POETRY IN PERFORMANCE:

INTERTEXTUALITY, INTRA-TEXTUALITY, POECLECTICS

This paper builds on a presentation given by the author at the NAWE Conference on Re-Writing, 25 November 2000 at Oxford Brookes University, where the main ideas were aired. A more complete treatment ensued at the 3rd Research Colloquium: "The Politics of Presence: Re-Reading the Writing Subject in 'Live' and Electronic Performance, Theatre and Film Poetry"; held at the Research Centre for Modern and Contemporary Poetry, Oxford Brookes University, 2-3 April 2001.

Abstract

*From fable to historical fact, Intertextuality has been for me - as for many contemporary writers - a potent driving force behind my creativity, an ongoing interest running deeper than the pleasures and subversions of, say, pastiche, parody or travesty. I present here an eclectic conception of writing which I term '**Poeclectics'.** Coined at first to reflect certain types of diversification among British poets on the page, I now see it has parallel applications for 'performative' works, as well as into and beyond other textual genres. Poeclectics is a re-orientation towards Re-Writing that re-emphasises the conventional re-visitation of literature's more recognisable 'voices'; but it can also quarry, in innovative ways, various elements of the experimental/ avant-garde, so as to encompass a variety of other processes and disciplines - anything from geology to mutagenics. Here, I position the term relative to several authors who observe similar patterns of development in British poetry since the Movement. In addition, I negotiate the positive (and negative) roles for Poeclectics as praxis - not only towards page-work but also as a support and spur for site-specific ('situational') writing and public commissions, modes of writing I describe as 'performance poems without a performer'. Finally, this paper provides a timely context for the introduction of '**Intra-textuality**'; and I explore some senses in which text may be said to demonstrate Intra-textual qualities.*

Introduction.

My original goal for this paper was simple: to illustrate the various routes by which Intertextuality has informed my work, particularly in performance. Here, 'Intertextuality' represents all the usual means through which literary texts are understood to inter-relate: that is, through pastiche, parody, allusion, reference, direct/indirect quotation, etc., along with other (more subtle?) techniques such as structural parallelism, rhythmic/tonal similarity, and the like. Also, I mean by 'text' principally the written/spoken varieties. Such Intertextuality is probably as old as text itself; but I feel I have been witnessing for some time - as well as expressing myself - a shift in emphasis and approach across a growing sector of 'mainstream' British poiesis, reflected by changes in the types of poem presented in workshops, performances, web-pages and books. The initiating (and highly-personalised) theme for this treatise therefore quickly shunted forward into my more general and on-going interest in a phenomenon I have termed '**Poeclectics**' [1]. The last thirty years of British poetry are already well documented, so my main task will be to tie together a set of perspectives and views to justify my neologism (and its contribution to terminological proliferation) whilst retaining from my recent NAWE presentation [2] an emphasis on actual performance texts (my own) as a means of practical illustration. In true Poeclectic style then, I shall be more discursive than catalogic or exhaustive; there is only sufficient space here for case studies of a few pertinent Poeclectic modes. I must also dispel, without delay, any sense that my seemingly glib evocations throughout this paper of terms such as 'Modernism', 'Post-Modernism', 'the avant-garde' and 'mainstream' means that I intend these to be taken up as monolithic, checklist-type concepts boasting geographical or chronological book-ends. In a paper which attempts to launch a raft of nuances it may seem perverse to slip so; but there is only so much one can do, and the usual restraints of space force me to call on the tacit understanding that wherever such terms are used without development, my comparisons and statements either root themselves in the bibliographic context at that point or else are silhouetted against a more general drift of background reading.

I. POECLECTICS - an Overview.

Poeclectics, put briefly, is not a wholesale movement as such; more a discernible trend and willingness among poets to utilise more freely, and in a conspicuous manner, a variety of texts, styles, voices, registers and forms, usually resulting in an opening up of imaginative range and flamboyance. It incorporates all kinds of influences from literature but also embraces - as does the avant-garde - many other types of stimulus, pattern and prompt as a means of generating experimental texts. These may include arbitrary/ programmatic cues and constraints from outside

