *The Poetics Of Miscellaneousness: The Literary Design of Liu Yiqing's Qiantang Yishi and the Historiography of the Southern Song*, University Of Michigan, Michigan
- Gao, Xingjian. 2001, *Soul Mountain*, trans. M. Lee, Flamingo, London
- 2007, *The Case For Literature*, trans. M. Lee, Yale University Press, New Haven and London

- Garréta, Anne. 2015, *Sphinx*, trans. Emma Ramadan, Deep Vellum. Dallas
- Gayot, Paul. 2005, 'Introduction [Oulipopo]', in H. Mathews & A. Brotchie (eds), *Oulipo Compendium: revised and updated*, Atlas, London, pp.255-256
- Gibbs, Jonathan. 2013, 'Friday Book Design Blog: The Age of Wire and String, by Ben Marcus', The Independent, viewed 20 March 2014, <<http://blogs.independent.co.uk/2013/05/10/friday-book-design-blog-the-age-of-wire-and-string-by-ben-marcus/>>
- Goldsmith, Kenneth. 2011, *Uncreative Writing: managing language in the digital age*, Columbia University Press, New York
- Grangaud, Michelle. 2006, 'Calendar', in D. Eggers (ed.), *The State Of Constraint: New Work By Oulipo*, vol. 22, McSweeney's, San Francisco, pp.71-85
- Griffiths, Paul. 2008, *Let Me Tell You*, Reality Street, Hastings
- Gu, Ming Dong. 2005, *Chinese Theories of Reading and Writing: A Route To Hermeneutics and Open Poetics*, State University Of New York Press, Albany
- Hahn, Kimiko. 2006, *The Narrow Road to the Interior*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York
- Hanan, Patrick. 1967, 'The Early Chinese Short Story: A Critical Theory in Outline', *Harvard Journal Of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp.168-207
- Hargett, James M. 2001, 'Sketches', in V.H. Mair (ed.), *The Columbia History Of Chinese Literature*, Columbia University Press, New York, pp.560-565

- Hervouet, Yves. 1976, 'L'autobiographie dans la Chine traditionnelle', in J. Prusek (ed.), *Etudes d'histoire et de littérature chinoise: Offertes au professeur Jaroslav Prusek*, Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, Paris, pp.107-42
- Hightower, James R. 1957, 'The *Wen Hsüan* and Genre Theory', *Harvard Journal Of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 3/4, pp.512-33
- Hinton, David. (ed.) 2008, *Classical Chinese Poetry: An Anthology*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York
- Holman, Hugh. 1972, *Handbook to Literature based on the Original by William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard*, Bobbs-Merrill, New York
- Huang, Martin W. 1994, 'Author(ity) and Reader in Traditional Chinese Xiaoshuo Commentary', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp.41-67
- Hugill, Andrew. 2012, *'Pataphysics: A Useless Guide*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Huntington, Rania. 2005, 'Chaos, Memory, and Genre: Anecdotal Recollections of the Taiping Rebellion', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp.59-91
- 2010, 'The View from the Tower of Crossing Sails: Ji Yun's Female Informants', *Nan Nü*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp.30-64
- Idema, Wilt. & Haft, Lloyd. 1997, *A Guide To Chinese Literature*, vol. 74, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam

Inglis, Alister D. 2006, *Hong Mai's Record of the Listener and its Song Dynasty Context*, State University Of New York Press, Albany

James, Alison. 2006, 'Automatism, Arbitrariness and the Oulipian Author', *French Forum*, vol. 31, no. 2, pp.131-40

Jauss, Hans R. 1982, *Toward An Aesthetic Of Reception*, trans. T. Bahti, University Of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis

Jouet, Jacques. 2001, 'With (and Without) Constraints', trans. R. Lapidus, *Substance*, vol. 30, no. 3, pp.4-16

Kao, Karl S.Y. 1994, 'Projection, Displacement, Introjection: The Strangeness of *Liaozhai zhiyi*', in E. Hung (ed.), *Paradoxes of Traditional Chinese Literature*, The Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, pp.199-229

——— 1997, 'Self-Reflexivity, Epistemology, and Rhetorical Figures', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp.59-83

Kelly, O. 2010, 'Sexton Blake & the Virtual Culture of Rosario: A *Biji*', in S. Sonvilla-Weiss (ed.), *Mashup Cultures*, Springer-Verlag, Wien, pp.120-35

——— 2012, 'Email Correspondence ', personal communication, 6 July 2012

Kerr, Katherine. 1998, *Yijian zhi: an alternative perspective*, Doctoral thesis, University Of Sydney, Sydney

Kutcher, Norman. 1999, *Mourning In Late Imperial China: Filial Piety and the State*, Cambridge University Press, New York

Le Lionnais, Francois. 1973a, “‘La Lipo’ (Le premier Manifeste)”, *Oulipo: La littérature potentielle*. Editions Gallimard, Saint-Amand, pp.15-18



——— 1973b, 'Le second Manifeste', In *Oulipo: La littérature potentielle*. Editions Gallimard, Saint-Amand, pp.19-23

——— 1986a, 'Lipo First Manifesto', in W. Motte (ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer Of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp.26-28

——— 1986b, 'Second Manifesto', in W. Motte (ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer Of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp.29-31

——— 2005, 'From Craft Industry to Technology and Science (or Bhaskara, Hercule Poirot, Dick Francis, and the Oulipopo)', in Mathews, H. & Brotchie, A. (eds), *Oulipo Compendium: revised and updated*, Atlas, London, pp.263-264

Le Tellier, Hervé. 2011, *A Thousand Pennies For A Thousand Pearls*, trans. I. Monk, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign

Lécroart, Etienne. 2013, 'Various Journeys [Divers voyages]', in Oulipo (ed.), *Winter Journeys*, Atlas Press, London, pp.283-301

Lescure, Jean. 1986, 'Brief History Of The Oulipo', in W. Motte (ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer Of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp.32-39

Levé, Édouard. 2011, *Suicide*, trans. J. Steyn, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign

——— 2012, *Autoportrait*, trans. L. Stein, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign

Levin Becker, Daniel. 2012, *Many Subtle Channels In Praise Of Potential Literature*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

——— 2013, 'Le Voyage obscur [The Obscure Journey]', in Oulipo (ed.), *Winter Journeys*, Atlas Press, London, pp.325-43

Liu, James J.Y. 1975, *Chinese Theories Of Literature*, The University Of Chicago Press, Chicago

Liu, Wu-chi. 1966, *An Introduction To Chinese Literature*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London

Liu, Yeqiu. 2003, *Lidai biji gaishu* [*A Brief Discussion of Biji across the Ages*], Beijing Chubanshe, Beijing

Lopez, P. 2007, *Pataphor and Pataphors*, viewed 7 May 2013, <<http://www.pataphor.com>>

Lowes, John L. 1919, *Convention and Revolt in Poetry*, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston

Lu, Hsun. 1959, *A Brief History Of Chinese Fiction*, trans. Yang Hsien-Yi & Gladys Yang, Foreign Languages Press, Peking

Keenan, David L. (ed.) 1999, *Shadows in a Chinese Landscape: The Notes of a Confucian Scholar*, M. E. Sharpe, Inc., Armonk

Ma, Yau-Woon. 1985, 'Pi-chi', in W.H. Nienhauser (ed.), *Indiana Companion To Classical Chinese Literature*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, pp.650-652

Ma, Yau-Woon. & Lau, Joseph S. M. (eds) 1978, *Traditional Chinese Stories: Themes and Variations*, Columbia University Press, New York

Marcus, Ben. 1995, *The Age Of Wire and String*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York

——— 2013, *The Age of Wire and String*, Illustrated Edition, Granta Publications, London

Markson, D. 2001, *This Is Not A Novel*, Counterpoint, Berkeley

Mathews, H. 1986, 'Mathews's Algorithm', in W. Motte (ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer Of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp.126-139

——— 1990, *Écrits Français*, Oulipo, Paris

——— 1995, 'The Poet's Eye', in Mathews, H. & White, I. (Eds.), *Oulipo Laboratory*, Atlas, London, pp.1-23

——— 1997, *20 Lines A Day*, Dalkey Archive Press, Normal

——— 2002, *The Human Country: New and Collected Stories*, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign

——— 2005, 'Anoulipism', in H. Mathews & A. Brotchie (eds), *Oulipo Compendium: revised and updated*, Atlas, London, p.50

Mathews, H. & Brotchie, A. (eds) 2005, *Oulipo Compendium: revised and updated*, Atlas, London

——— 2005, 'Oulipopo', in H. Mathews & A. Brotchie (eds), *Oulipo Compendium: revised and updated*, Atlas, London, p.266

Mathews, Harry. & Perec, Georges. 2003, 'Roussel and Venice: Outline of a Melancholy Geography', *The Case of the Persevering Maltese: Collected Essays*, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign, pp.123-146

Mei, Yuan. 1996, *Censored By Confucius: Ghost Stories by Yuan Mei*, trans. K. Louie & L. Edwards, M. E. Sharpe, New York

Minford, John. & Roberts, Claire. 2008, 'Editorial: *Zhai*, the Scholar's Studio', *China Heritage Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 1, viewed April 4 2013, <<http://www.chinaheritagequarterly.org/editorial.php?issue=013>>

Minford, John. & Tong, Man. 1999, 'Whose Strange Stories? P'u Sung-ling (1640-1715), Herbet Giles (1845-1935), and the *Lia-chai chih-yi*', *East Asian History*, vol. 17/18, pp.1-48

Morice, Dave. 2001, *The Dictionary Of Wordplay*, Teachers and Writers Collaborative, New York

Motte, W. (ed.) 1986, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London

——— 1998, 'One Always Writes The Same Preface', in *Jacob, Menahem, & Mimoun: A Family Epic*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp. vii-xvii

——— 1999, 'The Rhetoric of the Impossible', *Substance*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp.4-21

——— (ed.) 2007, *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*, 2nd Edition, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign

Nair, Rukmini Bhaya. 2011, 'Thinking Out of the Story Box: Creative Writing and Narrative Culture in South Asia', *TEXT*, Special issue: Creative writing in the Asia-Pacific Region, pp.1-19

Nanxiu, Qian. 2001, *Spirit And Self In Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsin-yü and Its Legacy*, University Of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu

Nufer, Doug. 2004, *Never Again*, Black Square Editions, New York

Ogawa, Yoko. 2013, *Revenge*, trans. S. Snyder, Picador, New York

Ouyang, Yu. 2007, *On The Smell Of An Oily Rag: Speaking English, thinking Chinese and living Australian*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town

- 2011, 'Engagement of Minds That Breeds "Strange Flowers"', in R. Scott (ed.), *Strange Flowers: Australia-China Encounters in Writing and Art*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, pp.9-16
- Peck, Anthony. 2011, *Pillow Book of a Manic Depressive*, Chipmunkapublishing, Essex
- Perec, Georges. 1978, 'Notes Brèves sur l'art et la manière de ranger ses livres' [Brief Notes on the Art and Craft of Sorting Books], *L'Humidité* no. 25, Spring, pp.35-38
- 1985, *Penser/Classer*, Hachette, Paris
- 1986, 'History of the Lipogram', in W. Motte (ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer Of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp.97-108
- 1987, *Life A User's Manual*, trans. David Bellos, David R. Godine, Boston
- 1992, *53 Days*, trans. D. Bellos, Harvill, London
- 1999, 'The 1976 Prospectus', in D. Bellos (ed.), *Georges Perec: A Life In Words*, Revised Harvill Press Edition Edition, The Harvill Press, London, pp.582-585
- 2008a, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, trans. J. Sturrock, Penguin Classics, London
- 2008b, 'Brief Notes on the Art and Manner of Arranging One's Books', in J. Sturrock (ed.), *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, Penguin Classics, London, pp.149-55
- 2008c, 'The Work Of Memory: an interview with Frank Venaille', in J. Sturrock (ed.), *Species Of Spaces and Other Pieces*, Penguin Classics, London, pp.127-33

——— 2008d, 'Think/Classify', in J. Sturrock (ed.), *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, Penguin Classics, London, pp.188-205

——— 2008e, 'Twelve Sidelong Glances', in J. Sturrock (ed.), *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*, Penguin Classics, London, pp.156-64

——— 2009a, *Thoughts Of Sorts*, trans. David Bellos, Godine, Jaffrey

——— 2009b, 'Brief Notes on the Art and Craft of Sorting Books', *Thoughts of Sorts*, trans. D. Bellos, Godine, Jaffrey, pp.21-30

——— 2009c, 'Twelve Sidelong Glances', *Thoughts of Sorts*, trans. D. Bellos, Godine, Jaffrey, pp.31-42

——— 2009d, 'Thoughts of Sorts/Sorts of Thoughts' *Thoughts of Sorts*, trans. D. Bellos, Godine, Jaffrey, pp.119-140

Perec, Georges. & Oulipo 2013, *Winter Journeys*, Atlas Press, London

Poucel, Jean-Jacques. 2006a, *Jacques Roubaud and the Invention of Memory*, North Carolina Studies in the Romance Languages and Literatures, Chapel Hill

——— 2006b, 'Oulipo: Explore, Expose, X-Po', *Drunken Boat*, vol. 8, no. 1, viewed 22 March 2011, <<http://www.drunkenboat.com/db8>>

Qian, Zhongshu. 1998, *Limited Views: Essays On Ideas And Letters*, trans. R. Egan, Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge

Queneau, Raymond. 1976, 'Les Fondements de la littérature d'après David Hilbert', La Bibliothèque Oulipienne O3, Oulipo, Paris

——— 1986, 'Potential Literature', in W. Motte (ed.), *Oulipo: A Primer Of Potential Literature*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, pp.51-64

——— 2012, *Exercises In Style*, trans. B. Wright & C. Clarke, New & Expanded (25 exercises by Queneau previously unpublished in English, trans. Chris Clarke, and new exercises) Edition., New York, New Directions

Reed, Carrie E. 2000, 'Tattoo in Early China', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 120, no. 3, pp.360-376

——— 2003, 'Motivation and Meaning of a "Hodge-podge": Duan Chengshi's "Youyang zazu"', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 123, no. 1, pp.121-145

Richie, Donald. 2007, *A Tractate On Japanese Aesthetics*, Stone Bridge Press, Berkeley

Roubaud, Jacques. 1988, '*Deux Principes parfois respectés par les travaux oulipiens*', in Oulipo (ed.), *Atlas de littérature potentielle*, Gallimard, Paris

——— 1992, *The Great Fire Of London*, trans. D.D. Bernardi, Dalkey Archive Press, London

——— 1993, *N-ine, autrement dit queneine (encore)*, Oulipo, Paris

——— 1999, 'Deductions Concerning Marcel Benabou, Oulipian Author (Notes)' trans. Roxanne Lapidus, *SubStance* Issue 89 (Volume 28, Number 2), pp.37-40

——— 2006, *Poetry, etcetera: Cleaning House*, Green Integer, Los Angeles

Ruiz, Pablo, 2014, *Four Cold Chapters On The Possibility Of Literature: Leading Mostly To Borges And Oulipo*, Dalkey Archive Press, Champaign, London, Dublin

Ryan, Marleigh. 1976, 'Modern Japanese Fiction: "Accommodated Truth"', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp.249-266

Schneiderman, Davis. 2013, *[SIC]*, Jaded Ibis Press, Seattle

Schott, Ben. 2009, *Oulipo*, Radio broadcast, BBC 4, London

Seaman, Bill. 2001, 'OULIPO | vs | Recombinant Poetics', *Leonardo*, vol. 34, no. 5, pp.423-430

Sheck, Laurie. 2006, 'Kimiko Hahn', *Bomb*, vol. 96, no. 1, viewed 12 December 2013, <<http://bombsite.com/issues/96/articles/2834>>

Shen, Liyan. 2008, 'Folkloric Elements in Avant-garde Fiction: Yu Hua's "One Kind Of Reality" and "World Like Mist"', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, vol. 35, no. 1-2, pp.73-86

Shields, David. 2011, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto*, Penguin Books, London

——— 2013, *How Literature Saved My Life*, Vintage Books, New York

Shields, David. & Vollmer, Matthew. (eds) 2012, *Fakes: An Anthology of Pseudo-Interviews, Faux-Lectures, Quasi-Letters, "Found" texts (and other fraudulent artifacts)*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York & London

Shōnagon, Sei. 2006, *The Pillow Book*, trans. M. McKinney, Penguin Books, London

Shōnagon, Sei. 1967, *The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon*, trans. Ivan Morris, Penguin Books, Middlesex

Silverblatt, Michael. 2002, *Ben Marcus: Notable American Women*, Public Radio Broadcast, Bookworm, Los Angeles

Songling, Pu. 2006, *Strange Tales From A Chinese Studio*, trans. & ed. J. Minford, Penguin Books, London



- Struve, Lynn A. 2005, 'Introduction to the Symposium: Memory and Chinese Texts', *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp.1-4
- 2007, 'Dreaming and Self-search during the Ming Collapse: The *Xue Xiemeng Biji*, 1642-1646', *T'oung Pao*, vol. 93, no. 1, pp.159-192
- Tao, Min & Liu, Zaihua. 2003, "'*Biji xiaoshuo*' yu *Biji yanjiu* ['*Biji xiaoshuo*' and the study of *biji*]", *Wenxue Yichan*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp.107-144
- Thomas, Jean-Jacques. 2006, 'OuLiPotemkin: Down with the Tyranny of Constraints!', *French Forum*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 113-121
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1976, 'The Origin of Genres', *New Literary History*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp.159-170
- Viers, Carole A. 2008, *The Oulipo and Art as Retrieval: Copyists and Translators in the Novels of Raymond Queneau, Italo Calvino, Harry Mathews, and Georges Perec*, PhD Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles
- Vernier, Hugo (& Beaudouin, Valerie). 2013, 'Hell's Journey [*Le Voyage d'Enfer*]', in Oulipo (ed.), *Winter Journeys*, Atlas Press, London, pp.233-240
- Wellek, René. & Warren, Austin. 1962, *Theory of Literature*, Third Revised Edition, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York
- Wertheim, Christine. & Viegner, Matias. (eds) 2007, *The /n/ouliptian Analects*, Les Fignes Press, Los Angeles
- Wilkinson, Endymion. (ed.) 2000, *Chinese History: A Manual, Revised and Enlarged Edition*, Harvard University Asia Center, Cambridge and London

- Wu, Jianren. 1975, *Vignettes From The Late Ch'ing: Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over two Decades*, trans. Shih Shun Liu, The Chinese University Of Hong Kong, Shatin
- Wu, Laura Hua. 1995, 'From *Xiaoshuo* to Fiction: Hu Yinglin's Genre Study of *Xiaoshuo*', *Harvard Journal Of Asiatic Studies*, vol. 55, no. 2, pp.339-371
- Wu, Liquan. 1993, *Zhongguo biji Xiaoshuo shi* [History of Chinese *Biji* Fiction], Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, Taipei
- Zamperini, Paula. 2007, 'Elective Affinities: Literary Soul Mates and the Marketplace in late Qing Fiction', *Late Imperial China*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp.62-91
- Zeitlin, Judith T. 1993, *Historian of the Strange: Pu Songling and the Chinese Classical Tale*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto
- Zumthor, Paul. 1972, *Essai de poétique médiévale Collection Poétique*, Seuil, Paris
- ΠΟ. 2000, *The Number Poems and other equations*, Collective Effort Press, Melbourne



## Arrayed Miscellaneous Notes On Fear & Loneliness

by Scott Dolan

by Juan Juan

by Dave Drayton

## PART I

If I may, I wish to talk about chairs. To be more specific, the odd correlation between the range of movement and angle of the back of a chair, and the amount of money you have to pay to sit in them. If for example, you go to the movies; as a full-fare-paying adult you could expect to pay between \$14 and \$16 to sit in the chair they provide. But if you go to a silver screen or gold class affair, your chair allows you an extra 45 degrees of movement, and consequently the price of your ticket doubles. I recently flew to Hong Kong with Virgin Airlines, and to sit with the spine at an uncomfortably healthy 90-degree angle the whole trip cost me a little over \$1,500. But the people a mere 20 feet in front of me, in business class, were paying in excess of \$5,400 for a 90-degree range of movement that allowed them to lie flat on their back and stare at a beige ceiling.

Now, what about chairs owned by varying medical practitioners? When I went to my local GP I sat slumped in a metal-framed cushioned chair. The cushions themselves could have been patients, their lungs having long ago collapsed, meaning I sat not on a cloud-like pocket of air, but a stale sandwich of faux-leather, styrofoam and stainless steel. I sat on this chair, dreaming up its diagnosis and left, script in hand, having paid \$70 to have sat there. The dentist is a different story entirely. I last went to meet Dr Martin K Fox seven weeks ago. He smiled his school captain smile, and showed me from the waiting room, whose chairs resembled those of the doctor's consultation room, to my new chair. The dentist's chair. I sat in this monstrous contraption, with its metallic arms reminding me of an ambitious inventor's rabid scribbles, and prepared myself as Dr Fox put his foot on the pedal and lowered the chair.

\$15

\$30

\$47

\$68

\$89

\$102

\$120

Finally I came to a stop lying flat on my back, and pretended the off-beige ceiling was that in the over-priced cabin of a plane. It was a futile attempt to take my mind off Dr Fox's intrusive metallic poking and probing. One hundred and twenty dollars for that mechanical chair. Which brings me to the final chair, and the one most relevant at this point in time. The chair, or couch rather, in my psychiatrist's office. This couch is as long as your average three-seater, but the back support and armrest have been removed from the final third of its length. This couch is indulgently clichéd, from its opulent chocolate brown hue to its scent of leather, real leather, and its cushions, which partially consume anyone that sits on it. Now the reason for this seat's expensive price tag is the options it offers; once again, its range of movement. I can sit on the edge of my seat, bolt upright, spine at 90 degrees. I can let it slowly nibble on me, as my waist sinks into the nothingness of the chocolate brown, my head sliding slowly down the back rest as my spine opens: 90, 100, 110, 120 degrees. Or, as these doctors tend to prefer, I could lie down, with my head on the armrest, my feet dangling off the cliff-face of the opposing end, and my spine in an open 180-degree position. Sadly Dr Gleeson, or Matt as he prefers me to call him, seems to dismiss the fact that I never allow myself to lie down on this couch, and consequently I believe him to be overcharging me.

To be fair the price isn't the only reason I choose not to lie down, it's also to take some of the seriousness out of the situation. If I lie down, I'm paying Dr Gleeson to listen to my problems, and admitting I have them. If I sit up, Dr Gleeson and I are just working through a few things together. I have come to the conclusion that this is why he wants me to call him Matt – create a friendly rapport with the clientele, allow them to open up more, that old thing. It's hardly like I am being charged \$180 if it's just two friends talking. So that's my chair theory. And now, the reasons for my being here with Dr Gleeson.

My birth name is Scott Dolan. Scott Dolan – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1984 – 7.5 Pounds. I was decidedly average in everyway. I used to tell a story about how I was so average that Mike and Penny, my parents, spent a half hour crooning over the wrong baby in the nursery of Hornsby Hospital.

There they were, staring into each other's eyes, marvelling in silence at the miracle of creation, turning their heads in unison to stare at the beautiful newborn that in fact belonged to two people they would never, and had never met. Penny was in a dressing gown; she still had some sweat glistening on her brow. My birth was relatively mishap free, but she still broke a sweat. Mike in his business pants and shirt, with sleeves rolled up. The jacket discarded somewhere in the heat of the moment – She's in labour! She's in labour! – he held her left hand softly in his right, she was tired and delicate. He lightly grasped only her index middle and ring fingers.

They both had one hand placed on the cot, exasperated smiles painted on their faces, this was not nine months, it was more; it was an embodiment of their love. Penny broke from Mike's grip and barely audibly began to cry tears of happiness. It was at this point that Kate, whose name was as blunt as her actions, intervened. She had been working



since six the afternoon before. It was 3 am and, being the well-rehearsed bitch that she was, she would make herself feel better by pointing out Mike and Penny's mistake.

-Mr and Mrs Dolan?

A turn of their heads, how could she ruin this moment? This seamless stitching together of hearts and souls and bodies? Who was this cold-blooded fiend, masked in peach scrubs? Who was this **Kate**?

-That baby's mother has become concerned with the amount of time you are spending with it.

-I am this baby's mother. And I will tell you right now Kate (that K was so hard it was spat out like a poison arrow) that I have no concern about the amount of time I am spending with my child!

-Oh, my apologies, I must have been mistaken in thinking the Dolans weren't the parents of Dylan Klein. Should I tell Mrs Klein she actually gave birth to that Scott child over there in crib four?

-

Their silence said plenty. Mike and Penny walked over to my cot, and there I was, already becoming accustomed to being unconsciously neglected, a forgettable "Who?" delivered with a furrowed brow or feigned expression. Kate returned to her desk with a cold-blooded smile, the blue-lipped bitch.

You see the key to telling this story is to engross your listener. So when I tell it, I would watch their faces, gauge their reactions and really give them what they want – play up or down the role of Kate, play up Mike and Penny's loving glances. Anything to keep them passively consuming my tale. The second they are not 100 percent engrossed in the story, this happens:

-You weren't even a day old! How could you know all this? You must be lying!

And then I've been caught out, the story seems pointless and there's an awkward silence that follows, even if they were pointing out the untruth of the story in a friendly manner. I hate those silences.

So I had been christened, in the most unholy way possible. But christened none-the-less, I now had a caste. I was forgettable. I was no one, and my best friend from the age of six told me this. James was a little insecure, and would have made a good aid worker. I met James on my second day of term two in first grade.

-Hi, I'm Scott.

-Hi, I'm James.

By the end of the day we were both called Juan. When I look back on this first day, and our time together, I am inclined to think that reincarnation is plausible. Juan had an aura of world experience that was not often possessed by six year olds. He seemed embodied by great minds that had come before his. He seemed wise, and lived in a realm beyond the rest of us. In a word: sage. I used to imagine Juan as Geppetto, and everyone else as Pinocchios. He saw the grand strings of the universe being pulled in the slightest puppeteered movement of the playground. I often had theories about Juan. And it was his vision that led to our rebirth as Juan.

-I've nearly forgotten your name already.

-Scott.

-That name doesn't suit you. I bet it is forgotten a lot. You are a wallflower.

As a six-year-old I did not know what this was, but stared expectantly waiting for him to finish this impromptu asphalt psychoanalysis.

-You are a no one, he elaborated. We both are.

Ah! Something I could comprehend. He had implied we were the same, which of course meant one thing. The depth of conversation provided stark contrast to our actions, typical of the energetic children we were – six-year-olds at little-lunch jumping up and down schoolyard stairs for the simple pleasure of jumping. We continued this game, that day, and years after, Juan peaking with a jump up seven stairs in the eleventh grade, I could only ever make it to five.

-We should be friends.

-No. We should be more than friends. We are both no one, but this makes us special no ones. We need special names. More special than Scott or James. We will be Juan, we will both be no-Juans.

-One? Han? Hoo-ahn? Wahn? Won? Wan? Djaan? Waurn?

The words were dribbling out of my mouth, the last drops squeezed from a honey container, lacking definition, shape or identity.

-Juan, he corrected me. J-U-A-N. Juan. It is a Spanish name derived from the Hebrew John.

This made no sense to my underdeveloped six-year-old brain, but I had my first, and only real friend. Juan had taken me under his wing, and unlike everyone else, he revelled in succinct normality and averageness. With Juan, I was no longer a wallflower; I had been plucked from the wall, and was being nervously carried to a first date. I was brought into the real world.

You would think Juan would have excelled in class given his obvious intellect, but it was as if he masked it in order to stay close to me. The day we became Juan, he had

signed a contract with himself, and he would not leave my side, a walking talking breathing conscience, an ever-present voice of reason.

Five years after that first day Juan and I had both received a letter from the Board of Studies, it was the results of the Selective Schools Test, and would play a role in determining the high school we would attend. This test was designed with the purpose of finding people like Juan. People who were above average thinkers, those who thought outside the proverbial box. We had decided to open them together. It was not one of those clichéd “On the count of three” moments that television shows would have you believe precede any action undertaken as a partnership. It was simply another step in our lives that would be shared. We were no one and alone we were together. There was a tearing of envelopes, neither expectant nor cautious; it resembled the opening of a packet of chips.

-I got accepted to Bakers. Crap.

-Me too Juan.

-I don't believe you. Show me your letter!

Again I was too hot-headed. This only happened around Juan. He was the only person around whom I was comfortable enough to allow myself expression that had not been filtered through a self-conscious social sifter. I knew he was lying, he was much smarter than that and Bakers was the lowest ranked of the local selective schools. I grabbed the paper from him and felt immediate guilt.

-What shocks me, Juan said in a very casual manner, is that after five years you believe I would lie to you.

He had a point. But so did I. Juan's letter stated that he had been accepted to Plumping and Seekers Boys as well, both higher ranking schools than Bakers. He assured me

Bakers was his preference regardless, and that his parents would understand. I had never met his parents, but I believed if anyone of our age was capable of informing their parents about such a decision in a coherent and persuasive way, it was Juan. Truth be told, I did have moments when I thought Juan may not have parents at all. That is how reliable a friend he was, always there. Always there. Juan had not lied.

The next day there was a knock at my front door. I always found the front door of this particular house strange. Almost every house has at their front door some window into the outside world, as if front doors had all been designed during some war by a paranoid architect certain that any and every tapping could be bringing not just a visitor, but some unprecedented calamity. Perhaps Poe was involved in the design of front doors... My door allowed for no such vision. There was no peephole, no paned glass, no frosted window through which to spy a raven. As such I approached the door much in the same manner that I had approached yesterday's envelope, blankly. I twisted the metal handle (another strange thing about this door, the handle was placed not to either side, but dead-centre), and drew the curtains to reveal the stage on which Juan would recount the previous evenings proceedings.

-It's done, he said with a tone of finality.

-What's done?

-Bakers. I spoke to my parents and let them know that I will be attending Bakers alongside you.

I wanted to tell Juan that he shouldn't, that it was a waste of his ability to not accept one of the better offers, but I was too selfish and too attached.

High school was much the same as primary school; better for Juan's presence and for our friendship. We had other friends, I won't discount that, we functioned, for the most

part, as regular awkward unsure insecure teenagers, but our connection was never lost, and simply grew stronger and incomparable to that of a bond shared by any other two people. And, as always, Juan was a guide to me.

### **Another Theory About Juan:**

Have you read *Fight Club*, Chuck Palahniuk's book? Or seen the movie? 1996 novel. 1999 film. Violence to serve as a metaphor for the conflict between a generation of young people and the value system of advertising. Edward Norton and co.

My theory is that Juan is Brad Pitt. He came along, with a greater knowledge of everything bigger than Scott Dolan and told me "This is what you are not", plain and simple. So I sit there, and I theorise the possibility that Juan does not exist, that I created him through an ability to be someone by myself. I contemplate the feasibility of the notion that as a figment of my imagination, as the receiving end of so many conversations and as an occupant of so much space and so many days, Juan never existed in the physical realm. Juan was a soap-selling bomb-making punch-throwing single serving friend in the form of a six year old that grew up and never left. Yet.

Once we had finished school Juan and I had moved out together, it seemed logical. We had managed to find a brilliant place just off the park and the bowling club at Stanmore. Sandwiched between two clones of itself stood our shared abode. One townhouse of triplets, number twenty-two, plucked not from obscurity, but a real estate website, and selected as our fortress. The neighbours were nice enough, the one to the left neurotically cleaned his Alfa Romeo 75 every second day – regardless if it had been driven. We had done surprisingly well for ourselves with this find. We were paying \$180 a week each in rent, and that was covering the fact that we had just the two of us in a three-person townhouse, another roommate was realistically never an option.

I never found out what year the house was made, it would have been nice to have known, walking home across the park with my arm drunkenly round a girl's waist, pointing through the trees at the opposite end to the tired sandstone of our home. To have her artificially architecturally inclined, asking "What year was it built?" noticing the old materials. And then with ease I could say *Originally, circa 1910, but there have been some modern upgrades inside*. Our talk would cease the moment the front door had closed, we could drop the charade and just revel in the night that umpteen beers had given us the confidence to have. Waking up on Saturday to the cricket in the park and my favourite ten o'clock sun. The problem wasn't that I never found out what year the house was built, but that, in the darkness of the night, there was no sun to reflect on the sandstone, so girls rarely asked me any architectural questions. Girls were rare. It's a shame really, I enjoyed that little discussion I'd planned inside my head. I told people it was late Federation. This tired sandstone welcomed each of us as we approached. Still yellow in places, moss green in others, and a mixture of brown elsewhere. Grey on the three worn and uneven steps that brought you to the front door.



The tiny three foot wide balcony on the second floor had a decent sized hole in the decking and on the best days a setting sun would send light through the hole, hitting the yellow of the bricks that arched the doorway, and lighting my home in the most inviting way. This sun never made it through the thick canopy of the back garden, but I liked it that way. We had a house that served as an equator, where Juan and I took daily holidays to a scorching front yard summer and a rugged-up back garden winter. We had weather to suit moods. The bathroom and kitchen, as I had told these imaginary girls in my daydream night of passion, were recently renovated. There was one...

Neither Juan nor I had any cooking experience, but a kitchen this good was the perfect arena in which to begin the slow process of building up a repertoire of non-hassle food on students' wages. This kitchen holds a special place in my heart as it is here that I discovered one of my most important vices: tea. As a child tea was in the same category as fish, cooked apples, creamed cheese, soft cheese, blue cheese, pickles, strawberries, cabbage, mushroom, Brussels sprouts, chilli, banana, crab, egg, chives, sultanas, kebabs, mustard, fig, asparagus, sticky date pudding, radish, dates, duck, sour cream, stuffing, mousse, blueberries, jackfruit, pork, green capsicum (bell pepper), canned tuna, any white condiment, olives, all melons excepting watermelon, relish, oyster, onion, pears, plain yoghurt, jelly, mashed potato, pineapple, soy sauce, cucumber, black pudding, mandarins, gravy, red grapes, the sauce known as 'sweet & sour', couscous, brown bread, banana bread, and kumara. Things I had never so much as tried, but had been written off completely as having any chance of making regular appearances in my diet, or anywhere on my plates or in my cups and bowls. I stood by my convictions for many years until, age 18, I had a revolution.

I awoke not to my favourite ten o'clock sun but to a later midday one, half a day wasted. One of the girls that never asked architectural questions returned to my

bedroom from the kitchen carrying two mugs, their contents, black tea with milk, no sugar. The teabags had been removed and lay sopping on my kitchen table awaiting a squeamish hand to pick up their cold limp bodies and discard them properly. I was feeling a little sorry for myself, and very thankful for the cup of coffee presented to me, and it was in this frame of mind that I greedily gulped down half the cup. It was what I needed, warm, easy on the throat, but something was a little off, not as much flavour, odd texture. It was not that I did not like this drink, but I knew it was not the coffee I would have made.

-Did you put soymilk in the coffee? It came out a little more accusatory than I had intended. I had never liked Juan's habit of drinking soymilk. I ironically considered the substance 'unnatural'.

-Had I made some coffee I might have. You had to hand it to her, for a Sunday morning she was pretty quick, and cheeky too.

-Pray tell then, what exact concoction is it that you have me drinking? I played up the pompous diction and delivery too, both of us at this point masking smiles.

-It is tea my dear, and one should learn to watch their tongue in the company of ladies.

