

the collection's opening dedication (to Sycorax, Shakespeare's witch-mother and Brathwaite's longtime muse), which promises to "seal these stories...w/a new humility." Although these words might seem ironic in light of the brashness of Brathwaite's poetic form, they reflect a sincere effort to relieve the divisive pressures that haunt the Caribbean psyche, and to address the clash between colonial education and native culture. This clash is one in which the Barbados-born, Cambridge-educated Brathwaite has long been entangled, but *DS (2)* presents a new insistence on a more conciliatory perspective. In the past, Brathwaite has railed at the inadequacies of a school system that privileges snowflakes over sand; the first story of *DS (2)*, however, marks a willingness to cooperate. A remembered encounter with an old professor sparks a crucial question—"How does the trained pr-/ospecting intellect/ual. >/deal w/its opposite...?"—which, though left open-ended, finds its answer in the speaker's sympathy with his teacher's struggles.

A revelation of similitude resounds throughout the collection, with subtle structural and thematic reminders cropping up to remind us of the poet's opening pledge. A panoply of references to the Western literary canon permeate the text and reinforce the vision of a world in which all is connected: the first story conflates the sylvan Cambridge campus with a Dantesque woodland and leads, in the final "Salvage(s)," to an invocation of Eliotic musicality.

It is with this thought in mind that one best grasps the value of *DS (2)*'s redundancy, which is otherwise something of an oddity to those familiar with the original text. The repetitions should be understood not as mere duplications, but rather as exposed layers in a process of literary evolution, the underwritings of a poetic palimpsest. History, for Brathwaite, is sacred, and the overlapping shadows of old poems, in *DS (2)*, act as markers of the poet's faith in the restorative power of remembrance.

Courtney MacNeil

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Tim Atkins, *Horace*. Oakland: O Books, 2007. 76pp. \$12.

*The following is the third chapter of an unfolding critical novella on current British Poetry, to be entitled Corroded by Symbolysme: An Anti-Review of Twelve British Poets, Being Also a True Account of Dark and Mysterious Events Surrounding a Famous Poem Supposedly Written by Frank O'Hara. The final installment in this series will be released in the next issue of the magazine.*

The readere of the previous section of this serial reviewe will recall that in 2004 I had the mixed pleasure to spend a spring afternoon in Cambridge,

England, chatting with J.H. Prynne in the gardens of Pembroke. She or he will remember how the great poet had become visibly agitated when I told him that a friend of mine was about to publish an essay that provocatively argues—through rather compelling circumstantial evidence—that Frank O’Hara was not in fact the true author of the famous poem “A True Account of Talking to the Sun at Fire Island.” The reader will recall, as well, that I subsequently received over the next few months, from various telephone callers—most with English accents—a bizarre garland of barely veiled threats to my future happiness and well-being were the aforementioned essay ever to be made public. (Indeed, this essay has now been made public, at *Almost Island*: See Tosa Motokiyu at [almostisland.com](http://almostisland.com).)

Well then, in the packet of books I received for review there was no book by Tim Atkins, the young English poet and editor of the excellent online journal *Onedit*, but I am going to talk here about a manuscript of his that was seeking a brave publisher, and the title of this manuscript is *Horace*, and it is just a wonderful collection of poems, and I will try to explain now, with the aid of Tim Atkins’s commentary, what more or less goes on in this terrific book. (In fact, shortly after writing this, I learned that Tim’s book had been accepted for publication—and then was published—by O Books, in California.)

I had met Tim in the city of Los Angeles a couple of years prior when he and I gave a reading at a great rare and used bookstore whose name I can’t now recall, in a series called, I think, Beyond Baroque, hosted by Andrew Maxwell, the editor of *The Germ*. Maxwell was very nice, I liked him very much, and as we said goodbye he gave me copies of his beautifully produced magazine and told me he planned to publish, with my permission, two or three poems from my then-forthcoming collection of Greek translations (which I’d translated with my co-translator, Alexandra Papaditsas), *The Miseries of Poetry: Translations from the Greek*. I never heard from him again, for some reason, who knows why, this world of poetry is so strange and sometimes sad. It’s quite a coincidence, however, that this book, which is co-mine, is inspired by David Wilson’s Museum of Jurassic Technology (MJT) in LA, where the afternoon before our reading, Tim and I had spent a few hours in absolute exaltation, completely enthralled by the fantastical collections in that small, dark *wunderkammer* of a place...