literature (such as weather charts and algebraic formulae). Poeclectics thus combines a powerful sense of 'making' (Greek: *poiesis*) with a desire and facility to work inventively with a variety of sources and processes ('eclectics': from the Greek *eklegein*, to choose out, select). The term is new, but clearly many of its practices are not. Pastiche, role play, ventriloquism, dramatic monologue - these methods, and many others, fall within its scope. But Poeclectics occurs wherever poets adopt a particular position, style, method or voice - or invent one - to suit the purpose at hand, rather than being concerned primarily about any unifying principle of 'voice', or perhaps even of intention, throughout their body of work (though I must stress that a sense of the author's presence or voice is not thereby *necessarily* extinguished). Poeclectics is therefore characterised by its emphasis on discrete poems and how they generate particular formal, emotional and aesthetic effects. One might usefully weigh, for example, Jo Shapcott and Carol Ann Duffy (particularly her more recent poems) on one hand against AE Housman, Thomas Hardy, Emily Dickinson or Sylvia Plath on the other, to begin to get a feel for what I mean. I could also cite my own work, in which the cross-over from science into the arts constitutes a key, and recognisably Poeclectic, feature.

But haven't Intertextual techniques like this been around at least since *The Decameron*? Isn't Poeclectics just an extension of Modernism or Post-Modernism? And in what sense is Poeclectics distinct from the avant-garde, itself a loose term representing a vast body of (often under-acknowledged) writing and performance reaching back into the very heart of the last century? Well, considerable overlap does exist between the techniques of Poeclectics and of these 'movements'; but I have found all literary terms, in some way or other, either too skewed or too loaded to describe accurately the developments and possibilities I am attempting to identify. In fact, Poeclectics is helpfully discussed via this very resistance to established categorisations, and precisely because its techniques do not fall uniformly and satisfactorily into any one 'school' or its associated identity or 'tradition'. Of course, many writers and works, too, fail 'to fall uniformly and satisfactorily' into such movements; but in Poeclectics the tendency is endemic. It is hardly revolutionary, however, to argue that the eclecticism of Poeclectics is more expansive than in 'Modernism', or that its experimental-pluralist disposition transcends 'Post-Modernism' or 'Post-Structuralism', simply on the basis that those *isms* usually remain tied to a set of particular historical-literary associations in ways that Poeclectics either does not, or does less stringently. Nevertheless, Poeclectics does suggest a constantly-expanding set of activities more universal and recurrent than in any historically-sited movement. Post-Modernism and Post-Structuralism must always refer backwards to a historical 'Structuralism' or 'Modernism', while the avant-garde (etymologically at least) faces forwards. Poeclectics resists any particular temporal associations by looking forwards, backwards, and all around, for what it needs. In describing some recent British poetry in Poeclectic terms, then, I am not citing a brand new movement but a clear shift in the prominence and character of an ever-growing set of practices - practices which span a number of existing critical annotations.

Poeclectics has other, subtle distinguishing marks. To begin with, its eclecticism avoids the monologic drive of Modernism, whose fragmentary approach may be every bit as diverse as that of Poeclectics but whose complexity still aspires to a unified and 'mimetic' world-view. High Modernism deploys juxtaposed passages "strikingly divergent in register, rhythm, imagery and context" but ordered according to "an implicit metaphorical or narrative structure" (Robinson [3]) - as exemplified by, say, the hetero/poly-glossia of Joyce's *Ulysses*. So, Poeclectics generates something more akin to a mosaic of coherences than a coherent mosaic. Moreover, in place of Modernism's 'Make It New', Poeclectics puts (strictly speaking) a mere 'Make It'. And Poeclectics is not wary of the poetic subject in quite the same manner as much of Post-Modernism. I venture that the Poeclectic author-self strives for largesse rather than the ludic, for heterogeneity-through-pluralism over pluralism-as-negation. Gregson's note on the "residual respect" for the real in even the most Post-Modern of British writers ([4] p.5) lends weight to this, and I will discuss Poeclectic notions of the self in more detail later.

It happens, too, that Poeclectic approaches can open up issues surrounding the current state of critical-creative discourse (or is it 'dys-course'?). This may occur, for example, when the Poeclectic reworking of ideas and texts constitutes their critique, as in some forms of 'Re-Writing' [5]. Re-Writing and Poeclectics further overlap, in that both may invoke conscious compositional modes activated through more-or-less standard text-based Modernist/Post-Modernist techniques; but Poeclectics (like the avant-garde) will more naturally explore non-literary as well as non-textual adaptations derived from almost any conceptual or textual origin. There are signs that Poeclectics has shown fresh vigour in plumbing these possibilities (which, for me, are now important characteristics of the term) and poems in these various veins continue to bleed through into the mainstream. But I need to be plain here in stating that I see Poeclectics as much more than a *description* for observable developments of this kind in the practice of (Re-)Writing: the term also encompasses incipient and potential methodologies and writing modes (along with their new frames of reference) whose trajectories breach the documented boundaries.