Tea. What had I been thinking all these years? This was fantastic. Amazing! No longer would I be left stranded in the wake of a late night, warm drink craving. There was no need to succumb to these vices, drinking a coffee and laying awake wide eyed at night cursing my damaged willpower.

That night I ate like the kind of man that commands a harem. God-like, I ingested. fish, cooked apples, creamed cheese, soft cheese, blue cheese, pickles, strawberries, cabbage, mushroom, Brussels sprouts, chilli, banana, crab, egg, chives, sultanas, kebabs, mustard, fig, asparagus, sticky date pudding, radish, dates, duck, sour cream, stuffing, mousse,

blueberries, jackfruit, pork, green capsicum (bell pepper), canned tuna, any white condiment, olives, all melons (including watermelon), relish, oyster, onion, pears, plain yoghurt, jelly, mashed potato, pineapple, soy sauce, cucumber, black pudding, mandarins, gravy, red grapes, the sauce known as 'sweet & sour', couscous, brown bread, banana bread, and kumara.

Parramatta Road is a two minute-walk across the park from the front door, and from there it's a ten-minute bus trip to the city. People always talk about the uncanny ability of one person to sense another's emotions or experiences. A world apart but totally in sync. Like all those horrible American TV shows about twins who shared some unexplainable bond, the ones that get shown on daytime Australian TV ten years after they are made. Juan and I were barely a fifteen-minute transit apart; maybe that's why I felt such a strong signal.

It was 9:12am and technically speaking, I was late for uni. I'd just left my house, and, allowing time for buses, it would take me twenty minutes to be there, the lecture started at nine. That being said, I would have twenty-eight minutes to indulge in yet another culinary delight that I had discovered since my tea experience broadened my palate. I would savour my bagel and cream cheese and be early for my tutorial. I walked across the park, it was a little overcast, but that's how I liked the days to be when I was going to uni. It wasn't a day wasted inside; I was sheltered from potential rain by a mass of concrete and education.

As I reached the far side of the park, that which was closest to both the bowls club and my bus stop, I suddenly became horizontal. I lay in mid-air, suspended, as the ground, seemingly in slow motion, made its way up to me. Clumps of grass, dirt and rocks threw themselves into my back and the perpetrator of this pain sat innocently in the grass by my right ankle. A cricket ball that would not take the blame and me, Monday

morning's dew seeping through my clothes and my dignity, making me feel colder than I should have on this particular morning. Considering the comically clichéd nature in which I fell, the aftermath was more painful than I could have expected, my stomach began to tighten, to convulse, and I wished for the laughter and applause of a studio audience to pick me up, dust me off, and send me on my way. But they weren't watching. They didn't see me struggle to my hands and knees and cough like a dog between bouts of vomit. I crawled, digits digging into dirt, up to the tap and let the water flow. I lay on my back and let this urban waterfall cascade onto my face and wash away last night's dinner, this morning's breakfast, and a few specks of bile. And then it was over. And as quick as my pain and sickness had escalated it was gone, and despite my wet face, I felt at peace. The whole affair had lasted five minutes, from my slipping on the cricket ball to the last clinging spit of vomit.

Now only twenty-three minutes in which to enjoy my bagel, that was still enough time. A trip to the doctor is unnecessary, the fees were one problem, but the time was another; a whole day wasted in travel and waiting and waiting and travelling. I felt fine now anyway, I concluded that I had just hit my head when I landed, and that's why I had vomited, a minor concussion.

As I approached Parramatta Road I could see my bus leaving the stop before mine, this was a good thing. If you have to run for any public transport, you know your timing has been optimum, there was no time wasted in travel or waiting; it is moments like these that the universe is in sync and the green man at the traffic light that tells me to cross the road agrees. "Perfect timing," he says, "Just in time for your bus you have reached my crossing, the universe likes you today my young friend." The green man was lying.

The bus driver moves to pull out from the curb only to slam on the breaks, screeching to a stop. I had sat down on the last available seat, and it was with such gusto that the bus

ceased to move that the girl that had followed me on was thrown to the floor from her standing position. A whirring of ambulance wails alerts the occupants of the bus as to why we stopped. I see a man in a grey suit and yellow silk tie who had looked distressed at first close his mouth as the ambulance passes by the right hand side of the bus. As he does so he bites his tongue, and silences the abusive questioning of the bus driver's ability that he was about to spit out. I am glad to see this man silenced. We set off on the tail of the ambulance but the traffic does not part like the Red Sea for us. We putter along in first and second gear, stopping and starting, starting and stopping.

When we pull up on Broadway, just outside of university, I notice the ambulance from before has mounted the curb. Rather, I notice an ambulance that has mounted the curb, and assume, recalling the events of my transit, it to be the one which passed the bus I boarded some minutes earlier. This bus. A body in a black bag is being trolleyed into the back of the ambulance and policemen, whose vehicle I cannot see, are clearing back a crowd of students, none of whom are distraught, but all of whom are curious. This is a faceless death, a mass in a black bag; as long as it remains unknown it remains a point of interest. Give death a name and then it will be mourned. I assumed the death to be a heart attack of some kind; there is no blood staining the footpath on which I stand and there is only one body. Within two minutes the scene is cleared and the ambulance and police have left. Had I caught any other bus I would not have even known that this death had occurred.

The next two hours and fourteen minutes comprised an over-creamed bagel, an under-attended tutorial with a guest lecturer from the University of Michigan, an Australian ex-pat by the name of Ross Chambers discussing a theory of literary digression he was calling 'loiterature', and an over-priced bus. I walked back through my front door at just past midday and fell asleep on the couch. I have no idea why uni makes me so tired. I

have had a reasonably eventful round trip that took under three hours, but to be tired enough to require a siesta just seems ridiculous.

### *Knock Knock Knock*

It's a soft knock; I don't know why they didn't use the doorbell. I guess the knock is a little more personal. Come to think of it, I like the knock. I roll over and pick my phone off the floor. It's quarter to five. Feeling refreshed I border on spritely in my approach to the front door. I look through the higher of the two thin glass panels that are to the side of the door. I am greeted by the profile of Markus, our thirty-something gay next-door neighbour. I was always intrigued by adamant Markuses, those that would not let you call them Mark. He is still not looking at the door, though I assume he has heard me approaching to open it.

-Hi Mark, I decide to do some further research into my Markus theory.

-Scott, he pauses, bites his bottom lip, and does not correct me in his usual manner with an exasperated "Mark-US".

-Yes?

I think he is crying, and I have no idea why, or for that matter, why he would come to me. We enjoy a pleasant enough neighbourly repartee, but are far from close. He sniffs; preventing an obviously agitated nose from overflowing in the most dignified way he can manage and thrusts a slightly damp, and very crumpled, newspaper into my arms. With one more sniff he tilts his head, pirouettes and walks briskly from my yard, turning at stiff right angles back into his garden. Markus loses his composure five steps from his open front door, and he does the home stretch with hands covering his face. The sound of a slamming door ends with a staccato a very strange thirty-seconds of neighbourly relations.

My fingers seep into the newspaper and smooth out the page that has been tossed at me.

It is from *MX*, this afternoon's edition. And then I see why Markus was so dramatic.

### **Seppuku in Sydney**

The ancient Japanese ritual of seppuku was used for a suicide committed this morning.

James Chattley, 19, committed suicide shortly after 9:00am this morning at the University of Technology Sydney, where he was a first year student.

UTS Vice-Chancellor and President Ross Milbourne said, "We are unsure why James decided on our bathrooms as the location for this sad act."

Police are still investigating the matter, and said that no letter was found with the body.

Nima Hachigo, an international studies student and PHD candidate in the university's Asian studies school observed, "The seppuku was performed quite accurately, using a sword for personal disembowelment."

My legs moved on their own accord. I was vomiting in the bathtub when I noticed a note on the sink, Juan's toothbrush playing the role of a paperweight. I picked it up. It was so brief that I could take it all in in a glance

*Juan,*

*I'm far from asking you to clean this dread.*

*But quiet, zip it: We wax, we wane.*

*Juan.*

I vomited again. Bile stuck in my stubble and tears tried desperately to navigate their way through the mess on my face, trying to escape the thousands more that chased them down. I cried seas and oceans. And the drain in the middle of my newly renovated,

white and blue tiled bathroom floor drank the sea. And I felt the cold of the tiles. And I was sweating. And I slept.



When I woke up the note from Juan was unrecognisable. My tears and vomit had been joined by urine from my poor attempt at sleep and had rendered Juan's last words a diluted mess of ink. I felt no guilt in throwing away the letter. It was by no means a perversion of justice, I was sure it had been Juan's writing, and it gave no insight into his reasons. After I had flushed the note down the toilet I collapsed into the bath, still fully clothed, into the previously pools of vomit that had since dried, and I turned on the taps. I was no longer capable of crying, I let the faucets do their work. And I sat in that bath until the water turned cold, until day became night, and until I sensed the sun rise once more. And then I took action.

I looked in the mirror and saw a new man. No vomit, no tear stains, and no beard. Clean shaven, suit clad and clasping money I walked out the front door on Wednesday morning. Clear in my intentions it was less than a half hour before I found myself on the footpath in front of 35 Regent St Chippendale, looking at the entry to the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages. Walking across the foyer of the building my leather shoes made the prominent footstep sounds I had only ever heard in movie soundtracks, and I took this as a good sign. \$173 later I left the building with the same purposefully audible footsteps, and the knowledge that I was twenty-four hours away from feeling a lot better.

I returned home with the same decisiveness that I had left. These actions were not my own. I was being driven by the task at hand. The TV would have to be moved, so would the couch, there was no question. I carelessly pushed the entertainment unit to the left, further along the wall. I was a man on a mission and it was a miracle nothing broke. I moved to the opposite wall, squatted down and explored the bottom of the couch with my hands. Finding an adequate grip for both hands I stood up, lifting one end of the couch with me, and dragged it to the blank wall that the entertainment unit

had previously occupied. Turning the couch I let it drop and pushed it back against the wall. I was a man on a mission. I walked back to the where the couch had been, I was so full of purpose! And I drew the curtains. And then I sat on the couch and looked out of the window. Never has anyone stared with such intent, has any one single person been so devoted to the task of simply watching a suburban window. But I had purpose, I had reason, I was a man on a mission.

At 11:33 the next morning, my mission was complete. I did not sleep. It could not be risked. I was running on an empowering cocktail of fear, necessity and suspense. I went to the mailbox and retrieved the contents that had just been deposited within. I walked back inside, sat on the couch and sorted through the three objects I now held, knowing one of them was extremely important. An envelope for Juan, I'm pretty sure this contained a Christmas card he had bought off eBay. It was eight months away, but Juan had found this Christmas card so hilarious he had to buy it. He showed me it on the night he put through the payment, amidst bouts of laughter. It showed Santa drinking a glass of milk and perusing a letter that read:

*Dear Santa,*

*If you leave a new bike under the tree, I will give you the antidote to the poison in your milk.*

*Timmy*

I had found it mildly humorous, but nowhere near as funny as Juan did, and was worried that I would be the recipient of the card come Christmas, and would have to put on some laughter for him.

The next item of mail was a pizza coupon addressed: "Dear Resident".

Finally, I come to the letter I had been most concerned about. It is marked with a stylised green tree within a blue triangle, the emblem of the New South Wales Registry of Births, Deaths, and Marriages. I open the letter more cautiously than the one containing the results of my high school placement. I open this letter more carefully than any letter I have opened before, and this is not easy. I have no fingernails, I have bitten them off since I was a child, and I now try to delicately slide the stubby ends of my fingers under the corner of the adhesive strip on the back of the letter. It tears. Shit. I try again. More tearing. Curse my bad habits. I can't take these risks.

Tweezers in hand I begin the process again, and in ten minutes I have an opened envelope in front of me, the contents of which have survived the ordeal unscathed. I unfolded the piece of paper that lay inside and carried it with me to the fridge.

Dead centre.

This paper was placed, held to the fridge by a magnet shaped like a hamburger. Content with my actions I returned to my couch, and to my staring out the window, happily knowing that I was now officially, and legally "Juan".

I sat there for that entire day, doing little more than referring to myself as Juan internally as I stared, head cocked, out the window.

-Hello Juan.

-Hello.

-I see you are staring out a window Juan.

-You have keen observation skills.

-Why thank you, Juan.

Always polite, always finishing every statement with Juan. Each internal conversation pouring a little more cement onto my new identity. Setting me in stone as Juan. Hello Medusa.

Friday came with a few more tasks, necessary in my transformation from Scott Dolan to Juan. There was a driver's license, an ING Direct bank account, and a Medicare card to be taken care of; all legal documents had to be changed. I pulled on jeans and a plain grey t-shirt. I couldn't for the life of me find socks, and as such pulled a pair of black Volleys uncomfortably onto bare feet. I then considered the disgusting notion of that expression. The manner in which it devalued life. I walked out the front door for the first time as Juan and my five o'clock shadow was not enough to dim the bright light of this particular morning sun. I wished rapidly for a facial eclipse. I had never felt so claustrophobic, a world sans-Juan was an abusively imposing one.

I found comfort in tunnel vision and arrived at the bus stop on Parramatta Road through a recall of steps rather than a conscious navigation. Once sitting I realised I had actually crossed the road to arrive here and retrospectively expressed concern to myself about the danger of crossing such a street. At this hour. With this traffic. In my state. The heat was worse than the light now and boiled me to the point of considering the likelihood of my own dehydration. As I sat blistered and boiled, red-faced and anxiously crying sweat through pores I saw my bus approach.

Don't be full. Don't drive past. Quick, put out an arm, signal your intentions to board. Don't stick your arm out too far. Don't get hit by the bus. Watch your footing. Watch the drain. Tunnel vision. Three steps to the driver's seat. I look down and see the coin pouch of my wallet in crystal clear high definition wide screen. Shit I hope I have enough money. Fifty cents. Twenty cents. Twenty cents. I have made it. Pan up to the

bus driver. Oh shit what is my line? My line! Fuck. Fuck! My line. His expectant eyes force their way through the silence. He knows his line. My jaw unlocks and descends.

-Broadway... Student.

-Ninety cents.

Bang. Bang. BANG. The coins ungracefully collide as they farewell my hand and meet his. Another painful pause as the ticket is printed. Screaming as a hairy hand that is hugged by a Thai-bought 'Rotex' watch rips it from its birth place, tearing its serrated paper umbilical cord and stuffing it into my sweaty hands. I am not fit to be a parent. I see a world of feet as I shuffle past four rows of seats and collapse into mine. Eyes closed, I feel a grunt as the bus struggles to make the leap from first to second. If I can't see you, you can't scare me. I pray someone else pushes the red button to signal the driver. Surely I am not the only one alighting at Broadway. I consider the notion of praying when one doesn't believe in God. There must be something more useful I could be doing. I hear a bell and exhale loudly enough to garner attention from a passenger sitting adjacent to me. I turn my head faster then she turns hers. We will not make eye contact.

Three steps from the bus driver to the pavement. Do not trip on that gutter. Do not graze elbows. Tunnel vision and I saw my feet and street signs. Up Broadway. Pitt Street. Left foot. Right foot. Right Eddy Avenue. Feet. Left Elizabeth Street. There's gum in front of me. It is everywhere. I am walking on concrete and gum.

Do not stick yourself to my shoe gum. You are not welcome here. Successfully evade gum. Cigarette butts, I can see you are still smouldering. Do not burn me cigarette butts. I am not wearing my socks. My shoes are so very tired. They have holes in their souls

and soles and I do not want blisters on the bottoms of my feet. Let me pass in peace I beg. I will not smoke your brothers and sisters I bargain.

I arrive at 260 Elizabeth Street. My clothes are soaked and I look up to a taunting blue sky. It has not rained. I have. I look up at a pink-brown building with highly reflective windows and am finally grateful for this blinding sun. It means I can't see me. Doors slide open and I slide in.

A machine demands I take a number and I comply. I cannot see the point in arguing. I am sceptical about this plastic RTA seat that I am confined to. I see it as a safer option than standing, but am worried about what my couch will think when I get home. I have sat on a total of three seats outside of my house today and this is the worst one. This plastic is unforgiving. I should be stern. My spine should speak its mind, "Listen plastic moulded object, do not harm me. I am important. Do not force me into a room to wait for a chiropractor. This wait is enough. Let us cooperate." Perhaps my spine needs its own Juan. My spine is spineless. My spine is silent. I sit in pain. My pain is subdued by a red LED light that displays my number.

34

I walk to the counter. Tunnel vision. My spine glaring at the seat we have just parted. I am greeted by an upbeat Sarah. Why is someone so young and upbeat working here? What is your ulterior motive Sarah? Why are you so happy-go-lucky? Do you not know it is only nine in the morning? Do you know Juan is dead? What are you hiding from me Sarah?

-Hello, I would like to get a new license printed.

-Change of address? You never see people with green eyes. Sarah has green eyes and I cannot bear to look at them.

-No, change of name. If I do not look at Sarah's extremely personable face this conversation is robotic and distanced. I hand over my change of name certificate and my old license.

-That will be twenty-one dollars. It will take about five minutes if you would like to take a seat?

I nod. My speaking role is over. I turn and out of habit return to the seat from before. Hello, old friend. He is menacing and I do not allow him the victory of scaring me into the laps of his neighbours. I brace myself and sit. I sit hard. And I force myself with a new gravity onto the plastic. When I depart to pay for my new license I sense the chair breath a sigh to be relieved of me and my spine is grateful for this small victory. But the chair is patient. I pull out my wallet in wide-screen and search for the money. Ten dollars on the desk. Ten dollars on the desk. A one dollar coin can only make half of the distance and drops to the floor. The RTA erupts and I hear the loud guffaw of the chair. I had won the battle but he had won the war. I descend kilometres to the unforgiving RTA tiles and rise in a haze. I grasp my new license. I clutch at my change of name certificate. I am evicted by the force of the laughter and find myself struggling to breathe sitting on the ninth of eleven steps leading from the RTA to the street.

I hope that the gum and cigarettes remember our earlier discussion. I stand slowly and breathe in countless toxins. A mostly fine day with a chance of an innumerable amount of respiratory diseases. I decide I will limit my breathing. I bid farewell to my peripheries and begin the expedition home through a self-imposed tunnel.

I fall out of the bus at 10:16 am and am unwelcomed by a traffic congested Parramatta Road. More petrol fumes and speeding cars. More people with knives, people needing money. People not needing me. I am not immune to toxins. I am no good at Frogger. I am no good at fighting. I have no money. I have nothing to give. I run. I breathe too

heavily. I must stop this. I run forty steps and breathe. Forty steps and breathe forty steps and breathe. Forty.

Steps.

And.

Breathe.



I wake up on my sandstone steps. The door is opened with a relative silence and my vision widens as I enter an abode of familiarity. I run to the couch and my back and arse beg forgiveness. Apology accepted. I slide deep into a forgiving realm of leather comfort. After letting the stress of the morning soak into the cushions of the couch I retrieve my laptop from my bedroom. It is a strange and alien place, this bedroom. It does not take long to disassociate oneself with a place. On returning to the comfort of the couch I nestle within it and log onto my bank account. My computer has become the busy street. So many programmes. So much requesting my attention. Recalling my login password was a marathon of mental exertion. What if they thought I was hacking into my own account? I was taking so long. Two incorrect password entries. Don't time out the account. You are not Scott Dolan. There is no inconvenience. Come on Juan. A mimetic cave search is barely fruitful. Mango13. Finally. I hate mangoes. Fruit gives life or sin. I am Scott. I am Juan. I am Juan.

The computer hurts my eyes; this screen must be damaging my retinas. I complete the process in thirty-second bursts of concentration. The heat of the battery burns my thighs and counts down to frustrated relinquishing of this metallic, electronic, networking time bomb. I finish my task within the time limit. Juan Juan has \$1236.04 in his ING bank account.

I plan an expedition beyond the realms of the couch. I do not want to see the laptop for a long time; I climb the stairs to my bedroom. Stowing the laptop under the bed calms me slightly and I return to the couch. This room has become my life and I am grateful for its geographical location, so close to the front door. The first room I enter when I arrive home, that is if I ever have to leave. It was an interior designer's worst nightmare.

I had reduced it to THE COUCH, the entertainment unit, which housed the dormant television which patiently waited, full of scary stories that would not be told. Beneath it

sat the DVD player, growing fat from its lack of exercise. He had not been played since Juan's death and had previously been on a strict nightly regime. Atop the DVD player sat two discs from the Season 4 *Scrubs* set. Beneath these the doors lay closed. Protecting me from the other DVDs no doubt angry at the lack of attention they had been receiving. The television and DVD shared a power socket with the toaster; it had been transferred from the kitchen and sat on the floor accompanied by a half loaf of bread, wrapped tightly to retain freshness, a single butter knife, a warm container of margarine, and a deceased looking container of vegemite. I had moved the plant that sat in the corner out of the room. I didn't trust him one bit. And as such the room had become nearer self-sufficient.

I had been dismissing the questions that arose in my mind about the wasted rent money if I were to only use one room of the house. Tired from my involved and assaulted morning I lay down and the couch whispered positive requiems that lulled me to closed eyes and a dead mind. Previous to Juan's death I had never slept completely still.

The biggest problem caused by the renaming process came in the form of my Medicare card. I was only nineteen, and had only moved out of home relatively recently. I had to go through my parents in order to get my name removed from the family card, and obtain my own card with my own name on the front.

After every ring of the phone, I felt like hanging up, I always kept my phone on private number in case of situations like this; I could end this call before it began, and no one would know. No name left. No number. No Scott. I'm Juan. One more ring I told myself, one more and if she doesn't pick up then so be it, I'll just forgo this nation's wonderful healthcare scheme, I don't care. And then she answered.

-Hello?

-Penny, it's me.

-Oh Scott! Me and your father have been so worried. You didn't answer my calls after we heard about James. I've told you, an SMS does not suffice as enough contact. You're the only nineteen-year-old son I've got.

Penny genuinely sounds glad to hear from me, you'd think if she was that worried she would've driven the half hour to check up on me.

I interject.

-I'm the only son you've got, and I'm out of your hair now, so you've got to learn to relax and not worry about me.

I hear her start to crack, quiet but desperate breaths pulled in.

-Of course I am going to worry. James killed himself for Christ's sake! And all I get from you is an SMS saying 'I'm fine.' I've been worried sick. I couldn't sleep. You can be so bloody selfish!

-What do you mean Christ's sake? You're not even religious.

Penny is really crying now, not making the slightest effort to hide it, and the second these words leave my mouth I regret it. I shouldn't have pushed.

-Now is not the fucking time to get smart with me Scott. It is not the time.

Penny starts to pull herself together. A few louder deeper breaths come through from her end of the phone. She begins again.

-How is uni? I'll put your father on the phone?

-It's all fine. Listen, I don't really have time to talk to Mike right now, I actually called for a reason.

I worded that wrong.

-Talking to your parents isn't a good enough reason for you?

Penny sounds incredulous. She has it in her head that I have been going through some process of ostracising myself from the family. I hear those same deep breaths as Penny composes herself.

-Fine, we won't talk now. What do you need?

The tone of the conversation sounds like that between dealer and junky; it disgusts me.

-I need you to take my name off the Medicare card, so that I can have my own. It will be easier now that I've moved out. And we don't use the same doctor any more. So yeah, it will be much easier.

I should have stopped talking a long time ago.

-What is the real reason Scott? Are you on drugs? Do you have STDs? What?

Only a mother could jump to so many conclusions so quickly, and I am not in the mood.

-It's STI Mum.

I don't call her Penny so she realises the actuality of my faux-seriousness.

-STD is politically incorrect now.

-So that's it? My only son sleeps with cheap strumpets and has syphilis?

-Fuck, Mum. No. I changed my name and need to update all my legal documents. Okay? So I need to change the name on the Medicare card and decided I may as well get my own while I'm at it.

My honest response has sobered her anger and accusations momentarily. Her tone drops from hysterical.

-You changed your name? To what? What about Dolan? Your father will be crushed.

-Mike won't give a shit, it's not like this family has any heritage, we're as plain and average as every other Australian three-piece. You couldn't even recognise your own baby at the hospital remember?

-Scott! Enough of that horrible story.

Penny is crying again.

-You know we love you.

It is an odd choice of words, I never questioned their love.

-Now what did you change your name to?

-Juan Juan.

-For fuck's sake! I am coming round. I thought you had grown out of that childish rubbish.

I had to applaud Penny for three reasons at this point. Firstly, she hung the phone up; no 'goodbye', no 'see you soon', just a no bullshit plastic banging of receiver onto phone. She occasionally had sass. Secondly, she had said fuck instead of Christ, it really added some gravity to the situation. Sure, I regretted thinking so later, but at the time Penny just seemed cool. And thirdly, she never paused to question whether or not I was lying. She just accepted it and decided on a plan of action. I don't know if it speaks to her character or mine that such an action was accepted as having happened so easily, but the decisiveness of her actions reiterated my new identity as Juan.

I sat on the couch and I waited. I had spent so long on this couch, shared so much with it, that every time I stood up became harder, and every time I sat down I grew further attached to it, slowly spreading my roots under its cushions, into the tired springs

wrapping them around the short wooden stumps it called legs. Together we sat and we waited.

Since Juan's death I had done little more than sit on this couch. So while Penny took longer than expected I was not sure if she was genuinely taking a long time, or if my perception of such things had been warped due to the excessive hours I spent staring at this blank wall and bland window. I heard a knock and opened the door, Penny looked rushed. A beige pantsuit gave her the appearance of the liberated 1970s' woman, off to work for a lesser wage than her male-counterpart in an office that still allowed you to smoke indoors. Her handbag slung down from her shoulder and she was holding a business card. By comparison I looked considerably less professional. I stood in an open doorway wearing grey thigh-length cotton boxers that had 'JUAN' scribbled on them in a kindergarten scrawl with black permanent marker. This name-tagging of undergarments had been enough to force a smile from me. My first since Juan's death. Something in Penny's actions gave away her disapproval of my ensemble.

-Put some pants on please Scott. A shirt, too, perhaps?

It wasn't actually a question, I could tell from her tone I had little choice in the matter.

As I went in to the next room I could hear her exasperated exhaling, breathing out a toxic combination of carbon dioxide and stress. She tapped her foot impatiently on my sandstone doorstep. As I walked back into the room, eyes adjusting to the alien outdoor sunlight, I saw an impatient silhouette with one arm raised above its head, grasping the doorframe. 'Let's go,' it said in Penny's voice.

I got into the passenger seat of Penny's car and regressed to that six-year old I had always been without Juan. Scared, insecure and lacking control, always being pushed and pulled in directions about which I knew nothing. I heard the engine grumble as the

car pulled out from the curb. I had yet to fasten my seatbelt and cursed aloud for Penny driving off in such a manner without first asking. If we had crashed I was certain to have died. I locked the door and tried to open it once I had done so. The business card appeared below my nose, Penny was handing it to me. She had been holding it there for sometime and now needed to change gears, giving up on the hope that I would take it from her she let it drop to my lap as she dropped down to second to take a tight left turn. I turned it over slowly, my arse uncomfortable on a seat other than my couch and my attention as such somewhat distracted. I was careful not to paper cut my fingers. Oh how they sting.

**Dr Matthew Gleeson**

B.Psych(Hons); D.C.P; MAPS.

9661 2122

[Mgleeson@gleesonassociates.com](mailto:Mgleeson@gleesonassociates.com)

I choose not to ask, inquire or argue. Penny had organised this and there was little I could do to change her mind, especially trapped in this sixty-kilometre-an-hour metal cell. This was why Penny had taken so long to arrive, and she obviously thought this would help matters. As we sat in silence I read and re-read that card, with my eyes and the tips of my fingers. I felt its clean-corners softening from their hard-right angles into overworked caving curves. Curves that would not slice. I saw the dirt and oil from my hands sully the crisp whiteness of the cardboard and thought of how a total stranger would soon justify a mental process of raping and pillaging my mind with a framed

certificate signed by someone who I had never heard of. It seems a little voyeuristic doesn't it? That he can climb in one ear sift through my things, mess up the carefully organised clutter of my filing cabinet, re-wire all my little thought processes, climb back out, and have the nerve to charge me money. He'd tinker with my little grey cells. The car stopped. Penny reached over me and struggled to open the passenger door.

-You are not sitting in here. Don't be difficult, I've organised this appointment for you so just get in there. Why are you locking yourself in anyway? You are not a child anymore.

She paused after this last comment. Would a grown man change his name so ridiculously? We all deal with grief differently. I saw her reasoning written across her face and witnessed her shake her head slightly, and in doing so saw her shake off any potential thoughts that sided with my actions. I unlocked the door myself, having grown a little uncomfortable at having a pair of forty-year old breasts rubbing against my chest as she heaved, out of breath, struggling to force me out of her car. She really should have quit smoking by now. I stood with my hand resting on the frame of the door, poised to close it and unsure of what to say. We both looked just off centre of one another's eyes, a gaze that summed up the uncertainty of the situation and I decided it was best to say nothing. I turned up the corners of my mouth slightly, widening my eyes, pulling my lips in between my teeth, raised my eyebrows and made sure that my face read *Here we go... I guess* and with that I closed the door, turned, and approached the stairs that led into the building that housed Dr Gleeson's office.

Walking through double glass doors I entered the foyer. Relieved to find it empty and well laid out, I approached the board next to the elevator and scanned it for Dr Gleeson's name. Level 2. I pushed the required button next to the elevator and as I waited considered how hard it would have been to put the address and level of his



practice on the business card. What happens if I got lost? If I had neither the credit nor the money for a pay phone in order to call the number on the business card? It seemed careless. Not hypothetical lack of credit but his death trap of a business card. This X-less treasure map. Two metallic doors opened as a skyward arrow lit up in dulled orange. A stairless coffin opened its mouth and awaited my entry. He was hungry, and I was a coward.

Out of breath I reached the top of the stairs. The couch must have been feeding on my fitness, I considered it a fair trade and was grateful for the comfort it provided in return. I walked down the carpeted hallway, and found Dr Gleeson's offices on my right hand side about half way down. Pulling on a door that clearly read push I decided it best to flee the scene and return in two minutes time. Risking punctuality, something I would have normally placed great value on, so that I would not have to engage in the awkward conversation with whoever lay on the other side of that door. Who would make a bad joke about my shortcomings in the field of door-opening, possibly sighting a Gary Larson comic while doing so. Pushing my way through the door I had a sense of accomplishment that was so ephemeral I did not even have a chance to say goodbye. A brand new room. Another chair that wasn't my couch. And another person behind a counter.

-Hi, I'm Juan. Penny Dolan booked me an appointment.

-Penny Dolan booked an appointment for a Mr Scott Dolan?

The receptionist had yet to raise her head and I hated both of my selves for being in this situation.

-Uh. Yeah. That's me too I guess.

She receives this news as casually as one would receive the time, had they, just prior, requested it from a stranger at the train station.

-You're late.

She is still yet to look at me and I drip apologies that roll down my forehead but don't escape my mouth. Sweating silence. Finally she looks up and breaks it. Red framed glasses clash dangerously with her green eyes, I am not sure if it is good or bad. Why do so many people have green eyes now?

-I am only joking. Don't stress.

I laugh at the irony internally; don't stress? Can this woman even see me? I am not sure if such a casually humorous demeanour is well suited to a receptionist job in a psychiatrist's office, but I keep this information to myself.

-I will take you through to his office now.

I remember nothing of the waiting room. Stress and fear induced tunnel vision refuses to allow me the freedom of perception. I follow the receptionist through a wooden door that seems out of place for reasons I cannot even fathom. Her skirt sits low on her hips. Her hips roll perfectly off the lowest region of her back.

That first meeting went quickly, and did not breach the topic of Juan's death, though I assumed Penny had filled Dr Gleeson in on the situation. So he sat on that knowledge in his tan slacks (people like Dr Gleeson don't wear 'pants'), comfortable looking sky-blue shirt (comfortable looking shirt-blue eyes) and olive green pullover. He was happy to call me Juan, and spent that first hour just asking me questions about my life.

-What is your favourite movie?

-What are you studying?

- Can you tell me about your favourite restaurant?
- What is your earliest memory involving an animal?
- What was the last dream you remember?
- Do you see yourself as the skydiving type – why/why not?
- What is your proudest athletic achievement?
- If you could live in any other country, which would you choose?
- Of the five senses, which is your favourite?

Dr Gleeson made a point of slipping my name into sentences.

- That sounds like a fantastic holiday Juan.
- So Juan, do you play an instrument?
- That's funny, Juan, I also enjoyed her first book more.

I had experienced people like this before, and they make you feel important. Even if they are not buttering you up to recover information about your opinions on your best friend's recent suicide, every time they use your name in a sentence your chest swells a little more. The next three visits occurred throughout a fortnight and punctuate marathons spent on my couch. The twenty-four hour day had ceased to exist. I no longer worked, I had not been to uni since Juan's death and was eating a loaf of bread a day, toasted with margarine and vegemite. Dr Gleeson told me there was a noticeable increase in the rosiness of my cheeks, and made some mention of Vegemite's 'vitamins' (using the British inflection).

So now you know how I got here. And I now sit here, stomach full on a five-slice breakfast, twenty-eight minutes into my fifth visit to Dr Gleeson. In the last few visits

we had been engaging in some hypotheticals. I refer to them as hypothetical for two reasons. Firstly, some were hypothetical due to their impossible nature:

-If you were a car...

-I want you to assume, Juan, that you now have six limbs...

-If you no longer needed to eat food to ensure survival, how would you use the time previously set aside for meals?

And the majority of the others fell into the hypothetical category due to the fact that they conflicted with the lifestyle I had happily ‘condemned’ (Penny’s word, not mine) myself to since Juan’s death. If Dr Gleeson proposed we discuss a potential situation in a workplace, or at uni, or with a new social acquaintance, I had difficulty in constructing such a situation in my head as it was not cohesive with the couch-and-vegemite-centric universe in which I dwelled.

-Juan?

He tugs me out of my head and redirects my attention to a canned tin of tomatoes that he is holding. It is placed between his two perfectly horizontal hands and if he had flashed his million-dollar smile you could have been forgiven for thinking that this was an infomercial. That it’s 2 am and you drunkenly flick on the television and this man is selling you this can of tomatoes, that for a limited time only came with a second can absolutely free, and that he was making all his money on postage and handling. I can’t afford four easy instalments I think, and those tomatoes won’t go well on vegemite toast. And I don’t have a can-opener and that particular can does not appear to have a ring pull. And even if it did the likelihood that tomato juice would flick off the lid when I opened it is quite high, and then I will have stained a shirt. So if the can has a ring pull I have to buy a new shirt, and if it does not, I have to buy a can opener, both of which

necessitate me going back to work in order to afford such luxuries. And then once the can is open the serrated metal edges of the lid pose an opportunity to cut myself. And then I would not be able to determine between blood and tomato juice, leaving either a product or protruding digit ruined. And once this dilemma is approached the ruination of my vegemite toast has become a near-certainty.

-Juan? Dr Gleeson is pulling me back again.

-Sorry Matt.

-That is quite alright, he says and I know he means it.

-Tell me exactly what goes through your head when you look at this can of tomatoes.

The tin is now placed on the desk in front of him. It looks lonely amongst the well-organised artefacts of Dr Gleeson and I tell him this. I then recite the story of the infomercial, adding that it really required him to be holding the can in *that exact manner* (i.e. placed between his two perfectly horizontal hands) for it to make any sense.

