BIRKAN BERZ CAROLE (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle)

Re-born in RNA? Encoding, Uncoding and Transcoding the contemporary sonnet

Whether one looks at it as a fixed form or a more flexible genre, the sonnet is one of the most codified practices in Western poetics. From its inception, the codified devices of the sonnet (its lines, rhyme schemes, stock images, rhetoric of composition to name but a few) have been reinterpreted, transmuted and subverted through processes of creation and translation. This paper assesses the situation of poetics in the late 20th and early 21st centuries when poets decide not merely to subvert the code but to foreground it as the most important element in the poem. Looking at examples taken from French and English language poetics, I aim to examine poems that highlight the notion of a code in four different ways. Paving the way for the others is Jacques Roubaud’s ‘La Vie (sonnet)’, in which the words are given as zeros and ones (and which the Anglophile poet has translated into English!). The second type consists in highlighting the code by temporarily removing the signifier – the subject of Eugene Ostashevsky’s The Feeling Sonnets, which begins ‘It is with profound ambivalence that we inform you of our feelings’ and plays with the tautological dimension of the sonnet as love poetry acquired in the genre’s long history. The third way consists in superimposing another code onto the sonnet. In this, poets like Harryette Mullen or K. Silem Mohammed work with Oulipo S+7 techniques or with Google-engineered anagrams to generate versions of Shakespeare’s sonnets (this also being reminiscent of the German language Oskar Pastior’s work with anagram-based sonnets). Finally, I look at the work of Christian Bök whose Xenotext proposes to encode an initial ‘Orpheus’ sonnet in DNA injected into bacteria and have the bacteria re-engineer a new ‘Eurydice’ poem in RNA, a storage method which purports to be immortal, even after nuclear apocalypse. The perspective used in this paper is partly that of relevance theory, which posits that linguistic communication occurs somewhere ‘beyond the code’ in order to be ‘relevant’. Taken together, what these instances of coded and decoded sonnets mean is that, on the contrary, it is the foregrounding of the code that keeps renewing the sonnet, making it fresh and relevant.

BRAULT DREUX ELISE (Université Polytechnique des Hauts-de-France)

“All in all most of us are making good / recoveries”: when leaving the hospital is a rebirth.

I propose to analyse how, in a selection of 20th century poems, the patient’s discharge from hospital is poetically rendered as an experience of rebirth.
The hospitalized patient is caught in a therapeutic chain, submits to specific protocols and to the highly organised institution which tends to deprive him/her of his/her social identity. For the vulnerable individual that goes through a critical trial, recovery is a new empowerment, a return to agency and a reconstruction of his/her physical, social and ontological self.

Peter Reading, in C (1984), twice significantly questions the plausibility of recovery, reaching the metapoetic conclusion that recovery is as impossible as good (intertextual) poetry. Poetry can merely be used as a soothing lie, a “make-believe game” to pretend that illness is not eternal and rebirth is impending.

Yet, I will look at three other poems that more optimistically deal with recovery, starting with “Discharge” by W.E. Henley (In Hospital, 1901): the poetic treatment of the return “into the wonderful world” is enthusiastically conveyed through a (almost hackneyed) synesthetic experience, a rebirth to the multifarious delight of the senses too long thwarted by the limitations of the hospital. Moving towards the second half of the 20th century, I will shed light on more mundane (but no less poetic) evocations of recovery in Liz Lochhead’s “Homilies from Hospital” (1972) and Fleur Adcock’s “The Soho Hospital for Women” (1979). While Lochhead depicts the submission to the enduring process of recovery which though successful will leave “scars”, Adcock adopts the standpoint of the cured patient, born to her social self again, “intact”, and retrospectively looks at her hospitalization and at the daily routine of her former partners, most of whom still hospitalized, awaiting recovery. In these poems, space (inside / outside), time (submission, boredom, expectation), rhythm (suggestive of the varying breath of life) and metaphors of rebirth, will all deserve peculiar attention.

A few words may be added, to conclude, about the poetic representation of the bedsitter’s discharge in Thom Gunn’s “Lament” (1991), “delivered into time again” when his lover dies in hospital; and about the impossible definite discharge of the chronic patient who, in Hugo Williams’ “From the Dialysis Ward” (2014), recovers his altered self, daily, in the city, after a few hours spent in the so familiar ward.