Given the strong genetic likenesses between Poeclectics and Re-Writing, one will need reassurance that Poeclectics is not just Re-Writing in some light theoretical disguise. This is not difficult to supply. The common pedagogic manifestation of Re-Writing is to consciously initiate processes of writing-intervention around an explicit 'source text' as part of critical/creative analysis within a course; Poeclectics tends (in my experience) to originate from a set of motivations that are pre-existent to, and co-existent with, composition and which (at least to some degree) subconsciously seek an appropriate outlet mode. Poeclectics is therefore distinct from Re-Writing interpreted as an associative study/criticism conducted through the portal of an 'initialising' text, though on occasions Poeclectics may

likewise critically address and rework a given source. Neither is Poeclectics synonymous with what might be termed the 'microscopic' definition of Re-Writing as the ubiquitous Intertextuality inherent in *all* new works. This conception of Re-Writing as simply 'what happens whenever we write' constitutes a diffuse, backgrounded input to language. It is something like language's atomic structure, and any illustrating examples will tend to lead us back to the construction of language-as-universally-used. Poeclectics casts a sharper light than this. It tends to resolve clearer forms, shapes and qualities within its created texts. It concerns, intimately, the diversity, plurality, inventiveness and experimentation which occur *within* an individual's body of work. While the notion of Re-Writing as the very core of writing is undoubtedly compelling, it does little to illuminate the particular facets one may find in a Poeclectic author's poems. Poeclectic writers may still exude recognisable aromas, but they continue to stress the 'occasional' at a fundamental yet 'macroscopic' level by focussing on the poem at hand (its specific content, form and context). This latter set of distinctions, by the way, also explains why Poeclectics locks into the 'performative' in a deeper sense than most stylised performance verse-forms, through its anti-stylistic priority to make each poem or project fulfil a specific individual purpose and mode of expression.

I hope I have gone at least some distance towards demonstrating that the twins of Poeclectics and Re-Writing are not, after all, identical. This is as good a place as any to further distinguish between Poeclectics and its next-nearest living relative - the avant-garde. These both incorporate diverse practices, and in certain respects the Poeclectic writer may seem little more than a particular type of avant-garde practitioner who selects, devises or dabbles in 'performance' techniques which avant-garde writers have been developing at least since the 1960s. But it is no accident that the avant-garde bears a singularly martial title, one which still reflects accurately a revolutionary drive in its manner of exploration and innovation, and taken 'on average' Poeclectics may not be nearly as radical as the avant-garde. Poeclectic poets do draw on a wide range of discourses, and may even work loose some new strands of writing; but there is less sense of any overtly subversive 'common cause' between them, even in terms of innovation, plurality and diversity *per se*. By the same token, the individual avant-garde writer does not necessarily seek contact across a variety and range of creative-critical discourses in quite the ways a Poeclectic writer will: the latter is far more likely to include conventional methods and styles (*sans* irony) alongside poems dealing with (say) language-as-medium or hypertext. Even though the radical political agendas of its early origins may have shifted, generally, towards a transformative exploratory aesthetic, the avant-garde remains relatively 'specialist' compared with Poeclectics in that it is still recognisably experimental, oppositional, peripheral, clued-in, leading-edge, front-line and will embrace profound political motivation (in its broadest sense). Its collective focus is on 'the not yet devised'. Poeclectics (= 'making' and 'selecting') incorporates the old, the new, the not yet devised, the already devised, the ad hoc. In brief: although most of the techniques of Poeclectics may not be considered exactly ground-breaking, the term itself (when used as a descriptive or conceptual tool) carries in its wake a set of valid (though subtle) theoretical distinctions which allow it to sail free of mere historical or terminological tautology.