-Juan, he pauses and let's out a slight chuckle, my chest swells a little and I say hello to his dental campaign pearly whites, I think I may be making some headway here.

-Could you please excuse me for five minutes?

I agree and I pass the time trying to calculate how much money I am being cheated out of through this polite acceptance of his request. I was never great at maths and surprise myself with the rapidness in which I reach the correct amount. Assuming he takes exactly five minutes I will have wasted fifteen dollars. But he has only taken two and I have finished my equations. The next four minutes are spent debating whether or not it is worth requesting this money back. I could suggest it semi-jovially at first, gauge his

reaction and go from there? It would save me enough money to pay for about eight days worth of bread.

Dr Gleeson walks back into his office carrying a plain white t-shirt. He calmly passes his framed certificates, tickets to charge fares, on his way back to his seat and apologises for the delay as he sits down. His manner of sitting belies the otherwise youthful demeanour he displays. Both hands reach down, open-palms making contact first, grasping the arms of the chair. He then eases himself down slowly, the height dropping revealed in the angles of his elbows. He exhales throughout the entire descent.

When the leather of his seat meets the cotton of his slacks he is once more injected with youth, it shoots through his veins igniting his eyes and sending his hands up energetically to hold the white shirt in plain view.

-I want you to tell me exactly what goes through your head when you look at this white t-shirt Juan.

The 'exactly' is once again emphasised. I keep nothing in my head this time. Thoughts drop from the cave in which they are created and cascade out my mouth.

-Well once again there is the tomato problem. A shirt that white is prime for a red staining. That leads right back to wasteful nature we already discussed. Even if I tried to clean the stain off that would require soaking it, which would require me to be touching wet clothes for an extended period of time, which just wouldn't do. A shirt like that also lends itself to be accidentally worn backwards. I can hardly tell the difference between front and back, and that would just be plain embarrassing. I haven't really been wearing clothes apart from our visits, you know, Matt? My couch doesn't really have a dress code.

Dr Gleeson knows. He lets out a short laugh that acknowledges the fact that I made an attempt at humour, but doesn't commit to any form of appreciation of the joke.

Dr Gleeson then does something extremely out of character; he breaks eye contact. He looks away for a second, and tilts his head slightly to the left and then lets it bounce back to its previous position. He nods slightly and then brings his eyes once more to meet mine. Blue on blue. The gaze draws me in, and I feel as if I am consuming his actions. I hear the slap of saliva as he parts his lips to speak.

-Juan, have you ever heard of erythrophobia? Neophobia? Sitophobia?

-I have not.

-They are the fear of the colour red, new things, and food respectively. What I believe has happened is that since Juan's death you have regressed into an immediate loop that was relatively safe and controllable, our visits being the exception. And without Juan's friendship, or guidance, or assistance, or how ever it was you felt that he helped you, you have developed not simply a fear of the unknown, but a fear of something a little more complex.

-Go on. I say it cautiously, without intent, it's almost snarky.

-Polyphobia.

-               ? I express a question with a face.

-Fear of many things. In your case, near everything.

-Okay. (It's all I can manage).

-I hope you don't consider me rude for asking, Juan, but have you any other plans for this afternoon, apart from the couch?

-I do not.

There is the slightest hint of defeat in the tone of my voice. Dr Gleeson's grand plans have already managed to belittle my busy schedule of couch sitting.

-Okay, perfect. Here's what we are going to do Juan. I am going to get Jess, my receptionist, to make you some vegemite toast and you can have lunch here in my office. In the mean time, I am going to construct a list of fears and dates for you.

Dr Gleeson does not wait for a response. He pivots with purpose and departs heel to toe towards the door. After four previous visits I had still not learned the receptionist's name.

When Jess enters she carries four pieces of vegemite toast on a white tray and a glass of orange juice. Conversely she doesn't carry herself well. Scuffed-toe flats shuffle a grey skirt and white top into the room. She has an amazing smile and I still cannot work out why. There is no way in hell I'm going near that orange juice, too much vitamin C can actually be a burden on your immune system, and the citrus would sting my eyes... I say none of this to Jess, and do my best to appear appreciative. I give the same lip bitten smile and hope that it doesn't scream *I will not touch your contaminated vegemite and poisoned orange juice*; I hope it says *I appreciate your hospitality*.

Whatever it is that Jess reads from my face, she correctly assumes it best not to hand the food directly to me, and instead places it on Dr Gleeson's desk. I nod thanks and she departs, walking with considerably less purpose than Dr Gleeson, perhaps it is because her skirt is sitting too low on her hips, perhaps it is because she departs only to return to sitting bored at the front desk. I am resolute in my decision to not consume what she has left on the desk for me. So I sit. I stare. Vegemite toast does not make for interesting conversation, or visual stimulation, but is so very reliable. I don't know how much time has passed by the time Dr Gleeson finally returns, I decide to be upbeat regardless.



-Hi Matt. I flash my imperfect teeth.

He ignores the untouched food and juice, a gesture for which I cannot thank him enough. He smiles too, flashing his perfect smile.

-Tomorrow it begins. The tone of his voice is not menacing or foreboding, it is matter-of-fact enough to instil a little drive, a fleeting notion of courage in me.

Dr Gleeson walks towards me.

Heel toe.

Heel toe.

Heel toe.

And places a bundle of envelopes approximately two inches thick in my lap. An ochre-red rubber band binds them together. I look at the top envelope and see tomorrow's date in the same regal blue ink and professional penmanship that has graced the back of my previous *Your next appointment is:* cards. I look up at Dr Gleeson; I think I am hoping to gain a little encouragement from his expression, though I can't be sure. I see that he is still holding something else and as my eyes fall on it, it falls into my hands.

-A diary, Juan. For you.

I am quite sure he would never admit it, but I believe that Dr Gleeson chose this particular diary for the similarities it shared with the couch that I now sat on. The brown leather. The high chocolate stitching. The scent of something that was bigger than the middle class. It was like a first Christmas, all grown up, clasping gifts I didn't quite understand to my chest. These weren't wrapped, and they weren't something I wanted, but something I needed. Maybe they were both.

-I will see you when you have completed the diary Juan. That will be in one month's time. Perhaps you will not take so long to realise the irrationality of these fears, if that is the case, please, call me. Do you think you can do it?

-I will do my best Matt.

-If you truly do your best I have no doubt you can complete this Juan.

That was the other thing about Dr Gleeson he is one of few people that can spit out one of those motivationally-leaning clichéd lines, with the most off-the-cuff delivery, and have it hit home, without the receiving party even flinching. Throughout my school life, sporting events, and other day to day challenges I had probably heard that line delivered in one form or another at least 100 times, 'If you do your best you are sure to win/pass/impress...' Dr Gleeson was the only one I thought I believed.

-One more thing Juan.

The real Dr Gleeson had entered my day dreaming, shaken hands with himself. I hunt composure and respond.

-Yes?

Dr Gleeson extends a hand, another envelope, unmarked. He sees the question on my face before I am required to shape the words.

-It's a few notes on the art of note taking. It should help you get in the swing of things with your diary.

### **Theory About Juan #3:**

Just as I had conceived that he was embodied by some that had come before him, that had bestowed upon him the years of life experience and knowledge he possessed from such an early age, I had also conceived his spirit's placement elsewhere in the world. It was in Dr Gleeson. It was plausible enough; I was comfortable with Dr Gleeson, he shared a similar amount of knowledge and desire to assist me, he called me Juan. Perhaps Juan had just made another sacrifice, he could have bestowed all his knowledge on a small young mind, and had a greater period of time with which to wield it, but instead he chose to occupy this George Clooney-esque graciously attractive salt-and-peppered cranium, as it meant he could help me. Bless you, Juan.

The door to Dr Gleeson's office closes behind me, and as I hear it click into place, I go into the auto-pilot that has managed to get me home the last four times. My eyes adjust to comfort and perform the kind of heroin-induced pupil swell at the familiar sight of my couch. I am home and have nineteen hours until I will wake up to an alarm for the first time in three weeks. And when I do I will open an envelope that I will not want to open, and because of Theory #3 I will do it regardless. And I will do my best.

## NOTES ON TAKING NOTES

Note taking constitutes a central phase in the transmission of knowledge. Notes recorded from reading or experience typically contribute to one's conversation and compositions, their thinking from which others – in this case you, Juan – can draw in turn in their own thinking and writing, thus perpetuating a cycle of transmission and transformation of knowledge, ideas, and experiences. These notes, recorded not necessarily accurately, but as truthfully as you can manage, will not only help me help you, but potentially shed light on the cases of others stifled by fear. Your methods of note taking can be shown to contribute to shaping the modes of thought. To this end, please make as many entries daily as you see fit. You needn't do it all at once, just try to make a habit of jotting down progress, recollections, thoughts, feelings and what-have-you intermittently throughout the day.

The transmission served by personal notes such as the ones you will record, most often operates within one individual's experience—from a moment of experience and note taking to a later moment when the notes are read and sometimes rearranged and used in articulating a thought, the miscellany when organised and presented as a whole will offer an overarching view of your mind. But, as I mentioned personal notes can also be shared with others, on a limited scale with family and friends, a professional such as myself, perhaps a few colleagues that may benefit from what crops up.

Remember that a journal is a unit of space, it's the surface area a farm labourer can work in a day.

## PART II

## **Saturday 2 April Vestiphobia – Fear of Clothing**

By the time I had opened Dr Gleeson's envelope this morning I was extremely grateful that for the last six years I had slept naked. The cold leather of the couch pressed against the skin of my backside, and for the first time I questioned whether or not the couch was truly with me on this plight. Dr Gleeson had said I must focus all my energy on conquering each fear, each day, so I spent a minute or two simply considering the notion of a fear of clothes, my nipples now erect from the morning cold. I would put them on just as I left the house. There would be a naked breakfast. And it was so. In all my naked glory I ungraciously flopped about the living room preparing vegemite toast. Squatting, then on hands and knees, I had made it to my bedroom and was retrieving my laptop from its hiding place, arse to the sky and bare knees burning on the carpet. There would be no layering of clothes today. The fewer, the better. And so I dressed, ending this naked procrastination.

The walking pace is uncomfortable but willed with purpose and I look forward to being able to collapse onto a seat. The bus is surprisingly undercrowded and I manage to get a seat six rows from the back, but I do not get to rest. I am thinking of the clothes I have pulled on. Curse Adam and Eve and their introduction to shame and their foliage of bashfulness. Adam and Eve sit on this bus, with piercing eyes and unnecessary suits and they can see how this cotton tears and lacerates my skin. Damn you Levi Strauss and your distinctly denim demeanor, you have got me in chambray shackles.

A Seattle man was apparently strangled to death by his own ripped-up clothing after he fell on a metro escalator last weekend, according to the King County Medical Examiner's Office.

Maurecio Bell, 42, of Renton, Wash., was reportedly found unconscious around 5:30 a.m. Sunday at the bottom of a King County Metro escalator, the Seattle Police Department said. It appeared that Bell had fallen and his clothing had become entangled in the moving escalator's mechanism, choking him to death. There was reportedly an opened bottle of brandy in his back pocket.

Police said surveillance footage shows Bell staggering and leaning against the escalator at 5:19 a.m. He lost his balance and fell onto his back when he was about three-quarters of the way down the escalator, but did not attempt to get up. When he reached the base, the mechanism ate up the back of his shirt, strangling him.

I get off the bus at Broadway and pause after a few steps to check my timetable. These sleeves are so constricting, I feel the pull of the stitching, trying to contort me into a mannequin pose. Finally my hand delves into the depths of the bag slung across my shoulders. Fingers are blindly grasping and dismissing. Phone – no. Text book – no. Pen – no. Scrunched up paper – finally. Pulling the piece of paper from the bag a brisk city wind blows my stupidity right into my own face. There is no need for me to be perusing my timetable, it's Saturday. I could have spent this entire day naked at home. I suppose Dr Gleeson would be happy, though.

I just had my first bagel in nearly three weeks, and the event was wrought with complication. Having realised these clothes were even more unnecessary than I had first thought their presence on my skin was hell. Each step was difficult. I could feel the fibrous friction on my skin and began to stop. after. each. step. To allow my skin some time to recover.

What would happen to me if this friction wore me down to the bone? I did not want to move. Every step a swishing of fabrics. Left foot and my shirt wipes off the epidermis. Right foot and my jeans tear and scrape the dermis from me. Left foot my underwear



pull at the hypodermis peeling it back from my muscles. The physicality of me is being slowly unraveled, like a loose stitch in a jumper. A skeletal figure, I made my way step by step, fearing extinction, toward a circle of yeasted wheat dough. A breakfast snack the catalyst for my suffering, I filled my head with thoughts of completing the challenge Dr Gleeson had set out for me, and I would treat this as a regular day.

I took slightly more than twelve minutes to reach The Coffee Stop, which was situated a mere thirty-six metres away. I took three gigantic steps, bagel in hand, to reach the nearest seat to the counter with minimal clothing friction. I could feel eyes, my dramatic steps were pupil magnets. Finally I managed to sit. The first cream-cheese lathered morsel is ripped from the bagel, my teeth persuading it to enter me.

I chew it significantly fewer times than the recommended thirty. I begin to swallow and the process occurs in slow motion. I feel my Adam's apple rise as the food tries to pass through. It puts pressure against my skin as it becomes externally visible and then it stops. It is restricted. I cannot complete the act of swallowing. My Adam's apple is pressed up against the collar of my shirt and it is holding it in. I have bagel halfway down my throat and there it lays dormant and I cannot breathe. The collar is tightening. I cannot breath. My throat is tightening. Squeezing the bagel into the cushiony walls of my oesophagus. My fingers claw their way up the front of my shirt. Peeling it back from my throat. It feels elastic. Veins in my arms surface as I strain to allow just an inch of space between my throat and this death trap of a t-shirt. I unhinge one set of fingers and reach for the flat white I have also purchased. Warm creamy brown liquid cascades down my throat and hits the bagel dyke. I am filling up. I am ready to burst. I will flood!

I put down the coffee with too much zeal and the consequent splash back causes some collateral damage, a stain on my jeans. Shit. I reach up and push my index and middle

fingers on my right hand against my throat, still pulling back at this murderous collar with my left. I push in harder with the fingers and, red in the face and unable to breathe, I drag the morsel down to the top of my rib cage. I feel it drop and air rushes into my lungs.

Another bite and the process becomes easier. One more and it becomes easier still. I ignore the perverse looks I am receiving. I feel each bite being digested and forced onto my outer layers. I have skin of dough. I bought one more bagel before I left, in case these clothes continued to strip me back and query my existence.

I am sitting at home again, wrapped in a towel, skin still slightly moist, watching a Seinfeld DVD on my television. The entertainment unit is being used again. Praise me Dr Gleeson. I am living a normal life! Near-naked sarcasm on a Saturday afternoon. I spent ten minutes in that shower. Government doesn't want me to spend more than three. Sorry, Prime Minister, but you have no idea how much fibre that shirt left on my torso. This towel sits loosely around my waist, and I think this is how I must have felt a few thousand years ago. There were less clothes to be scared of back then. B.C Juan, cowering at the sight and thought of loin cloths. I watch these four people on the television, sitting in an apartment, talking, discussing, debating, arguing, reminiscing, and it occurs to me that for the last three weeks I have not spoken to someone unless I paid them money shortly thereafter, except Penny. This thought is pushed quickly out of my head before I have time to contemplate it as the clothes in which these characters are clad come alive. Yelling at me. The TV is on mute now. I have subtitles running across the bottom of the screen. Running shoes – trip on the laces. Leather jacket – choking on steak, cows moved to revenge. Jeans – have you not seen what that zipper covers?

I realise now that their sweaters are straight-jackets and their pants are prisons. It's twenty past four when I make this realisation and shortly thereafter I admit myself to

the same institution. I need more food, and it feels damn good to feel hungry. I stand, clutching my towel, and look for the same set of clothes in which I left the house this morning, they form a discarded heap at the door to the bathroom. I approach with caution.

*The urban jungle*, David Attenborough explains in a quaint and polite manner that reeks of British Academia, *is home to many, many species. But this is a rare sight; the VereorInduviae. He approaches clothes much as the lion stalks his prey. Note the light footsteps on the carpeted floor. Watch how closely the hunter sticks to the walls. To this unsuspecting pile of clothes he remains incognito. Ah! He is closing in. Such an athletic creature, look at the graceful manner in which he crouches, preparing to grab the first of his prey. The underwear is plucked from the back of the pack, what a stealthy catch. But wait! They are not going quietly. It looks as though there is a struggle! The rest of the pack has been alerted to the presence of the VereorInduviae. This does not bode well for our young hunter.*

I'm rolling on the floor, a manic-depressive dresser that can't decide whether or not I want to be dressed. But it is not about what I want. I've broken a sweat and wasted a shower. Perspiring I pull on the underwear and my thighs feel claustrophobic. The same can be said for the covering of my limbs by jeans and a shirt. I walk like a cowboy to Slices on the corner. Wide legs, avoiding friction, straddling an invisible horse. I pass someone wearing a puffy jacket. Personally I don't feel the weather justifies such apparel and it is so bulky that I am forced to walk in the gutter as we pass on the footpath. Anything to avoid contact with that gigantic jacket. My footsteps arrive lightly atop the cigarette butts that crowd the lipped road edge.

There is half a pizza sitting in my fridge downstairs. I am going to bed naked on a bare mattress; the manchester felt like baggy clothing. Tomorrow I'll have to call work and get shifts for this week, it's been a while.

## Tuesday April 12 Nomenophobia – Fear of Nouns

Hung-over and groggy. Having committed to the caused, that makes the attempts to do so again now even harder.

Must catch the asphaltic-hovering-big-carry arriving, that's all. An asphaltic-hovering-big-carry to learning; learning en masse; an asphaltic-hovering-big-carry back to enclosed safe-warm. But be wary. Does thought-in-present count? Is it required to be deprived of creating-fearing even in thought-in-present, or just in the recounting of another of the strange-scary inflicted here?

Who knows whether the best of men be known? or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? without the favour of the everlasting Register the first man had been as unknown as the last, and *Methusaleh's* long life had been his only Chronicle.

The asphaltic-hovering-big-carry is there, as usual, and the green 'please cross' illuminate, and the black-beneath-transporting, and all are crossed. Aboard the asphaltic-hovering-big-carry. Crowded, as usual, and through some reasoning, boarding is done freely. Does my fearing extend to the use of unsayables by all? It feels so. Conversing occurring either in person – face-to-face – or selfishly over mobile conversationals, are littered with what are now uttered-expletives. Effortful and translatory, in filtering by deconstructing, deconstructing by reformulating, reformulating by way of certain syntactical tensionally, or the adjectively accrued. It is being done, on this worded documenting, on this asphaltic-hovering-big-carry, in attempting to recall so vividly the blissful of revelationing felt upon raising digitized anatomicals and

But man is a Noble  
Animal (is he? Am I?)  
splendid in ashes, and  
pompous in the grave,  
solemnizing  
Nativities and Deaths  
with equal lustre, nor  
omitting Ceremonies  
of Bravery, in the  
infamy of his nature.  
Life is a pure flame,  
and we live by an  
invisible Sun within  
us.

pulling with them garmented portions, and stuffing  
garmented portions and portioned digited anatomicals  
into enhearers.

That-that-is-without-sound.

A serene sublime submerged sunken silentious still  
soundless placing.

And then learning. Narrow to-be-troddens crowded, and  
indicates now too, that each among crowded bear what

is apparently (and actually, really now, because such defenses become overwhelming)  
inciting now almost-frissoned fearing.

Forward, beyond the crowding, to entrancing. Via anterooming in motions, a loud-red-  
woolen underneath, and ascending flighted ascensions. Passing the rooming-of-  
expanded-regality and coupled overseeing securers, classing is reached.

Within is similar to the asphaltic-hovering-big-carry, but more intently so. Here, in  
classing, desking while seated and reading, having feed the tuitionary and selected to be  
here, twixt regulated sunning and mooning, studying this particular subjecting, each  
learned is expected to obtain broader wording. And here, within classing, some such  
wording is going to be from a rather large subsetting that terrify.

Thus, a returning to that serene  
sublime submerged sunken  
silentious still soundless  
placing. Remaining through  
confused staring and jokingly

Darkness and light divide the course of time, and  
oblivion shares with memory, a great part even of  
our living beings; we slightly remember our  
felicities, and the smartest strokes of affliction leave  
but short smart upon us. Sense endureth no  
extremities, and sorrows destroy us or themselves.  
To weep into stones are fables.

lectured preaches 'Scandalous', hiding interpretational incorrection of what's

situationally occurring (while striving for laughing; young enough to still feed off laughing learned).

Remaining in serene sublime submerged sunken silentious still soundless placing on asphaltic-hovering-big-carry towards enclosed safe-warm.

And now at enclosed safe-warm, the equated becoming easier, and the needs for translating getting smaller and smaller as rumination is limited and cordoned off, nighting imminent approaches wearily.

Was not easy, and the slightly calmer filtering simply of the cerebrally immediate becomes akin to imaging a flocking that upward sheeped.

Making equated brings a reclining sunning, soulish visions growing heavier.

Proliferation of the anxious.

*Times before you, when even the living men were Antiquities; when the living might exceed the dead, and to depart this world, could not be properly said, to go unto the greater number.*

## **Saturday 16 April *Phronemophobia* – Fear Of Thinking**

Waking, as I did, in a jungle of adhesives, upright sore back and with a lump on my forehead, it was some short time of detangling before I could actually get to today's envelope.

Even recounting to you this much is hard, Dr Gleeson, as I'm sure you are aware, thought penetrates. To begin with, I can't think about my fear of not thinking, as you have instructed that I do with each fear. More distressing still, I can't think about not thinking about thinking, because that in itself exacerbates the dilemma. How am I to deconstruct Descartes in a day? To convince myself that consciousness is no more than an accidental side effect of the state of the brain?

Such convincing requires cognition, cognition thought, thought being, is the answer then to cease to be? But the mental and physical courage required to follow through with suicide – something possessed by Juan, surely – seems beyond me. Especially given the level of thought required to reach such a state. The bridge between here and there has collapsed. In my state, it can't be rational. Nor can I rationalize my own rationality or lack thereof without shouting Boo! deep into my brain. Juan had not taken his own life, no, he had taken control of it. Life is a gift given before request, if the philosophically inclined can, upon examining the conditions of the gift – a thirty day trial period if you will – find fault or reason to return it, is it not their moral, philosophical, intellectual, and ethical duty to do so? If we can only quit this thing once we may as well do it right. It was enviable act, but one beyond me.

That level of reason too far down a line of thought whose length it would currently be illadvised or worse still dangerous to attempt to fathom the length of.



I think therefore I am. Descartes. *Cogito ergo sum*. O Grog, i' cuts me, o! Descan't. I won't think. I won't be. I'll exist in the void of me. No, not the void. An endless spiralling gape. I'm in desperate need of The Unlightenment.

In a flash of intervention – if the thought is delivered divinely, negating the act of thinking; the Jesus of ideas, need it be feared or followed? – two solutions appear.

### **The First:**

That if, proposing every thought was counterbalanced by its opposite, an unthought, an anti-thought, an equilibrium in which  $t=0$  (t being 'thinking') could be reached. A world where every impossibility was impossible. The unthinkable of the counterfactual as it were, or weren't.

### **The Second:**

To follow a thread of thought so abstract, so intently, that thought is negated entirely. For example;

I can't think about my fear of not thinking and more distressing still, I can't think about not thinking about not thinking, because that in itself exacerbates the dilemma. But what about not thinking about not thinking about not thinking? And beyond that not thinking about not thinking about not thinking about not thinking about my tormenting act of thought? To overthink exhaustively, to do so until exhaustion of myself and the concept of thought.

Attempting The First proves difficult. The intangible space between thought and unthought, the micro unit of time burns my head. Synapses threaten to burst collapse before the elixir of opposites sets the balance right.

*It is good that breathing is subconscious, done without thought: it is bad that not breathing isn't conscious, undone with thoughtlessness. I am not even breathing of my*

*own accord, some other body outside of me – my opposite, my unme – puts its mouth to mine and holds me, anxious and lofty, before wheezing panicked breathes into and out of my paper bag lungs.*

*A fear of thinking is rational, plausible: No conquering of thoughtlessness is irrational, implausible.*

*I am unthinking thoughts, I am a black hole: I am not thinking unthoughts, I am not a blackhole.*

Once after dinner with a friend we were talking about how she is so great and always herself and how I think too much about things and about what people think of me. I asked her how she got to be like that. “Do you like chewing gum?” she said. But I didn’t really get what she meant.

I attempt my second theory. I think about not thinking about my attempt at my second theory, and certainly not the first theory, failed I suppose, that proceeded it, I don’t think about not thinking whether or not it was failure, or what constitutes a failure, because I am not thinking about the fact that I am not thinking as a result of attempting a second supreme act of thinking, one to end all thinking after the failed, what is failure, attempt at my first theory of negating thinking which I am not doing now because I am not thinking at all except, I suppose, about the fact that I am not thinking about my attempt at my second theory, and certainly not the first theory, failed I suppose, that preceded it, I don’t think about

Then I thought maybe chewing gum was like thinking too much because both can have a laxative effect. At least with me. When the thoughts are especially stressful.

Chewing gum is also like thinking too much because it's all fresh and exciting at the beginning, but then it loses its flavour and goes all grey and rubbery. That's how ideas go when you think about them too much. They get a bit boring and just seem too difficult and so many things could go wrong and then you end up feeling tired before you even start so usually I find it's best not to start at all.

not thinking about whether or not it was failure, or what constitutes a failure, because I am not thinking about the fact that I am not thinking as a result of attempting a second supreme act of thinking, one to end all thinking after the failed, what is failure, attempt at my first theory of negating thinking which I am not doing now because I am not thinking or giving much thought to anything besides the fact that I am not thinking as a result of my attempts at my second theory for reducing fear of thinking, or to exhaust it by exhausting thinking itself which isn't what I'm thinking about in fact, but what I'm doing by thinking about the fact that I'm not thinking about my second theory or about not thinking about my attempt at my second theory, and certainly not the first theory, failed I suppose, that proceeded it, I don't think about not thinking whether or not it was failure, or what constitutes a failure, because I am not thinking about the fact that I am not thinking as a result of attempting a second supreme act of thinking, one to end all thinking after

I asked my friend if that's what she meant. She said, "No, I was just wondering if you'd like some chewing gum after the coffee".

Point made.

the failed (what is failure), attempt at my first theory of negating thinking which I am not doing now because I am not thinking at all except, I suppose, about the fact that I am not thinking about my attempt at my second and certainly not the first theory, (failed, I suppose), that proceeded it, I don't think about not unthinking about whether or not it was failure, or what constitutes a failure, and because unthinking was a part of the first theory on thinking that I wasn't thinking about because I am not thinking about the fact that I am not thinking as a result of attempting a second supreme act of thinking, one to end all thinking after the failed (what, really, is failure) attempt at my first theory of negating thinking which I am not doing now because I am not thinking at all except, I suppose, about the fact that I am not thinking about my attempt at my second and certainly not the first theory, (failed, I suppose), that proceeded it, I don't think about not unthinking about whether or not it was failure, or what constitutes a failure

**Wednesday 27 April *Caligynephobia* – Fear Of Beautiful Women**

Once again I wake beside a beauty. Earlier now, not offered the comfort of no alarm. I have a lecture at 9am. Once again Jim Adkins pulls me from my sleep. His voice is loud: Are you gonna live your life wondering?

Hannah stirs before I can hit snooze. I kiss her, those lips, whisper something incoherent; you needn't wake up. An apology or a brief morning lullaby. And she returns to that foreign land, eyes closed.

I retrieve your envelope and open it with some unearned air of ease. Like you'd make things easy. I'm watching her from across the room. Sleeping beauty, La Belle au bois dormant says Juan, from somewhere. In a moment, before a moment even, somehow retrospectively, its impact already immediate and historic, she has aged. At once she's the Queen Mother in the same tale.

The dimples become pimples, swollen, and occupy the room. The fruit of that forest of hair is rotting, singing out to flies with siren songs, occupied by beastly mermaids. The plucked eyebrows sharp as needles. Those breasts, one resting on the other as she lays on her side, start to froth and spit forth the vomit, my vomit, from weeks ago. She had kept it there, hidden it from me these last two nights. A sick token, a cleavaged shrine.

A long, long time ago, in a distant land The Emperor Kinmei reigned over his country. One day a man who lived in these lands rode on a horse and went out to look for a beautiful girl. By chance, in a spacious field that had only two trees, clasping one another's branches, he met a lovely girl. This beautiful woman looked bewitching and coquettish. She was trying to entice the man with her charm. She approached him in familiar manner, and the heart of the man swelled with joy and opportunity. So, he gave her a wink and asked where she was headed.

The woman answered, "Well, I'm going around looking for a nice husband."

Taken by her beauty, her forthrightness, the man asked her, "Could you be my wife?"

Having accepted his proposal, the woman accompanied the man back to his house. They got married and commenced their life together. Days passed, then months, and then the woman fell pregnant, giving birth to one boy on the day 15 December.

On that very same day, at the exact same time, a bitch that the man kept bore young. Not a litter, but a single pup. This puppy, day by day, when he looked at this woman, he opposed her, felt hostility toward her, was angry at her, growled, bearing his teeth, would bark and snarl.

After one particularly vicious display the woman was very frightened and, trembling with fear, she entreated her husband: "My Dear, beat some sense into that mad pup, or kill it, please!" But, her husband, full of pity for this puppy, he could not bring himself to kill it.

More months passed, rice was harvested, and it was now the season to polish and refine the yield in a mortar. On this particular day, when the wife delivered snacks for the young workers, as she always did, the pup emerged from behind the mortar barking, and snapped at her leg. The pup's mum soon joined the fray. The wife, trembling with fear, then transformed into a vixen, fleeing both dogs and not returning.

The workers told the man this when he came in search of his wife at sun down.

Or so I tell myself, or try to. And at once again she is the beauty and it's crippling. Why the fuck has she been here these last few days in this husk home? What goddess finds duty in this hovel? It's hurting my eyes. Poetry talks of radiance of women, of beauty radiating, and it all seems a farce until now. When I'm short of breath. Vomiting again, not on her, but in the kitchen, out of sight, for now, concocting a remedy.

When Hannah stirs I've already managed to pull a pair of my jeans right the way up those legs. I'd reasoned – and my reasoning had proved correct – that my looser fitting clothing would be easier to pull onto her sleeping body. And that its larger size would go further in covering her slight frame. She wakes to me attempting to pull an old navy blue sweater over her head. I had slipped her arms into the sleeves first, and this works in my favour, her attempts to fend me off are restricted, she's in a straight jacket sloppy joe. I board her, force the remainder of the fabric over her head. Beside us is the ski mask I had picked out. It's black and heavy. It is over her face. The green eyes peer through the darkness. Her nose has disappeared. She's hitting me, punching. I shift my weight. I straddle her more broadly and pin her wrists to the ground beside her waist, anchoring them there with my knees. She kicks but its useless. She screams so I cover her mouth. I hold my hand over it. Tighter, and tighter still. And then the struggle stops.

In this baggy ensemble she's as a good carcass. But not one. Egad, no bondage. I check. There's breath but no consciousness. The contact with this beauty is burning. I check a pulse again. It's there and steady. I wash my hands. Her aesthetics feel like acid on this unworthy skin. And I leave for university.

I reason that public transport is a gamble, every chance a goddess boards a bus. So I walk to university. I take backstreets. If I see a svelte figure I turn. A face with fine features and I'm gone.

This route, the beauty bypass, makes me considerably late for university. I've missed the lecture in its entirety. I got to class. I keep my eyes down. It's no use though. In communications the ratio of men to women is 1:4. I'm forced into contact in this small room. The strange thing is, now that I've confronted them, I can see only flaws; snaggle teeth and lazy eyes, an off-set fringe, a blemish or fifteen, a mole that is not a beauty spot, but a mole. Nothing more. At home, wrapped up, maybe now conscious, perfection is on a pedestal, wrapped in baggy fabric, lying on my floor. And once you've faced perfection, well the rest, even that that comes close, doesn't come close enough. I can manage this.

Until I need to go home.

Hannah is conscious when I get through the door. This is good. This is bad. This is sickening. She is still wearing the clothes I dressed her in so forcefully, I was a parent preparing a child in their Sunday worst. She has removed the ski mask and is holding today's fear. Like a policeman caught red-handed in an apartment with those red hands holding a warrant.

I vomit. I still haven't eaten. It's bile now and little more. She laughs. I splutter.

-It's a matter of plurality.

-How do you mean?

-Women.

There's a glint in her eye courtesy of that E.



### **Wednesday April 6 Pogonophobia – Fear Of Beards**

I rolled over to perform an in-bed stretch. I wasn't in bed and was rudely awakened by the floor. Taking the stairs two at a time I made rapid pace to the bedroom to collect this morning's envelope. The distance between A and B is boring. I just want to be there. In the spirit of this morning's unexplained "gung-ho" attitude I rip down one side of the envelope, letting the white paper fall to the floor at my feet. My middle and index fingers explore the inside and pinch the enclosed piece of paper, pulling it out. I am off to the bathroom. I haven't shaved since Monday and small brown hairs are birthing themselves from beneath my skin. Yield the crops, I think. Get rid of this facial vegetation.

I am lathered up. From the ear to the jaw I use downward strokes, from the neck to the jaw I work upwards. You cannot go against the grain; it causes ingrown hairs which cause infection which cause hospitalisation which causes death. I work quickly and efficiently. I should be on an advertisement for Gillette. A small nick on my neck serves as testament to the speed at which I completed the task; it's left to air as I choose not to cover it with a small torn square of toilet paper.

Halfway between the house and the bus I cease walking and curse aloud. Time just allowing it, I turn and head back home for a razor to put in my bag. No more than eight steps have been made when I turn and head for the bus again, there is no time. I repeat this to-and-fro sidewalk dance twice more before heading towards the bus stop. I have missed my bus. Risking a second means being late for university, so I stay seated with my palms and open fingers pressed hard against my face, covering pores, stumping any hairs that try to escape.

As the bus arrives I scan its contents, perusing its passengers. The driver has a beard. Big and bushy. It climbs high onto his cheeks and crawls towards the large frames that

hold lenses over his eyes. His shirt leaves the top two buttons undone and I cannot find a point at which the beard stops and the grey mass of chest hair begins. A salt and pepper forest covers his face and I am repulsed and scared. I enter through the back door of the bus sans ticket. Coincidentally the repulsive nature of the driver's beard has been somewhat of a blessing in disguise. Not only did I not have enough money for a cheap Bic razor, I didn't even have a wallet. It would have been hell trying to explain that to the driver.

My lecture has begun and I sit with hands anxiously rubbing an increasingly prickly face.

Nine o'clock shadow.

Nine oh four shadow.

Nine sixteen shadow.

My attention wanes, it darts between my face and the slideshow at the front of the hall.

Nine twenty-two shadow.

The lecturer is a short lady. Shockingly short. It's as if someone forgot to give her shins, they just plonked feet on the bottoms of her thighs. Her cardigan is the colour deep purple and she wears a brooch.

Nine twenty-four shadow.

Snippets of a discussion about photographic documentation fall in my ears, my face is like glass.

Nine thirty-one shadow.