Little did we speak, we were so amazed, as we wandered from exhibit to exhibit: the Megaloponera Foetens, the stink ant of the Cameroon; the anthropological studies of Maston and Griffith of the Deprong Mori of the Tripiscum Plateau; the anonymous Fruit Stone Carving upon which a vast theological landscape unfolds; the seventeenth-century horn from the head of Mary Davis of Saughall (not as large as Papaditsas’s, I noted silently to myself). Also the bizarre Delani/Sonnabend Halls, with their dream-like

discursions on memory and its tricks; the barely believable studies of bees and their psychic capacities, by the eccentric but genius bacteriologist Alexander Fleming; the Garden of Eden on Wheels collection, magical detritus from LA trailer parks, old and modern; the Decaying Dice of Ricky Jay; the memorabilia and history of the Dog Heroes of the Soviet space program; the Floral Stereoradiographs of Albert G. Richards; the Microminiatures of Hagop Sandaldjian...and so much more, but I shall stop, for one easily gets carried away in the pleasure of naming.

By and by, we approached David Wilson, curator of this mysterious place, and said to him we revered his work as a profound poetry in Fourteen Dimensions. A gnome-like man, he giggled, and thanked us for coming, Would we please come back again, he asked, to which we said, Sure, thank you very much, and we signed the Guest Bookum and that was all, we went out into the blazing, super-heated Sunne of the simulacral city.

Anyway, the reading at Beyond Baroquem was a small, pleasant affair: Among others, I met the wonderfullie kind and brilliant poet Jen Hofer, the poet and paranormal investigator Mark Salerno, and the somewhat taciturn yet polyte and debonaire Walter K. Lew, editor of *Premonitions: New Asian North American Poetry*, whose introduction aggressivelie attacks (for its lack of inclusion of Asian-American poets) my now nearly twenty-year-old anthologie, with Craig Paulenich, *Beneath a Single Moon: Buddhism in Contemporary American Poetry*. I offered hime a cigarette, and he said No thank you, showyng me a large patch upon his upper arme—a patch, oddlie, immediatelie below a tattoo of the head of the famouse criticum Michel Foucault.

Tim read his Horace translucinations and I was in awe; it was as if he had stolene an exhibit from the MJT and were presentyng it now in this store full of rarest editions, costing from fifty dollars to fifty thousand. He made my epigrams (also Latin imitations) seeme quite teeny by comaparyson. Well, I liked the young man immenselie.

Two years later, as chance would choose, Tim and I met againe at the CCCP, in Cambridge, England. He gave another astonishinge reading from his still-unpublished tour de force ravaging of Horace. I had just returned to Trinity after bidding adieu to J.H. Prynne, and I went up to Tim, who was chatting with Stephen Rodefer and Mark Nowak by the wyne cooler. The day before, Stephen had said something insultynge to me and I had grabbed him by the collar and pinned him against the wall; Mark, who had once been my good friend when we were grad students in the famouse and prestigious Creative Wrytyng Program at Bowling Green State Universitie in northwestern Ohio, had been studiously avoiding me all weekend, though I could not blame hime, I suppose, since I had stolen two of his essays on Experimentale Poetry and Trade Unionisme verbatym and published them as my own in my dissertatone.

Hey, guys, I said cheerily, What's happenynge?

Hi Kent! said Tim, as the other guys walked away. How about a pint at The Eagle?

And so because my meetynge with Prynne had caused me to miss a lunch appointment with Tom Raworth, Forrest Gander, and Astride Lampe, I said Sure, I'd like that very much. So we went to the publet and came to sit in the fyne room where Wittgenstein and his adoring circle were in the habit of meetynge, and I said, Tim, I am so fascinated by your *Horace*, which does so much, going into hime so as to go out of hime, his Latin like a goatskin you pull taut at certain passages so as to bounce on it and go up in the air and summersault there, but I love the way you stay there, up in the air, taking that opening gesture of Pound's *Frigidaire*, how that spirit keeps you up there, Olympically, for passages, impossiblie so, and then you come backe down and bounce arounde, a bit childlike on his language, and then you go back up, even higher than before, though you hit the edge and crye oute every now and then, but then you get back up, and away you go, it's just terrifick!