Time for concrete examples. JH Prynne was described in a recent Bloodaxe catalogue as "Britain's leading late Modernist poet". The confidence of that pigeon-holing irritates; but one can argue that Prynne, across his books, uses a largely recognisable set of registers and creates thereby a distinctive linguistic presence (in spite of the Bloodaxe write-up by Rod Mengham which flags up his experimentalism and how he "has carefully denied himself the comfort of an avant-garde house-style"). It follows that Prynne's approach is not nearly as Poeclectic as (say) Jo Shapcott's, whose recent collection 'My Life Asleep' (Oxford Poets) allows confessional poems and lyrical translations of Rilke to rub shoulders with monologues from a talking quark, Mrs Noah, a hedgehog and a rhinoceros. It would not have seemed incongruous in Shapcott's book to have found some highly experimental pieces also mixed in. A key point here is that the manner-*isms* of Poeclectics are distinct from those of (say) 'stream-of-consciousness' writing, because although the latter may permit many voices and themes to speak it nevertheless remains coherently/ incoherently (and recognisably) stream-of-consciousness. The juxtaposition of voices, styles and traditions in Poeclectics is a 'quantised' heterogeneity, where each poetic project occupies its own 'quantum level', whether it be completely traditional or entirely novel. Of course, the Poeclectic writer still may be identifiable behind and through the work, but not via the same stylistic routes as a Prynne or Muldoon.

II. POECLECTICS and the Dialogic: Making Voices?

So far, I have outlined a new emphasis in Britain on the voice of the poem over that of the poet, noted personally over two decades across collections and in competition entries, collaborative projects and commissioned works. There is critical corroboration for the tangibility of such a shift, reflected more popularly by the considerable weight attributed in recent years (in publicity and on dust jackets) to a poet's diversity, or 'range' [6]. Parallel conceptions include Ian Gregson's 'Dialogue and Estrangement', in which post-Movement poets have deployed "stylistic mélange" ([4] p.4). A single quote from Gregson will suffice as endorsement that the type of developments I describe under the umbrella of Poeclectics constitute more than a literary glitch or passing trend:

'What characterises the generations after Larkin is a growing refusal to allow one stylistic idiom to dominate

- modernist and realist techniques jostle with each other in their work, producing a greater open-endedness than in the poetry of the Movement, a sense of a plurality of voices... ' ([4] p.4).

Bakhtin (as Gregson himself points out) has already catalogued similar (though more patent) developments in the novel, away from mimesis and towards polyphony [7], and differentiates between 'monologic' texts (which impose some unity of style and vision) and 'dialogic' texts (where different styles and voices enter into discourse between one another and the culture at large). Bakhtin also coins the term 'novelisation' to describe how the multiple voices and perspectives in novels are taken up by poets ([4] p.7). One might lean upon these existing ideas and propose that Poeclectics represents - at least in part - a recent increase in migration from mainstream British poetry into more evident and experimental dialogic territory: a limited surge having, perhaps, some equivalence to (and historical precedence in) novelisation but possessing the distinguishable characteristics presented in my opening section. But this begs a question, or two. Given, then, the overlap between Poeclectics and Bakhtin's/ Gregson's models, have I simply been observing - like Gregson - the maturation of a new phase of novelisation in British poetry? In other words, is the Poeclectic term redundant?

Well, there is no doubt that novelisation runs quite close to my description of a distinctively multi-vocal presence in the British poetic mainstream, and Gregson's account of the dialogic does resonate well with Poeclectics as I understand it via my own engagement with, and analysis of, the contemporary British scene:

> *'The importance of the dialogic lies in its emphasis (as opposed to the single voice of traditional lyric poetry) on the interrelation and interaction of voices. There is a postmodernist element in this in the way it opposes the privileging of any one voice but there is an anti-postmodernist element also in the way it dwells on the felt authenticity of each voice, and in the political urgency of its championing of, as it were, the under-voices...'* ([4] p.6).

That "felt authenticity of each voice" is wonderfully succinct as a first description of my own Poeclectic instinct. But there are also significant shades of difference here. For Gregson, whenever recent British poetry "has evoked the postmodernist impossibility of speaking in a privileged voice it has tended, not to celebrate it as Ashbery's poems do, but to fret over it and struggle against it" ([4] p.5). His linking of 'Dialogue' to the poets' political agenda also defines a particular purview:

> *'... stylistic 'mélange'... is not mere eclecticism - it reflects a genuine concern to oppose single-minded visions of experience with a self-conscious emphasis on diversity and mutability. Much of the impetus for this is political, and arises from... cultural polyphony.'* ([4] p.5).