A massive black and white photograph from Salvador Dali's *Dali's Moustache* appear on the screen. A lump appears within my chest. Another picture replaces the first, a

prominent moustache thrust forward at me. The lump rises. A third! The lump rises. A fourth! I run. I dart up the stairs from the lecture hall. Twenty-one steps in eight strides. My legs at full extension. My bag flailing behind me, pulled along barely by fingertips that want to cover my mouth. I exit and turn right, pulling the door to the male toilets so hard that it swings back with a crack into the wall.



I vomit.

This sandpaper face of mine does not return to the lecture hall. It waits patiently for the end, and makes its way towards the tutorial. The bearded windscreen washer dwells beneath the overpass and I safely cross above him. Embedded within his beard are the countless childhood stories of the troll beneath the bridge. I am clawing at my face now. I am sure I am leaving visible scratch marks. Though I have only cuticles exposed I try feebly with these blunt stumps to pry the sprouting hairs from my face.

*Rhitta Gawr was a giant who held court in Snowdonia, Wales. The twenty-six kings of Britain assembled their armies to destroy Rhitta but were vanquished by the giant, who cut off the kings' beards and fashioned a great cape out of them to protect him from the cold. Sometime later, as King Arthur washed his hands after slaying a different beast, the red-eyed giant of Cernyw, he received a message from Rhitta, demanding his beard to patch his cloak.*

Hated is this hair of man. Central to the room is my tutor, and I am giving him little attention.

Life without a wallet makes me question whether or not paying for the public transport I have used over the years is necessary. The calculations I make accumulate to thousands of dollars potentially unnecessarily spent on tickets for a transport so public it makes me at times uncomfortable. Free-riding I approach the destination where I am scheduled to hang out with Luke for the next five hours.

Luke lives at Newtown and I get off at King Street. A menagerie of men and women caked in dirt converse outside the church. Their mouths are chimneys and their hands are claws. Their bearded faces are fearful, menacing. I scratch my face. The filth has collected to such an extent on the females' faces that even their fine hairs appear longer, defined. Beards of hair and grime and filth. Disgusted I recoil, and as I do so I kick a raised piece of pavement with my toe. I trip, re-gather, and increase my pace as if to convince anyone that has seen this little performance that the trip was merely a way of kick-starting myself into a faster walk. Not even I am convinced.

-Hey Luke. A bodiless head floats around the door, the epitome of paranoia. It creaks open once he has seen it is me.

*When Arthur refused Rhitta marched south with his armies to claim it from him.*

*In the resulting confrontation, Rhitta is forced by Arthur to shear his own beard in defeat, and the barefaced giant retreats much humbled in stature but much wiser in knowledge.*

-Juan! Hello. He gestures for me to walk in. My feet carry the huge smile on my increasingly hairy face. I have told Luke about Juan before, and about our nicknames. He enjoys the story and every time he calls me Juan I can't help but smile.

There is general small talk about our mornings, his coffee, my university. Politely, I ask to use the bathroom. Unpolitely, he tells me to stop behaving so formally and do whatever the fuck I want, his house is mine. I walk past the kitchen and the scent of toasting ham and cheese sandwiches follows me as I turn left into the bathroom. The seat is down on the toilet, and I lower my pants and sit down to urinate.

For some reason I have never quite grasped the ability to piss accurately, so rather than leave a slippery yellow trail of destruction every time I pee, I have taken to sitting. For some it may be an emasculating concept, but for me it is merely a clean one. As I reach for the soap on the basin the back of my hand brushes a razor, and it sends waves of relief that reverberate through my body. I work rapidly, I have already flushed the toilet and I do not want to bring attention to the amount of time I am spending in here. White soapy liquid dribbles down my neck, my skin is red from both irritation and the warmth of the water that weeps through the soap. Each stroke of the razor slices fine hairs and removes an inch wide strip of anxiety from my face. A small trail of blood trickled

down from beneath my ear, below the jaw line I wiped it quickly and left, hoping that it would go unnoticed.

-You're bleeding. It wasn't a question, but a mildly confused statement.

-Oh, my neck? Was scratching at a pimple there, must have opened it up. Eat my lies, Luke, this is too awkward to explain.

Luke fed himself.

-The joys of being thirty-seven hey Juan, you no longer have to worry about acne.

I smiled, not because in eighteen years I would not have to worry about acne, but because he called me Juan, and we had moved on from my bleeding neck, and I thought of Juan. We ate the toasted sandwiches that Luke had made and I could feel the crumbs clawing to stubble that was working its way back to the surface. Luke and I played Rummy. The game was even though the cards weren't fair. What Luke's hand lacked was made up for in skill. I excused myself to the bathroom again after the game. My face continues to itch as the day wears on; there are thousands of spears inside my skin that pierce it in an attempt to escape. Luke informs me that he is having dinner with his parents tonight. It is only five o'clock; I am not meant to finish until six.

-Don't worry about it, he says. We won't tell work, you will get a couple of extra dollars and I'll get a great meal from the folks.

-I guess you're right, my delivery appears reluctant and even I am unsure why.

-So I will be seeing you next week? The question is posed as one between friends.

Rather than give an answer that draws attention to the nature of this relationship being intertwined with my employment I just smile and say:

-See you then, Luke.

My face hurts to smile it tugs on already taut skin.

## Saturday 9 April Omegaphobia – Fear of the Letter O

I'm awake with a wretched back and blue feet, in disbelief that fear had driven me camping. The tent is scrunched up, a parachute unsprung, held by a jumper that we will never find. I leave the park and walk straight at mi casa. It is time that I retrieve Dr Matt's letter. I bring it with me, first level, and read.

A twenty-sixth the QWERTY fear, I guide my digits anywhere but between I and P, L and 9, K and the naught. The fear lacks basis. Rendered incapable; describing what it is I believe may happen if I fraternise with that devilishly circular little letter.

I decide it is best I simply steer clear; evade the letter's cruelty. Better safe than in peril. My eyes impassively view the TV; better that than a Mac which seems unsafe. The advertisements (Car Insurance, KFC, Iced Tea) end and the feature returns. The

animated family's	<i>Ring-a-ring o' roses,</i>	name is plastered
amidst a blue sky,	<i>A pocket full of posies,</i>	and at the end sits that
letter! An endless	<i>A-tishoo! A-tishoo!</i>	abyss. A snake that
eats itself. An	<i>We all fall down.</i>	unrealised disaster. I

change channels. *Sex and the City*. A title I can handle. That being said it features characters significantly less palatable. It is Saturday, and here I sit, my viewing habits submerged heavily beneath a fear I can't describe, and resulting in a sexually flippant, fiscally immature, thirty-ish female quartet with brand heavy hands and feet. I need nutrients. Leaving the cheap strumpets I make a kitchen beeline.

The fridge buzzes as I disturb its sleep, its eyes are bright. I see my new enemy everywhere. Sitting amidst bright blues and reds, advertising that appeals; eye-catching. Semi-blindly, I clutch and grab, leaving anything blatantly branded with his evil marking, a vitamin c-rich juice puddles the tiles like a crime-scene. What I am carrying's exact nature eludes me, but I find relief in the lettering used. I tear the labels,



a failsafe, and begin a makeshift meal. Full cream milk, cheese, pickles, bagel. What remains behind is a mess in the kitchen. A mess branded by That letter. A mess that I can't face.

This day is life at half speed. Changing channels, eradicating regular drinking and eating habits and tearing tags that were fixed inside garments; all because I fear a stupid letter. My dwelling resembles filth, muck, grime, these vile junkyard quarters; a sleazy XXX party aftermath, minus the party.

I walked with hands shielding eyes, peering between fingers, lest I accidentally be faced with that letter. I did little. Behaved little. And saw little. I frustrated me and I hated that circle. And I slept.

Peter and Iona Opie, the leading authorities on nursery rhymes, remarked:

The invariable sneezing and falling down in modern English versions have given would-be origin finders the opportunity to say that the rhyme dates back to the Great Plague. A rosy rash, they allege, was a symptom of the plague, and posies of herbs were carried as protection and to ward off the smell of the disease. Sneezing or coughing was a final fatal symptom, and "all fall down" was exactly what happened.

The line *Ashes, Ashes* used in place of *a-tishoo* in American colonial versions of the rhyme is claimed to refer variously to cremation of the bodies, the burning of victims' houses, or blackening of their skin, and the theory has been adapted to be applied to other versions of the rhyme.

It has a Roud Folk Song Index number of 7925.

### **Friday 8 April Aibohphobia – Fear of Palindromes**

I left the hospital this morning in the clothes that I had left my house in the morning prior. Crusted with sweat they had a pungent odour of effort about them. Three pages of a scrappily written Thursday night memoir are folded and housed in my pocket and I decide the walk home will do me a world of good. My feet are light, and I walk quickly but without effort while reading over some of what was written last night. My own fear-fuelled ramblings astound me, and my actions seem distant. I realise how unlikely it is that I have contracted HIV and the even lesser likelihood of contracting the numerous other infections I feared I would obtain by merely breathing. I almost manage to laugh at myself; I think this is an action that should be reserved for those who hold more mental stability. The first step into the house is a step into an unnatural state of humidity the corridor seems full of something that cannot be seen by these blue eyes of mine. I have been sitting in the dining room in nought but underpants transferring my fear-ridden scribble to legible script. There is one sentence left from yesterday's writings when I look at the time in the top right corner of my laptop's luminous screen.

It's fourteen minutes past nine and I am yet to open today's envelope; enveloped with guilt I walk upstairs to retrieve it. The crisp paper feels a little cold against my skin. It is tucked into the waistband of my underpants, and I quietly acknowledge autumn. With the envelope on my lap I write out the final sentence of last night's confessions. I open the envelope. The humidity is stronger now. I am made aware of the true malevolence of this building. Walls are pushed by powers I cannot see towards me and doorframes do their best to prevent my exit. Carpet claws at my feet and causes heavy steps that slow my departure. Carrying the same dirty clothes I had discarded on the floor and my laptop I manage to squeeze out the front door, a champagne bottle being opened at a

funeral, the cork thrust out into an unhappy world. The number twenty-two on the front of my house mocks me as I dress on the footpath outside Markus’.

I am waiting at the bus stop on Parramatta Road in a white t-shirt with a cartoon elephant drawn on the front. It feels like it is made from cardboard and I see a woman in a navy blue pant suit wrinkle her nose at me as I pass. I smell that bad, and she looks like she has an ill-fitting bra or a botched breast augmentation. I have won this small battle. The next bus I can take is at forty-two minutes past nine. I will be late for my ten o’clock lecture and I am a little frustrated; I hold punctuality in high regard.

I walk up the flight of stairs to the lecture hall and am momentarily taken aback by the significant lack of sound as I enter the building. The trucks and cars and beeps and yells and winds of the street disappear. The door closes behind me and I watch the city mime through glass. It is 10:01 and I impatiently chew my nails not wanting to enter the lecture. I count sixty Mississippi’s while biting cuticles, look to my phone for confirmation of 10:02, and enter. Voices bounce off walls and I am not late, feeling better I sit at the back right and open my laptop, awaiting knowledge.

An hour passes and fellow students pass me by, eager to leave a lecture that they sat through but weren’t present for. It is time for the tutorial and I follow this wave, pulled by a tide of people I am yet to know well enough to trust. It is colder outside than when I arrived. The wind has bite and bark of equal measure, loudly whipping crumbling leaves against my denim clad legs. Entering room thirteen on the fifth floor I smile briefly at the seemingly random selection of numbers that signify the location of this room. Bliss renders me unawares as I sit next to a girl whose brown hair seems too thin for its length, too wispy. An odour of citrus creeps towards my nose, smoking itself off her neck and behind her ears. She doodles idly on a diary and I take note of how little has changed between High School and university. We aren’t adults now, and we are

certainly not grown up. I sit next to a girl who is wearing perfume that I can only assume costs upwards of one hundred dollars and still she draws cute flowers and love hearts on the covers of her books; a cartoonish whimsy in blue ink. She will probably write the name of a crush, of one that makes her breathe heavy, in curly cursive amidst the hearts. Or her own, signifying ownership of this depiction of childlike cuteness. She has dimples that show as her satisfaction at her scribbles becomes more apparent. She begins the aforementioned cursive. The pen is pulled slowly and lightly down the cover, rolling from stroke to stroke, pooling an aftermath of clichéd femininity. She writes; H. a. n. n. a. h. I stand and leave.

I walk to the other side of the room. Pull a chair out from its home beneath a black wooden desk and sit down. I can't look at

I can't think her name so I don't. I push it out of my mind and don't feel guilty because fear omits guilt. Confused glances that are basted with offended green eyes. The girl whose name I cannot say seeks answers. A face painted with frustrated bewilderment continues to invade my peripheries. It is hers. I must sit here for fifteen more minutes while she stares.

Fourteen more.

13.

12.

10.

Kanakanak is a neighborhood within the city of Dillingham in the U.S. state of Alaska. It is Yupik in origin and is said to mean "many noses," referring to the orphanage census that was located at the Kanakanak site after the 1918-1919 influenza epidemic.

Erosion of a steep riverbank below Kanakanak Hospital has exposed an increasing number of coffins and bones from unmarked graves in recent years.

Now, the Alaska Area Native Health Service, which manages the hospital property, has started a project that will identify graves in danger of exposure and move them if necessary.

In September remains were removed from a steep bluff overlooking the Nushagak River. The person may have been an Alaska Native who survived the smallpox and measles epidemics of 1900 only to be cut down by Spanish influenza in 1918. It might have been a cannery worker from Mexico or China, a visitor from a distant village or maybe a Dillingham orphan with no family left to claim the body and bury it.

No one knows how many bodies are buried around Kanakanak, but some people believe it could be hundreds.

The time is 12:21 and I cannot breathe. With a dry throat I count Mississippi's. We are let off two minutes early and I rush out of room.

With light feet I traverse great distance; two and a half flights of stairs, and emerge on the footpath near the car park entrance. Looking back to check I am free of that confused name I continue towards the bus shelter. Returning my vision to the fore I am too late to prevent a collision with the gateman for the parking lot. Without grace I fall. Without composure I stand. And with squinted eyes I note that the gateman's nametag is brightly sending sunlight my way. The gateman has a nametag. The GATEMAN has a nametag. The GATEMAN has a NAMETAG. GATEMANAMETAG! Semordnilaps attack me.

I return from whence I came with little thought paid to what awaited at the top of those stairs. She is pleasantly shocked to see me; plucked eyebrows raise and lips set in concrete determination. She needs closure. She approaches with such purpose that she glides. She does not blink. And she has me cornered against the wall mid stride. My left leg two stairs above my right, off balance and ill prepared for confrontation.

-Why did you move from next to me in class?

-There was no reason. I recoil.

-I call bullshit. Tell me now. She moves closer.

-There was no reason. I am against a wall. Inhaling palindromes.

Quiet as my voice is she is determined.

-If there was no reason you wouldn't have moved, now tell me. Cracks look as though they are about to emerge in this tough persona, but a subtle shake of the head and a deep breathe submerge them once again.

-Dammit I'm mad, says she.

I take a deep breath and scan a rapidly emptying stairwell. People make way for my freedom. And I splutter truth:

-Your name. It terrifies me.

With quick steps I descend freedom stairs and with a sharp right turn begin my voyage around the block, a near four-minute detour to avoid that gate. In desperate need of a shower and a fresh change of clothes I board a bus home. She keeps creeping back into my head and making me sweat. She pries open my ear and climbs inside; she has brought a deck chair and a bag with her. She finds a spot inside my brain that gives enough support for her ill-designed camping store-bought chair and then she lets her hands dive into her black bag, now resting on her lap. 'Perfect entry!' cry the judges amidst echoes. She pulls out a fire engine red thermos and holds it by its black plastic handle. It contains the heat of flames. The hands swim around in the black bag again, hidden from view, creating arms that are potentially endless stumps. A fruitful and purposeful search produces a mug of matching colour and a book. Clear amber liquid cascades from red vessel to the other as steam rises, and with a humid malice, burns the inside of my head. My brain is cloudy. The vision is cloudy. The sky is cloudy. It is mid-Autumn it is April. She leans back in her chair and as it squeaks it tells me "She is comfortable, you know? She is staying here," and I say "Shut up chair! She is not welcome. I hate her name". But the chair tells me "Look, she has opened her book, she is sipping her hot amber liquid she is not leaving", and the chair laughs a rusted smoker's laugh at me. She reaches into that black bag and pulls Herself out. And then the Her she has pulled out pulls another. And so it goes. She sits with Herselves in there; all reading and sipping. And then they start to talk.

-We live here!



-Er

-Eh

-Evil!

-Ew!

I want them out. Drinking tea they bicker about a lack of biscuits.

-Dessert I stressed!

Even when some are produced from that same black bag they are not happy.

-Drat such custard!

They still bicker.

-Is it mad? Too bad! About dam, 'tis I!

-Spot on devil omen; emo lived no tops.

-Er, God? Ash-self time defiled, O! De-lifed, emit flesh sad ogre.

They multiply so much they're surprised to see even themselves. They dismantle me.

-And a dark stutter: et tu? Tsk! Rad, a DNA!

-He stole big noose, soon gibe lots, eh?

They encourage the destruction, egging themselves on.

-Ram! Go slit, no? On 'til sog, mar...

I use no words, I just force Hers out. I shrink my head. It gets smaller and smaller. It disappears inside my collar, it becomes my neck, and as it does I feel Her pushed out of my ear. Like a turtle now safe I reemerge.

I have made it home. The house offers no warning; it takes advantage of my absent state of mind. It counts the sandstone steps I climb. One. Two. Three. It watches as my silver key glides into a lock and as I begin to push the door open it cannot contain its joy. The door opens and it screams in delight as I look up and see the two two's, a pair of twins where both are evil, fixed upon my door.

It is just after half past one and the back of my jeans are damp. The sun has not shown his face today, and last night's dew is yet to be forced from its grassy home. I am sitting opposite my house in the park. The door remains slightly ajar, the key only half removed from the lock. Swift decisive action is needed. Strong steps that grate the ground with a clear definition between heel and toe become a timid shuffle. I have reached the front gate. I run at the door and in one motion slam it shut and withdraw the key.

And back to regroup and re-gather amongst the ranks of dew. We have won an important battle today. Happy with the results of swift action I decide, with next to no secondary thoughts or consideration, to head for the shops.

An inhuman beep is set off as I push open the glass door that allows me to enter the camping supplies store on Parramatta Road in Camperdown. Its presence here had long confused me, it did not seem the ideal location for a camping store, and the decision to open seemed to me, fiscally irresponsible. None the less, today I was grateful. And today I was decisive. My mood gingerly walked towards jovial, urged on by this swift acting, newly decisive demeanor.

### **Yet Another Theory About Juan:**

There were very few moments when Juan showed weakness, though when he did, I believe he reassured himself through an abuse of the trust and respect I had given him. These times he acted out of character, requesting I partake in acts he otherwise would have discouraged, should I have ever been stupid enough to suggest them.

One Monday night about eight months ago, Juan had been quiet for most of the evening. We were watching television with the volume down, just loud enough to fill the void. We were so quiet you could hear Max hosing down the Alfa. When the hosing stopped, and Channel Ten announced the upcoming program to be Sports Tonight, Juan perked up.

"I have a hilarious idea," he waited for no response on my behalf. "How funny would it be to leave a shit on the bonnet of Max's car?" The swearing was unusual, and I couldn't tell if he was joking.

In an upbeat tone I asked the shop assistant – a saint, really, haloed in amongst the ghouls that I have seen this morning: that girl and herself – for the cheapest tent. My mood was infectious and without question he proceeded to show me. My smile, too, was infectious and he beamed as he said:

-I have to tell you, this is obviously not the best quality tent. It is a nylon blend and not proper canvas. But you seem to know what you want.

-I am aware, I assure him. It is just for the night.

-Well let's get you on your way then, he says with a smile.

I follow him to the counter and with a mischievous smile he scans the barcode on the tent and taps away at the computer. He doesn't make eye contact as he does so and

That being said, if you are making the suggestion to leave faeces on a car's bonnet, you are hardly going to refer to it as poo, faecal matter, or some other more innocent or scientifically accurate term. My delayed response, stuttering and uncertainty made my desire to sit out this prank blatantly obvious.

Juan was persistent. "I will bring you out some toilet tissue," he offered. Always in these situations he gave himself a minute enough role to feign involvement, enough to persuade me.

So I am squatting on a bonnet that makes metallic dents beneath my heels, a wobble board of shame, as I ready my bowels. Juan tosses me a roll of toilet tissue and retreats to wait by the front door.

tries to hide the smile under an extremely thin veil of retail professionalism as he requests forty-two dollars and ninety-five cents.

I hand him a fifty and he opens the till. Perpetuating his façade of professionalism he earnestly counts my change, incorrectly comprising two twenty-dollar notes, and a ten-dollar note. He hands them to me, gives me the tent, and, despite our similarities in age, says:

-Thank you sir, have a nice day.

I smile, and not wishing to reveal his inappropriate behaviour through an obvious open acknowledgement, thank him casually, and leave. As I walk out the door I hear the beep once again, a computerised farewell from a robot that hardly knew me. I pick up a paper from the shop next door and begin the walk home.

A navy blue Nissan patrol is parked perfectly parallel to the curb. My admiration draws my attention to the vehicle, I note its number plate. I, O, B, zero, one, B.

So successful had my two previous impulsive actions been that I swiftly took part in a third.

I squeeze a shit out in a matter of seconds; it falls in three medium size pieces on the red bonnet of the car. The paint looks the colour of blood in the clouded light of a half moon. I wipe three times but don't bother to check the success rate of my actions. As I step down from the bonnet, attempting to be silent while the panels of the car groan about my guiltiness, I pull up my pants in the same action. A hurried silent shuffle carries me quickly back to the front door where Juan greets me with a blank look. There is moist shit stuck between the cheeks of my bottom that is knotting my pubic hair. Juan looks through me; I look to the floor and still manage to stub my toe as I ascend the sandstone stairs to a house that is now made of accusing walls. I sat in the shower for an hour, scrubbing shit out from between my cheeks and crying. When I had toweled off, I went down stairs for a drink; Juan had remained standing behind that closed front door the whole time. A mannequin without a window, he was yet to move. *My mannequin stares well past my window, my petrified whisper.* I went to bed thinking that at least Juan was happy, and I cried again.

Retrieving my keys from my pockets I marked a deep and extensive scratch into the body of the car above the number plate. And ran. I'm stockpiling bad karma.

A tent is not a suitable jogging companion. Within minutes I am back at the park, and within minutes of my arrival, my free tent is erect. I attempt to consider the action I just took, to debate with myself, to justify what I had done psychologically, even though the moral arguments may, by far, outweigh those I could currently present. But I feel sick at the thought of that mirrored number plate. I will check my emails; productivity is the best friend of those who procrastinate. Though I sit just twenty metres away from my front door in this park, I cannot access my internet. Max Bourke, the neighbour on my left side, has wifi available; I just need the password. I get in on the first attempt. He loves that Alfa Romeo 75.

Feeling like somewhat of a park-dwelling oxymoron, I checked my emails in a suburban tent. I had made an adjustment so that emails to my university address, which unfortunately remained Scott.Dolan@uts.edu.au, would be forwarded to my hotmail account. Three such emails, anchored to university addresses themselves, awaited in my inbox; two from my Media tutor, and one from H. West, a student. An inch long grey bar at the bottom of the window signifies my impatience. It slowly fills with aqua blue as I await my message. I read the first line:

*Scott, it's Ha...*

## **Sunday 17 April *Xerophobia* – Fear Of Dryness**

Have you ever risen from sleep restless? I made quick time in opening your envelope, and quicker time still in commencing a shower. For a long time before this I've found in the shower a certain refuge from the world, a place well suited to thinking. So, with disregard for the national concern of drought, I patiently embraced dampness and considered xerophobia.

Consideration led me to recall my initial reaction – that you had written xenophobia, and that that was just sick of you – and then led me to consider the notion of being submerged. The idea that being submerged means being underwater. And the hypothesis that, perhaps, being supermerged could mean being above water. And, further to that, that merging – just plain old merging – would be like wading, or showering. Like being whelmed with water.

I put the plug in and allow the water to rise. I move, moistly, to the ridiculous phone mounted on the wall beside the toilet, and dial Sebastian to get the week's shifts.

Wrong number.

I get him on the second try. I've got Mario and Luke this week. I move back to the still running shower. I lubricate. I'm human. I'm 70% percent water. I surround myself.

I call Mario. Well, I try.

I apologise for a wrong number.

And apologise for another, and assure them I don't need a plumber.

I confirm Tuesday afternoon with Mario; Wednesday with Luke (after not a single misdial).

The hot water has long ago run out. My usual disdain for the beach is nowhere to be seen. In any other instance, being at the beach would feel to me like attending a party I wasn't invited to, and reluctantly at that. But today, today it feels like the beach is a mirage turned real. An oasis. A genuine, sopping wet paradise. I chafe and I crack and I creak and I lurch towards water, recklessly discarding clothes like a breadcrumb trail that will lead me back to civil society. At first it's simply the transition onto wet sand, my feet earning some relief. And then it's ankle deep. And then I collapse into an ocean. A belly flop, a baptism, some moisture.

Drip-drying I left and as the process continued I felt I was dying. I got off the bus a few stops early and strolled straight into a drive-thru

carwash to be blasted with water like a hippy at a protest. A driver looked in confusion while the owner of the car wash chased a soapy me down Parramatta Road before giving up and shaking a fist at the world. My footprints left puddles, and the puddles housed rainbows.

The driest place on Earth is in Antarctica, in an area called the Dry Valleys, which have seen no rain for nearly 2 million years. There is absolutely no precipitation in this area and it makes up a 4800km<sup>2</sup> region of almost no water, ice or snow. Water features include Lake Vida, Lake Vanda, Lake Bonney and the Onyx River. There is no net gain of water. The reason why this region receives no rain is due to Katabatic winds, winds from the mountains that are so heavy with moisture that gravity pulls them down and away from the Valleys.



At first these puddles were fully formed, formed to the point of deformity, each footprint on the footpath a swollen version of its stamp. Then heat and friction stripped me of my water. The human body is 70% water. I was drying and scared. I was dying.

Juan once told me he had found a gun at his grandfather's house. We were still in high school at the time. He held it at his own face with no intent. Pupil to barrel he stared, scared himself until the urine began trickle down his thigh. This is what fear does at extremes, it's one of its symptoms: shortness of breath, increased pulse, sweating, uncontrollable urination. Dehydration.

I'm drying. I'm dry. I'm blocks from home. I'm dying. And fear freezes faculties. I can barely walk. My soul is parched. Death by osmosis.

And then I piss. Gloriously inglorious, I soil myself then and there. I'm Alice's Tin Man in revelation. I run to cover as much ground as possible while lubricated. I'm oiled and sleek. I'm covered in piss and fluid. I'm nearly home.

I run a shallow bath and immerse myself. Leaving a trail of tributaries I exit, the bathroom in my wake for a moment. I collect the snorkel – an unused Christmas present – from under my bed as some form of life assurance and return to my watery grave.

\*

We have all been scared at some point. We've been scared of our own capacity to scare  
– others and ourselves.

**Another Memory of Juan:**

Walking home from the shops Juan drops the five bags – four in his right hand, one in  
his left – on the pavement, leaving no explanation beside them as he darts up the  
footpath and down an alley. I pick the bags up, near doubling my load, and amble along  
in what I assume to be his wake, his (still running? I can't/won't know now) body  
beyond my field of vision.

As I turn in to the alley Juan bears himself like an almost-shamed flasher. In place of  
the unrequested genitals is an apologetic damp groin.

- I had hidden in the alcove of this garage to give you a playful fright, but the  
anticipation of the scare unsettled me so as to lose my bladder.

That was Juan's explanation.

But this was not that kind of fear. It remains so. I cannot know the boundaries of what I  
wish to portray, I don't know how many fears I must face but could presume their  
number to be near infinite. To make it in some way comprehensible to you I am  
endeavouring, simply, or not, truthfully, as accurately as swift retrieval and recitation  
can allow, the astronomical properties of terror.

\*

**Thursday 28 April *Docerophobia* – Fear Of Documentation**





## **Monday 11 April Sobriphobia – Fear of Sobriety**

I awoke and ran for the toilet. I could barely contain the remnants of yesterday's detoxing binge. I was up until midnight, sporadically taking laxatives. I was having my own little geriatric themed pharming party. Today's envelope informed me that sobriety should be feared. I didn't agree with the fear Matt. It didn't sit with me. But then I found a bottle of vermouth in the cupboard. And I had a swig. My body rejected it, sent it out with a stern wagging finger: You are not welcome! It tasted awful. It tasted what I imagine communism would taste like. The fridge had a bottle of coke; it was at least a week old. The carbonation had long ago retired. I mixed it with the vermouth, communism and consumerism, in a refreshing morning glass!

I gulped down a selfish mouthful, leaving the glass two thirds full. There was something wrong. Something missing... This was breakfast – where was the orange juice? I once again requested the assistance of the fridge's contents. Shortly, I stood three feet back from the answer to my fear. A tumbler, one third coca-cola, one third vermouth, one third orange juice. I braced myself. My grip on the kitchen bench was so strong I felt as though I should be cast in a NutriGrain ad. My head fell back, hatched open, and I consumed the contradictory elixir. And you know what Matt? I thought, You know what Matt? You're onto something here. Sobriety is boring. Boredom is scary? Right? Am I right? Of course I am Matt! So I went to uni.

I run into Mash in the hallway and he asks me if I had looked at the assignment.

We exchange emails, his is [themashman69@gmail.com](mailto:themashman69@gmail.com). I tell him I'll send him my notes tonight. A hand taps my left shoulder. With a lazy mouth I turn to see a ghost. Where is this wicked hand? It taps my right shoulder. I turn. There is no one. I return my neck to a position more comfortable for one who now considered themselves a seasoned booze-hound. Hannah was in front of me. She smelt of citrus again.

-Vodka soda and lime?

I had said it out loud. Fuck. She smelt like a sexual fruit bowl. And it was an accident. She looked at me in trepidation, weighing up how genuine she believed my offer to be.

-Ok. After class? I'm just down the hall in 312.

-Fantastic.

This was not fantastic. I had to be drunk. I had to be, because, as I explained earlier Matt, your idea is really good. That's why you're a doctor I presume.

Class ends and Hannah takes me to The Clare. It's across the road from uni. Three tradies in petrol station-bought sunglasses haphazardly pour Coopers Pale into greedy schooners. They're teasing the eldest of the bunch. He wants a cigarette, but they tell him he's quit. He begs. They laugh. Beer flows.

Hannah orders a jug of Coopers Pale; apparently it'll set us back a fiver each. I excuse myself to the bathroom. Once round the corner I walk to the bar, it sits amidst a sea of pokies. I pull my phone out surreptitiously, because I'm a genius, see. And I begin a conversation with myself.

-Vodka Red Bulls, you sure?

-Who cares if we just finished exams, you think I'm made of money?

-Ok. OK! We'll 'celebrate'.

The bartender has witnessed this conversation and is no doubt thinking that I am a good friend, suggesting more responsible drinks, buying rounds for friends. I order four double vodka Red Bulls. These drinks kill teens and stop hearts. It's a medical fact. There's science. He gives me a knowing smile and rolls his eyes as if to say "Friends eh? Always trying to get drinks". Like we share this common situation with all men

between the ages of 18 and 30. We banter like old pals. We're amicable. People watch me and the bartender interact and think: that is the kind of friendship I want. He places the four drinks in a dented aluminium metallic blue carrying tray. I hand him forty dollars and tip him one last smile. I walk away. I am fucking Tom Hanks I am so believable. He stops me. This better not take long. I am sobering up.

The inhabitants of a small Greek island live on average 10 years longer than the rest of western Europe. So what's the secret to long life in Ikaria? Stamatis Moraitis thinks he knows what it is. "It's the wine," he says. He makes about 700 litres of wine a year on the island not far off the coast of Turkey.

-It's \$46 actually mate.

I give him an extra ten dollars. And I wait for my change. I thought we were friends. My steps change as I enter the bathroom. The floor is sticky. The residue causes my steps to linger. The lock on the door is twisted to reveal the 'engaged' symbol (though the door is broken and doesn't close properly). I sit on the toilet, with both seats down and skull the drinks. They force sobriety and urine out of me. An infantile Bic scrawl informs me that world will end on the seventh of July in 2011. I better prepare. I catch a glimpse of myself in the bathroom as I exit. I am sweaty. My pores spit onto my forehead. I have dandruff. My cheeks are pink. But I'm drunk on confidence. I struggle back to join Hannah on a vinyl couch. It's navy blue but the stains aren't masked. She had poured a beer when I left, but my time in the bathroom had left the head deflated. It tastes like virgins. I spent too long in the bathroom I realise. She'll probably think I was taking a shit. I don't want her to picture me taking a shit on our first date. Is this a date? We're having drinks. Shit I need a drink.



My beer seems eager to part ways with its glass. I am jovial. I stand and make large gestures with my arms as I talk. My beer is gone, Hannah's stands at half mast. I inform her that I actually requested lime vodka and sodas with her (I say 'soda' like a four year old middle American), and walk off to obtain two such drinks from the bar. In my absence she fills my schooner once again from the jug.

Sobriety is elsewhere. A third cousin. I think I met him once. Nice guy, kinda boring though. Middle management type position... I am vague. To die of drunkenness after spending a carefree life, though deplored by the world, need not be an unhappy ending.

I alternate between sips of my vodka and my beer. It's two o'clock in the afternoon and I am wasted. The lime dances in a carbonated lagoon contained in a glass. It tickles my nose as I drink it. And drink another. Hannah's citrus zest calls to me. She uses a strawberry shampoo. She has a fruit farm head. I don't tell her this. I am the perfect drunk womaniser. A+

I lean in and smell beneath the lobe of her ear (pierced and holding small studs) and she drops her weight. Her back falls to my chest and her neck pushes abruptly against my nostril. I kiss her neck. She gasps:

Oh!

It's polite and sexual. As her lips emit the sound her mouth forms an 'o', her lips appear the same width and thickness right the way round, and I see the bottom half of her front four teeth. I bite softly on the lobe of her ear. Hear that expulsion of restrained concern and curiosity. And then I vomit all over her breasts. Not in a sexual manner. In the manner of a drunken deviant who is apparently 'scared' of sobriety. Who has consumed more than he can handle.

And who is being kicked out of a pub just after two on a Monday afternoon. I say goodbye to the security guard, but not to her. I walk next door to Bar Broadway. Drinking to forget my drinking to forget my drinking. Oh, and my fear.

A Maori man that has accomplished six feet with ease has arms folded in front of him, resting on a protruding gut. Who said black clothes were thinning? His arms are covered in tribal tattoos from the elbow down. He doesn't speak, he just shakes his head and I keep walking. I have vomit on my shirt. I can't get alcohol and I can't get sober. I make a beeline for Redfern Station.

In the second week of university Juan had decided we should smoke pot. A friend of his from his journalism course had a friend who dealt. He lived down the road from Redfern Station in a surprisingly Victorian townhouse. I went with Juan to pick some up. It wasn't peer pressure, just a devout following I guess. The guy answered the door in large green mesh basketball shorts and a blue shirt that had a lion eating intricate feathers on it. Juan asked him if he could buy a fifty. His drug knowledge astounded me, his confidence eluded me. I was nervous in these yellowing nicotine stained walls.