BRAUN ALICE (Paris Nanterre)

"I wanted to write the poems I’d needed to read": the transformative experience of birth in Liz Berry's The Republic of Motherhood

In an interview she gave about her collection of poems, The Republic of Motherhood, Liz Berry explained that when she became a mother, she was overwhelmed by the intensity of her experience, and as she turned to poetry in order to make sense of her conflicting emotions, she realised she came out empty-handed. This realisation is a common trope for contemporary authors of autobiographical accounts of motherhood, such as Rachel Cusk, or Marie Darrieussecq: even though motherhood has been written about, the writers who become mothers often feel that they need to give a literary representation of their experience in order to leave a trace for other women to find. This is especially true of Liz Berry who also mentions in the interview that she found relief and solace from the
community of other mothers: with *The Republic of Motherhood* she tries to open the literary I of poetry to the voices of all the mothers around her in order to sublimate their day-to-day strivings. The experience of motherhood and the birth of her first son are described as a deeply transformative, ambiguous and mystical experience, the shedding of her old self and the emergence of another.

**GOURSAUD BASTIEN (Université Sorbonne)**

**Renaissance, Flowering and Boom—Contemporary British Poetry and Renewal.**

In 2002, poet and critic Ruth Padel described “a large-scale renaissance of poetry in Britain” — a moment that she said had begun “in the late seventies”¹. Ten years later, poet and biographer Fiona Sampson published *Beyond the Lyric, A Map of Contemporary British Poetry*², where she praised “a period of tremendous richness and variety” in which British poetry was “flowering and expanding”. In 2019, Sarah Crown wrote for *The Guardian* about “the rise-and rise-of the new poets”³, focusing particularly on the impact of social media and social platforms, and on what she called a poetry “boom”. These are only a few examples of the language of renewal that has paradoxically been recurrent in critical and journalistic discourses regarding contemporary British poetry.

This paper intends to answer three questions: first, why is the image of the renaissance pervasive when it comes to contemporary British poetry? What moment of British poetry is it opposed to and what is the nature of the opposition? Secondly, is there an evolution in the way that trope is used by critics and poets, and if so, would it be a better point of entry to understand the development of the British poetry scene? Finally, beyond the journalistic cliché and potential marketing strategies, do these terms actually refer to an evolution and/or common poetic strategies?

While tentative answers to the first two questions will be provided through an exploration and confrontation of several types of “renaissance” discourse, the final part of this paper will be devoted to close readings of some of the examples of poems associated with it.

**GRAFE ADRIAN (Université d’Artois)**

‘Reborn’, ‘new-born’: Geoffrey Hill and the Poetics of Self-Recovery in *The Triumph of Love*

*The Triumph of Love* (1998) was Geoffrey Hill’s first attempt at the long poem sequence, and led directly on to *Speech! Speech!* (2000) and *The Orchards of Syon* (2002). Markedly

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different from 1996’s *Canaan, The Triumph of Love* saw Hill broadening his poetic diction in entirely new ways for him, integrating obscenities, non-sequiturs, snatches of faux editorial asides, dialogue, and irreverent sideswipes at contemporary institutions, critics and other poets, aiming at the vernacular he so admired in Petrarch (from a poem-title of whose Hill drew his own title). Breaking free of Eliotian impersonality and other self-imposed constraints, Hill now began incorporating both visible autobiographical elements (as opposed to merely familial—witness *Mercian Hymns* [1971], a tribute to the poet’s grandmother), and self-mockery, into his poetry for the first time. His love of European poetry is exemplified in the allusion, to, among others, the Polish poet Aleksander Wat (a usefully homophonic surname), and the latter’s ‘self-recovery’. We will read *The Triumph of Love*, then, as a turning away from an excessively stringent, bookish kind of verse, towards more relaxed, open verse forms the adoption of which enabled Hill to renew his poetics at the same as he recovered his own poetic self.

**HOUĐU LUCIE (Université d’Artois)**

“Closer to the fire, deeper into the darkness”: Tony Harrison’s Gulf War Poems or a Poetic Rebirth in Times of Conflict

Starting in the early 1960s, Tony Harrison’s career seemed, by the end of the 1980s, to reach a highpoint with *V*. Intertwining private and public within what he once likened to “a shared intimacy”4, Harrison had until then written extensively about his family, the breach between his working-class upbringing and his education which gave him a sense of estrangement. Then in March 1991, Harrison addressed the First Gulf War with “Initial Illumination” and “A Cold Coming”, published on the front pages of *The Guardian*. Harrison’s focus shifts towards a distant reality. Harrison finds words, thanks partly to a re-semanticisation of the Eliot intertext (“a cold coming”), to articulate “some of the speechless events of our worst century”5. This paper thus offers to investigate to what extent these poems are a renewal of Harrison’s poetic—a demonstration of his re-birth as a war poet, through a turning-away from the personal and the local, poeticising crucial events taking place in the wider world.