This, together with his 'political urgency…championing' point, demonstrates Gregson's success in crystallising out a number of essential facets of the contemporary scene - however, he does not quite describe Poeclectics in its ever-expanding entirety. Certainly, Poeclectics can provide the building blocks for such politicisations of literature, but it is not uniquely (or predominantly) defined by them or by what certain writers have so far achieved with its techniques. Many Poeclectic experiments, for instance, are spurred through commissions, sheer curiosity, or delight. By incarnating 'poiesis' as well as 'eclectics', Poeclectics promotes those activities and motivations not necessarily or dominantly political, but also driven by an aesthetic sense of what may be desirable or appealing simply in 'the making' of poems. It can move freely in and between politics, genres and disciplines, suggesting dynamic new forms of hybridised praxis - as in my own transformations of folk lore, myths, word-processing phenomena, laboratory techniques and scientific processes into performance poems; but it can also run, at times, against any radical political re-orientation by celebrating the traditional (transmuted or otherwise).

Furthermore, Gregson's excellent case-by-case account of 'Dialogue and Estrangement' must remain (like this paper!) in the tradition of literary criticism that reflects upon and attempts to understand what has *already* happened. Where Poeclectics passes beyond this - and beyond Bakhtin's typologies, including novelisation - is that it can be more than a post-hoc descriptive term: it also delineates a potential re-orientation towards, and a set of possibilities in, writing/criticism even for those who have not yet adopted Poeclectics to any significant extent (and regardless of political motivation or cultural origin). While Gregson and Bakhtin *describe* new movements in literature, Poeclectics goes on to encompass the diverse templates (whether known, documented, or yet to come) through which all such movements may at times be *expressed*. It is precisely this focus on potential (as well as completed) praxis, together with the emphasis on 'occasionality' (the single poem or small group of poems under composition), which gives Poeclectics its distinct flavour. The propensity might be expected to lead to a more anthology-based literature, one which begins to seek 'great poems' over 'great poets'. There has been some evidence for this in Britain [8], with the editors of the influential anthology *Emergency Kit* decisively stating: "This is a poem-oriented book" [9]. Poeclectic occasionality also comes powerfully into play for site-specific commissions (not colonised as yet by the avant-garde, whose work in this genre is not widely accepted) and for poetry off the page (much explored by the avant-garde, but little discussed by Gregson). This site-specific manifestation of Poeclectics is becoming increasingly important and is dealt with later.

III. POECLECTICS and its Deep Causes: Re-Making the Self through Otherness?

Where Gregson's 'dialogic' does sound a distinctly common chord with Poeclectics is in the engagement of the writer with 'otherness':

> *'What is involved in this insistence on polyphony, however, is not mere pluralism. It is not a question of the bland tolerance of difference but of a profound sense that the self has no meaning except in interrelation with others, and that the lived experience of the self can only be expressed through determined efforts to evoke the otherness with which the self continually interacts.'* ([4] p.7)

This quote alone might convince me that Poeclectics and the dialogic were founded, after all, on identical stone, were it not for that heavy accent on 'except' and 'only'. Poeclectics does not insist on Either-Or. Still, the two perspectives fall almost into step again when Gregson notes that for writers like Carol Ann Duffy "the emphasis is on the dialogic rather than the dialectic, on the juxtaposition of worlds rather than the refining of a single world" ([4] p.8). Indeed, Poeclectics may well be a manifestation of poets trying to represent and further expand a growing consciousness of self/non-self by enlarging their work into mosaics comprising collage, polyphony and bricolage, where they can "accommodate more of the self because it is more sensitive to otherness" [10]. Perhaps the closest Poeclectics gets, then, to a characterising theory is that its diversity and pluralism may serve simultaneously: (a) the desire to investigate the tangents of self; and (b) to register deep uncertainties/insecurities regarding canon-making and the validity of any given authorial position. These tangents and uncertainties, as we have seen, can cut 'dialogically' into any historical material but will also certainly ride history's leading edge. As new types of knowledge are popularised and reproduced, Poeclectics is likely to seize upon their special relevance to the contemporary self and facilitate their uptake into poetic consciousness, analogously with Bakhtin's novelisation. Science and the media are current input areas which immediately and emphatically spring to mind.