Well, said Tim, chucklynge and clinking a toast, That's nice of you to say. But I think I do my share of bouncing right off the trampoline and crashing onto the ground, too! We both laughed, and I liked this young man's modesty immenselie. Read me a few odes, I said, I want to know more. And so he stood and read, doing so with great energy (though for lengthe I cannot quote entire) and sounding a bit like Pound on that recording of "Sestina: Altaforte", where there are all the trills and the force of it makes it seeme like he is the figure in *Nude Descending a Staircase*, coming out of himself, progressivelie, in repeating patterns, and the readyng of this was so strong, so intense, that the publet, quite full at this hour, grew silent and rapt with attention:

ODES III / 2

In 8 different situations  
we must apologise for being overweight

for example a pin or expansion  
at the Parthian gates

a show trial

& the agreed on questions

in the capitol

a broken arm pierces the sleeve

—for god often confuses the innocent with the evil doer's fate

to those who do not merit death, remember

senators—this is a hairball instead of a senate

vengeance, on

one lame foot

in a bright room with a bellyful of pills

& well-dressed hate

seldom loses track of the outlaw

though she sets off late

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ODES III / 9

<< In days when width was dear to you, Lydia

& cobblers flocked to other necks

did I occupy this cottage in a bliss-state like Sting?

>>>> Enamoured of no other more than me

than the frosts or of shopping, O Horace

I made these buildings, with you, more famous than Wendy's

<< But blonde Chloe how & whom for I stalk

for me thus now blows & grinding runs across the organ

noteless I not caring whether I live or what

>> >>> Yes, Calais, too, fucks me up

wherever love must, dying once or twice

on home video if it raises his art to clear sight

<< Ah, Lydia: what in the history of socialism

indicating that the soul is fed to the eye teeth

will return us as lovers?

>>>>> Stars impale themselves on their own light

on the top of the bus reunion tour, I promise like a bubble

the formal field of kissing burst returned returns us to us

When he was finished, the patrons began to clap, but in a very serious and respectful way, not sarcastically, as would have been the case if this had been the Unyted States. Truly, even, I saw some heavysset gentlemen dab-

bing their eyes.

Wow, I said, that's really somethynge. You are certainly questionyng the boundaries of translatione there!

Ah, but what is the boundary, Kent, do you know? Tim asked me, with a wrye smile, sweat pouring from his sideburnians.

Well, I said, clearynge my throatum, insofar as the concept of boundary goes, it seems to me there is, on the one hand, a complex of boundaryes that are interior to the practice of translatione and which the translateore is usually negotiating in intuitive, interdependent wayes, boundaryes, for example, that relate to issues of fidelity, prosody, the relative stress the translateore gives to sense or to sound, the choices she or he makes between formal or dynamic equivalence, all those things translatione theory is usually focused on, and on the other hande, boundaryes—very contested ones—that could be seen as marking the outer limits of translation as a mode, boundaryes, for example, that relate to what a translatione is or is not, whether a text is actually a translatione or whether it has slypped over into somethynge else. Of course, these inner and outer boundaryes are very hazy, wavy, as it were, and they appeare and disappare, oscillate and collapse together in chaotic sequences, causynge bemusement and suspicions of failure, nearly always for the translateore, often for the reader, and sometimes, as we know, serious consequences for the innocent world at large. There have been not only destructive poetic conflicts, but terrible military ones, too, from tyme to tyme, because of these hazy boundaryes of translatione. It's interesting: Sometimes people have been persecuted, have even died as a direct consequence of their paintynge, music, sculpture, dance, or original poetry. But many, many more, most of them bewildered bystanders, have died throughout history as a direct consequence of translatione: died both for the lack and the excess that gets found there. Think of the Bible, for instance...

Tim looked at me and nodded gravelie. Yeah, lately translation theory has been much in vogue, at least on this side of the pond. Increasing numbers are getting a PhD in it. Let's hope that there might be greater peace in the future because of that. Probably not, though... Which is not to say that translation theory can't be of use to the experimenter. Nor that it can't be beautiful, even mystical, in and of itself. Think of Walter Benjamin thinking of the Bible, for instance...