**MACKEOWN ANDREW (Université de Poitiers)**

**Born Again Larkin?**

Philip Larkin often said Thomas Hardy’s poems provided a turning point in his own writing of poetry. Out went Auden, Yeats and Eliot (last seen cast adrift on the North Ship), and in

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5 Ibid.
came Hardy, the ‘less deceived’, with a steady eye on ‘the lives of men, time and the passing
of time, love and the fading of love.’
How reliable is this idea of Larkin’s poetic re-birth? Maybe not a great deal. It ignores the
increasingly symbolic bent of later poems in ‘High Windows’ (eg Dublinesque, The Card
Players), and suggests that the modernist troika ceased to influence Larkin, which, especially
in Yeats’ case, I believe to be untrue. It also tends to obscure other, non Hardyesque
influences from earlier poets, such as Hopkins and Thomas, who were nevertheless claimed
by Larkin as ‘exemplars’. By looking closely at poems from before and after the supposed
renaissance I will suggest that the idea of a born again Larkin is misleading and needs to be
reconsidered within a broader context of influences and their continuity.

SABY AURELIEN (Université Paris Sorbonne)

Renaissances baroques de Vénus dans une rêverie de The Age of Anxiety (1947) de W.H.
Auden

Couronné du prix Pulitzer en 1948, le quatrième long poème de W.H. Auden intitulé The Age
of Anxiety est remarquable en ce qu’il annonce dès son sous-titre – « A Baroque Eclogue » –
une renaissance de l’esthétique baroque. Le poète, toutefois, se garde bien de préciser toute
définition du baroque. Il emploie l’adjectif au sens le plus large pour renouveler des formes
tour à tour médiévales (à l’exemple du vers allitératif), empruntées à la période historique
du baroque (de la fin du XVIème siècle jusqu’au premier tiers du XVIIème), voire aux poètes
romantiques pour créer in fine un ensemble hybride inclassable et inédit dans la littérature
du XXème siècle, une perle irrégulière rappelant l’origine portugaise du mot barroco. Miroir
réfléchissant les résurgences baroques qui sous-tendent The Age of Anxiety, la rêverie
eveillée de Quant (l’un des personnages de l’églogue) dans laquelle il fait renaître la déesse
Vénus – rêverie dont nous proposerons une traduction française –, témoigne de la force et
de la complexité des rapports entre naissance et renaissance chez Auden. Inspiré de Milton,
Shakespeare, Botticelli ou Bosch, sans oublier Baudelaire et Goya, ce songe injustement
mésestimé par la critique pourrait faire l’objet d’une étude détaillée visant à souligner un
désir à jamais inassouvi de renouvellement de la poiēsis.

KIT KUMIKO TODA (Université de la Réunion)

‘Begot like other children’: Auden’s refusal of the Renaissance

The word ‘Renaissance’ has an inherently positive connotation to it; it implies the ‘rebirth’ of
a marvellous Golden Age. Its primary signification—a surge of cultural and technological
advances thanks to the re-discovery of Greek and Latin texts—indicates the preeminent
position that the classical world has come to hold in European culture.
Auden, however, adopted an ambiguous attitude towards the classical past. His political
positions and his scepticism of authority doubtless explains his sympathy for the works of
Pieter Brueghel the Elder, an artist of the Flemish Renaissance who tended to focus on humble subjects. In ‘Musée des Beaux Arts’, Auden muses upon Brueghel’s works, providing another look, not at great men and their heroic lives, but at the unimportant, forgotten people on the peripheries of these stories: the ‘Children who did not especially want’ the ‘miraculous birth’.

The paintings present heteroglossic narratives of multiple lives, reconfiguring the perspective of the ‘makers of history’ and presenting a rebuke to a society in which ‘So few of the Big/Ever listen’ (‘Homage to Clio’). Like Brueghel’s paintings, which transpose Biblical and Classical events to his contemporary 16th century Flemish society, Auden’s poems also refuse to give historical events the romanticising effects of antiquity; instead they restore the horror of the Massacre of the Innocents or the destruction of Troy, by clothing them in modern dress.

This paper will demonstrate how, throughout his career, Auden consistently questioned our society’s adulation of an often warlike classical past and the aggrandising narrative of its rebirth, and, in so doing, criticised the violence of his own age.