Common withdrawal symptoms from alcohol include difficulty sleeping, sweating and heart palpitations. Withdrawal can also cause delirium, hallucinations, rapid heart rate, high blood pressure and hyperventilation. Alcohol withdrawal can also cause heart arrhythmias and kidney or liver dysfunction, which can also be fatal.

Our as-yet-unnamed counterpart urged us to follow him down the hall. He was yet to speak. Turning into the second bedroom on the left, he waited for us to follow him in, and then closed the door.

-Fifty? He asked in a British accent, verifying the order.

Juan nodded. Our new friend then stripped naked and retrieved a digital bathroom scale, a digital kitchen scale, and a small zip-locked bag of weed. He weighed the kitchen scale on the bathroom scales.

2.7kg.

He then held the kitchen scale in his arms, cradling it as a mother would a newborn, and stood himself atop the bathroom scales.

63.9kg

His head nodded approvingly, as if these were some scientific figures he had long predicted after years of research finally being confirmed in the lab. He then plucked a nugget from the bag of weed and placed it on the kitchen scale, and once again stepped onto the bathroom scale. The kitchen scale read 3.6 grams. The bathroom scale, unsurprisingly had not changed. As he stepped down he had a semi-erection. Juan's composure was incomprehensible. Why he needed the bathroom scales I do not know. I had been so stoned that night that I vomited. You could make out a film noir wash of rehashed Kinder Surprises on the bathroom floor.

I walk at an incredible speed; surely my hips wriggle suggestively like those of the athletes who have mastered this style? My mind is willing weak but sobering legs towards destruction. I am at his house in ten minutes. Four concrete stairs with ageing paint splatters of maroon red and custard yellow lead me to the front door. I use my knuckles instead of the brass knocker. I attempt to nut out a little rhythmic arrangement on the door. I lack the coordination. The door is pulled open quickly, his hands drop to his sides once it rests against the wall. He squints; his eyelids appear to struggle with gravity.

-Can I please have a twenty?

I sound like an idiot. I say it like a child.

He turns, pauses, and walks. I follow. When we reach the second bedroom he keeps walking. Momentarily confusion takes me, that is until I see the third room, his new room. It's about two feet wider on all sides. I smile for him, business is strong. He gets naked at a rapid pace. He gets naked like superman.

-Twenny?

He verifies the purchase in a lazy British accent. As I nod he exhales heavily from the corner of his mouth, blowing strawberry curls out of his eyes. He retrieves the bathroom scale, the kitchen scale, and the bag of weed from under the bed. As he hands me the small plastic bag he has just weighed out I notice that, again, he is semi-erect. I retrieve the money from my pocket. No, I retrieve some of the money from my pocket. \$13.50, when the change from both back pockets, both front pockets, and the sneaky little waste-band pocket are combined. I search my wallet and come up with another \$1.50. I offer an apology through a look that suggests a genuine and sincere accident. He, still nameless and naked, looks at me as Penny did when she put me to bed on Tuesday nights as a child.

There was a rotating dinner schedule. Chicken, spaghetti bolognese, steaks, Thai stir-fry and pizza. Tuesdays were always spaghetti bolognese. Penny made heavy on the garlic. The kind of bolognese that would kill all kinds of vampires and the undead. Fairies and foxes. "The Exorcist's Bolognese" Juan and I had called it as we had grown older, and partially wittier. As a child, and even until about age 18, my dental hygiene left a lot to be desired. Brushing happened irregularly at best, never often, rarely weekly. On any other night of the week I could fib my way past Penny's dental inquisitions with a relative ease. Tuesday nights though, Tuesday nights were different. Penny would come in and find me already in bed – at what would be in retrospect some

ridiculously early hour – and give me a kiss on the forehead, asking if I had brushed my teeth. I would nod, jaws clenched.

-Scott?

Tom Elder was a local gardener and well-known prankster that was spared jail for sending a hoax bomb to a pub. One day coming home from work he crashed his bike into a wheelie bin, tumbled over the handlebars, and broke 11 ribs and cut his kidney in the process.

He was put in intensive care after crashing his bicycle, but doctors say he died of alcohol withdrawal because he wasn't drinking his daily Stellas. Despite treatment, he died a week later of a cardiac arrest.

His brother said he held down a job, he looked after their father, who was in his 80s, and looked after his invalid girlfriend: 'To me, he did not have a drink problem. Whenever I saw him, he never seemed actually drunk.'

She would question me in the same tone that all mothers question children with on television advertisements, the tone that only the kind of mothers who make homemade lemonade would use.

I was resolute; I have no idea why I would be so stubborn. Why I would consciously fight for the right for my teeth to decay, for my breath to smell? But I did. I nodded

again. And then her hands would reach for me. Landing just below my ribs were her hands; her fingers lithe and covered in quaint rings. I would squirm, and I would turn red in the face and hold my breath as she tickled. But inevitably she won. She always won. I would exhale, loud and hard, and she would smell my breath and smell my lies. And instantly, all the fun would be gone. And she would stand up and point to the bathroom, with a look on her face that asked why I had lied, why I had made things so difficult. And I would sullenly oblige.

That was the look my drug-selling acquaintance now gave me. Strangely enough it hurt. I felt the pain of disappointing a stranger.

-Look, I'm sorry; I'll go get the five dollars now from an ATM. I'll be back really soon. I'm sorry.

He nodded, and began to get dressed. Not once did he break eye contact with me – silently covering his body as he openly resented me. I saw myself out.

I dart across the road. A pause to wonder at the momentarily intricate machine that is the human body, even when intoxicated. With confidence I walk face first into glass paneling. With certainty I curse the stupidity of an automatic door that isn't automatic. With shame I enter the actual door of the city convenience store, five paces to my right. The ATM calls my name, but I detour to the counter with a smile on my face, my memory cannot be faulted. On that ill-fated night with Juan, the last time I had smoked marijuana and seen the colour of my food mid-digestion, we had made the mistake of buying it with no tobacco in the house. With no cigarettes, or tobacco, or papers, the weed would be essentially useless. I would buy cigarettes, and ask for cash out. Not only would I kill two birds with one stone[(d) Ha! I am so witty Matt!] but I would also dodge the dreaded two dollar bank fee on the ATM.

-I'd like a packet of cigarettes please. I feel like I'm trying to buy them underage. I lack the certainty, slightly threatening effortless cool of a real smoker. Should I have used some slang instead? A pack? A deck? Some ciggies? Some darts? Some fags? A smoko? A durry? Only non-smokers call them cancer-sticks, right? I'm ruined.

-Are you listening? Hello? What type of cigarettes? He has attitude and he knows I'm a fraud. He sees everything; a god with CCTV.

-Um, the blue ones? Little children with freshly received pocket money in multitudes of little silver coins standing at the counter of a candy selling tuck-shop have more of an idea of what they want to buy than I do. I need to purchase some cool. Or some courage. I see neither on display.

-The blue ones? He questions. Clearly my description has been of little to no help to him.

The alcohol surges in me, it needs substance, company. Dutch courage fuels my insistence.

-Yeah.

I am sure, I know what I want, because I am addicted to them, and I smoke them to punctuate important occurrences in my day, like meals, and coffee, and sex, and the paper, and driving, and stress, those blue little bastards are the bane of my existence.

-The blue ones, I repeat. I am serious this time.

I notice his eyes roll slightly as he pulls a light blue packet of Winfield's from the shelf and scans them. He asks for \$12.70.

My card isn't in my wallet. My card isn't in my pockets. I perform the frantically clichéd look-of-disbelief-coupled-with-head-shake-and-pocket-pat dance. But to no avail. I apologise and take my leave. I head quickly to the pub.

Drunken flashbacks of leaving it on the bar as I scrambled for short straws with an increasing lack of dexterity. My credit card is safely tucked away at home. In case of emergency. But this emergency is too urgent to warrant the round trip.

I'm refused entry to the bar when I try to retrieve my card. And that comes as no surprise, I can practically smell my modern history there from the door. I don't look for Hannah. There are those who say women are like drugs and booze, but I'm inclined to disagree.

Defeat is not an option, not when I've left a semi-erect backpacker just minutes down the road. And then the idea strikes me. The window-washing junkie! He's at that same set of lights with such regularity it's practically full-time employment. I gave him five dollars once knowing full well he was spending it on drugs; now it's my turn.

Have you ever confronted a junkie Matt? It's not easy. I shit you not, I lost the tip of my pinky trying – successfully might I add – to retrieve my five dollars from the grime-ridden bum bag that hung around his skeletal pelvis. What's a finger between fiends?

My erect and naked British friend was nice enough to throw some of his own tobacco in amongst the greenery.



**Wednesday 20 April *Phasmophobia* – Fear Of Ghosts**

I don't believe in ghosts, rather I didn't, but I've seen Juan since he left and the exceptions to the rule, this strange miracle, it brings doubt on my resolve. I know people imagine that they see a lost one in everything while grieving, but this is more than that, this is a presence. On these times he has eluded me, run the coop, intentionally or no, but that is how it has played out. Should he arrive today, being the only ghost I believe I could believe in, I would not want him to scare me, or, more accurately, I would like the resolve to not be scared of him. Surely his benevolence is not bound to the body, does not emanate only from a physical sense of him?

Is it fair of me selfishly to distribute my investment in a matter of faith in the supernatural? Would it serve better to consider Juan's antiphysical presence, should it have truly existed as I had sensed earlier (and hope to do so again) as a mere anomaly (which, to be certain, occurs day in, day out, in matters of life and death, big and small)?

Perhaps, as a fail-safe, my own aversion to topical points of terror now sufficiently proven to be quite beyond my control, I should prepare myself for the eventuality of meeting a ghost. I have little else to do today beyond some reading for university, and a brief visit to Luke late this afternoon. I have hope, for you and I both Dr Gleeson, that I can conquer this fear.

*"The  
ghosts  
of my  
family  
someti  
mes  
haunt  
me in  
my  
sleep  
and I  
know  
that  
they're  
fine but  
it still  
scares  
the hell  
out of  
me."*

Years ago, west of Bathurst there was a young man named Nathan searching for somewhere to stay when he stumbled across an apparently vacant sheering shed. There was no sign of any sheep and the shed seemed to be in a good condition. At dusk, he finally found another young man there, who he believed to be a shearer. He had been living there for a while; he introduced himself as Bruce and welcomed Nathan.

At night, Nathan climbed into his bed and was just about to fall asleep when a beautiful woman entered the pen of the shed he lay in, and asked if she could share the bed he'd fashioned from straw, hide and wool. Naturally he was shocked! Remembering his sense of ethics however, Nathan rejected her advances and instead threatened to call Bruce, who was staying in a swag nearby. The woman suddenly appeared to be frightened and set out to leave. However, just as she got to the door she turned around and left a piece of gold on Nathan's bed. Nathan immediately picked it up and threw it in to the courtyard, yelling, "the ill-gotten wealth will defile my pocket" as he did so. As she departed the mysterious woman said: "This man is so cold-hearted."

I do not want to 'bust' Juan, so the theories of Messrs Murray, Aykroyd, Ramis, and Moranis are useless. Demi Moore loved a ghost, however. The Chinese had customarily encountered ghosts in their folk tales. I recall, in fact, a story in an anthology of folk tales – *Superstition Around The Globe* – one particular Chinese folk tale that spoke of a man that spat on ghosts in order to catch them. He would stake out in graveyards, with a bag and a rope, and hope to catch sight of a ghost, in order to spit on, then grapple with on common ground; spit to make it tangible.

The next day, another bushman turned up at the woolshed with his son. The very next morning the bushman was found dead. A little hole, like a stab wound, was found on the soles of his feet with traces of blood around them. On the third morning, the bushman's son was found dead too, with the exact same wound on his feet. Bruce told Nathan that these murders had been committed by ghosts.

That night, the beautiful woman came to Nathan again, but this time with a different purpose. "I have seen many people, but no one is as upright as you. You have the virtues of a saint and I can't deceive you anymore," the woman said, "My name is Agatha. I died when I was eighteen and was buried near the woolshed." She was a ghost, Nathan was sure of it, and despite his horror he continued to listen. It turned out Agatha was being controlled by a mysterious sheep-like creature and was sent to seduce those staying in the woolshed, killing those that gave into her charms. "When I get close to them, I stab their feet to make them pass out, then suck their blood out for the sheep to drink. Sometimes, I use gold. It's not real gold, but the bones of demons. Once the tenants take the gold, it will deprive their hearts and guts," explained Agatha.

That afternoon Luke noticed my distraction. We were having tea in his kitchen, I was distant. He persistent. And eventually, abstractly, I told of my dilemma. Of my desire to see Juan perhaps once more. Told him that I had imagined – I softened the version for him, to retain in his eyes some sense of sanity about myself – myself seeing Juan around the place.

Transported back to younger days, and attempting to lighten the mood, Luke told me of séances he used to attend.

Just when Nathan was about to congratulate himself for not accepting her offers, Agatha told him: "The sheep is hungry, but now there is no one to kill but you." Terrified, Nathan asked how he could survive another day. Agatha told him to stay with Bruce, as no ghosts or monsters were able to touch him.

Bruce agreed to stay with Nathan the next night and put a little box at the opening of the swag before they lay to rest. Bruce was sound asleep when Nathan became more and more frightened. As a black shadow moved towards the entrance in the middle of the night, a bright object flew out of the box and cut through the canvas and the supporting metal pole, shooting towards the shadow. Bruce got up and went outside to check muttering about the sheep breaking his box. Bruce then explained to Nathan that he was not a shearer but a swordsman, and showed him the object in the box—a small bright sword. He said if it wasn't for the metal pole, the monster sheep would be dead by now.

-A thinly-veiled cover for group sex, he says with a playful wink and a smile that shows age to be haplessly and happily admonishing of youth.

They would perform these rites, these practices, and call upon all kinds of dead celebrities. While 'brainless on amyl' they stroked in the non-presence of famous gay sexual lore.

-You should try a séance, just a little private one, to get in contact with Juan, Luke said, handing me a book he used to use with instructions, a tacky Wicca manual.

When Nathan prepared to leave he dug the bones out of Agatha's grave and took them with him, hoping to keep her out of reach of the monster. He planned to rebury her near his cottage in the bush and pour a cup of wine in front of her new grave, he told her as such when shovelling dirt and bones.

Just when he was about to reach his cottage, someone called out. Nathan turned around and found it was Agatha herself, "I couldn't possibly pay you back for the favour you did for me. Please let me serve you and your mother in the future."

Believe it or not, it is possible for ghosts to gradually become more and more like humans. In the end, Nathan married Agatha and a few years later even gave birth to a baby boy.

-As I said, I was pretty out of it when we played around with the stuff, but even if it's all a farce, it may help you think through things, feel as though Juan knows what you're dealing with.

Naturally, I came home, flicked through the book and prepared. Before I began my séance I smudged the area with sage or sweetgrass for ritual cleansing. I eliminated potential distractions, such as children or ringing telephones. I bring an object – toothbrush – that belonged to a deceased person – Juan – as a way of strengthening the connection.

Photographs are also good links to the dead, so I pull one from the spare room, Juan looking as though deep in conversation with an emu. I create a spirit-friendly atmosphere: the spirit realm is apparently partial to the number three, pale colours and

lilac shades (which are good for promoting psychic awareness), and the scent of cinnamon and sandalwood.

I drape the table – made of natural material, wood – with a pale apricot fabric sheet, I duck out to buy, and return to light, cinnamon and sandalwood incense; I place incense somewhere away from the table, rather than on the table itself. I light three candles, because they are a nice addition as well – not only do they provide some visibility, but there's a school of thought that believes spirits are attracted to heat and light sources. I pour myself three glasses of water. I turn off my phone. I cast a protective circle, I guide myself through a short meditation. I am a medium. As there is a specific spirit I am trying to contact, I ask for him by name: Juan.

I chant the name.

I don't interrupt or speak out of turn.

I don't yell or shout, even if surprised.

I don't fidget.

I don't get up and leave.

Because I am aware that channelled spirits can manifest themselves in different ways, and that some spirits will feel more comfortable acting on inanimate objects that could be felt or heard, I am not surprised by tapping, thumping, soft breezes, temperature changes and the table levitating as these things have all been recorded at séances.

I will be the dark arts done good.

And I see him, on the far side of the room. A snapshot shutter release of a self. A negative on legs. All that you still are. A body dissolved but a presence surely though.

Not physical, but undeniable. A metaphysical presence, one that hadn't so much as crashed into this plane of existence as simply crashed it, as one does a party.

I wretch a little in my throat, scrape my clavicles with a growl and pool together what is loosened from glands with the saliva I can muster up. I spit at him, like in an old western, or from first base in the 60s, I spit like a bullet and he's gone.

In desperation I go to the bathroom. I light a candle. I turn off the light. I stand before the mirror and say his name three times in the almost dark.

*Juan*

*Juan*

*Juan*

I saw my own face in the mirror, finding its shape and forming as my eyes adjust to the lack of light.

## **Tuesday 5 April Bathmophobia – Fear of Stairs**

I awoke this morning two minutes before my alarm was set to go off. On a day like this I feel as though it would be impossible to be unproductive. My body has said, “I have had enough sleep, and I am ready to wake up”. Well rested, I tuck in my elbows, pressing them against my torso, and roll from the left of the bed to the right. My hand crawls away from my chest and plucks the top envelope from the pile on the dresser. I verify the date. An exasperated “Fuck” allows itself to fall out my mouth, it is joined by many more as I pull on undies and walk the necessary nine footsteps from my bedroom door to the top of the stairs. They are carpeted, a flight of ten, a ninety degree turn to the right, and five subsequent carpeted stairs. I take three steps back, slowly. I breathe in; a deep breath. Chest swells to accommodate for this new oxygen intake. I lean forward and take those three steps forward – plus one more.

My head makes first contact. The hanging light halfway up the staircase welcomes my forehead with a crack, sending my head backwards, exposing my throat. Arms are held loosely forward, legs are tucked up, an indoor long-jumper, an idiot. Second to make contact is my right knee. The force with which it hits the wall at the bottom of the first ten stairs spirals me, seventy-four kilograms of fear, down the remaining five stairs. My whole body makes contact now. I see a little blood trickle from somewhere on my head into the tightly woven cream carpet, I am facedown and feel that my right foot is slightly elevated. I snatch it back from the staircase and lay, breathing and bleeding. Breathing and bleeding.

I half expect some caffeine and nicotine addicted New York detective to walk in and start chalking a line around me. One cheek to the ground, left arm extended further above the head than the right. Right knee tucked closer to the body than the left. How



are you going to chalk this outline if you are always carrying a coffee and a cigarette?  
Steam and Smoke. Steam and Smoke.

There is a gash on my head that bleeds lightly; I am examining it in the reflection of a spoon in the kitchen. There is a single step up into the bathroom. Once again I see this shiny bigheaded doppelganger of mine, the one who only dwells in convex metal, the one who lives a life in silverware. My mouth on the silver spoon. Cupping my hands at the kitchen sink I collect a hand-made bowl of water, splashing it at my face and feeling it pull the blood from the wound. Coaxing it down the drain. I towel my forehead off, collect my effects and leave, I have a busy day of both work and university.

Following an ungraceful attempt to slide down the aging and rusted handrail that neighbours the stairs from the front door I walk to the bus stop. I watch the first bus go past, as I sit on the bench, making no attempt to board it. The second arrives at the bus stop, and I soon arrive on its back seat. The first bus required me to climb three stairs to board it, the second was wheelchair friendly. I am pathetic. I alight the bus and stand beneath a sky that is a milky autumn mix of grey and off blue. Hands buried in pockets I walk to Liam's place, an apartment block in Redfern.

Redbrick, 1970s, a horrible bricked pattern that forms a skewed arch above the dual doors. They have eight panes of glass each; four high, two rows. Divided by moist and rotting wood the colour olive green. There are six steps of the same redbrick that ascend towards these two doors. I have never taken so long to enter Liam's place. I had come feeling too happy, Liam's apartment has an elevator. It is run down, stinks of urine, stained, and reminds me of a loading dock elevator more than one found in a residential building, but either way, it meant no stairs. I had not even considered the entrance to his building. I can only jump up five stairs, Juan can testify I have never made it higher. My milky sky ceases to curdle, and for a brief moment a sun that is bright and not warm

creeps onto the stairs that stand before me. A sign. I can jump six stairs. An extra three inches on my five stair best.

I step towards them slowly, before increasing my pace, I bend my knees, I let my arms hang. They swing back, and as my feet peel themselves from the concrete below I hurl my hands towards my destination, a step above my best. Wind blows my hair back, I open my mouth and inhale, my cheeks ripple for a moment, pushed wide by momentum as I take a deep breath of a personal best, of the conquest of fear. I begin slowly to descend and my feet make contact, they touch down. My arms swing back to my side in an attempt to counter my weight pushing forward, but it's too much. I step out with my right foot to steady myself, to slow this push, and it kicks the sixth stair – my big toe screams. The lower part of my left shin collides with the lip of the sixth stair, and I fall. Palms meet redbrick, redbrick palms.

Personal best is five stairs and a grazed knee.

I walk inside, limping on my right leg, through the mouldy olive green, and watch a circle ignite with a dull train-cabin glow as I push it. It summons a knight in coated armor, an elevator to save me from these stairs.

Dabbing at my knee with tissue, I apologise to Liam. He takes a draw on a joint and tells me it's okay. We play Halo for three hours and I get paid \$75, and Liam knows I get paid \$75, and I walk out the door unsure as to whether or not I feel guilty. Bittersweet is the smile that is painted on my face as I descend the four levels from his apartment to the ground floor, bypassing stairs as I experience this controlled fall. Approaching the stairs to the footpath my toe, my shin and my knee scream "DON'T JUMP!" and I am scared of what these stairs propose. I sit down on the top stair, knees tucked to chest, and then extend my legs. They make it three stairs down. I place my hands on the stair to steady myself, and lower my arse to meet my legs halfway down

this staircase. Low centre of gravity, minimal danger I tell myself, but I have to be quick. I repeat the process, and stand up breathing heavily on the footpath. Brushing my hands on the thighs of my jeans I feel the pebbles fall out and they leave little red indentations on my palms. I walk away with dirt covering my backside.

The wait for a wheelchair friendly bus is not too long, and I soon find myself at university. I feel a stray drop of rain hit my shoulder. Two ramps of about fifteen metres a piece fold back on one another to take up the equivalent height of their neighbouring architecture; ten stairs. I walk across the pedestrian overpass, I walk across the traffic of Harris Street. I walk past the shirtless man that has defined muscles because he does not eat, but washes windcreens to live off heroin and cocaine. He has a long goatee-moustache combination. I once gave him a fiver, to which he responded: Thanks to and for the Queen!

This route meanders through the campus, seemingly without purpose. But it takes me to my lecture without stairs. Glass doors slide open and I walk into a building that is significantly warmer than its surrounds. The heat draws my hand from my pockets. In the middle of this building lays a decision. A flight upwards of twenty stairs or an elevator. I select the elevator. I descend one floor, alight and arrive at my lecture. The lecture hall sits around five hundred people. Doors of lightly coloured imitation pine open up and feed students in through the back, down the stairs and into rows of seats with swinging arm rests that cover your lap and allow you to take notes or doodle idly. The seats are covered in a deep purple that is often stained with the matte grey and black of old chewing gum, forgotten and discarded. I walk in through the back, my detour has meant I am slightly late.

No one sits at the front. We are halfway through semester, so attendance is slowly dwindling. Yet apart from about twenty conscientious students, and one with a hearing

aid, the others in attendance are sprinkled across the back four rows. They fill the aisle seats. They leave empty seats in the middle of clusters, taunting me. I cannot reach them without descending this summit of a stairwell. The blue carpet beneath me sinks down to its underlay as I turn on my heel. I walk outside the lecture hall to consider my options.

Against the wall, between the two doors that enter the hall on the left and right, there is a small grouping of furniture. Two long coffee tables in cream-white, and two three-seater vinyl mocha brown couches. A girl of huge proportions takes up two thirds of one of these couches as she sits and stares intently at her laptop. She is looking at a blank document, and it is obvious her intent stare is an attempt to avoid eye contact with fellow students. She has earphones plugged into a small black device, it looks like the radios used by security guards

Behind a rusty, broken gate at the top of the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi in Eagle Point Park (Clinton, Iowa) is an ancient set of steps plagued with tragedy and wrought with mysteries and fables. Locals call them the “Thousand Steps”, and they were built in the 1930’s, same as the rest of the neighboring park, to allow access from the top of the bluffs to the beach below. Although originally used frequently by families and other people looking for a scenic hike, the stairs soon fell into disuse and began to decay, making them very dangerous to use.

By the 1960’s, it had become a rite of passage to descend the stairs and live. Dozens of children died attempting to master the stairs every year all throughout 1970’s, when attempts (and the associated death toll) began to slow.

Even now on average one person a year loses their life on the stairs. There are frequent reports of ghost sightings, the confirmed discovery of human remains and even rumours that the sight used to be a Native American burial ground that remain, as yet, not fully substantiated.

The steps still stand today, as dangerous and mystifying as they were 50 years ago. If none of the legends are true – the burial ground, the human remains, or the ghosts – the death toll still stands, and the question remains... Who will be the next victim?

that stand in black at the entrance to nightclubs.

This poor girl is so fat that the seats the university provides within the lecture hall cannot house her. Instead she sits out here, without contact from other students, one person on a couch for three, and listens to the lecture from afar. The first slide of the lecturer's presentation appears on her screen. I sit down next to her. I will observe the lecture from here, I cannot face more stairs. I tap her lightly on the shoulder, she is breathing heavily though she is doing little more than sitting and occasionally typing. She turns to me, her hair looks thin and the strands that have fallen from her ponytail are clumped together by sweat. Her brow glistens as though snails have used it as a thoroughfare. She looks at me, mouth permanently open, bottom lip fat, top lip thin to the point of nonexistence and says nothing. I can see a tongue piercing in there. She turns back to her laptop. I tap again. She turns and removes one earphone, she breathes heavier now.

-Hey, I'm Juan, I was wondering if I could share an earphone with you and listen to the lecture?

-Juan? You're not one of those fucking exchange students from Europe are you?

Her voice is raspy.

-Um... no. My delivery is slow, I am confused about this blatant racism.

-Nice try. She takes my uncertainty for lies and gives me a "get fucked" smile that causes her thin top lip to disappear while pulling three chins into two.

-Your type are always getting an easy fucking pass through here, easy grades and higher marks. Go home.

Her hostility is partially lost in the permanently exasperated nature of her out of breath delivery, but enough of it remains. She returns the earphone to her left ear and returns

her gaze to the screen. Her hostility has quickened her breathing and left me sitting perplexed, mouth open in bewilderment. As I sit, still looking confused and attempting to come to grips with what has happened she begins to shuffle across in my direction. In no way is this a sexual advance. A large amount of black denim muscles me closer to the edge of the vinyl, and I stand my ground. I ignore the hint. The force behind her weight is too strong and she pushes me off the edge of the seat to the ground. I look up at her. Black jeans, oversized red shirt with sweat patches and Irish green eyes that are belittled by her chubby face. I am lost. I cannot comprehend what has just occurred. I stand and I leave and I shake my head. This lecture is lost to me.

I follow the elevators and ramps to The Coffee Stop. It takes me thirty seconds to lift a lead-weighted thigh high enough to drop my right foot up the only step that leads into the shop from the footpath.

The tutorial is uneventful and it takes me nine minutes to get there from The Coffee Stop; some of the elevators only stop on even floors, I was unaware of this and needed to be on level 21.

I had another three hours lined up with Mario. The man had two kids to a wife that he loved and still loves, but couldn't tell her he was gay. The shame led to a horrible concoction of public toilets and alcoholism that resulted in the contraction of AIDS and the loss of his family. We meet and do his grocery shopping at the Coles next to Town Hall. Carrying four white plastic bags apiece we walk to a coffee vendor nearby and Mario lights up a Camel Light and offers me one; he always does, and I always refuse. We get coffee and he sits on the steps to Town Hall and I sit on the rail beside them, I climbed up from the footpath and thankfully he didn't ask.

-Have you got much planned tonight? His voice is quiet yet strong, the kind of person that needn't shout to get a point across.

-I am kind of bogged down with university work. Haven't been out much at all lately.

-You should come out with me for drinks sometime, I can make sure you have a good night? Bit of a struggle picking up guys since the test results came back.

He lets out a chuckle that runs away before it's audible.

-I might have to take you up on that Mario.

I say it jovially. I try to lighten his mood. He responds by pulling at the oversized grey and white striped cardigan I am wearing, its thick knit. He talks about fixing my fashion before he takes me out lest he becomes entirely ostracised from the gay community simply for being seen with me. I joke that it works wonders with the ladies we both know I am lying but say nothing.

There are two steps from the footpath into Mario's front garden, he lives in Summer Hill and we caught the train home. I gesture for him to walk through the gate first and casually step over the thigh high brick wall instead of taking the stairs. We say farewell, shake hands, and both know that I got paid \$75 for today.

I am sleeping on the couch tonight Dr Gleeson. I spent just on eleven minutes staring at the stairs to my bedroom with my left hand resting on the rail. Occasionally my knee would lift, preparing for the ascent. It would hang there for thirty seconds or so before falling back into place, leaving feet side by side. I was humming a Led Zeppelin tune as I stood and wished I could mount the stairs. But I couldn't. I am sleeping on the downstairs couch tonight.

## Thursday 14 April *Hippopotomonstrosesquipedaliophobia* – Fear Of Long Words

It makes sense, this fear, does it not? Long words are prone to be thought of in a way that is not clear. I mean, look at the first word you wrote on the page I read from you when I woke up. It is far from clear. The next four, though – *fear of long words* – they make great sense. Clear sense. They are brief, to the point. With brief blocks of sound the gist is there at once. It gets to the heart of it.

I mean, words that are big, like the one you give me on this day, they ask too much of the mind. One has to break each part down, to then put it back as a whole. A task that asks too much, that can not, like Don, be scraunched through. In your field of work one could have a hunch (and have that hunch be right) that long words are par for the course – but how ‘bout the rest of us? I mean, we aren’t all the type to drink in such big talk, it ends up as hot air.

On this day I take bliss from plain things. The thrill of the blunt, the curt, the crisp. The short and sweet and sharp and terse. Not one thing is blown up, drawn out, this day (the fourth of the work week) is mine. No work, no school.

Look, if you will, at what it means to live, the things that, so it is said, make a life: a home, food, drink, love, sex, breath, rest. Is there one word in there made up of two or more blocks of sound? No. And that is not in lack of a point.

Please, don’t smirk, look smug or leer, this thought, I feel, is a fair one. In a world where it all is too much (it all of course could be life, or fear, or work, or love) there is a case to be made (a case I make now) for the to-the-point.

Some of the time it seems that it is just prats that scat with long yacks. A yarn can be spun with a short piece of string, and that string can be made from small threads.

Quick, mix small words, jet by, have zip, go forth.



Folk that fear large and long words may well find their death (life screeched to a halt),  
or at least a thing way too dire to face, in toiled turns of phrase. With that in mind I sit, I  
KISS when I tell you, Matt, that on this day, I had fun while I kept things bare.

✻

*Titin also known as connectin, is a protein that, in humans, is encoded by the TTN gene. It is the largest known protein (it functions as a molecular spring which is responsible for the passive elasticity of muscle) and its chemical name is the longest word in the English language:*

[illegible]

354

355

356

357

358

359

360



361

362

363

364

## **Friday 15 April *Kathisophobia* – Fear Of Sitting Down**

Consider, momentarily, the long history of people giving big news – good or bad – and first clarifying with the receiving party of the news that they are in fact sitting down. Where's my clarification? And what's the history or science behind this platitudinal ritual?

I read today's fear, as I do most days, sitting on the side of my bed. This is big news, but certainly not news to be sitting down for. I'm upright. The puppeteer jerking the string that hooks into the spine, a bolt that brings me to life.

When the initial disgruntlement subsides (about halfway to uni on the bus; 9:23am) and my thoughts can consider something if not pious at least less disagreeable than revenge, I'm moved to muse on benefits and justification of such a fear.

Immediately there's the fact that boy oh boy do I look like a model citizen standing here on this bus. Look at all the pregnant women, geriatrics and crippled customers resting their weary feet. None are wanting for a place to plant their arse, and amongst all this relief I stand, a saint, a virtuous man who has sacrificed his seat to a greater good. A public transport god.

Moving on – statistics, terrifying statistics. DVT, for one. Those little exercises they recommend you do on planes, or even long drives. Don't want stiff old trombone legs, the deep vein thrombosis. It's likely it's deadly.

They say that in your average job these days you spend eight hours sitting down, enzyme changes occur in our muscles that can lead to increased blood sugar levels, this more than doubles your risk of diabetes, inactivity kills brain cells, The body needs mobility. Our spines are comprised of 26 mobile blocks of bone (vertebrae) which

rotate, bend, extend, and are designed for movement. Knees, hips, ankles and feet are all mobile joints, too.

These are facts. Deadly, deadly facts.

And add to that the six hours a night spent lying down, asleep. Our leisure time, also spent reclining.

There are solutions, of course, measures in place. The smoking break now replaced to encourage a break from the computer screen. Those same plane exercises repackaged in brochures and YouTube videos for the workplace. Ergonomic chairs. Core-strengthening furniture. Mobile workstations. But it's all a farce. We're committing suicide slowly and comfortably. And one day we don't stand up. That's why everyone over 70 is jumping into wheelchairs; it's a right and ride of passage.

I hover at the back of the lecture theatre when 10 o'clock arrives. I walk small distances across the back wall with a stiff right leg, so that if someone asks why I'm not seated, I can use a locked knee as an excuse.

I stand to attention.

I walk – on my two hind legs! – to class when the lecture finishes.

I linger longer than I should outside the door. Let there be overwhelming attendance. There is – we are approaching mid-semesters, it takes as much as grades to coerce the cohort.

We are a seat short.

-No matter, I protest. I'll stand.

The lecturer will not pick up what I'm putting down about not sitting down. It will disrupt the class. (I add to my aforementioned mental notes on kathisophobia the submissiveness of the act of sitting).

*After years in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show Sitting Bull returned to Standing Rock Agency. A local agent feared that the Lakota leader, Sitting Bull, would soon flee the reservation with the Ghost Dancers, and ordered his arrest.*

*The agent, James McLaughlin, drafted a letter to Lt. Henry Bullhead (noted as Bull Head in lead), an Indian agency policeman, that included instructions and a plan to capture the chief. The plan called for the arrest to take place at dawn on December 15, and advised the use of a light spring wagon to facilitate the chief's removal before his followers could rally. Bullhead decided against using the wagon. He intended to have the police officers force Sitting Bull to mount a horse immediately after the arrest.*

*Around 5:30 that morning 39 police officers and four volunteers approached Sitting Bull's house. They surrounded the house, knocked and entered. Lt. Bull Head told Sitting Bull that he was under arrest and led him outside.*

*The hubbub roused the camp, who came to their chief's aid, and when force was used on Sitting Bull by the police Catch-the-Bear, a Lakota, shouldered his rifle and shot Lt. Bullhead, who reacted by firing his revolver into the chest of Sitting Bull before another police officer, Red Tomahawk, shot Sitting Bull in the head. The chief dropped to the ground, dead, between midday and 1pm.*

*In the ensuing melee The Lakota killed six policemen immediately and two more died shortly after the fight, including Lt. Bullhead. The police killed Sitting Bull and seven of his supporters at the site, along with two horses.*

The lecturer leaves the room triumphantly and returns 37 seconds later with a new chair, bearing it with proud condescension. I return to my locked knee ploy.

