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A greener pasture

Abstract:

A 2,600 word prose poem written using two Oulipo constraints: Homophony (deriving a new text from a pre-existing text by imitating its sound) and homosemantic translation (a translation in which the vocabulary of the source text is changed while its sense is kept). I have combined both of these devices, recasting it as *homosemantic emulation or HoEm*. The poem *Greener Pastures* emulates Eliot's *The Waste Land* (the original facsimile, before Pound's infamous redactions), revisioning the poem in contemporary Brisbane City. This experimental work transcends the modernist sensibilities of Eliot (hence 'Greener Pasture'), not only with a 'postmodernist' eye, but with conscious effort to create new posthumanist metaphor. *The Waste Land* gave us a fractured man gathering up his redacted mannequin limbs among the debris of his ideas about himself in the new industrialised world of the early 20th century. *Greener Pastures* examines the future of this man in the now of our world, the age of artificial intelligence, drones, theocratic death cults, charismatic techno-magicians, corporate devils and discount chain novelists. The result is a prose poem consisting of five fictitious episodes or 'days' in the life of a man perpetually haunted by Coleridge's *Porlock* (21st C. alienation, postmodern darkness, sentiments of disenfranchised Australians of European descent i.e., longing for the greener pastures on the other side of the ocean fences).

Biographical note:

Brentley Frazer is a widely published Australian poet, memoirist, academic, and editor. His poems and other writings have been published in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, France, U.K, U.S.A, India, Japan and Slovenia. He is currently in the final stages of a PhD (poetry/experimental literature/creative nonfiction) at Griffith University supervised by the poet Anthony Lawrence and the writer Nigel Krauth. He was editor of the ground breaking art and literature journal *Retort Magazine* 2001-2013 and is currently publishing editor of *Bareknuckle Poet ~ Journal of Letters* ISSN 2204-0420

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– experimental poetry

A GREENER PASTURE

for Les Murray

Perhaps our eyes are merely a blank film which is taken from us after our deaths to be developed elsewhere and screened as our life story in some infernal cinema or dispatched as microfilm into the sidereal void. (Baudrillard, 1990, p. 63)

1. *She Kissed Your Arse Goodbye*

April gets hot here, lizards mate on cracked footpaths, pre-mix aluminum Bacardi cans stir desire for the drought to break; memory of dull roots, thirst for rain. Couldn't get warm at all last winter, it figuratively snowed. I bet pay TV stations enjoyed a jump in subscriptions. A hot westerly thundered in over the Story Bridge, had everyone kicking off their doonas. It hailed, we sought shelter in a pub, but the 3AM lockout rules had us running from awning to awning. We waited until dawn for the cafés to open. I sipped a latte, you sculled long blacks with sly shots. *Bin kein New South Waliser, aus dem hohen Norden bin, echte Queenslander.* (Am not a New South Welshman, from the far north, genuine Queenslander.)

I remember as a child I met Bob Hawke at an indigenous festival. My father took me down to shake his hand and I felt shy. He said: —*Brentley, Brentley, pleased to meet you . . . did you enjoy the corroboree?* I could only see a cloud of dust but I liked the didgeridoo, and the electronic forest of candyfloss machines and hot dog stands run by nomads who come north in June. You complained the wife is clingy, tendrils in your every waking moment; said you're a broken son-of-a-bitch, last time you argued she cut you from every photo. You got sunburned at the cricket, no shade beneath a dead canvas gazebo, almost dehydrated to death . . . five bucks for a water! You met a blonde and she offered you shelter. She had a baby doll dress on, shorter than a manga character (join me under my BCF sports umbrella) *You look sad? Marital bliss, huh!* She laughed. *Is she likely to facetime you or show up unannounced? I'll take care not to get lipstick on your collar.* Eine neue Frau lockt, Stud-Muffin, schalten Sie sie herunter. (A new woman lures, Stud Muffin, turn it down). *You don't even need to buy me flowers. Think of me as a sex friend; call me for hookups.* But later, much later, home from the club knees covered in bruises (she'd lost her panties) you couldn't

deliver *the old-boy failed me, no response!* A moth on a bulb silently smolders. *Ein gelangweilter verlassenen Parkplatz.* (A bored abandoned carpark).