Now, working poets may well want to 'accommodate more of the self' but they also need accommodation! It is worthwhile taking a momentary detour here to inspect the contemporary relationship of creative self to self-support. In this, Poeclectics may both serve and reflect recent funding patterns for poetry in Britain, drawing at least some of its energy - negative as well as positive - from the growing variety and quantity of financial packages now available for poets to work in public, community and semi-commercial situations. Freelance poets find themselves increasingly involved 'off-the-page': in teaching and academic environments; in schools and school assemblies; in institutions and voluntary agencies; in collaboration with musicians and the visual/ plastic arts; as cultural 'caption-makers' for public monuments and at civic locations; in community centres, parks and forests; on public transport; in response to folk narratives, artefacts in museums, commercial products and commemorative scenarios; on oil-rigs and in fish-and-chip shops. The list swells annually. My 'Multi-caption' poems at several of the Imperial War Museum's sites, and Sue Hubbard's immense IMAX poem in the Waterloo underpass, are two cases in point. And I know I am not alone in having written and taught in many of the above-mentioned situations. Then there is the powerful and ubiquitous input to Poeclectic practice through the burgeoning of the creative writing business [1] (both within and without academe) where professional writers frequently lead with Re-Writing techniques possessing a distinctively Poeclectic impulse (as in the 'Try (re)writing this in the voice of…' type of workshop exercise). Do these activities signal the emergence of a more fluid and commercial Poeclectic self which seeks greater communal (or market) contact? Perhaps so. Whether generative or responsive, these financial incentives certainly do sharpen the kinds of focus on occasionality and praxis which Poeclectics is well suited to deliver. What is more, the ad hoc socio-educational contexts into which such work is often launched encourages what appears to be the inherent preference in Poeclectics to experiment in ways that retain accessibility and a kind of self-sufficient coherence within each poem (a core feature of Poeclectics I shall shortly attempt to explain).

Returning to the dialogic aspects of poetic selfhood, it is also tempting to link Poeclectics with the "detachment of the self from the poetry" ([11] p.239) which David Kennedy associates with post-Movement writing in the wake of *The New Poetry,* where "any cultural origin or position is available and equally valid" ([11] p.20). Kennedy goes on to say that

> *'… many poets have chosen to question the relationship between authenticity and artifice… by locating - or asking the reader to locate - the voice of an individual poem on a sliding scale between the apparent self of the poet and an explicit character or persona'* ([11] p.261).

This link-up becomes doubly convincing if one posits that a resonant condition has indeed evolved between the funding imperatives behind cultural provision (with their associated culturo-capitalist values) and a wider social thrust towards the questioning of personal identity. Such speculation aside, there is still a real Poeclectic flavour to Kennedy's assertion; particularly in that phrase "the voice of an individual poem" which highlights how, in Poeclectics, the Intertextual tends to play along to a poem-by-poem pulse. He invokes Peter Reading as a poet whose "identity of 'I' has always been various and is certain to be different in any two successive poems" ([11]

p.145). Kennedy reveals further Poeclectic tendencies in poetics by first referring to Gregson's citation of Simon Armitage, Jackie Kay and Glyn Maxwell as examples of poets who display narrative uptake across a range of characters and who lend "high priority to the mimicry of a colloquial and vividly contemporary voice" (Gregson, quoted in [11] p.144) and then, crucially, modulating Gregson's observation by claiming that the "narrators and protagonists [in the poems] are not ambiguous or questionable in the same way that those of Fenton, Motion or Morrison are" and "leave us in no doubt about the identity of their speakers" ([11] p.144/5). This forms a large part of what I meant earlier by the 'self-sufficient coherence within each poem' which Poeclectics tends to generate.

Kennedy's astute observation serves to further estrange Poeclectics from most Post-Modern conceptions of self. Although the kinds of 'ventriloquisms' Kennedy points to certainly do not characterise the entire Poeclectic regime, they do illustrate how this central strand of Poeclectics - unlike much of Post-Modernism - "seeks subjects other than its own fictionalising" ([11] p.149) and attempts to preserve what Craig Raine calls "unity of impression" (quoted in Gregson, [4] p.17). Yes, Post-Modernism and Poeclectics both undermine any residual Romantic notion of the poet as identifiable with a single lyrical persona; but they do so in subtly different ways. A serviceable analogy of how the two diverge in this respect can be found in radio: Poeclectics is a little like the author being able to tune in to, and select, a great many discrete 'voice channels', while Post-Modernism entails hearing cross-talk across a number of channels all at once. In this sense, and indulging in gross generalisations, Kay et al are Poeclectic in a way that Fenton et al are not. Their conceptions of self and otherness are recognisably different, even though all these writers deploy otherness as a potential site for creative reconstruction.