Right, I said, growing secretly excited. One question here might be, torquing your original question a byt: What are the boundaryes between "theory" and "practice" in translatione? What should the relation between the two be? Eliot Weinberger once wrotum, with typical pythiness, that theory is to translatione what the laws of thermodynamics are to cookynge.

Dude, said Tim, Eliot Weinberger is the fucking shit... We sat quietly for a while, smoking. You know, said Tim, suddenly, Frank O'Hara once wrote,

more or less, that if a theory is chasing you down the street with a knife, you just go on your nerve and run. But might there be times when it's a good idea to try to talk things out, maybe even invite the killer theory inside? Are there times when thermodynamics might be conceptualized into a kind of poetic fire over which to cook unusual recipes?

Tim, mate, this is what I've been thinking myself, I said. Thermodynamics, you know: Poetry and Translation as inwreathed in feedback loops through Tyme. Horace, I'd wager, cookyng over Greek fire, knew this deep down.

Uh huh, said Tim, leaning a Dunhill into the small flame cupped anciently in my trembling hande, Maybe there are modes of translation where theory becomes a kind of content and translation becomes a kind of form, so that the latter is an extension—an extension into new forms. In other words, what about practices where the outer boundaries of translation—those fuzzy, classificatory boundaries you mentioned earlier—start to expand and overlap, as in a three-dimensional Venn diagram, with the boundaries of other literary kinds? Think of it overlapping with fiction, myth, even, for instance, something you're rather capaciously familiar with—that kind of overlapping. He puffed on his fag and blew a ring of smokum...

Yeah, I reached over, slapping him on the shoulder, lapping up his flatter. You know, it was the late Armand Schwerner who once asked, in a little known, extremely interesting question, "Why leave fiction to the fiction writers?" Schwerner, you know, is the author of *The Tablets*, a magisterial faux translation from Sumerian that is also—and more than has been recognized—"authentic" translation overlapping invention and vice versa, a formal enactment—knife-wielding theory having been invited inside—of those wavy, misbehaving boundaries, inner and outer, of the mode's nature. An enactment of diffusion, interference, so to speak... Oh, man, you've got to read it! *The Tablets* is a singular work of poetry that is also a kind of singular translation—perhaps it stands, along with a few other works of contiguous nature, as a translation of the troubled and indefinable spirit of Translation writ largum. As such, we could consider it—if you'll forgive my popular science—as standing in a kind of proto-relation to "classical" kinds of translation, I mean in a manner analogous to how a tentative, early guess in quantum physics stood in relation to classical physics.

Tim's eyes rolled back into his head and went whyte: Hm. As you describe it, I wonder if the "strange" space broached, however incipiently, by works like *The Tablets* hints at qualitatively new practices of poetry to come, ones whose possibilities are not yet fully imagined? Of course, some would say this is really a realm best reserved for poets. Which makes me wonder big-time, though I'm hardly the first to wonder it, since all translators of poetry have wondered it in secret moments: What, exactly, is the boundary between being a poet and a translator?

But, Tim, I said, don't you see that your *Horace* asks that question implicitly and so brilliantly. It's fueled by the question, I'd say. A few others—Erin Mouré comes to mind, she's fabulous—have made an at least provisional poetics out of that question: When a poet enters the act of translation, transforms that act into outright poetic material, and does so to produce poems qua translations that are, to paraphrase Brian McHale, if I can recall, scale-models of difference and sameness, cross-pollination and contamination, candidly marked by misprision and imprecision... When a poet does this, is he or she acting as a poet or as a translator? Think of Spicer thinking of Lorca, for instance...

OK, said Tim, batting his lids and looking straight at me now, However, I'd say that even though the spectrum might have unrecognized regions not to suggest, in any way, that there is something lacking in standard forms of translation, or that these are waiting to be superseded. To the contrary, actually. But I wonder, and I guess this is what you in a way are asking, too: If we can have the works of, say, both Brahms and Cage understood as music, the art of both Watteau and Duchamp understood as painting, the writing of both Tennyson and Mac Low understood as Poetry, why can't we imagine that the task of Translation might extend, for the sake of certain purposes, beyond the relatively stable protocols and boundaries that currently "define" the practice, eh?