You said you saw all this coming, consulted a gypsy at the psychic fair. She gave you the flu, but she's highly regarded in the U.S, a wizard with Tarot. You drew The Lovers (she said that's not what it means) followed by The Prince of Wands (now that changes everything!) Look, The Fool! Portrayed by Giger with a shotgun in his mouth and The Hanged Witch, with legs akimbo like a cybernetic animal. But, The Hermit there, followed by the Six of Cups . . . if you want my advice stay waist deep. Don't drown in Love. Fictitious town, sold as anonymous by the tourist board. Film a crowd on the William Jolly watching fireworks, it could be Paris. You won't sell your novel in Europe if you write about Australia. No one looks at you on the tube in London, like the beggars in King George Square. I keep strange hours here. Always around when the clock strikes twelve. All the other writers have planted their heads up Tim Winton's Nielsen Bookscan statistics... *Vous! Écrivains collègues—merde contre les éditeurs de livres du marché de masse!* (You! Fellow writers-shit against mass market book publishers!)

2. *Space Invaders*

We talked for a dozen lives each at an old arcade table. It had chipped edging and cracks in the laminate. The graphics flickered, light leaked. (You wore sunglasses) said: —*They want a Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in the C.E.O's Chair, on account of noble birth, pure as Colombian coke.* The Prime Minister's ethics are gilded in aristocratic hope, look at him, everyone's dad, feeling the Duchess up. He's got vested interests yet he puts his elbows on the table. Smell his cologne, like oil and forests, oak desks, linseed, cold libraries, benzene and broken promises. He's a paradox, like fist-fighting Buddhist Monks, shouting at the drowners: —*Jesus doesn't want you here.*¹ Let the Freemantle Doctor get them, the law of the sea sure showed that leaky vessel. Look out, refugee! This place has teeth, cling to your wreck. Watch the shark nets. I saw a photograph. He has wine on his desk, a pushbike in the office, that goofy grin, somehow sinister. A toy truck, minimal books, all uniform. It's simply barbarian, what they do to language in Parliament, I mean. Did you hear . . . work is welfare . . . now that's an oxymoron. Hegelian Politics, new rules for the socially inept! They haven't worked out the old ones yet. The policies of cognitive dissonance. It's like Kasparov challenging an amateur and betting against

himself to lose. No mail's coming through. Reboot the server. Did you hear that! Sounded like someone going under a bus. Did you hear it? What the fuck was that? It really did sound like death. Cypher? Don't forget. I'll never remember, she said: —*That's not what it means . . . the Lovers, followed by The Devil, and the King of Cups?* As I said, right now I don't know if I'm living or if I'm dead. Put another dollar in. What a jug-head, wanna-be emperor with a scrawny hairy chest.

Anyway, I didn't make it to the stairs she followed me, said: —*I'm horny, drunk, crash here, go on. Why won't you talk . . . we don't have to talk, come inside . . . please come inside.* And then? But I'm thinking about what I read in the papers . . . it's damn near biblical and I'm not even religious. Death plagues people leaking blood on aeroplanes rumours of war, nude models on the streets of New York, all the celebrities have crumbling marriage disease, schoolgirls killing one another. Perversion . . . it's contagious. Ahh . . . it was a Murdoch rag, sensationalist crap. So proletariat one minute and bourgeois the next. —*Where to run? Where shall we turn?* Storm the building in protest, charge the guards the polities can see you out the window wave your placards . . . they don't care, they're playing space invaders with the Tasmanian wilderness. Look at them pushing through legislation with their verbal typo-graphics vernacular acrobatics. Now there's little difference between in dependence and independence, we should mean test them, we want to know what they're doing, buying drugs and booze I bet, that's why they don't go to the dentist. This woman said (she has seven children) that her man just got back from Afghanistan, a tour of two years. Like I'd care, damn canon-fodder's wife, I'm a Rhodes scholar, I don't shop at Coles! She screamed: —GIVE US A FUK'N BREAK FROM YA POLITICS, MATE. Look, I said: —You bitch screw you and your seven kids, get off the meth, you're dirty gym pants are NOT shopping attire, bow your head, you look fifty and I bet you're not thirty. —I'm hooked! She said, Like, sadface. I like me ice, it ain't smack I, like, nearly died from that. Me dealer reckons if I don't toke every night, like, *she'll be right.* I bet she's defacto pretends she's married to make the rug-rats legit. —Look, I said, see my suit you could pay six months of rent with this. I'm a Randian hero, you're an insect. If I didn't love these Armani loafers I'd have kicked her to death.