One should also note here that Gregson's dialogic represents "a promiscuous mingling of materials, an enjoyment of hybrid forms and images, a conflating of voices and perspectives" but "has tended to call upon linguistic ready-mades, upon pre-existent forms, and mingled them" ([4] p.10). It is this double-barrelled 'mingling' which evokes the frequently non-uniform style within the individual 'Post-Modern' poem, and Gregson's point concerning the dominance of 'ready-mades' is exactly where the dialogic (as he describes it) leaves off and Poeclectics (in its full and experimental variety) can move on. Poeclectics may therefore contribute to the 'rapprochement' Gregson seeks between the hackneyed idioms of the dialogic and the exciting invention displayed by such writers as Roy Fisher and Edwin Morgan. As a bonus: when Ken Edwards comments that in Post-Modernism "all the personal pronouns are at risk", thus explaining why the English Literary establishment retreated into an irony from which "the use of personae and dramatic monologues… is one way out" [12], one might reply that Poeclectics could actually be the recent expression of that 'one way'.

I suspect in all of this that the Poeclectic 'multi-voicing' of poems relies much more on a Bakhtinian/ orchestrating author than it does on a Barthesian / Post-structuralistically dead one - at least in terms of praxis. Not so much the 'death of the author' then, as the re-birth of the *auteur*. One often has a sense in Poeclectics of the author selecting and framing, in that "what pretends to be a single voice in the poem is at least two" ([4] p.97). Which is not the same as Bakhtin's 'carnivalesque', a mode that "brings together, unifies, weds and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the significant, the wise with the stupid" (quoted in [4] p.10). This, once again, seems to define a particular set of approaches and types of outcome outside of which one can Poeclectically stand. It seems fitting, therefore, to end this section by summarising how Poeclectics can be related (in sweeping terms) to Bakhtin's ideas. I present David Lodge's simplified model for the progression of the novel [13], and show how it may be extrapolated into the current Poeclectic terrain. Note that **Diegesis** indicates 'telling', or the use of the author's voice(s); and **Mimesis** denotes 'showing', the manipulation of various characters' voices. Superficial and limited though it is, and fraught with the danger of presenting Poeclectics falsely as a clearly-defined 'movement', this table may nevertheless provide, for some practitioners, a useful initial glimpse of the Poeclectic landscape.

Poeclectics: a proposed extension to Lodge's progression of literature.

Classic Realism:	Diegesis	*dovetailed with*	Mimesis
Modernism(s):	Diegesis	*sub-ordinated to*	Mimesis
Post-Modernism(s):	Diegesis	*foregrounded against*	Mimesis
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Poeclectics:	Diegesis	*as* or *through*	Mimesis

IV. INTERTEXTUALITY & POECLECTICS: Relationships, Definitions, Examples.

CREEL SILO. "THE WHEELSMITH'S DAUGHTER'S SON (AND OTHER POEMS)"

Silo has no ordinary background. He has been a weightlessness consultant for NASA, a forensics expert on carpets, and a hotel porter. He now designs jigsaws for under sevens. Perhaps that's why *The Wheelsmith's Daughter's Son (and Other Poems)* is so adept at creating a language of fragments, interstices, cracks and interfaces, where shards of everyday life are collated into a larger view of the world and of intergalactic space travel. *The Wheelsmith's Daughter's Son (and Other Poems)* is a poetry of the heart, the gut, the mind. This is a deep-pile of a book, where we are invited to fuse the senses, the intellect and sex. Silo plants one leg in classicism and the other in futurism, meaning he can do remarkable things with the present. In *The Wheelsmith's Daughter's Son (and Other Poems)* poetry is a body - a very big body, with rippling thighs and a Zimmer frame. In it you'll meet the high-wire contortionist who rode shotgun for Nixon, two lovers making out in a large bowl of *Spaghetti al Vongole* and Persephone on a bike (literally). There's a child's misfired attempt to origami the Brooklyn skyline, and the epiphany of a pristine *Sunday Sport* found immaculately folded on a seat in the Underground. But in the end, *The Wheelsmith's Daughter's Son (and Other Poems)* is the story of a wheelsmith, his daughter and her son.