Exactly, I said (beginning to realize that both of us were being quite prolix and amazingly eloquent, but a few pints of bitter can do wonders for the conversation), And in asking these things, of course, we right away encounter other shimmering boundaries—ethical boundaries—ones that are, again, innere and outere, inside us and outside us, and at the core of translation, in all its multiple expressions, from the get-go. For translation is, I think this is one thing I'd allow myself a bit of certitude on, a bringing of Otherness—that most mysterious and wavy of matters—into new being. That translation is the spirit of writing that most intimately interfaces the boundaries of Otherness, then, is probably what makes it so difficult to define: what makes answers to the ethical questions it provokes so difficult to determine, what makes its possibilities so rich and various, what makes its stakes and consequences both incomparably thrilling and potentially grave. And I think—though, as I said, I'm not sure about any of this—it is what makes the boundaries between those consequences so disturbingly wavy, as well.

We sat again in silence for a while, smoking, drinking, looking around. I felt good sitting, I fantasized, in perhaps the same spot Wittgenstein had once sat. I noticed, then, a man in the corner peering sternly over his newspaper. He quickly looked back at the news that is found there. But by and by, I noticed that he continued to spy in our direction. And I saw on his thin hand (as I had seen on those of Kevin Nolan and J.H. Prynne)



a large, whyte opal ring!

Tim, I said.

Yes, Kent, said Tim.

Don't look now, but do you recognize that suspicious-looking manum over there in the corner?

Tim waited a few seconds, then causally looked over. Why yes, whispered Tim, leaning toward me, I don't know him personally, but I'm quite sure it's the famous writer Iain Sinclair; he is a close associate of the Magus Poet of Cambridge, J.H. Prynne.

Hmm, I hmm'd. That's interestynge.

And then I proceeded, sotto voce, to tell Tim (who had previouslie by coincidence mentioned Frank O'Hara) about my strange encounter earlier in the day with Prynne, how he had reacted with such strange intensitie, even anymus, to my proposal about O'Hara's famouse poem. I looked over at the manum in the corner and called out: Mr. Sinclair?

The manum immediately got up, put his cigarettes in his shirt pocket, and walked rapidly out of the publet. Tim and I looked at one another, our mouthums partlie opene.

This is really bloody weird, said Tim. You're probably not going to believe this, it sounds like some exhibit right out of the MJT, but there's been an urban legend floating around for some time about a secret society of us and Brit poets, of which Prynne is Grand Wizard of sorts, and the story is that this group is charged with preserving some dark secret related to the poetry of O'Hara!

Tell me you're pullynge my legum, I exclaimed.

No, no, I am not pulling my leg, said Tim, excitedly. I mean the whole thing is so ridiculous and it's got to be positively apocryphal, everyone has always assumed it was something like those old rumors of Paul McCartney's death, or something... And yet...

And yete, I echoede.

Hmmm.

Hmmmum.

We sat in silence some more, smoking, drinkinge, rubbyng our newly shaven chinums.

Well, said Tim, looking at his watch, I hate to say this, Kent, but I have to run. Sean Bonney is down at the The King's Arms and wants to talk, and I see I'm late already. And trust me, you don't want to be late for Sean if he's already had a few.

Yes, of course, I said, I think I'll sit here a while, just looking about and thinking. We'll see you tonight at the Bromige and Rettallack readynge, right?

Right mate, wouldn't miss that for the world. It's been fine, I've enjoyed this immensely. Tell me what you find out... Damn.

See you, pal, I said.

Later, back in Freeport, I wrote Tim the following email, in my minyature style:

*Dear Tim, Kent Johnson here. How are you? I think often of the pleasant time we spent together in Cambridge. Listen, I am reviewing your Horace for the upcoming issue of Chicago Review, and I am going to do it a bit differently than your standard review, I think. We'll see what happens. I would very much appreciate your sending me any comments on the book that you might find worth my consideration as I mull things over. How you see the pieces going together, the overall conceptual push of the work, its place vis-a-vis the other "dominant" approaches within the UK avant, etc. I ask this very rapidly and awkwardly, on my way out of town tomorrow for a spell, where and when I hope to get some work done on this, so hoping against hope you might be able to write me just a few notes before tomorrow!! (In responding, would you please do so in eight point font, as I happen to favor (it is an idiosyncrasy) email in such miniatyuresque setting.)*

And he wrote back:

Hi mate! Horace initially came about (& then disappeared) from a patch of translation that I was doing years ago in Barcelona. I learned Spanish from reading Hernandez & Jimenez & Machado. I was so into the whole business that when I found an old copy of Horace I got a Latin dictionary and started to translate. It was really boring and I had little fun. The only way I could make it enjoyable was to mess around with the tight Latin structures & cut chunks.