3. *You Burned Down Her Apartment*

It started with a straw hat, a Eugenia Kim . . . she saved for it. Anyway I crushed it up. It was after a party, I invited an ex . . . stupid in retrospect, but we flirted and one thing led to the next. We only kissed. She threw my Xbox out the window. There were a lot of people in attendance, girls in summer dresses. She lives in the exclusive *Quest River Park Apartments* on the promenade, the fourteenth floor. I left, forgot my phone. On the banks of the Brisbane River I sat my sorry arse, watched City Cats on water like broken glass, had too many smokes vomited in the park. ‘While I thought that I was learning how to live, I’ve been learning how to die.’ (MacCurdy, 1938) That rumble’s not death approaching only Hells Angels rolling by. من الـ شـد يـاطـ ين أصوات أسمع TV (I hear voices of demons from the TV). The Attorney General slithers in a mangrove, gets his scaly torso from the bay all the way to Southbank. I was taking photographs of crows late in July, down by the Maritime museum, near the old frigate, the *Diamantina* an only survivor. Surrenders were signed on her deck. Whoop whoop whoop chukka chukka chukka fucken helicopters. Masked metropolis under electronic smog. Mr Brownstone wandered past high, gave me a clippie-bag of E, damn hipster has a full Ned Kelly, invited me to breakfast at *The Gun Shop*. He’s dating an actress, she has an accent I don’t know which. ξαναπώ (Ask again) I don’t like killing, especially in the morning but it’s an essential part of the process (the hearse rumbles on the curb) but you know, you don’t need to slaughter your own lamb, just order pizza. Did you see that documentary? About the drag queen . . . I saw her at *The Beat*, back in the early 90’s, a truck driver with terrific tits, what a site! Until you saw them in the dawn, she’d always be down at *Mellino’s* drinking beer, off the licence (they shouldn’t serve ‘til ten). Those performances were her only work. I heard she couch surfed several flats draped in sequins people watched the footy on her bed diva gowns stained with semen. Anyway we went, the ex and I, to rent a hotel for the evening. There can be no co-operation between us, forget any advances endeavours to engage in caresses *I’ve learned self defence!* She broke my nose and sucked me off. To her there’s little difference. An atrocity! Like stealing from the visually challenged. The whole thing felt clumsy, like an old man drinking milk on a train. She never looked at me, kept her eyes on the viewfinder . . . in a way I’m glad we did it, but I regret it all the same. I went to say as she walked away, *Thankyou*, but she’d put her headphones on, already pressed play. Man bør være vakker og mektig uten anger. (One should be beautiful and powerful without remorse.)²

'And so it goes, go round again but now and then we wonder who the real men arrrrrrre.' (Jackson, 1982) Neon music leaking from a speakeasy on Ann refracting light diesel slicks spinning rainbows the engines of sleep 'the night is black and the stars are bright and the sea is dark and deep'. (Davenport, 2007) Ooohhh ships passing in the night she turned on her side and I basked in the pale light of the past participle of lust. To this bar then I wandered after burning down her apartment. You what! FIRE SALE! Ha ha ha sale, fire, get it while it's hot.

4. *Life By Decree*

Porlock came knocking, for two weeks I died inside my room above the laundromat, I forgot, or maybe didn't realise that you can see my television flickering in the window even if I pull the curtains. He had a warrant, 'the duty of youth is to challenge corruption.' (Cobain, 2002) 'Old men declare war children fight and die'. (Hoover, 1944) Damn Porlock ruined my high interrupted this rhyme. *Shift f5 shift f5 shift f5* thrive amid the rubbish *scientia fortis elegit* (Knowledge Chose The Strong (Bold) Ones)

Under the eaves of our sprawling suburbs. The New Extinction Age has been announced. Her! My death! She I could hold when all else fell away.³ See her flee across the pantone 376 c high definition liquid crystal screen. Вырезать Раш анимация заводные птицы (Rush cut animation of clockwork birds)

It's the end of the land the fissures in Yamal. Alien hellmouths. Dragon breath hypothesis. See that WTF on the statistics chart . . . we're in the age of consequences. I read it first at *The Lunatic Outpost*, someone had dragged it back from the darknet, methane under the ancient arctic permafrost rumbles beneath the Siberian tundra. Precious or precocious, who knows; oh no there goes my sensibilities that peculiar brand of typographic altruism you see in letters from the Mayor.