-Hm. The lecturer is growing weary of me. The lecturer disappears.

38 seconds later the lecturer returns with a second chair for me to place my straightened, lock-kneed leg upon. I accept less than graciously and hover, dangerously close to making contact.

Class begins.

My thighs burn. To squat for extended periods of time like this requires an unhuman energy I can't fathom. I move my buttocks closer to the chair in almost insignificant increments. I balance on Duchamp's infra-thin. A lifetime of sitting has me addicted. It's right to fear addiction. I relapse, for just a moment, to regain my strength. And then I hover again, balanced on one foot. I count 60 seconds standing, 10 seconds reprieve. I can wean myself of this. A benevolent spirit makes each upright minute come easier. I am growing stronger. Addiction is daunted, I count 65 seconds, I lift a little higher, I stretch the bond my body has with sitting, 75 seconds and higher still. I've been here for two minutes, I'm strong, I inch higher.

180 Mississippi

181 Mississippi

182 Mississippi

It's a miracle!

183 Mississippi

184 Mississippi

185 Mississippi



I'm reformed!

186 Mississippi

187 Mississippi

-You've been treating that chair like a trampoline and this class like a joke since you've arrived, that's enough silly shit, just leave.

Not angry, no. The lecturer is tired while chastising. And I am ejected; free to be erect.

On the bus home I am once again a model citizen.

At home the burn begins again, or perhaps the clarity today has brought reveals it to be more of an itch than a burn. No one has to sit down. We're taught to. I fear what sleep will do to me and my resolve, and resolve to up-end the bed. One of two rolls of black duct tape is retrieved from downstairs and used to fix the mattress to the now vertical wooden frame. I drag my contraption and place it halfway through the doorframe.

Beginning at my ankles, I strap strip upon strip of the tape across myself, fastening my body to the mattress. When I have covered myself, mummified blackly all below my armpits, I place one hand on the side of the door frame in front me, held at chest height, bent at slightly the elbow. With my free hand and my mouth working in unison, I fix the hand there. Then, using only my mouth, I crudely fix the remaining hand atop the first.

If by some fluke I fall in the night. If I attempt to submit to this sitting addiction subconsciously, this position, this makeshift harness, it should keep me upright.

*Still, I know you hear me scrawling furiously... Head is spinning, legs are buckling...*

## **Sunday 24 April *Orthophobia* – Fear Of Property**

I feel I know this house's topography when I wake. The valleys between furniture, the mountains of clothes, the ruins of readings. Yesterday's inventory was taxing, but I feel at home at home. It's in this mood that I open your envelope. It is from this mood that I shift – the epiphany spanning the time it takes eyes and mouth to open wide in newfound horror – to the understanding of what has occurred.

I make my life with possessions. I'm a hoarder; they'll find me dead and smelling, a week after the collapse, buried in the rubble of my recruited objects. And I can't have that happening. To die, with dignity, that's how it should be done. Seppuku, a prime example. I've got to clean this mess out. What do you need to live? Water? I've a tap. Shelter? I'm crowding it. Air to breathe is everywhere. I'm selfish and dangerous and consumerist. I empty my pockets – phone, television remote, today's letter – out the window. Then the cushions from the couch. Then I realise what I must do.

It's a fire sale, it's a bargain; everything must go! It's extreme defenestration.

I undo my inventory. I relinquish it all.

The plastic cups, the oversized comb, the pens in a plastic case, the Twin Tower shakers, the DVDs, the magazines, the No-Doze, the juice bottles and coffee mugs, the coffee table (out the front door), the Dali clock, the torch, the basketball, the woollen shawl.

The couch joins the cushions out front; I drag it through the door.

The towel and the chessboard, the television and stereo, the XBOX, the DVDs, all haphazardly displayed out front of the house. Holiday mementos, knickknackery and plants – fake and real – are carted out too.

I drag out the rugs. I pitch the barometer. I launch the Band-Aids. I kite tea towels out windows. I lob books. I hurl golf shoes. I Frisbee frames and paintings. I catapult clogs. I bowl lamps. I propel deer and a biscuit tin. I let fly with a letter opener. I peg buckets of all kinds. I sling the ornamental cover of a tissue box.

Bear witness to my bizarre Buddhism, worldly possessions relinquished to the world. A garage sale where everything is free.

Dragging out the bookcases, I stand amongst the remnants of this extensive and late spring clean. *I'm lost in a sea of debris.*

I've vented an entire room. Exhumed the ghosts that were trapped under furniture. I move to the kitchen.

I toss a toaster. I jettison Vegemite. I, with great struggle, do away with a fridge. I pelt fruit. I fling furniture small enough to be flung. I project the percolator. I deep-six a pepper grinder. I cast a spice rack into the world. I jaculate Jesus. I heave a radio.

Juan's room remains untouched.

I move my disowning upstairs.

Though her full name isn't ever mentioned, we know the Queen of Sheba ruled over a kingdom in the region of Ethiopia. The royal family of Ethiopia claims to be direct descendants of the child born to the queen and King Solomon. In their legends, the queen is named Makeda.

When they first met King Solomon invited Makeda to a ceremonial feast where spicy food was deliberately served. Because she was staying the night, the queen asked Solomon to swear he wouldn't force himself on her.

He said he wouldn't take anything from her if she didn't take anything from him.

Unfortunately, she got thirsty during the night, woke up, and reached for some water that was placed close to her bed. As she went to quench her thirst the King appeared, reminding her of her promise, as water was the most esteemed of all earthly possessions. The queen took the water and drank it, so setting the king free of his promise.

I discharge toilet paper. I get rid of scales. I fillip a burgundy bath towel. I expectorate an electric razor. I dispose of products that clean my body and my house. I dispatch tracksuit pants. I chuck lamps. I discard a toothbrush.

I transplanted my bedroom, down the stairs, out the front door.

I am without possessions. Am I free or fearless?

Before she left for the underworld, Inanna put on her divine regalia. She instructed her minister Ninshubur that, after three days, she was to ask help of the great gods. At each of the seven gates of the underworld, Inanna removed part of her regalia, until, naked and bent, stripped and stripped of possessions, she came before the seven judges of the underworld and her elder twin-sister Ereshkigal, whose name means "Queen of the Great Earth." All gave her the look of death, and had her dead body hung on a hook.

Three days later, Ninshubur began to seek help, but neither the chief god nor the moon god, Inanna's father, was sympathetic. However, the god of wisdom instructed two creatures to sprinkle both a life-giving plant and life-giving water over Inanna's corpse.

When the creatures sympathized with Ereshkigal, who was groaning in misery, she offered them rich rewards, but they asked only for the corpse on the peg. They sprinkled it, and Inanna lived again. However, before the judges would let her leave the great below, they insisted she provide a substitute, and so demons ascended with her to bring her substitute back. Inanna refused to give them several faithful servants, but she surrendered her bridegroom Dumuzi because he was not in mourning for her. For a while Dumuzi escaped the demons, but finally they carried him off. Then Inanna mourned for him.

## **Thursday 7 April Molysmophobia – Fear of Infection**

*The following has been compiled from the morning's notes and my scratchy memory in a hospital bed with scratchy linen, assisted by reports from witnesses and doctors at the hospital, and a meeting with you, Dr Gleeson.*

Thursday is a day off. There is no work and no university. There is no alarm. Armed with the day's envelope I embark on a short but necessary mission.

The metal of the tap was cold to touch and the water no warmer. My skin tightens and recoils as I pass my hand through the cascades of this private waterfall, checking it is cold enough to be refreshing. My face is splashed and my eyes are rubbed and I look in the mirror, watching drops of water race to my neck. I rub vigorously at my face with an olive green towel; it dries me, pulling off the water, and scraping off yesterday. With hands no longer damp, I open the envelope. It is alive with deadly possibilities. Looking up once more at the mirror I examine my concerned face.

My right eyebrow droops lowly over my eye. Both eyes are wide, aware, cautious. My jaw is clenched, teeth grinding chunks of enamel into a dry throat. My lips are tight; they dip down from the centre and curve up at the edges, they anticipate something, but know not what and beg with the universe that they don't have to find out. My skin is white. I am a ghost. A scab has formed on my neck where once there was blood. A scab has formed on my neck where once there was blood. A scab has formed on my neck where once there was blood. A scab has formed on my fucking neck where once there was blood. Whose neck? Mine! How did this happen? I cut it shaving. The scab looks nasty, a little dark, perhaps it is infected? Perhaps, I did borrow a razor blade from a person who is HIV positive.

Run.

The canvas of my black shoes is rubbing my heels raw, socks deemed unnecessary in the rush. My epidermis splits, there is blood and puss that leaks around to my ankles but I keep running. My jeans rub the hairs on my legs to blunt stubs, shadows of their former selves, and my legs are alight, on fire with friction. No man has run this fast. Breathing heavily I stamp pavement, I make tracks, I exhale gales. I swing my arms; biceps are flexed from exertion. At the end of each swing I grab with my hand, I grab the city, hold tight, and pull myself forward. No man has run this fast. My feet are pulled high and pushed far; when they land they are pushed down by my concern, and it causes them to shake the world. Left foot hits pavement and a building collapses. Right foot hits pavement and an island is flooded. No man has run this fast, but how many men have raced death.

Doors fly open. They swing round and hit the walls that hold them upright I stagger into emergency ward, dizzy from a lack of air, heaving with exhaustion, body heavy with lactic acid and with the last of my energy proclaim:

-I need the cure for AIDS!

The room spins and faces that will not

*A woman (a friend of a friend, of course) met a man while out on the town one night. One thing led to another, as they say, and she ended up having sex with him. Later, the woman fell ill. She went to the doctor, who examined her and announced that she was "infected with corpse-worms" (maggots).*

*A subsequent investigation revealed that the stranger she had slept with was a pathologist in a local hospital. He had fornicated with a decomposing corpse in the hospital's morgue earlier that same day.*

help me look away, and the backs of their selfish heads display emotional indifference. I focus my stare on the woman and two men who sit behind the desk. The people with clipboards and pens and the ability to help me.

-I need the cure for AIDS!

I scream so hard I throw my teeth at them.

I scream so hard my voice cracks. I scream so hard I collapse.

I awake in a bed with white linen weighing heavily on my exhausted body. I look at my arm and follow the tube that protrudes from below the elbow to the clear bag that hangs overhead. I feel it filling me, I feel it flowing in, and with the strength it provides I grip the metal rails of this bed hard.

I throw my shoulders forward until my elbows feel as if they will snap. My back curves unnaturally away from itself as my head is flung back towards my spine. With an exposed throat I hold this position, and I breathe in, I inhale volume, and power, and then I breathe.

-I need the cure for AIDS motherfuckers!

Someone who neighbours my bed laughs. They laugh out loud. I hate these people who find infection so funny. That can laugh at becoming aware of a life threatening condition. These are the people who give me a job, these ignorant people who can so easily use mental and physical disabilities and ailments to fuel offhand derogatory comments, insults and jokes. The people who isolate others as a way of grouping together. What do they share in common? Fear of difference. What kind of basis for a friendship is that? At least their bonds are strong. No one heeds my calls. I scream again expecting immediate treatment, my scream is powered by desperation; can they not hear that? New South Wales Health is certainly in a sorry state. I yell again:

-Do you not want to save a man's life?

I hear laughter and I cry. Climbing out of bed I pick up the stand that supports the life-juice that is hooked to my arm, the only thing that gives me the strength to continue my search for a cure. I lift it and place the frigid smooth metal on my shoulder; I can feel it through the thin cotton of the gown they have placed on me. The soles of my feet cringe at the cold linoleum. I am a walking picture of desperation. I am searching for a doctor. Desperately I scan hospital halls, for medical knowledge clad in a white coat.

*"You were just a chicken bone in a science coat when I had fair hair."*

Patients ignore me. Visitors hurl looks of confusion and disgust. I turn as I continue my search. The silver legs of my IV stand twirl with me in a disgusting infectious choreography of need. A clipboard, a shirt and tie, a scarf of a stethoscope; signs of hope sing to me. In a moment of calamity my shoulder baggage is dropped with a metallic clang. I reach out and my fingers curl into pressed cotton. My thumbs delve in and wrap round to join them. My fists hold folds of shirt and I pull a man with sensibly and stylishly short brown hair towards me. I read his name tag.

- Doctor Mackon. He remains calm despite my approach.

-I

-Need

-A

-Cure

-For

-AIDS.

My delivery is calculated. He must comprehend the gravity of the situation.



-And why is that?

Comprehending the serious tone with which he has asked such a stupid question causes me to stumble.

-Because I have AIDS. My delivery is uncertain, confused, the words drunkenly stumble from my tongue with no affiliation to my heart or head.

-When were you diagnosed? He is patient. Too patient. What is he playing at?

-I haven't been. I cut myself yesterday using the razor of someone who is HIV positive. I thrust my scabbed neck in his face.

-Look at this infection!

He recoils slightly.

-We need to act quickly. We need to beat it. We need to get in early. We can't let the virus spread. I have slow circulation. There is still time. Let's get a cure now!

The words chase each other, falling over one another, pleading. I am crying. I know I am dying. Every gesture pulls on the IV cord; it jingles the liquid bag that hangs limply off me, discarded on the ground. Today I am a ghost.

-I would like you to come with me. I think we should discuss your situation. What was your name? Dr Mackon limply holds my hand, his grip feels like a suggestion, far from a demand. His palms are rough, I assume from over-soaping, the price of being sterile.

-Juan. I say softly, I am tired. And I follow Dr Mackon down the halls. My buttocks protrude from the ill-fitting gown.

After four steps the IV is pulled from my vein, forgotten and wasted, and I am left with a tail made of rubber tubing protruding from my arm. Dr Mackon allows me some safety. With every step I feel my immune system weakening. This hospital is bright

with sickness. Alive with infection. Each hall we walk has spent years consuming the sick. The diseases outnumber the cures, and they have an endless, microscopic ability to threaten me. Sunlight that pours delicately through a sliding glass door that opens onto a well-vegetated balcony burns my skin, skin cancer infects me. Behind closed doors I hear the wheezing high pitched cough of a girl no more than six, the germs waste no time in crawling beneath the crack of the door. They work quickly, and as they fly down my throat I spit. You will not have at me, influenza! I spit.

My hands play tag with my mouth and my pocket; do I breathe unfiltered air, or risk inhaling what has now occupied the prime real estate of my palm?

I follow Dr Mackon and stand awkwardly three steps into the room as Dr Mackon performs the task of closing the door. A plaque with his name is plastered at eye height. The door moves silently until it closes with a crisp click. He walks past me as silent as his door and gestures for me to take the seat opposite to the one he is headed towards. It has wooden arms and brown cotton upholstery, as does his. We are equal in our seating. Eye contact is initiated and I get the feeling that it will be maintained. He has a hazel stare.

-Juan. Right now you are in what we call the 'window period'. He says 'window period' like it should be written with inverted commas. He continues:

Mr. Shinichiro Kido loved his sashimi and sushi so much that he tried to get them as "alive and fresh" as possible. He began having severe headaches three years ago, attributing it to migraine and stress from work. It was only when he started losing his psychomotor skills that he sought medical help.

The scalp specialist noticed small movements beneath his skin... It was only then that the doctor did a local anaesthetic to his scalp and discovered the cause of the movement: tiny worms.

A major surgery was thus immediately called for and the extent of the infestation was horrific.

Remember, tapeworms and roundworms and their eggs which abound in all fishes fresh or saltwater can only be killed by thorough cooking and/or freezing the fish to between 4-0 degrees Celsius. The eggs of these parasites can only be killed if they are cooked or frozen to the said temperatures for a week or more. Think twice about that raw dish next time... or you might get a headache.

-If someone believes they have potentially contracted AIDS we perform what is known as an ELISA antibody test. It is the most accurate test we have. This test cannot be performed for at least thirty days however. What happens Juan – my ears perk up, my trust doubles – is that after the original infection it takes approximately thirty days for detectable antibodies to develop, it can take up to six months though, sometimes longer.

-I need this test now.

The ghosts of AIDS converse within me as my conversation takes the path of exorcism.

-Enough window periods. I need to know. We need to stop this early.

-We can't.

-We must!

-I am sorry Juan. It cannot be done.

-It can be done.

-I am sorry.

There is defeat in the air and it is muggy. I lunge at Dr Mackon to shake sense into him, to hold him and tell him he must help. But I cannot make it. I collapse and fall into the sleep that a child has at the end of Christmas day, a sleep of the most pure exhaustion. My sleep is patchy, with dreams of waking up that occur before the reality of such an action comes to fruition. Juan brings me flowers in my sleep. Juan brings me fine silk from the Orient. Juan puts a pillow to my face.

I am once again attached to a drip. A perfectly circular clock is mounted on the far wall and it tells me in no uncertain terms that time is seven minutes past nine. The vanilla moonlight that pokes its head through the window tells me it is evening. Dr Gleeson tells me he is glad I am awake.

-How are you feeling Juan?

-Scared.

-Good. Following your little performance this morning the hospital did a background check on you and discovered you had been visiting me. I was called in this afternoon. He lets out a chuckle.

-Something funny? Consciousness has brought with it an awareness of blood-pumping, of the movement of infection. Of AIDS, of influenza, of it all. My blood clots with infection, it is gluggy and thick and it strains to pass through thin veins while within it the demons of infection swim upstream.

-It is good to see you so afraid. Acutely so. It means you are making progress. This will be good for you in the long run, though I am assuming you are yet to do a diary entry for today?

-No. I do not elaborate. His eyes say that he knows.

-I would like you to do it now, if possible. Then you will be issued some sedatives and spend the night here.

-Firstly, I don't have the diary here so I can't do my entry – you held up this pad and pen that I copy from now.

-And secondly, more importantly, I am sick. I am dying. And you want me to write? My words are peppered with an incredulous disbelief.

Dr Gleeson was expecting this response and has come prepared. He talks me through this preparation.

-Disinfected oxygen mask. He points to a silver tray that resides on the side table between my bed and his chair.

-You will breathe nothing but pure oxygen, free of the infectious disease that resides in this filth the rest of us breathe. He takes an exaggerated breath that causes his shoulders to rise significantly and exhales with a smile.

-The rubber gloves and scrubs are the same as the ones worn by the doctors in operating rooms, designed to prevent infection. Now, get dressed, I will get a doctor to prepare this oxygen mask and you can get writing.

I want to hate you for the dismissive attitude with which you treated my fear, for the way that you were calm in a time of pure desperation. But I love you for the protection you offer, Dr Gleeson. I dress quickly, now the source of my concern is only the bugs within, as I sit protected from the infection of my surroundings. Before a brunette nurse in off-green scrubs fits my oxygen mask I consume three antibiotic pills. I want more but he refuses me. I am told that these will be sufficient to combat any infection that may be present in me at this time. Never have I been led to believe that AIDS could be cured with antibiotics, but, not knowing what else is currently at war with my immunity, I manage a sliver of graciousness.

As I write this down I relive the morning's events, and am assisted in learning of the actions I undertook without recollection, mimetically bypassed due to both stress and fear. I feel every fear again, and dread tomorrow, when I will have to copy this scrappy paper recollection into my diary, once more reliving a sordid day. The pen and paper rest on my lap now and I am given two sedative pills that are pushed down my throat with room temperature water from a tumbler glass. It washes away the anxiety that was once again gaining rapid momentum and I allow myself to sleep.

### Wednesday 13 April Originalitophobia – Fear of Originality

In the 428 bus, in rush hour. At the front of the bus – is that, is that Juan? A felt hat prevents verification. The newspaper had said seppuku but from the look of his neck it was surely by hanging. People getting off. A man standing near that maybe-Juan (I can't get to him in this crowd, stranger still, I don't want to, do I?), one hand on the metal bar, the other on a book he's reading: *Seel, City, Deers, Sex*. As more of these monsters in suits climb aboard this upstanding reader elbows Juan, knees him, thuds him, prods him, recklessly. Over public transport white noise perhaps-Juan tells him as much: 'You elbow me, knee me, thud me, prod me, recklessly,' in a tone that strives to be menacing – could this be him? Instead, it sounds like he needs antihistamines. He's sick or dying. Juan is becoming *jian*. This prodder sees a vacant seat and throws himself on it.

After class, some two hours later – having placed an order of a coffee, and spending

Your whale of a tale in the mail did not fail.

I was singularly delighted by your epistle.

To be sure, how your letter delighted my spirits!

Your brief missive flooded me with inexpressible joy.

Your letter was very sweet to me.

You could scarce credit what relief I find in your missive.

Your letter was the source of singular gladness.

Your letter having arrived, I was transported with joy.

Your writing to me was the most delightful thing possible.

Your epistle poured the balm of happiness over me.

I was both pleased and delighted that you communicated with me by letter.

That you paid your respects by letter was assuredly a satisfaction to me.

I read and reread your letter with great pleasure.

I can hardly find words to express the extent of the joy to which your letter gave rise.

Good God, what a mighty joy proceeded from your epistle!

I found singular pleasure in your letter.

Your letter caused me quite to smooth my brow.

Your pen sated me with delight.

the time awaiting its arrival (heralded by a  
barista calling, unsure, to me, certain,  
'Juan?!') pondering when this café just  
opposite the entrance to central station off  
Broadway changed its name from Café  
Roma to The Roman Heart – I spot him  
again. Swan-necked Juan. He's with a  
friend – but who? Is it Dr Gleeson?  
Perhaps just a conversant with this  
devolutionary convalescent? And I just  
hear a sentence above the hubbub as he  
points to the lapels of maybe-Juan's  
jacket: *You ought to get an extra button  
put on your overcoat.*

Later I visit Luke, despite forgetting to get  
my shifts from Sebastian on Sunday.  
Keeping one's word is hardly original in  
this day and age.

When I received your most gracious letter,  
boundless happiness occupied every recess of  
my soul.

Whatever kind of a letter leaves your  
hand seems to me flowing with  
sweetness and honey.

May I die the death if anything  
more delightful than your letter ever  
came my way.

Your letter promptly expelled all  
sorrow from my mind.

As I aspire to the love of the Muses,  
nothing more gladsome than your  
letter has ever ere this befallen me.

Your letter cast a dew of rare joy  
upon me.

When the messenger handed me  
your letter, my spirit immediately  
felt the motions of an inexpressible  
delight.

The charm of your letter put  
shackles of delight on my soul.

Your lines seem to me pure  
enchantment.

The man who delivered your letter  
brought cartloads of pleasure.

I was most luxuriously refreshed at  
the sumptuous banquet of your  
letter.

Like clover to the bee, willow leaves  
to goats, honey to the bear, even so  
are your letters to me.

Your letter made me positively jump  
for joy.



“evirra, evirra iuq eC”

.ma I nehew ereht eb t’now ti taht si erutuf eht rof raef tseggib yM

.tfig a si siht ,tluciffid elihW .esirprus a si gnihtoN

.rennam siht ni ecneirepxe ym gnittamrof yb erutuf eht fo rorret eht uoy deraps evah  
lliw I – sessecorp evitingoc ni neve ,tsap eht ,tey retteb ro ,tneserp eht sa erutuf eht  
redner ot elbissop sa senalp ynam sa no tpmetta na – tsrif dne eht uoy gnivig yb taht  
epoh eht nI .sdrawkcab lla siht nettirw ev’I ,dnim ni taht htiW

!erutuf eht fo nopaew eht si esirpruS .esirprus yb uoy ekat ot snoitasilaer esoht tnaw  
t’nod I

.uoy htiw gnirahs t’nsaw I taht – dneirf a uoy gniredisnoc (I ton ,lanoisseforp eht era  
uoy hguoht) yllanoisseforpnu spahrep ,dna – eruc a detcognoc gnivah ,eb dluow I ereh

dnA .aibohparutuf dereffus uoy taht erawa yletaideemI .uoy seifirret erutuf eht taht egdelwonk eht htiw detnorfnoC ylneddus ,eb dluow uoy ereh dnA ?flesruoy meht wonk neve ton did uoy fi ,suoicsnocbus erew sterces esoht fi sneppah tahW ?uoy yb deruobrah ylterces era sraef eseht fo emos fi tahW .deirrow werg I os gniod ni dnA .tsap eht no llewd ot yadot emit fo tol a dah evah I ,noseelG rD ,denoitnem I sA ?flesruoy (em ot nwonknu snaem revetahw hguorht) tsil eht delipmoc tub ,sseJ ot ksar eht tsurtne ton did uoy gnimussa ni thgir I mA ?modnar yletelpmoc neeb evah t'nac ti ylerus ;sraef fo tsil eht detcurtsnoc uoy woh aedi on evah I .uoy htiw ti erahs ot ton em fo ssimer eb dluow ti tlef I ,erutuf eht gniganam ot yek eht dekolnu dah I hguoht sa tlef gnivah ,dnA .dneirf a ot evah I gniht tsesolc eht – ereh seiradnuob lanoisseforp no noisurtne ym esucxe esaelp – neeb evah uoy htaed s'nauJ ecniS .stneve s'yadot drocer ot emit emac ti nehW derrucco puccih ylno ehT

.hguoht sterces dna seitiddo heus ot enorp saw eH .msilaugnilib sih fo erawa emit eht ta ton saw I tcaf eht gniredisnoc gnisufnoc erom neve edam tca nA .nirgahc ym ot hcum ,etalsnart ot gnisufer ,hcnerF ni yleritne ekops eh yad ehT .nwotweN ni bup a ta ,ylimaF smadA ehT ,enihcam llabnip a rof drocer eht tes ew ,yldetcepxenu etiuq dna ,mihw a no ,nehW .etihw ro wolley fo sedahs tneffid dna dnuor erew taht slaem erauqs eerht ;eseehc ylno eta ew yad ehT .I dna nauJ fo thguoht I .tsap eht deipucco I (noitasrevnoc ni nehW ,yllaitnesse ;oiraM htiw gniteem ym gnirud ro ,sub a gnidraob nehW saw I sa) tneserp yleritne eb ot deriuqer ton nehW .yromem ni detsixe I ,siht ot rehtruF

.[(kcubmuJ) doohdlihc ym gnirud denwo dah ew tac a ,loohcs hgih fo yad tsrif ym ,esu ot tey dah I tropssap a rof tohs gum a ,emoh wen ruo ni yad tsrif eht no I dna nauJ] shpargotohp detrossa ,(21\$ ,tereK ragtE ,*tuopilF dormiN ehT*) roirp sraey owt desahcrup koob a rof tpiecer a ,stekcit sub s'keew tsal :tsap ym morf sdne dna sddo deirrac I

.tsap eht htiw – ssensuoicsnocnu fo etats eht gniveihca dna peels ot nwod gniyl  
neewteb setunim eht ,kooc ot (atsap otsep) rennid ym rof sekati emit eht ,esuoh  
s’oiraM morf dna ot klaw eht ,edir sub eht – spag eht dellif I ,noitaraperp ym ,tsil ym  
hguorht edam saw yaw ym sa ,oS .tsap dna noitaraperP .noitaraperp dna tsaP .owt eseht  
enibmoc ot ylpmis dedeen I woN

.degnahc eb tonnac – detcurtsnoc evah dna llacer dna nesohc evah dna wonk I eno eht  
;yrotsih ym ,tsael ta ,si taht – yrotsiH .noitauqe eht morf ecnahc devomer I .seititne  
elbawonK .derrucco ydaerla dah tahw htiw yletamitlu flesym denrecnoc I

### **tsaP**

.deveihca tub ,elbaveihca ylno ton saw ti woN

.tpelS

.stneve s’yad eht dedroceR

.deb rof deraperP

.rennid etA

.ytisrevinu rof deriuqer saw tahw daeR

.hcnul etA

.emoh kcab sub eht thguaC

.oiraM :tneilc detisiV

.sub eht thguaC

.derewohS

.tsafkaerb etA

:ecnatsid dda ot redro ni ,esnet tsap eht ni tsil eht edamer I .tneserp tnenimmi yM .erutuf

ruoh 21 ym saw sihT

.peelS

.yraid siht ni stneve s'yad eht droceR

.deb rof eraperP

.rennid taE

.ytisrevinu rof sgnidaer deriuqer oD

.hcnul taE

.emoh sub eht hctaC

.oiraM :tneilc tisiV

.sub eht hctaC

.desserd teG

.rewohS

.tsafkaerb taE

:tsil a edam I oS .tneserp gnihtyreve sekam noitaraperP .erutuf a eb ton dluoc ereht

,gnimoc saw tahw wenk I fi tuB .emoc ot saw tahw fo deifirret eb ot em rof sruoh 21

ylno tfel taht ,mp01 yb peelsa eb dluow I demussa gnivaH .ma01 ta epolevne ruoy

denepo dna pu ekow I .stsil od ot ekam uoY

### **noitaraperP**

.tsap dna noitaraperp :sgniht owt ot nwod deliob tI .noseelG rD ,od ot gniht ysae

ylgnisirprus a saw erutuf eht tnorfnoc oT

**erutuF ehT fO raeF – aibohparutuF lirpA 91 yadseuT**

## Monday 25 April Eremophobia – Fear Of Being Alone

Waking in a cave. A house stripped of personality and memories. A husk, not a home.

The first task, to retrieve your pile of envelopes and diary from the tip out the front. I find them without too much trouble, cocooned between a pillow and a microwave.

And then the realisation I made so casually last Tuesday catapults itself back to the forefront of my consciousness. Fear of being alone. Since Juan's death I had no one. I mean, there's Penny and Mike, but they've got an obligation; it's not the same. They gave birth to me and through some sick contract – whether I murdered or teased children or purposefully inflicted pain on puppies – they would retain some obligation to love me. To offer familial solace, even from a safe distance. And the same can be said for you. Penny is paying you. We are not friends.

We radiate feelings to others, but ultimately we are alone. For me, the essence of life is how we handle our loneliness; who had said that?

The Khoisan people of the Kalahari Desert in southern Africa say that long ago there were no stars and the night was pitch black.

A girl who was lonely and wanted to visit other people, threw the embers from a fire into the sky so that she may illuminate the path to companionship.

This was how she created the Milky Way, a galaxy against loneliness.

I can't think of a time when I was lonely. Before now that is. There was the unconditional love of parents, but before I had reached an age whereupon I had enough reason to realise the aforementioned obligation, Juan had entered the picture. And since he had left I'd felt no reason to be lonely, terror kept me company, as did ghosts.

Was loneliness only weakness?

*"It's the human condition. We all want affection and the sound of another heartbeat."*

I wrack my brain in search of a personable exchange that hadn't been based on money. The house now empty, the loneliness echoed. Who had I even spoken to? Bus drivers and baristas, doctors (already excluded) and a delivery driver, family (excluded too) and food preps, a history professor, a hospital nurse, a junkie and a judge, a library assistant and a lesson-giver, neighbours (but they're much the same as family, coerced by geography into politeness) and more nurses, post workers and a plumber (in the aftermath of the coprastasophobia), real estate and retailers, teachers and tutors, vocational students and... Vocational students. Hannah.

I had left her, vomit in her cleavage, at the pub. I had been kicked out of class before it started the week after, having been unable to adequately explain to the lecturer why I was not capable of sitting down. Last week she'd been absent. I had kissed her before leaving parts of my stomach on her chest. Was that friendship? Intimacy? I'd heard of emetophilia, not that that had been my intention.

I search for the laptop. It's in the microwave. It won't turn on. I search for the charger. Markus's bin. I had been more thorough than I thought in my violent and impromptu Buddhism.

I send Hannah an email. I grow impatient waiting for her reply. I need company. Any company. I recall my list. I visited a barista. The round trip – to the café across the park and back – takes 14 minutes. I check my email once again. I religiously refresh the page. I receive a two-word reply:

*Yes. Address?*

Hannah arrives to find me sitting on the couch, perilously balanced on the three worn and uneven steps that brought you to the front door, where it had been discarded the night before. She did well to make little note of the debris, taking it in stride and

striding through it. She asks me when the house was built, and I tell her I have no idea. She joins me on the couch, hands me my bankcard.

## **Solo statistics**

- In 2006, 27 per cent of Australian households contained one person.
- This demographic is projected to grow from 1.9 million in 2006 to 3.2 million in 2031.
- In urban hotspots, the picture becomes even clearer: Perth's inner-city one-person households stands at around 63 per cent, Adelaide at 44 per cent, Darwin at 43 per cent, Melbourne at 38 per cent, Sydney at 36 per cent and Brisbane at 31 per cent.
- In Sweden, 60 per cent of households comprise one person, Norway has 40 per cent, the UK 29 per cent and the US 28 per cent.
- The fastest-growing areas of solo dwellers are in China, India and Brazil.
- Of those living alone, 57 per cent do so by choice, according to the Australian Institute of Family Studies.

-The bouncer gave it to me after you left me in the lurch at the pub. Told me 'my boyfriend' needed a cab, or a ride, or some help, and that the bartender had found this after you had emptied your wallet buying vodka red bulls.

I apologise, profusely, though without specifics. We enter the husk of the house and finally she inquires as to the garbage garage sale I've set up out front.

I explain Juan. I show her the stack of envelopes. The ones already opened. The diary. The palindromes and the sobriety. She helps me move things back inside. We leave them unarranged, sardined in the spare room.

She lies me down in the living room, still unadorned, the curtains still open on to the park, and takes her clothes off. I follow birthday suit.

A cigarette already lit, she asks if she can smoke inside and I, free from fear, shrug blissful permission. Contemplating the lit cigarette she speaks again.

-Have you ever touched snow?

I tell her I haven't. I explain my unused passport.

-When you went in, it felt like a lit cigarette flicked into powder. It just burrows, hot into cold, toxins into water, like despite it all, that was its home.

I contemplated this and again she speaks.

-What was your fear today? What are you afraid of?

I tell her I wasn't afraid. Not now. Then I tell her today's fear. I began my justification: 'That's not the only reason...' 'Fear's a catapult...' 'It took a moment like...' 'You've got to realise...' she puts an ellipsis on every sentence with her lips and lights another cigarette. She hands me the diary and a pen.



**Thursday 21 April *Rationemophobia* – Fear Of Reason**

“... it's a myth that there's any such thing as purely logical, rational thinking — because our minds are always affected by our assumptions, values, and purposes.”

—Marvin Minsky

Perhaps it's slightly contrarian of me Dr Gleeson, but I found today's fear rather reasonable. My reasoning being that to live an entirely reasonable life is to not live at all, wouldn't you say?

Fuck slightly, I am entirely contrarian, in the spirit of living.

Logic VS common sense in a cage match. I'm the

drunk guy cheering on from the back row seat, ticket bought from a scalper. We want blood! We want senseless entertainment! We're massive, we're the masses! We vehemently reject the culture of mundanity.

I will wear no shoes, no pants, no, no shirt! I walk to the café in underwear carrying a ten dollar note. I order a coffee, I leave a tip. It's unreasonable. I sip my coffee as I walk back across the park. I meet the eyes of the ghouls that look at me confused or offended as I return home.

Don a shirt, it's backwards, as are the shorts I wear. I walk again to Redfern, on the way meeting the eyes of the savages who question my unreasonable unreasoning reasonably plain to the eye as it is as a result of my fashion. I am going to buy marijuana again, for what reason? For none other than it would be unreasonable to think it unreasonable.

My nameless British provider answers the door. Same green mesh basketball shorts and the same blue shirt with a lion eating intricate feathers on it. I take 20 dollars from the wallet in my back pocket, now on my front and hand it to him. He leads me to the room. The same nudity, finally I understand the reason for the bathroom scales. I hug his naked flesh in thanks and leave.