Boredom! I salute you, mother of the muses! Baudelaire said somewhere.

So. Translator = Traitor. There's also an old Italian saying that a translation is like a wife: the less faithful, the more fun.

Poundian? Versions? Intralingual (certainly). Most of them come from reading the poems in English in various translations and then going at them. Others homophonic too. I wanted (childishly) to write a Republican & offensive homophobic translation but couldn't do it without (of course) offending myself too. Found that sometimes with edits the Latin was diminished & the other stuff expanded.

I found that the more wooden the translation (the Penguin translation was particularly good/bad), the happier I was. As I read & actually translated & understood more about Horace, my interest fell away. I didn't want to know more. When I knew less, I could imagine more.

This explains the fact that other poems are only very loosely out of the named Ode or Epode. (Translation method called Resurrection.) I have, thank god, also got a terrible memory. Perhaps a word, an emotion, a Latin homophone, whatever. & same odes in different versions. (From dub, perhaps.) I'm currently making a book of translation strategies: Appropriation, Approximation, Association, Clarification...through Evaporation, Negation, Resurrection (etc.). 35 strategies so far. Applying them to Petrarch's 366 poems to Laura.

I hated most of Horace. The apologist of Imperial Rome? Blah. The good friend? Well, there are poems for Thomas Evans & Miles Champion in there, so we manage some kind of agreement on that.

But all were written during an overwhelmingly awful time in my life. The political revulsion I imagine is obvious, and tone comes perhaps from Burroughs or Peter Cook & Dudley Moore's "Derek & Clive" sketches & general British Dadaist cynicism. I felt/feel such disgust for Empire, etc. But only, actually, because I'm such an idealist/optimist. & the poet is utopian. So believe it's a compassionate eye, after all.

Hopefully wrote poems to question by method academic assumptions of authority, transparency, etc. Horace, by chance, was ideal. Stole lines from Robert Lowell, P.G. Wodehouse, Cockney, all etc. Willfully misunderstood. & Needed humour to keep myself & the poem/world afloat.

But, I suppose, all in or out of Horace's world as much as mine. Am happy that London & Worcestershire are all over them: Horace wrote extensively about his small villa which was a long way from the capital & remained a provincial in many ways all his life.

I think of them all as being in some way ripped. & also could not have written them without Bernadette Mayer's Formal Field Of Kissing, Araki Yasusada, & Stephen Rodefer's Villon.

Hope that the world is in some small way overcome & overturned by them.

And by the way, are there any developments on the O'Hara front? I haven't said a word about it to anyone, keeping my promise. But I'm dying to know what, if anything else, has occurred?

I found this very interesting and wrote in reply:

*Dear Tim, Tell me again what you think about the boundary between translation and poetry, fidelity and the fictional. And also tell me about shame. What does shame have to do with the boundary? I think it has something to do with it for you because I think I remember you had just started to talk about it before we spotted the man who spied on us at The Eagle that afternoon. Tell me more.*

*And yes, there have been some incredible developments on the O'Hara mystery front—something quite extraordinary happened later in the week when I was with Martin Corless-Smith in London, and I will tell you about it later.*

And the next day, Tim wrote back,

Mate, There is no boundary.

That I write and translate comes from the fact that when I place my mouth to the corpse I both inhale and exhale.

As for shame; I feel none. (I'm sorry, I don't recall saying anything about "shame" at The Eagle. I only remember we talked for a long time about translation, its lovely and disturbing seductions.)

I have at times as a poet felt like Arjuna before the day of battle, but now, most of the time, feel only like Krishna.

Although there is no battle. The only point in all of this—reading, writing, translating, talking—is in the pleasure of it all.

“But does it make you want to live?” That is the question.

& this is my reply.

ps: But what the hell happened that was “extraordinary” in London? In the name of Byron’s bullocks, please tell me!

*Next up, Chapter 4: Adventures with Martin Corless-Smith in Cambridge, Boise, and London—and a violent assault upon my person in the shade of the replica of Keats’s plum tree.*

Kent Johnson