5. *A Fireman Drowned*

In the black-light of the club I wondered in my ringing ears on the dirty muted streets in retrospect of the silence that comes for those who have escaped screaming from the suburbs in this place that

never sleeps. I think if they catch me it'll be maximum security. *In fide fatum* (In Faith, Fate). Hard time, at least twenty, had there not been a death only arson . . . but hey, I'm not timid 'if we are bold, love strikes away the chains of fear from our souls.' (Angelou, 1994) I heard someone say don't venture to the banlieue lots of Black Africans in Buranda, we call it Little Liberia, you're better off scoring in West End, I know a dealer. Hey, didn't a French chick die down there, in the rotunda at Kurilpa park? They caught him on camera shadow her from the bus. He walked with her, him and his other, wouldn't have loved her had she heard that subtle thing I'm sure all killers say. The cold lens the silhouette of Death out to play a game of chance. I saw him, at the train station later, spark a cigarette, jaw set with malice, lighted his insensate face briefly beneath his hood. Who'd have thought it a death by water on the fourteenth floor during a fire. 'And you can't help but worry for them, love them, want for them - those who go on down the close, foetid galleries of time and space without you.' (Winton, 1991) Illuminated boy, whistling in the hall in the Gaza Strip of my heart beyond the bombed out walls, in the stairwells while fleeing the twin towers of my resolution falling, you . . . you are my urban decay, malfunctioning night-bell, 'God bless this cheap hotel, behind the curtain, there may be sun, one thing's for certain, thy will be done on earth as it is done in hell.' (Sexsmith, 2001) I watched it all from the bridge. די אָביעקטיוו אויג פון קאַמעראַס (The objective eye of cameras).

But I must go tho' it's fire that refines the sirens are close Les néoconservateurs sont l'antéchrist dans un sens non métaphysique. (Neoconservatives are the antichrist in a non metaphysical sense) Death, the colour of sleepless people walking in the lukewarm shallows of dawn.⁴ I've kept the broken photos so I never forget Myself. Se mi mortos, forviši mian porn (If I die delete my porn). Kai. Watsi. Rabuwa. (Take. Disregard. Renounce).

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Research statement

Research background

Modernist artists consciously absorb the principle of 'the medium is the message'. Modernist artists understand that to articulate their sense of modern experience they must change their medium, as well as what the medium says.

Research contribution

We make the tools and then the tools make us. Eliot regarded himself a revolutionary and his purpose was to direct attention toward sources of poetic power whose neglect had led to a devitalisation of poetic art. Drawing from all literature that preceded his place in history, Eliot consciously devoted himself to the development of a new poetic voice. He aimed to modernise himself and his chosen medium, poetry. For various reasons most poets working today are not willing to give themselves over to the liquefaction of conventional thought processes necessary to revitalise contemporary poetry. I consciously post-humanise myself for a new poetic voice and blur the boundaries of medium and message.

Research significance

I draw upon all literature that precedes my place in history, including Eliot, making myself consciously post-modernist. Rewriting *The Wasteland* using the Oulipian techniques of homosemantic translation and homophony results in a multicultural prose poem, one that contains in-text citations presented as qualitative research supporting my articulation (the argument) of the complex emotional state that arises from my contemporary Australian experience. The multimodal perspectives that arise force a new vernacular from the intersection of player and played. 'I died!' shouts the child as Sonic falls on the spikes.

Endnotes

¹ Cf. 'Jesus knew that there was a place for everything and it's not necessarily everyone's place to come to Australia.' -Tony Abbott, April 5th 2010. Q&A, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

² Cf. 'One should be beautiful, powerful and without regret.' The Vampire Lestat

³ Cf. *You Were My Death* – Paul Celan

⁴ C.f. 'Death the colour of dawn or sunset, bright midday or dark midnight of deep summer when the sleepless people come to walk within the lukewarm shallows' Bruce Beaver, *Death's Directives II*

⁵ Take. Disregard. Renounce – a direct inversion of the closing words of *The Waste Land*

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