YouTube clips educate me on to how properly roll the marijuana into a joint, I watch them studiously and complete my task. I walk to the nearby primary school and smoke it on the play equipment there in broad daylight, because I see no reason not to. It's just past midday.

I perform a soliloquy, why not, as I stand at the top tip of a slippery dip.

-Moderation is morbid! I'm smarter than Sartre! Age is unreasonable, aging moreso! But aging is an act of life, and if that ultimacy is founded in unreason than it shall follow that so is all else that makes up the great accident of life! Embrace it. Forego reason! Fear it!

"Herbert Simon first advanced the concept of 'bounded' or limited rationality. Because of limits in human mental capacity, he argued, the mind cannot cope directly with the complexity of the world. Rather, we construct a simplified mental model of reality and then work with this model."  
—Richards J. Heuer, Jr.

A teacher has spotted me and is walking from the demountable building in which she was moments earlier no doubt espousing flawed knowledge – doesn't she know  $2+2=5$ ! – and she does not look happy. Which, given my speech, my backwards clothes, my overpowering contrariness, is completely reasonable, but therein lies the problem. She does not

invite a lecture or a revelation so I scam.

Out of sight I walk backwards, why not? I count my steps aloud; I break my own rhythms; I restart the counts as I please. I skip and replace numbers. It's a broken backwards march with running commentary:

1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 16, 21, 28.

Left foot odd, right foot even. Both feet even. No feet! I crawl. I wave gleefully to the savages that watch me worm my way up the street.

I leave the house again, I buy an apple. Well, first I try to barter for it. “*Back to a free trade barter agreement!*” I offer unreasonable trades; my shirt, my house, that man’s hat. I buy it eventually, but only do so when we’ve settled on an inflated price. I leave the store. I return and attempt to replicate the exchange in its entirety. I will make experience and time seem unreasonable. I buy a second apple and leave it on the counter at the end of our performance.

At home, in the college of YouTube, learn the finer points of instruction required to allow me to smoke marijuana through the apple. It is too reasonable to do otherwise. I’m a fantastic student.

I call Penny.

-Scott, are you ok?

-I’m fine, and how are you?

-Are you sure? You sound, drunk? Scott, it’s 4pm.

-I’m sure, I’m sure. So, how are you?

-Scott, why have you called?

-Well, Penny, I saw no reason not too!

The punch line, the laughter, the joy! Penny thinks I didn’t stick the landing. I compose myself. I bid her farewell. I’m unbearably polite. I’m faultless. I’m absurd.

In the post office I buy an envelope and a stamp and return home. I pull a book from the shelf at random and search for an address. 32 Dureau St, Donnyville, Queensland, 4219. I write the address on the envelope, place in it the remainder of half of the remaining

marijuana, and a hand-written with the wrong hand so as to disguise the soul of me inscribed in my normal script that reads: *The full shipment will arrive Thursday week.*  
*QRTV3m7n.*

The combination at the end is irrelevant, a red-herring, but then again the whole thing is. It's unreasonable. I post the letter. I consider getting baptised.

Having drunk the remaining juice in the fridge I cut the bottom off the two-litre bottle with a serrated knife, as YouTube tells me to do. I poke a hole in the lid and construct from tin foil a small container capable of holding marijuana in which to place in the hole, as YouTube tells me to do. I run a bath. I've made a bucket bong.

I shave my legs.

I piss in the sink in the dark.

I speak in tongues:

*Rem mangani rem*

*rak rota wa-usha*

*Kut abalu ben*

*At gugu balu Uska*

*Ala lus lul tho*

*Lus yato-adu eta*

*Lul-tho gogo yo*

*Gogo sato sato re*

"It has been said that man is a rational animal. All my life I have been searching for evidence which could support this." —  
Bertrand Russell

For no reason other than to do so. I run another bath, but for the same reason as just mentioned opt to let it go cold. I rest my eyes while I wait for the heat to make its way elsewhere. Who would I be to think temperature capable of being unreasonable?

## Friday April 22 *Hypnophobia* – Fear Of Sleeping

I believe James Hetfield demanded that we ‘sleep with one eye open’, and Damon Wayans slept with both open while demanding a little R-E-S-P-E-C-T in *Major Payne*; both these instances suggest sleep is dangerous and both instances occur to me simultaneously as I read the contents of the morning’s envelope. I had first to walk upstairs, having decided inexplicably, though, perhaps that was the point, to sleep in the bathroom the evening before.

The next instance in this sequence, should you be interested, occurred two hours later, as I finished my second coffee for the day and was entering the lecture theatre. I told the

Freddy Krueger, the son of a hundred maniacs, is a vengeful spirit who attacks his victims from within their dreams.

Tina was the first to be killed by Freddy. She was slashed and thrown about her bedroom, before finally dying. Her boyfriend, Rod, was blamed for the murder. Later in jail, he was hung by Freddy but the police said it was suicide. If you are wondering who Tina was, she was Nancy's best friend and was shy, smart and friendly.

He is commonly identified by his burned, disfigured face, red-and-dark-green striped sweater, brown fedora, and trademark metal-clawed brown leather glove on his right hand.

Sleep certainly leads to death when Freddy is about.

future. Completely by accident you see. I hadn’t realised I’d done it until the future I’d predicted came to fruition, only then did I gave any consideration to the fact that I’d already envisioned such a scenario, but at the time, as the scenario I had envisioned was yet to occur, I hadn’t invested any real brain power in considering my consideration of that hypothesis that was in fact soon to occur. You see, those first instances had nagged at my thoughts and hitched rides and I wondered: surely there was something more concrete that would give me some information, some REAL information,

about the dangers of sleep. And then I pictured a sad-eyed, greasy-haired hippy, holding a paint tin and brush, with the dumbstruck sadness of an orphaned doe, proclaiming that ‘Sleep gives you cancer’, and clarifying that ‘Everybody knows that’. I’m conjuring up a Zen conscience to try and better inform myself, and think little more of it.

I’m alert, you see, from the coffee, so I have no trouble moving on from that point of thought to the next; in fact, I use my disinterest to propel me at force to the next topic, *Where Shall I Sit*, to the next, and the next, and so on.

Seated, the lecture begins. Society and culture and culture and anti-culture and sub-cultures

and oh look a video well eventually a video when the screen unfurls itself from the roof come on projection screen what is the video come on come on come on

We’re to be watching an excerpt from a British comedy, the Young Ones. Twits and wanna be socialists and punks and wish-they-were-hunks all bicker and froth and they set fire to their own beds and they chatter. And then my hippy, well, the one I pictured earlier, he’s right here on screen in class! Well, he’s been here the whole time see, but I didn’t notice until the scene in the decrepit bedroom that I’d already imagined in my head! And he’s saying my lines – this is when I know I’ve told the future – he’s saying them word for word for word forward for word. In a monotone slumbered display: *Sleep gives you cancer everybody knows that!*

And the DVD must be scratched because that scene just keeps playing on loop. The kids in class, the tutor, they do nothing; it’s mesmerising. Sleep gives you cancer. And I think I even heard someone muttering along. It’s otherworldly. This starts 20 minutes in, and occurs for the rest of the lecture. People either carry on unrelated conversations indifferently or sink into the sick rhythm of it all and then

-That's all we've got time for; perhaps you can cover more on what we've just learned from that viewing and Markson's manifesto in your tutorials.

I make my way to class by way of the coffee shop – the Roman Heart is once again the Café Roma (how long ago had this change occurred (or un-occured as seemed the case?)) – within which I stop to grab two cups. The coffee is hot; it burns my hands, black, and the cost of staying awake burns holes in my pockets.

Tutorial.

I'm edgy, notedgy perhaps just aware, energetic, attuned that's it! Attuned! Attuned is what I am I can cover this topic sleep gives you a cancer and I can write an entry for you Dr Gleeson and I can write down next week's homework readings as stipulated in the handout given out during week one of class and I can think more about fear of sleep which makes sense because life's short man and you gotta do what you gotta do and that means getting it done and Da Vinci didn't sleep! What an achievement, what an achievement! And hey look at that Hannah is not here I wonder where she is Oh and Markson says we've gotta write from everywhere and that James Frey deserves to

-See you next week guys; don't forget to do the follow up reading on Frey.

All the coffee has left my guts feeling wretched. I walk home, trying to burn off the excess energy, safe knowing that exercise releases endorphins and that these endorphins make you feel more alert. Doctors say you shouldn't exercise within a three hour window of going to sleep, but I don't need to tell you that.

I add to my rationale: Brian O'Brien and de Selby's theory on sleep, that it was *a succession of fainting-fits brought on by semi-asphyxiation*.

At the 7/11 halfway home, on Parramatta Road, I stop in and buy the largest packet of No Doze that I can. I'm home and it's 3:30pm, frequent zig-zagging, caffeine addled



what's this and what's that and what's over there's delaying my arrival. Four bathroom stops surely contributing too.

But I'm home and I'm alert and I need something on par with my levels of adrenalin. I watch *Speed* and I ingest No-Doze. I've got big pupils; I'm a wolf. My eyes are full moons. I watch *MacGyver*, whole seasons of it. I'm on the edge of my seat.

I pull the electric blanket off my mattress, inspired by Richard Dean Anderson's ingenuity, and I return to the couch with it in my possession. I eat two No-Doze. With the cord finding its home in the socket I turn the dial as high as it will go, 1,2,3 and wrap the blanket around my leg tightly. I fix it in place with a rope that has lay in the living room since I don't know when. I tie it tight. I watch *MacGyver*. My legs burns, it keeps me alert and when the heat is searing, when it is unbearable, when I become Sunday's roast and want to garnish my own limb, I take it off. I fix it, still hot, to the other leg and wait again for the heat to reach unbearable heights. I sauna limb by limb and in this way I stay awake.

I sauna limb by limb and in this way I stay awake.

I sauna limb by limb and in this way I stay awake.

I sauna limb by limb and in this way I stay awake.

## **Saturday 23 April *Tropophobia* – Fear Of Moving**

It's late when I wake, later than I'd like. Even on a clear day – not clear as in the weather, but as in whether or not there are things to be done – if I'm not awake by midday I feel behind. I've wasted a morning I could have spent mourning or something. All considered though, I feel whenever sleep arrived – it must have done so in a clandestine manner; I was vigilant – it was inevitable that it would stretch.

I make tea, a large cup, and carry it and today's envelope back to the couch. Tea meets table quaintly, resting without spilling, before I flop onto cushions with a quick and quiet free-fall. It's half past twelve.

The envelope is opened, the page inside set before my line of sight, read, contemplated, and with the slightest loosening of my grip, dropped to the floor. This is me, feet firmly on the ground, lower back just supported by the couch, arms slightly outstretched.

Within ten minutes my arms are burning. I'm trying not to blink. I'm a child sulking, playing hooky from a parent keen to give goodnights; I pretend to be asleep, I endeavour to make the inevitable movements of a barely breathing chest imperceptible. I am still. My arms are burning.

I shift them, an increment of an increment of an increment lower. Relief and regret. I repeat the action with more care an increment of an increment of an increment of an increment lower. I'm moving at a fraction of a frame, my arms descend in a slower than slow motion flail. Twenty minutes have passed and my palms rest on my lap. I'm intent, intense, immobile.

I'm bored. What's in my field of view? The accumulation of a life in tangible objects. Me in a catalogue. Little homely shrines.

***Outline of an inventory of some strictly visible things:***

A plastic cup capable of holding roughly 450ml of liquid, empty, transparent and ocean green.

A sheet, its fabric the colour of light apricot.

A plastic schooner, 425ml capacity, clear, empty. (Possibly acquired from a nearby pub accidentally).

An oversized black plastic comb, roughly 18cm in length, nineteenth teeth; usability: zero.

One roll of black duct tape.

An electric blanket, not even warming the floor it sits on.

Four black pens in plastic case, front cover clear, back cover black. Width of nibs ranges from .25 - .7.

Salt and pepper shakers, two inches tall, shaped like the Twin Towers – bleakly, one, the pepper, lays on its side, not a ruin, but at odds with the skyline.

A stack of DVDs lining the wall beside the television unit (which houses the television, 26", Sony; an XBOX, and remotes; an external hard drive, black, capacity in the gigabytes; a stereo, also Sony). Amongst the titles: *The Godfather*, *Scrubs*, *Ren And Stimpy*, *Lord Of The Rings*, *The Simpsons*, *Withnail And I*, *The Young Ones*.

A coffee table, two foot by three and a half, knee height. Four legs, a magazine rack built in below. On top, an empty orange juice bottle, Daily Juice; an empty and unbranded eggshell coloured, coffee cup, made from recycled cardboard; a coffee mug, patterned with native fauna *Red Flowering Gum*, and half-filled with last night's coffee; a packet of No-Doze, the sheet of pills sneaking a glimpse at the outside world, half

consumed; a fruit bowl, wooden, filled with old train tickets; a melting Dali clock, placed at inconceivably inappropriate height.

A yellow torch.

A basketball.

On the arm of the couch, a woollen shawl.

A towel, blue, of the bath, as opposed to the beach, variety.

A chessboard, on the floor. Pieces out of sight, chequers on the floor.

The floor! Four rugs, a competitive topography. All of varying tokenistic Persian patterning.

A barometer from Sweden that displayed a gauge – Stormy, Fair, Change, Storm, Very Dry – with the first letter of each option written in calligraphic red.

A packet of Band-Aids.

Three tea towels; one tartan, one red and white, one white.

A cardboard box, two foot square, containing books.

A stone flower pot, housing three fake ferns and a dried Bottle Brush.

A pair of black and white golf shoes.

A painting, French Revolution, mounted on Styrofoam, as thick as a club sandwich.

A framed Latin phrase, in appropriately old world script: *Nil Bastardi Carborundum*.

A decorative pair of clogs, poppy fields rustically painted on the toes.

A wall decal, a map of the world. New Zealand is backwards, or was it upside down?

Either way, Juan had spotted a flaw.

A side table at the end of the couch, and on it, two gold plated deer statues – one grazing, one gazing at the sky; a small wooden bucket; a letter opener, jade handle, bamboo blade; a Walter's Biscuits tin; a gourd; a lamp, fake bronze finish, what looks to be an Indian-influenced design, an off-centre lampshade, beige straining for elegance, the edges lined with yellow and blue rope.

What's beyond it? DON'T MOVE YOUR EYES. Remember.

In this room:

A bookshelf, walnut, four shelves tall.

And on it

Assorted books: Jorge Luis Borges' collected fictions; Steven Pinker's *The Stuff Of Thought*, its cover an odd-aqua; *Girl In A Coma*; Harry Mathews' *My Life In CIA*; assorted Agatha Christies.

A porcelain ashtray, shaped like an open packet of Marlboro Reds – useful only as knick-knackery.

A silver tin Penny brought back from Cambodia, 'real silver', two elephants on its lid: its contents a variety of movie tickets.

A postcard from that same Cambodia trip, *Holiday In Cambodia*, also featuring elephants; two.

A coffee table rarely used for coffee, discarded copies of the *Sydney Morning Herald* repurposing it.

A black external hard drive, no bigger than a paperback, capacity in the gigabytes.

On the windowsill, a bonsai, rusted brown, fixed in a permanent autumn, ankle deep in pebbles.

An undisplayed but well-presented collection of teaspoons acquired or inherited from who knows.

And then

### **The Kitchen**

A red toaster, capable of toasting four slices of bread at once, wide enough to fit bagels.

One large, half-consumed container of Vegemite.

The fridge, off-white – a true white good! – the lower two thirds for refrigeration, the top third, accessible by a separate door, the freezer.

Contents: regular milk, expiry date 31/04, barely used; half bottle of home brand soda water; two tomatoes; half bag of tortillas in zip lock bag; one bag green grapes; one block of cheese.

Two chairs, wooden, painted with a fading waxy green that left some of the grain of the wood peeking through; they had a workshop feel.

A table of the same colour, round, four legs, waist height – that is, the height of my waist – just over a metre in diameter. A glass circle of the same size, half an inch thick, set atop it.

Beside the sink a dish rack, beside that detergent, atop it, a rag, beside it, a sponge (blue for the rough side, yellow the soft).

A hanging cotton bag, elastic in both ends, stuffed – a chore-ish boxing bag – with plastic shopping bags to be re-used.

An old kitsch-red percolator used to hold stationery. That stationery: 7 paperclips, 2 red pens, one thick black marker, 4 pencils of varying sizes, 2 rubber bands.

A foot-high pepper grinder that is made from chocolaty dark wood that still slightly bears the marks from the grain in the wood from which it was made.

A spice rack: cumin, Cajun pepper, thyme, basil, five spice, chili, ground ginger.

An action figure Jesus.

A radio, black, old.

A bread bin, made by Juan in wood class, year 10.

A blue Slazenger water bottle.

### **The Bathroom**

A bath towel, burgundy.

A Colgate toothbrush, white and orange.

Two, no, three rolls of toilet paper, 2 ply, not counting the one on the holder.

Two tubes home brand tooth paste.

Four unused bars of Imperial Leather soap. One used bar on sink. One used bar in shower.

A white wall-mounted landline phone. (It had made our internet significantly cheaper to install as a package with a rarely used landline phone).

Bathroom scales.

A magazine rack beside the toilet (white porcelain) that contains: an assortment of *Time* and *The Monthly* back issues.

A hand towel beside the sink.

An electric razor.

A black table lamp, skeleton allowing it to bend from a central pivot, set on top of the medicine cabinet.

The medicine cabinet's door, serving as a mirror above the sink.

The contents of the medicine cabinet:

One wall, opposite the toilet, tiled entirely with 7x7 inch mirrors.

A real fern.

A cardboard box that once held five reams, repurposed as a recycling bin.

A small plastic trash receptacle, cream.

A grey pair of tracksuit pants.

### **Juan's Room**

A tartan pencil case.

A vase, about a foot high, brimming with dried banksias.

A commemorative baptism candle, set in a menorah.

An acoustic guitar I never heard Juan play, though I did not doubt his ability.

A crudely framed and drawn self-portrait by Juan, aged six. It had its own terrifying charm; it came alive in its own way.

Three canisters of tennis balls; two Slazenger, one Dunlop.

A miniature wooden chest of drawers, set on top of the desk (black metal frame, glass tabletop), the size of a small safe, three drawers.

Four Bostik glue sticks.

One packet of 12 HB pencils.



A photo of me, small, housed in an exhausted pewter frame.

A black, three-speed fan.

A cupboard as tall as Juan, cedar, one side for hanging, the other with shelves.

An empty but retained glass Coca Cola bottle.

A book shelf, *Infinite Jest*, the *Great Stories of Sherlock Holmes*, and the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford Dictionary* (in two volumes) always stacked horizontally at the front of one shelf or another, perhaps for easy or frequent access.

The four kings – Hearts, Spades, Diamonds, Clubs – printed on rust-worn aluminium.

A vintage container for Keens Mustard.

A fake fern.

A black digital alarm clock, display: red.

Three unworn wristwatches – two silver, metal bands; one a Rolex face set on a tacky Velcro strap.

A container of Caffé Nero Mints, the small tin bearing the Italian flag.

A filing cabinet, beige in colour, drawers: three. Contents: unknown.

On top of this, a farm scene, made from wood, a windmill and mill house the centrepiece.

A fake fern.

### **My Room**

A desk constructed out of six milk crates, arranged in a broken L, and the wooden board they support. On it doodles and sentences that have caught my attention in a variety of inks.

Movement assessment:	An empty glass tumbler.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is a lack of movement interfering with your daily life?</li> <li>Has your routine changed to accommodate your new movement patterns?</li> <li>Can you walk stairs with no discomfort?</li> <li>Can you walk unaided and with ease?</li> <li>Can you get down to the ground with ease?</li> <li>Can you get up off the ground with ease?</li> <li>Can you touch your toes?</li> <li>Can you get out of a chair with no support?</li> <li>Can you put your hands behind your back?</li> <li>Can you touch the back of your head with both hands?</li> <li>Can you bend your wrists up 90 degrees and down 90 degrees?</li> <li>Can your hands reach over your head?</li> <li>Do you have full movement and dexterity in your hands and fingers?</li> <li>Can you look up to the ceiling and down to the floor?</li> </ul>	<p>An empty glass bottle of ginger beer.</p> <p>Roll on deodorant; ineffective.</p> <p>A clay coffee mug, top half brown, bottom grey, filled with pens.</p> <p>A pair of sunglasses, rarely worn.</p> <p>A digital egg timer.</p> <p>A baby blue teapot, handle snapped off.</p> <p>A harmonica; key of G.</p> <p>A tube of sunscreen; SPF30+.</p> <p>A stereo in six parts; the body, a sub, two large speakers, two small.</p> <p>Unopened packets of old baseball cards.</p> <p>A pair of mittens, useless in this climate.</p> <p>A Tupperware container, in it, some almonds.</p> <p>The bed, queen sized, on a white wooden frame.</p> <p>The Manchester, all blue, thread count irrelevant.</p> <p>Two pillows.</p> <p>A hipflask commemorating a forgettable 18<sup>th</sup>.</p> <p>An old ladder, clothes climbing it.</p> <p>A reddish brown leather satchel bag.</p>

10 metres of black rope.

An all-purpose grey suit – weddings, funerals, special occasions.

Two bookshelves, exactly the same, both bowed by their burden. Purchased at IKEA. Structural integrity: terrifying. Contents: Jay McInerney's *The Good Life*; Will Self's *The Book Of Dave*; *The Helsinki Roccamatios*; *The Book Thief*; *The Bus Driver Who Wanted To Be God*; *The Children's Hospital*; *The Autograph Man*; *The Future Of Music*; *The Boat*; *The Year Of The Flood*; *The Withdrawal Method*; *The Future Dictionary Of America*; *The Strange Case Of Dr Jeckyll And Mr Hyde*; *The Famished Road*; *The Village On Horseback*; *The Portrait*; *The Outsider*; *The Wild Things*.

A couch, two-seater, mouldy grey, rarely sat on, often occupied.

Three pairs of shoes; two white Volleys with blue trim, one pair black leather.

A black backpack – Northface.

I run these lists again and again, make mental additions, memorise them for tomorrow when, less frightened by movement, I can fix them to a page.

Enumeration leads to exhaustion. I, like a shepherd, am sleepy. Can I still sleep if I must sleep still?

## Monday 4 April Myrmecophobia – Fear of Ants

I awoke to a squealing microwave. A clichéd morning stretch, the kind that necessitates the primal groan, and I walked upstairs to grab my laptop and today's excuse to be scared. I set up shop in my kitchen. Vegemite toast, tea, envelope, orange juice, coffee. So much liquid. Ants. I shared my bed with the enemy last night, I am sure of it. Ants, what a tiny terror. Ants, I really need my shower. I was certain these ants had set up camp, and I was going to drown the little fuckers. Three minutes and forty three seconds later the insect genocide was complete. I could not watch the process, could not bring myself to look them in the eye. It's hard to shower in the dark Dr Gleeson. With eyes closed the world is infinite. My razor cut the threads of individuality from my face as I blindly shaved and prepared once again for the kitchen. I had to retrieve my computer, had to leave for university, had to write all this down, had to have a plan of attack.

With a thong in one hand I ventured into enemy territory. My steps followed a high lifting of knees, my breathing was near silent. The scuttling of black feet reverberated through my ears as I struck. A thunder struck clap as an ant was sandwiched between rubber and tiles. Death justified by fear. Another light footed step by me. The stakes are raised. Two sets of black feet scuttling. I strike left, CRACK! I strike right CRACK! I reach for my laptop. Booby-trapped by spilt orange juice, a call for more ants, what was I thinking?

Pivot.

Step.

*Eniqs is a story telling ant in Maliseet culture. One day Eniqs was walking along the shore when, across the water, he saw the others playing ball. He was eager to join them – but how was he to get across?*

*Suddenly he saw someone paddling along. "Come and get me! I want to go over and play ball. I'll tell you a story to pay for my ride." Well, with that, the paddler took him aboard.*

*"Okay," said the paddler, "Tell me a story."*

*"First I have to have a smoke." So Eniqs got ready to smoke. He packed his pipe, lit it, took a few puffs.*

*Well, he had barely started when the paddler interjected-*

*"Okay, tell me a story already!"*

*"Just a minute. First I must put away my pipe." At last he put the tiny pipe away in his tiny pocket.*

*"Okay, now tell me that story!"*

*"First I have to blow my nose!" said Eniqs, and when he blew his nose, he blew his head right off! Poor guy... he couldn't tell any stories.*

*Ants can't be trusted.*

An ant rears itself onto back legs; it swells in size, a ghoulish man. It walks at me as I swat with a thong. It pleads ‘Please, Juan, please! I have wife – she is a queen! I have 200 children! I’m a family ant!’ I have blindfolded the line between rage and fear and I swat. He threatens: ‘We ants will have our comeuppance! You will pay for today’s death toll!’

CRACK! This reconnaissance mission – CRACK! – has been successful. I step from the cold dead floor of the kitchen tiles to the carpeted floor, to safety. I allow myself to turn around, and I am not even sure if I want to. I have left a trail of destruction. I saw bodies crushed beyond recognition. I saw the black remains of my enemies. The pungent scent of burning sugar stung my nostrils. My kitchen was a graveyard. I left for university.

Today was the day I met Alex Mashman. I feel his name was partially onomatopoeic. If something can be partially onomatopoeic. I hear it and think mash potato, I see him and reason that that is all that must enter that huge mouth of his. He is from America, Oregon, on exchange, for this term only, strong military background. Good posture and bad manners. We have been placed together for a group presentation assignment that is due in two weeks’ time. He sits at the back of the room flanked by a girl with an amazing smile that reveals both rows of teeth, and a guy with a tight white t-shirt. We exchange forced smiles as Scott, my twenty-something year old lecturer, informs us of the partnership. I sit in the middle row of chairs, to the left of the room. My position is non-committal.

We have a half hour lunch break on Mondays. Between 12:30 and 1:00 I consume two cups of coffee. I eat a bagel with cream cheese at the cleanest table outside The Coffee Shop, cupping my chin with my left hand as my right works to fill me. The process is slow and my left palm acts to accumulate the crumbs that drop from my mouth.

As the pile becomes too large I walk to the side of the road and blow the crumbs with a wolf-like gust of wind into the passing traffic. There will be no ants here. One of the cars that catch the remnants of my lunch is an Audi. It putt putt putts passed me in light-catching glory. Opulence on wheels, and I am thankful for the greed that is ever-present in the human condition. It pulls away from communism; the embodiment of an ant-like way of life by an entire society. My lips are pursed and as I blow I must look like a four year old blowing out the candles on his birthday cake. My purposeful exhale is filled with just as much hope, the belief that the wish will come true, that the ants won't follow this trail. I am not Hansel nor Gretel.

I am Juan.

I finished class at two o'clock today. Allowing time for a bus and a leisurely walk home. I should be home by half past. I am finally in the door, sitting on my couch writing this at quarter past three. Tonight is bin night. This made no difference to me until I passed Markus' house. Markus' bins. He had a few visitors, a few hundred visitors. An assemblage en masse of diabetes inducing diets. And they were just one house away from mine.

Grasping sticks I pulled my arms down feeling the tension of the bent branches, then the snap, as they parted in the middle. I'm an otter, I set to work. Stick meet footpath; footpath, stick. I lay these sticks down to rest. But there are gaps, these ants are a miniscule menace; like the otter, my wall must be water tight. Twigs, smaller now, fill the gaps. Pebbles fill the gaps left by the twigs. Leaves cover the gaps left by the pebbles. And all the while I lay on my stomach, a tongue poked slightly out the corner of my mouth, a tongue of concentration, a furrowed brow, and examining eyes.

The hungry dance of  
Ant Woman in the face  
of Bear's greed gave  
us all daylight. An ant  
can defeat a bear.

Let's see those ants cross this I say. And I say it  
with pride and I walk inside and I write this and I  
think about how an ant can lift more than fifty times  
its own weight and I hope that the ants don't track  
me down. It would only take the combined strength  
of 500 ants to lift me. I have killed more than that

today. I deserve to die today. By the order of things, I deserve to die. I close the door to  
the kitchen. They say the human body is seventy percent water. I've shed so much  
sweat there could be none of that left. My skin hangs from a barren skeletal frame. I  
could drown those ants in this sweat. The idea of an ant trying to swim creeps into my  
mind and as the thoughts begin to flow I realise what this fear is doing to me.

Dinner is eaten early tonight; twenty to six. Steak and salad. Tonight I ate like an  
American. Knife and fork at the ready, preparing the meal into bite-sized portions. I set  
the knife down next to me and begin the shoveling process, all the while cupping my  
chin. No crumbs. No ants. It is difficult to be productive after dinner. I suppose it is  
years of human conditioning that has trained the psyche to consider dinner the be all  
and end all of the day. The final nail in the coffin of a daily existence that contributes  
little to society. I should read. I should write about the ants that creep, silently waiting,  
in the smallest crack or crevasse, the perfect assassins. I should get started on my  
assignment with Mash, as his boisterous friends call him. At the earliest I will be in bed  
by eleven; that leaves near five hours for potential productivity that are certain to be  
wasted. Dr Gleeson, please do not give me a fear of time.

I manage to do some of the assignment. I have to deconstruct a film clip and discuss its  
production values. I am studying Media Arts and Production, I feel as if my future  
employment will serve as an analysis of my existence on a smaller scale. On the



production team of a movie, I am no-Juan, a quick glimpse of a name in size ten font in the sixth minute of the credits. I am forgettable. My name has not, and will not, convince you to come and see this production.

Kylie Minogue sings to me “I just can’t get you out of my head...” And I think that it is no wonder; I’ve watched this clip seven times already. *Use of blue screen. Flood lighting.* And every time I get one minute forty seconds in those life size fire-ant looking things start dancing and the paranoia sets in.

I’ve been pulled back from the brink of sleep. A hand has grabbed that weary scruff of neck and tossed it into consciousness. Eyes closed I lay, heavy-headed and blanketed with the warmth of exhaustion that comes from a life of glancing over shoulders. I am greeted by cereal spokespeople. The Cocopops monkey Coco; the Frosties tiger Tony; and Fruit Loops very own Toucan Sam eagerly wave to me. There are bowls upon bowls of their sugary goods surrounding us. I look to the Fruit Loops, the life being sucked from each individual piece as the artificial colouring seeps into the milk swirling into ephemeral Pollock-like creations. Ripples disturb the patterns. I turn to the Cocopops, chocolate boulders that have begun to shake. “What is happening?” I ask my new friends and they answer not with words but with looks of horror. I turn the necessary one hundred and eighty degrees to match their stares and see the source of such dismay. Ants. Thousands of them. Their scurrying steps shaking the ground at my feet. The cereal bowls topple; I am washed towards the enemy amidst a thousand brightly coloured life preservers. I cling to one, embrace my fate and close my eyes tight. Tonight I die at the hands of the family Formicidae.

An alien hand creeps to my chest. It pats once, twice, it grabs. It is my own. I am awake. I have not met a sugary death. *Little mother’s milk breath.* I am moist with sweat. I fear in my fucking sleep.

The kitchen is a mess, and I'm somehow part of it.

### **Sunday 3 April Telephobia – Fear Of Phones**

This morning I had a large serving of irony for breakfast. I awoke to *A Praise Chorus* blasting out of my phone with too much high-end, alerting me to the fact that it was 9:12 am. Pulling my mobile phone out of its charger I mashed the keypad until quiet crept back into the bedroom. I rolled out the left hand side of bed this morning; I keep everything important on the dresser to the right. I had to walk the long way round to retrieve the next envelope. Both phone and envelope in hand I made yet another naked descent into the realm of man, the voices of the Simpsons welcomed me. With breath-not-quite-bated I opened the envelope. Pulling the folded piece of paper from its dwelling I was surprised, to the point of dropping the envelope, to hear the opening cymbal counts of Jimmy Eat World begin once more; I must have only hit snooze. Humming along to the first few chords of the song I reached down and once more began the task at hand. The envelope now sat beside me, and its contents in my hand. Unfolding the paper I turned it over and read the words “Telephobia – The Fear Of Phones” printed in his fine blue hand over the crisp white landscape of otherwise unblemished A4.

Jim Adkins politely asks “Are you gonna live your life wondering?” through my inadequate phone speaker and I scream back at him “Yes Jim. Yes I fucking am!” Three minutes and forty eight seconds later I hear the final muted notes of the song ring out. Couch cushions are pulled from my ears, but my head is ringing. I will wash down the first course of this horrid breakfast with some Panadol. Do you see this irony Dr Gleeson? I can safely bet you have given me a fear of water on the morning I awake to rain.

Never, ever answer a cell phone while it is being CHARGED!

A few days ago, a person was recharging his cell phone at home.

Just at that time a call came and he answered it with the instrument still connected to the outlet.

After a few seconds electricity flowed into the cell phone unrestrained and the young man was thrown to the ground with a heavy thud.

His parents rushed to the room only to find him unconscious, with a weak heartbeat and burnt fingers.

He was rushed to the nearby hospital, but was pronounced dead on arrival.

Cell phones are a very useful modern invention.

However, we must be aware that it can also be an instrument of death.

Never use the cell phone while it is hooked to the electrical outlet!

Or a fear of assignments when uni is drawing to a close. On this day, I do not like you.

It always takes me a few practice swallows to get pills down. With a mouth half full of liquid I tilt my head back and drop one in attempting to buoy it perfectly where it does not make contact with any part of my mouth; coercing my throat into believing this is an ordinary mouthful of liquid. I cock my head forward, an aggressive nod that says 'I will swallow this pill', but I don't. The tiniest skerrick of water trickles down my throat, the few weak-willed droplets. I try again, and once more a few impatient droplets escape. It becomes harder to place the pill in the centre of this body of water now. To ensure it does not contact my mouth. Finally, it disappears, my throat curses me, questions how once again I have successfully tricked it into believing that the pill was not present. For once 'third time lucky' rings true. I pour another half-mouthful of water

in and prepare for the second pill. I thrust my head forward for the first time as once again my phone alarm sets off.

The shock forces the pill down my throat. Damn this snooze function. The first cycle is seven minutes long. If no buttons are pushed the alarm repeats after five minutes. Then three. Then two. Then repeatedly until you turn it off. I am going to have to touch my phone.

Walking into the lounge room my ears are assaulted. My head is being squeezed at the sides. I leave. My head is being crushed Dr Gleeson. I retreat to the kitchen. Away from the sounds of battle. I try again. Fingers wrapped around door frames, catapulting myself into an aural onslaught. But I am forced back into the kitchen once more. Peace is brought with the end of the song, and I have three minutes to find a solution. I am dizzy from the pain in my ears, the pain in my head. I am pirouetting like a madman, eyes wide, hands open, a perfect portrait of desperation. I need tools.

I was prepared at the end of those three minutes. As the alarm began yet another cycle I walked into the room. My feet left the cold tiles of the kitchen to be met by the carpeted floor of the lounge room, and I would face my destiny. The tea towel that hung from the oven handle was wrapped tightly round my head and ears. I was brandishing a chopstick as I approached my phone. I finally reached the spot where it lay and stood over it, a menacing grin painted across my face. The process appeared ritualistic. I stood, weapon held above my head, backlit by the ceiling fan, as my enemy pleaded to have his last words heard, a chorus. There's a demon in this device. Thrusting the chopstick down I pierced his heart, a rubber button crested with a red phone, and relished in the silence that followed death. A small nugget of truth makes its presence known in my mind: fear can drive us to murder.

I reached an easy conclusion that I would not be calling my boss, Sebastian, that day for work. Though I needed to tell him I was available for shifts, I needed money and according to Dr Gleeson I have to 'return to university and to work'. If people called me that was a different matter; I wasn't not confronting my fears by choosing to visit Sebastian in person.

*On September 12, 2007, a Country Link commuter train ran through a red warning light, crashing into a freight train, and killing 25 people.*

*The family of Tim Bobos, knowing he was on the train, watched the news with dread waiting for news of his fate--and then they got a call. Then another, and another, all from Tim's phone.*

*One family member after another was called, with Tim's mobile sending out 35 calls in total, at which point, ghost calls or not, we're sure they just started letting the things go to voicemail.*

*The police managed to find Tim's body among the wreckage by tracking his mobile phone signal, but it was not a happy reunion. Tim was dead, and to this day no one knows how the calls were made.*

I worked for a company that provided what were technically termed "carers" for people who had been diagnosed as HIV positive. Due to the nature of the work, and of the clients (many of whom had experienced and still experienced drug problems, and sex work, occasionally combining the two), the organisation was rather lenient with rosters. On the Sunday of each week I would simply have to notify Sebastian of whether or not I was able to work that week, and he would tell me which of my regular clients required "assistance" that week, leaving me to organise days and times at which to meet them.

During these meetings we would do their shopping, watch television, maybe have a beer or two. Essentially my job was to provide company, a friend. I guess my understanding of this is how I got the job. I was meant to possess a social work certificate in order to get the position, but I think I just understood the interview process. I could relate; I was, for whatever reason, not generally accepted in society. Juan had shown me the power of just one good friend. Stripped back it wasn't about what the guys had or had not been diagnosed with, we didn't discuss it. They had doctors for that, and they didn't need more. They just needed people to hang out with them.

I had to take my phone with me. I had agreed to answer any calls that came. Fear of electrocution and radiation poisoning are odd things. I walked the fifteen minutes from my house to Sebastian's carrying my phone in a plastic bag and wearing rubber gloves I had found housed beneath the sink. I walked like a scarecrow who had suffered a stroke. One arm at right angles, distancing myself from this communication device, the other swinging limply at my side. Forty steps and change arms. Forty steps and change back. I needed a friend in the form of a dentist; I needed a lead bib.

Sebastian had a boyfriend round. And I never make good first impressions. He answered the door, looking a little shocked to have a visitor. This struck me as odd considering it wasn't even his place. There was a lot of aluminium in the design of the exterior. I stood on the highest of the three steps that led to the front door. Looking at the ferns sprouting from a bed of white pebbles, their slight black imperfections matching the wood that bordered their box. These ferns must be fake, they are never watered, always look plastic, and never have soil. His phone received a text message as he answered the door and introduced himself. I let out an audible gasp, I am not even sure why, a fear of phones hardly even seems logical. What on earth is my motivation?

The radioactive microwaves emitted by mobile phones. The high death rate caused by the deadly combination of driving while using a phone. Phones being used during lightning storms. Having lines crossed and someone listening in on me. Having lines crossed and hearing someone else's discussion, discovering something from this conversation and being faced with a moral dilemma. I had plenty of motivation.

He was looking at me; I hadn't even said why I was here yet.

-Sebastian please.

-Sure.

His delivery was confused. An eyebrow crawled up and perched itself higher than the other, an arc of consideration on a tired face.

I muttered a thank you that was never received; he was out of ear shot. The door was left open as Sebastian was tracked down. A bigheaded me stared back from the shiny convex metal that displayed the number 43 on the door. This disproportionate me had rubber gloves on. Shit. How easy we forget. The costume of a man possessed. I put the plastic bag containing the phone down between my feet and pulled off the gloves, stuffing them into the bag as well.

-Scott.

I wasn't paying attention.

-Scott.

A bigheaded disaster.

-Scott.

Oh shit. That's me. I hope he hadn't seen much.



-Hi Sebastian. I just wanted to let you know that I am able to work this week. Sorry about the last three, a close friend died.

-Not your friend Juan?

-Well, yes, unfortunately.

The awkward silence that follows death fell. The third party is never responsible, and never affected by the loss of this person, yet they are expected to somehow, and instantly, provide uplifting and poetic sentiments worthy of Hallmark. Brace yourself for an unjust apology.

-I'm sorry.

Bravo. (Applause)

And now you can't even make eye contact. Without a face to face connection this is essentially a phone call. That just won't do. It lacks interaction. Look at me. Look at me. His eyes gaze down and to the left.

-I will go and get your names for this week.

I stand alone again at the door. Me and a fake fern.

When our brief meeting had finished and Sebastian had closed the door to 43 Fisher Street I donned my rubber gloves and set off home, a bagged demon at my side, trapped and causing terror.

Irony for breakfast, irony for lunch.

I was at the Paramatta Road side of the park when my phone rang. It is odd how one works under pressure. I had had enough of the curious looks of strangers, I was not about to do battle with a phone in the centre of the park. So I ran. My feet hit grass faster than drumsticks beat a snare. I was out of breath. And I ran. My hands were

clammy, covered in sweat, covered in rubber. And I ran. I could not miss this call. And I ran. I threw a key through the lock. The door swung open with such force. Upending the sole content of the plastic bag onto the carpeted floor I retrieved this morning's chopstick. A moment of pure fear, blinding fear, procrastination, parry. And THRUST! Plastic joust meets rubber button to release a voice that saunters up from the carpet below me. The realisation that the phone will have to meet my ears. The possibility of cancer. Procrastination. Parry. A second realisation, Loudspeaker! THRUST! Such technique, applauded by the now-amplified voice of Penny.

-Scott. Are you there?

-Yes I am here sorry.

-Twelve rings Scott. Twelve.

I am sure Penny's penchant for counting the rings of a telephone has had some deep psychological effect on me. What do you think Dr Gleeson? 'Five and a half rings is enough time to get to the phone from anywhere in the house. Five and a half is perfect,' she said. As a child I had five and a half rings to reach the phone before the answering machine began. And I had better not waste the tape. Five and a half rings, like a timer on a bomb.

-I was in the middle of something sorry.

She asked what you had said to me. I told her. I told her about the envelopes. About the diary. About how fucking hard it was to answer her call because today I was afraid of phones. She offered to call back on a landline, I told her I didn't have one. She suggested a public phone. I questioned if they still existed before expressing concern to myself over the amount of human excrement present in those booths. They seem to be a hotspot for crime. Last thing I need is to be beaten to death for the next fifty cent piece I

was going to throw down the coin-slot. After a conversation like this I can't conceive calling the guys to organise work. It will have to happen tomorrow. Unless, of course, you've given me some fear of communication.

Do you know where I am writing this Dr Gleeson? On the tiles of my kitchen floor. I couldn't bring myself to set the alarm on my phone. Too unreliable. Too dangerous. I set a timer on the microwave. The radiation is at least contained. I've got a pillow and I share my bed with the crumbs of the bruschetta I made for dinner.

*Text messages circulating in Nigeria, Sep. 14, 2010:*

Please, don't pick any call with 09141 its instant death after the call, 7 people have died already. please tell others fast, its urgent.

-----

Pls don't pick any call wit 09141 its instant dead tell others

## **Tuesday 26 April *Keraunophobia* – Fear Of Thunder And Lightning**

### **How to calculate your distance from lightning**

1. Watch the sky to detect a flash of lightning
2. Count the number of seconds after a flash of lightning before you hear thunder
3. Calculate the distance: Sound travels one mile every five seconds and one kilometre every three seconds. Therefore, if you want to find out how far you are from lightning, divide the number of seconds by 5 if you want the answer in miles and divide it by 3 if you want the answer in kilometres. The delay between when you see lightning and when you hear thunder occurs because sound travels much slower than light.
4. Refine your calculation: Sound travels at a speed of about 344 metres, or 1,129 feet, per second. To calculate your distance from the lightning in metres, just round 344 down to 340 and multiply the number of seconds by 340. To calculate your distance from the lightning in feet, just round 1,129 up to 1130 and multiply the number of seconds by 1130.

The diary and the pile of envelopes are all that is in the room besides myself and this new being. Hannah. I open today's envelope and move to the window. I'd forgotten to attend university yesterday. It's a clear day. Though Sydney weather is prone to stubborn and abrupt change. This time of year though, mid-Autumn, a late afternoon shower isn't out of the question, but surely not thunder and lightning. It's not hot enough, there's none of the steam about to generate that kind of action. On the front steps it feels as though my reasoning is sound. It's at best tepid.

When I return from the café, two coffees in hand, Hannah is awake, still looking comfortable enough to be lying on just the floor. She's reading today's fear, your proud penmanship.

-I think it will be an easy day.

-Lightning and thunder can be terrifying.

-For dogs, perhaps.

-And for people.

-It's a clear day though.

-It can strike at any time for those who deserve it.

-How do you mean?

I join Hannah on the ground. I could stay there the day. I tell her as much. I tell her, that, once again, as yesterday, university can wait. It's not as though fear is keeping me from going, I haven't disobeyed you Dr Gleeson, this is living normal life isn't it?

Hannah shares my sentiments. Not the living normal life, the skipping uni. I finally find out what she's actually studying. B.A Communications, like me, but a double degree with international studies. Today is her Chinese language and culture class. She's going to China next year she tells me.

-You know.

-Yes?

-Well a couple of weeks ago I was reading something for uni. Charles Hammond, I think his name was, he talks about thunder and lightning in China. The Chinese assume that those whom lightning strikes dead are being punished by heaven, which smites them with thunderbolts.

I see her angle, I concede to terror. And like a child, transfixed and timorous by a ghost story told by a face that is lit from below the chin, I listen to Hannah. Hammond found these tales in neglected collections of jottings – *biji*, Hannah calls them – and he says

that the people of the day believed them wholeheartedly. Why wouldn't they, I wonder. Fear's not to be taken lightly.

Hannah tells me of a poor man who borrows money from his friend but, after he attains wealth and their positions are reversed, he refuses to repay the debt and is struck by a thunderbolt.

We eat a late and simple lunch; cheese, bread.

She confers the tale of a man who is struck by thunder after having pretended he would help an old woman and a young boy carry their grain, only to then steal it. As the boy pursues him, he slips and drowns in a river. The mother prays and the man is smitten.

I am smitten with Hannah.

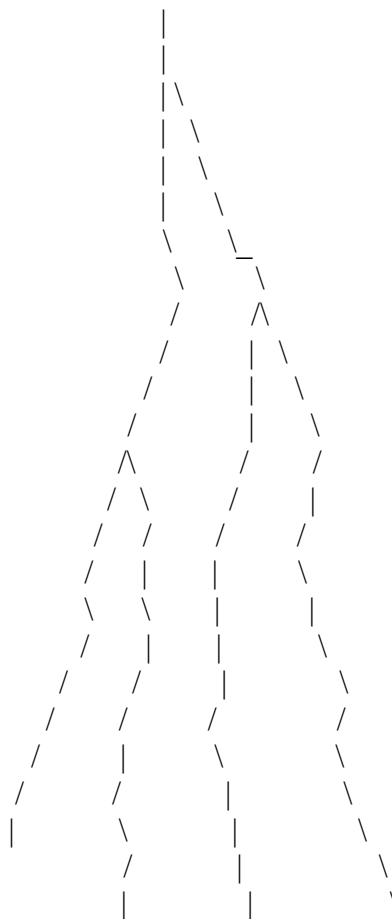
In the country north of Wuxi – Hannah tells me she'll be nearby for a while, in Jiangsu province, next year – there was a farm family that was bringing up a little foster daughter-in-law. Her mother-in-law treated her very cruelly; she overworked the girl spinning cotton and silk. One day some silk was missing but, no matter where the girl looked, she could not find it. The mother beat her, reasoning she had stolen it to sell to a neighbour. As she prepared to deliver a fatal blow lightning struck an ox in the nearby field, splitting open its stomach. Inside was the silk, swallowed by the ox. The girl lived. Hannah prepared soup, though I couldn't leave her side. It was getting dark, hard to pick clouds in the sky.

-Often there is a lapse of time between the person's transgression and the stroke of thunder, Hannah says, all the while stirring the pot on the stove. The kitchen is a coven. Outside, in fading light, Max is washing his Alfa Romeo. After dinner Hannah asks if I'd like to go for a walk to get some icecream perhaps? I can't leave the house and tell her as much. Not even Zeus could get a bolt through this roof.

She stays again.

We lay again.

On the floor.



## **Monday 18 April *Sciophobia* – Fear Of Shadows**

There was something in my peripheral vision that woke me before the alarm could. Not quite a figure, though it looked as though it could have been a man. A flat man, moving just as quick as I. Perhaps a voyeur?

Your note beckons Peter Pan; a playful shadow, a pitied one. Ultimately one that wants a shadow of its own. But a shadow cannot have a shadow, it would require depth. These are the shadows to be wary of, not the ones cast by a table, or a set of monkey bars, or fire hydrant, or a nearly extinct pay phone. The ones parting ways with their authors, with their life force. Some of these, as Peter showed, are strong enough to make it on their own.

I pack a torch in the bag I prepare to take to university, along with the assignment I must present with Mash, and my laptop. It's an overcast day, a world cast in shadow, but the weight of that is the only weight capable of flattening menacing shadows, those that pick at the stitching. So I walk safely from the bus to the building.

Within the building the game changes. Institutional lighting, bright – like our students' futures! – broad areas are safe in the lighting, but my route is carved in chiaroscuro. With such bright light, such radiant luminosity, any area that is missed in the illumination – a corner, a corridor where a bulb has blown, yet to be replaced, the spaces that line walls – is oppressed by contrast, impressed with darkness, encouraging shadow. On the boundaries of these zones the Peter Pans lurk, waiting for the moment to ditch the ride they've hitched.

I follow an enlightened path. I flash my flashlight where I spot them. And I get the feeling as I irradiate a path to class, that I'm being watched. Behind me, or to the side



when my attention, only for a second or two, some flat self and I are in step. Janus-footed.

A ghostly doppelganger.

Mash and I are to present first. I hook my laptop up to the projector, the screen is prepared. I open the obligatory Power Point document. A YouTube page featuring the Kylie Minogue video clip is loaded. I glance at my notes, on the production values of this clip. Mash glances at his notes. We have the same notes. I will speak on the first page of the notes, elaborating the dot points. Mash will do the same thing for the second page.

We will then be asked uninterested questions. We are ready.

**How to protect yourself from shadow people**

If you feel you have been visited by shadow people, there are ways to protect yourself. Ultimately, you will need to overcome your fear because until you do, then they will continue to feed off of it. In the meanwhile, you can do what is recommended to people who meditate:

**Smudging**

You may also consider smudging your home with some sage if you feel as though you are being visited by shadow people. When smudging, be sure to smudge your windows, doorways and halls along with each room in your home. You may also want to speak aloud, telling the shadow people that they are not welcome in your home anymore.

**Positive energy**

One thing paranormal investigators have concluded with regard to shadow people is that they tend to feed on serious negative energy. They are such dark spiritual beings that negative energy seems to attract them and keeps them coming back. In fact, it seems to make them even stronger.

So the first order of business if you feel you've been plagued by shadow people is to cleanse yourself of excess negative energy.

**Lighting**

As a last resort, if you feel you've been attacked and just need a peaceful night's sleep, keep on the lights. Use a sleep mask or blindfold if you must to shield your eyes. Shadow people are always there, but they seem to require darkness and shadow to materialize more strongly so keeping the lights on will keep them at bay.

I glance at the projection screen, straining to see in the light whether or not the video clip has completely buffered. The lecturer dims the lights and the flat me returns.

The confidence of him. The gall! The temerity! From where I stand, at the lectern, I can clearly make him out, surely he must know! I would recognise that shape anywhere, he is lurking on the side of screen, a nervously twitching leg or illustrative outstretched arm giving away his location. And he stays there.

I must try to ignore him, to focus.

-And so, as you can see through the use of a green screen, I continue.

I motion to it, he mimics me threateningly on the screen. A 2D menace.

-The director has clearly endeavoured to parallel shifts in mood sonically with what visually...

I try desperately to focus. I sprout information. I'm short of breath. I think. Yes, no definitely, I know now, I need to sneeze.

*A sneeze is the soul escaping the body.*

I turn; I cannot sneeze towards the class. It erupts and spots of spit stick to the screen. Too many to ignore. I motion to clean them with a sleeve and the shadow catches me off guard. He is bigger than me now. He towers over me. He blocks out Kylie on the screen. I reach back to the lectern. I reach into my bag. I fumble for the torch, click the button and it all goes black.

When I woke up I was in the corridor outside the classroom. Mash reluctantly assigned to be there for when I woke up. And you were there. And you were there. And you were there.

-You epileptic or something?

-No.

-You just blacked out, looked like you were wrapping things up anyway. But you looked at the screen and then...

Mash illustrated a luddite's big bang with his hands.

-You were gone.

I don't reply and he continues.

-The questions were easy, I handled. You were asleep for a couple of minutes; we checked you were breathing and stuff. Anyway, tutor says he'll give us both high credits so it doesn't matter that you dropped.

I stand up, wait for the mumble to cease, the required applause, the silence. I enter the room.

-Scott, are you feeling better?

I'm Scott, remember. Answer in the affirmative.

-Are you sure, you look a little dazed.

I scan the room for my shadow; he must have tried to make a break for it. Perhaps he succeeded, I can't see him.

-In any case, you've presented and I'm more than happy for you to head home now, though perhaps pass by the doctors?

-It will be done.

I lie. I collect my things. I hold my torch. I leave.

On the way, the weight of a grey sky compressing my route in safety still, I stop in at the camping store once again. The same attendant greets me, and sends me out the door with two floodlights, my pockets no lighter.

I set up the lights diagonally opposite one another in my bedroom and blind the walls. I watch vigilantly for my darker self. For a chance to trap him, stitch him up and on. I catch glimpses of him when I shift my post. But all he does is bait me. Tires me out. Fleetinglly flaunts himself to keep the fear alive until I sleep.

## **Sunday 10 April Coprastasophobia – Fear of Constipation**

Diets that are susceptible to the whims of Doctor-ordered fear have resulted in me having no fresh fruit left in the house, so the task of concocting something to assist my bowels wasn't that easy, but that's the price of being regular. Eager to see the fruits of my labour, I jogged briskly to the fruit and veg store on Parramatta Road. Returning with a quick-paced, lopsided walk (a bag of bananas, strawberries, yoghurt and green apples hanging from my left hand) I made a quick stop at Markus' house before my own. I could hear feet drag a body that did not want to follow along the floor. Movement was heavy. Movement was slow. And then I saw two bloodshot eyes that were ready to unleash a tirade of fury, until they saw me.

Juan had died mere weeks ago, and I was still within a window of grieving, a window that allowed for abnormal or rude behaviour to be made acceptable in lieu of the emotional rollercoaster which I was currently on. I could have asked that he obtain, and consequently lend me, one of those Thai, soccer-playing elephants. But didn't.

-Morning Markus, I am sorry it is so early. I wasn't going to bother you, but I needed to encourage a stubborn bowel.

-That's ok, what did you need?

His voice creeps out of his mouth, clawing its way back from some time yesterday afternoon when it was still there.

-I was wondering if I could borrow your blender?

His face darkens. The insolence; how could I wake him up, for a fucking blender? He doesn't say it. I am in the window; I could have an elephant. Where's my elephant? His face still questions me though.

-You see I am constipated and I am making fruit smoothies to flush the system.

I revel in the window.

-Oh. Well.

The rest of his words are not discernible, confused mutterings as he turns to go get the blender. He returns and his already swollen and crusted nostrils look larger in the metallic contours of the spotless silver Breville blender that he hands me.

-Thanks Markus.

I can't contain my joy, I am about to flush the system.

-Yeah ok.

He can't comprehend joy. It's just too early.

The door closes quickly, and the same heavy shuffle carries him back to bed. In contrast I have a sprightly step that moves me quickly home, and quickly to the kitchen. Bananas are peeled with the precision of our not so distant cousins. A monkey-ish dexterity sees three of them rapidly within the blender. I sprinkle strawberries on top, my movements are fluid; I have purpose. I slice two green apples into quarters – they collapse – begging to join their fruity companions. The jagged scar on my right thumb from where Mike taught me to cut apples catches my eye and I laugh. I actually laugh, and I toss my green remedy into the blender. Yoghurt eagerly drops atop my fruit Everest with a juvenile plop, and I seal the contents' fate by sealing the lid. A mechanic roar erupts as I allow Breville to work its magic. I impersonate the breakfast buzz with a low hum as I search through the cupboard above the sink. And my search is fruitful.

*Andrew, a childhood friend of the family, was known by the nickname Pop. This was because he was always chewing bubble gum (the kind that comes with temporary tattoos), and always blowing bubbles so big they popped.*

*To keep up his habit there was a whole room at their family houses dedicated to storing boxes and boxes of gum. He had such an enormous supply that he was never short of a new piece of gum.*

*At meal times Pop would swallow his gum before devouring food at an alarming rate; his jaws were strong from all the chewing. As soon as he had finished eating Pop would pop another piece of gum in his mouth.*

*One night, at a big feast at the family house Pop swallowed his gum as usual before filling his plate from the mountains of food on offer. But every time he brought a fork to his mouth the food would fall back out.*

*Doctors were called and they discovered that the gum had begun to build up in Pop's intestinal system and the stockpile had now reached his oesophagus. There was no room left for food to be swallowed or ingested.*

*Unable to eat Pop died three weeks later from malnutrition.*

Momentarily, the buzzing stops, the lid is removed, and I look at gloop beneath me, its pinkish hue mirrored on my excited face. I unscrew the lid on the half full, year old container of Metamucil and pour in the entirety of its contents. I am positively beaming as once again I make my friend Breville churn. I use the pulse function, I blend at different speeds, I laugh manically as my fruity antidote comes to life. I have mastered blending. I am mad. I beam at my poop panacea. I wear a name-tag that reads: Victor.

There is no time wasted on a glass, I drink straight from the blender. I pull the liquid with the force of a straw; we were made for each other. My throat coaxes it in. There is an almost sexual penetration. Me and my smoothie become one. And then, as so many lovers find, it ends too soon. A smoothie in bliss within me, and I, standing aghast,

asking “Is that it?” My stomach churns, I smile, and head rapidly for the bathroom. My arrival is less than glorious, a duck-footed shuffle that carries a top heavy man, desperately trying to undo pants while clenching buttocks. With less grace than could be desired I manage to perform a one hundred and eighty degree turn while simultaneously lowering my pants and underwear. I feel myself leave me. I am a bag of skin. I am worried I have lost my soul.

The television room seems reluctant to house me. It probably senses my scent, worthy of cartoonish stink lines snaking from my torso. A mustachioed man who used to run races professionally hawks a multi-vitamin. He smiles, and his skin looks like wax. His mustache carefully applied by a tweezer-wielding fashionista. I have enough vitamins to stock a chemist in me. He climbs out and challenges that, throwing sample products at me that turn to dust or junk mail as they hit the floor.

I read all the Sunday papers today. Front to back. Apparently there’s trouble with the New South Wales education system.



## **PART 3**

And here it was, a chance for him to be all of those things. That which he pretended to be; which he assumed they (the patients) assumed him to be, which is not unlike the that before this; that which they needed him to be, which, too, is similar to the two before this, but unlike them, does not yet exist; all that he could be. This was the redemption.

The Atterton Academy Achievement Award. The highest academic honour in Australia. Dr Gleeson thought to catalogue a check-list of some of the most renowned recipients to date as a source of inspiration but realised such an effort would in fact have the opposite effect. To apply pressure, to cloud his thinking, to diminish his vision, to force upon him, undeniably, an honest conceit to self: he was not worthy. And so the check-list remained unwritten. And in its stead, Dr Gleeson began to enumerate his reasoning for a confidence that had been slightly shaken but not destroyed. He could receive the AAAA.

**1) The vanity of contemporary society** – all of whom were prone to self-diagnosis, and very few of whom were aware of the Narcissus epidemic. When the most vain of all, those in the public eye, are being congratulated for their bravery in speaking out about how they had endured this, that or the other (why specify for lies) it has become the fashion to self-diagnose in order to overcome; to overcome to pat oneself on the back or justify some lesser, lazier existence.

Telling people that their vanity documented is therapy – more than that, is art! Is the self inscribed as clear as if we were walking encyclopaedias of all our experience! – they will surely eat it up. Everyone today suffers depression, or anxiety, or has ADD, OCD, ADHD, PTSD, bipolar, whatever.

**2) Australia in the Asian century.** For decades the country has been happy to engage with Asia on purely monetary and political fronts. There was exchange of currency, of

natural resources, of tokenistic aid, but rarely culture, and not high culture, not this kind of stuff.

During 1970s the Chinese Communist Party tried to re-orient its foreign diplomacy towards the West – it wanted to acquire modern scientific knowledge and technology transfers. Using a cultural approach to achieve its political goals the CCP launched an international ping pong diplomacy offensive in 1972. Armed with tiny bats the Chinese table tennis delegations were dispatched among the West, including Australia, bearing political olive branches that batted tiny white balls of cultural exchange. Just 40 years ago this was what the exchange of culture (or ‘Kul-cha with a capital K’ as it is known colloquially down under) between China and Australia consisted of. Stranger still, it was then – and is still, by some of today’s standards – a roaring success.

But now the government was crying out for a stronger engagement. There was a Prime Minister that spoke Mandarin! And there was the academic paper that would springboard Dr Gleeson to glory: *Chaos, Memory, and Genre: Anecdotal Recollections of the Taiping Rebellion*. This paper, by Rania Huntington, was the basis for the case study he had been encouraging that Juan kid to act out.

**3) His reputation as a psychiatrist.** He had been ground-breaking with his doctoral studies, he had flown against the grain, sure, but that was only because he hadn’t allowed himself to be confined. What a story to sell, the AAAA could use some lay press.

List composed, confidence confided, he thought of what it meant.

There was the prize money – \$5 million could solve more than a few of his worries (and aid in the construction of the images discussed earlier). There was the fame; he didn’t care for it, but knew if his distaste continued he could wield the burden to some extent

in his favour, providing he kept a safe distance. More than the fame there was the respect – colleagues, co-workers, the ex-wife who told him he was wasting his life (she certainly never appeared in the home life he envisioned his patients envisioned for him, and he kept it that way) – the accolades and the lingering impact that such an award leaves on whatever else is to come.

The greatest thinkers in the country had received the AAAA, and by consequence of that, each of their subsequent contributions to the public, in whatever field it was that they excelled in (or took up, like ducks to water, in the wake of the award) was in turn received with the consideration of the AAAA by the audience. Every reader had Midas vision, or felt that that was their responsibility. If you were AAAA alumni, all that you produced henceforth, and even retrospectively, was mined time and time again for deeper, hidden, more absolute meaning. You became a god.

How fitting, then, that Dr Gleeson's redemption should come from one of his own patients. It was simple. A few slight edits and he would present Juan's diary as a modern-day *biji*; one of those miscellaneous notebooks in Ancient Chinese that Huntington and her lot prattled on about. He would argue the benefits of the form; the greater insight into the mind of the author compiler, the strands of thought revealed in these small miscellaneous notes on fear and loneliness. A practical, medical application for the vanity of life writing, at least for his intents and purposes. Huntington, that angelic saviour of his, god bless her ignorant socks, had already established the accord between the typically fragmentary, discontinuous entries in *biji* and the episodic nature of individual memory. Especially of experiences so bewildering and horrendous – say, the suicide of a friend or lover – that they are difficult to narrativize coherently.

Sure, she was focusing on *biji* used to record the Taiping Rebellion, but Dr Gleeson shifts the focus from historical to psychological; he was bringing it into the real world.

He was making an impact on what it was to know and to reflect on oneself, and that's all this selfish world cared about now. And he was too selfish to care about that being a problem.

The way that everyone in Juan's world, apart from that father-complexed strumpet Hannah, was a stranger, a danger, like in the rebels' war narratives about obscure or anonymous strangers that Huntington examined, recalled and recorded neither for significance to national events, nor for any personal attachment to the individuals involved, but for some other remarkable quality.

He thought of Huntington's observations on the form, its brevity, miscellaneous content, and problematic relationship to history and fiction. This was perfect! Was he to believe that cartoon cereal spokesmen had attacked Juan? Surely not! But that Juan had believed they had? And the consequences of such belief? The insight? Well, that was something worth studying.

Had Juan not written for his lover with an "obligation to record the tales of the literate dead, and the illiterate both living and dead, both to honor or criticise the departed, and to instruct and entertain the living" as Huntington suggested? He was sure he had. It was merely a matter of adding a little academia and philosophy here and there: representation of self, social and personal implication of delusion, unfortold insight into the patient's machinations...

Juan had dropped the diary off to Jess, Dr Gleeson's assistant, dog-eared and exoskeletal; the spine of it battered and the bone-coloured pages barely still attached. He'd skipped out on their scheduled session to review the diary and the past month. Juan was uncontactable, but that worked in Dr Gleeson's favour. As long as Juan stayed that way the AAAA would, in all likelihood, be in the bag.

Now all Dr Gleeson needed was a way to organise the notes to better represent his theory. They can't just be scattered at random, that would be too obvious. Though just as dangerous would be to present them in chronological order, it would only undermine his theory of chaos in the patient, to weaken the parallels he could establish with Huntington's existing study. He must intervene to mimic Huntington's theory of chaos in memory more clearly. There needs to be an organisational model for the chaos, but which one?

The shape of the final organisation should suggest its own construction, hint at answers or the potential for and of them, without actually producing them. 28 entries, but how to arrange them. What does the number 28 offer?

It's a perfect number i.e. it is the sum of its proper divisors.

$$28 = 1+2+4+7+14$$

It is the sum of the first five prime numbers.

$$28 = 2+3+5+7+11$$

It is the third Granville number, the second being 24, and the first, six.

It is a Størmer number, alongside 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27 before it.

It occurs in the Padovan sequence: 1, 1, 1, 2, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 16, 21, 28

How would the properties serve to aid Dr Gleeson's arrangement though?

With each there is an outlier, or a remainder. But what if Dr Gleeson were to take ownership of those outliers, wield them as worked as the other numbers, as clinamen?

In this way the sequencing working to fracture the tendency of the mentally sound individual to narrativise, chronology shattered. Had he grouped them somehow, formed in his mind some categorisation of fear, a rolodex or personal encyclopaedia of terror?

And then a brief but informative foreword to set it all up. How he had come to have Juan as a patient, the early consultations, his progress, ‘the collection of entries is presented in the order it was delivered to me by the patient – one date, the final, missing – reproduced here as it was, the pages torn from the notebook though seemingly purposefully organised, to what end it can’t definitively be gauged...’

Some token mention of Huntington... More on Dr Gleeson’s theory...

‘Another method of analysis (and the principal one for earlier periods) is to hypothesise from finished texts about the methods of note taking from which they were composed. This kind of rational reconstruction is...’

## Friday 29 April Conscientiaphobia – Fear of Consciousness

*The method for formatting dreams and setting them typographically was established by GP in 1968 for the purpose of la boutique obscure. It is as follows:*

- a paragraph break corresponds to a change in time, place, feeling, mood, etc., felt as such within the dream;*
- the use of italics indicates a particularly striking element of the dream*
- the size of the gap between paragraphs corresponds to the level of importance of passages that were forgotten or indecipherable upon waking – large gap, large importance*
- the sign // indicates an intentional omission*

Juan used to have trouble sleeping. Something to do with his mental capacities, I had always assumed. The little grey cells wrestling against his will. And he had a cure. Well, not a cure, an aid. Phenergan. Promethazine hydrochloride tablets. 25 milligrams. They were, apparently, used by people with hay fever, allergies and the like. They also make sleep feel like an embrace; they invert you until you're pleasantly hugging yourself into submission. A cloud's chokehold. Rumour has it the exact same pill is marketed elsewhere as a sleeping tablet.

Today's envelope in hand I walk to Juan's room. A monument, a museum. A morgue? Amore.

The packet is still in the drawer of his bedside table. Four blue pills and the wrestle begins. Delinquency is the most democratic form of being an explorer and this brave territory is uncharted.

Etymologically speaking, consciousness comes from the Latin *cum* 'with' and *scio* 'know': with knowledge. Is this what you meant, Dr Gleeson, that I should confront a fear of knowing? Or simply that the concerns bred by my waking – kick-started as they are with the action of waking, of becoming conscious – should be met head on?



If it is the former, I'm already failing you with this loquaciousness. Either way and whatever. I'll do you this, I won't lie down.

I'm sitting on Juan's bed. First time since then. I'm not drowsy, just docile. And lucid. Docile and lucid. *And then there's weight, weight enough to rise me up an inch or two.* Something heavy on the mattress at the foot of the bed. And it's him.

A dream can create what does not exist; a dream can invent what has never been imagined. A dream is what does not come true; if it comes true, it is not a dream. If we dream and it is a dream, then illusion has become real; if we dream and it is not a dream, then reality is even more of an illusion.

Or so I think, I can't be sure. I'm sure he's here, I see him, I felt the see-saw of the mattress. Judgment can only be applied to experiences that are present to the mind. But when I say 'Juan' he shakes his head. When I ask him about that time on the 428 he shakes his head. When I ask him about spitting on him a week or so ago I receive denial.

-QB.

He says, not as though we are meeting for the first time, but suggesting that we are perhaps for the first time equals, or parallel. It's not condescending or congratulatory. Perhaps my theories of reincarnation aren't unfounded, at least when Juan's concerned. *I wonder if Juan was Dr Gleeson, then, if Juan was everyjuan.*

We perceive when a thing makes contact with the body, dream when it makes contact with the mind, and there is nothing to choose between one experience and another.

It seems petty but I ask:

-The Seppuku?

*I sometimes fear that I may lose my vocabulary.*

And Juan, or QB, or, shit, maybe even James at this stage, he tells me.

Juan is a member of the Oulipo, a group, he tells me, that are proving motion by walking.

-Like rats trying to escape from a labyrinth they have themselves designed, he says. Juan got lost in there and wanted out but it's not that simple. He takes the envelope I'm holding from my grasp, and pulls out a new document, some parchment or other, and with a histrionic clearing of the throat begins to read:

*One becomes a member first by attending one of the Oulipo's monthly meetings as a guest of honor and presenting whatever it is of one's work that dovetails with oulipian interests, then by being unanimously elected by the group. One can avoid becoming a member very easily: by asking to be a member and thereby becoming permanently ineligible for membership. After one is inducted one cannot quit or be kicked out.*

*One may relinquish membership of the Oulipo under the following circumstances: suicide may be committed in the presence of an officer of the court, who then ascertains that, according to the Oulipian's explicit last wishes, his suicide was intended to release him from the Oulipo and restore his freedom of manoeuvre for the rest of eternity.*

Where was this notary? Who is this group? Why such drastic action? Juan just looks at me tiredly. There was no notary, or so it seems. That's why he was on the bus, why his

shadow is lurking through these pages. He's looking for a notary, he's trying to finish the job, he wants out officially.

He got close, he tells me, really close. He spotted them, or their shadows, marks of their presence and influence impressed somewhere, everywhere.

But was always a step behind, a lame horse chasing a rotting carrot around a track inhabited by ghosts where bets and chance have no place.

So that has been his existence; a purgatory in pages.

//