I have so far held back from any detailed discussion of the relationships between Intertextuality and Poeclectics because I wished to present all the arguments together, in a single section, illustrating them with performance pieces taken from a range of contexts that provide concrete examples of Poeclectic practice. My first sample (above) is a short extract from a spoof review - now published (and paid for!). It is not poetry, I know; but I opened with it partly to subvert my own definitions, partly because it does 'perform', and mostly because it is a Poeclectic lambaste of Poeclectics-gone-wrong, targeting those blurbs which mindlessly and smugly equate diversity to quality. Stylistic parody - or, for that matter, the absorption of actual text - in Poeclectics is of course a familiar mode of textual assimilation. Overt forms of Intertextuality such as this have been referred to as 'weak', with more subtle methods termed 'strong' [14]. This theoretical perspective seems to me counter-intuitive [15], particularly for a poetry practitioner. I shall therefore use my own (more transparent) terms '**Explicit**' and '**Implicit**', respectively.

For me, Explicit Intertextuality has a **centripetal** tendency because a small group of dominant associations usually constitute the hub of its discourse and are difficult to escape. *Centripetal* texts often possess iconic/ totemic references and values; they build or depend upon consensus, and are easily converted into national or 'heritage' goods. Implicit work, though, may be termed **centrifugal** because it tends to fling language out into fresh processes and potential meanings [16]. *Centrifugal* methods are disposed to the generation of reader-oriented texts; they offer more nodes of conflict with the dominant culture, can possess unstable linguistic encodings, or plumb textual possibilities originating outside text. It is central to my own conception of Implicit Poeclectics that it includes various *centrifugal* trajectories through these darker regions of Intertextuality. I mean by this that a Poeclectic attitude can support ways into writing which outdo the recycling or hybridisation of well-known Intertextual techniques, however sophisticated those techniques may be. An example is my on-going experimentation with new types of 'translation': not between languages, but from one *discipline* into another.

'**Mutations**' was generated by such a route. I give this example early on because of its effectiveness in illustrating, perhaps, one of the more exciting and experimental Poeclectic modes. I applied the few simple laws of genetic transmutation to the syllables and letters of a line of familiar (ie 'Explicitly'-appropriated) verse, and obtained the poem. A *centrifugal* tactic like this might be expected to throw up the unexpected - but it is, quite frankly, astonishing to arrive at that point in the poem which drives one irresistibly to speak in Scots (try reading it out loud!). Audiences love to hear texts unfold under the influence of a bizarre law: they follow, chuckling, the ridiculous 'mutations' all the way to that sinister punch. Whenever I perform the poem I assist the effect by asking them to imagine me fooling around with the text in Ouija-like fashion, at 2am, lit only by the faint glow of my PC.

MUTATIONS

Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep
Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep
Littler Bo-Peep hes lost her shep
Littler Boy-Pep hees lost der shep
Littler Boy, Peep ees lost yer ship
Littler Boy, Peep his lust fer seep
Litter Boy, Keep h lust fer sheep
Titter Boy, lest ah keep yer wheep
Titter Boy, mah Keepe yoer heep
Sitter Boy, dah km Reepe yor heep
Sister Toy, deh Reape, kom n yor dheep
Titter Toy, de Reape komt ni yor sheep
Witter Boy - de Beaper kontim yor sheepe
Bitter Boy - de Reaper kom in yor sleepe.

Most readers will quickly recognise the massive potential here for the introduction, into mainstream poetry, of novel cross-disciplinary fertilisations in writing discourse. This is, granted, hardly headline news to the avant-garde. But, as outlined earlier, Poeclectics is not just about the re-use, re-invention and extension of weird or provocative compositional processes; it is also very much to do with a canny (and often limited) tailoring of Re-Writing techniques to a context-specific, practical situation - as the next poem demonstrates.

'**I Am**' was written for Whitgift School in Croydon. Commissions really focus the mind - especially where children and young adults are involved. I know, too well, that wrenching terror of the empty public space - far blanker than any sheet - which awaits your as-yet-unwritten text. Poeclectics can come to the rescue in such cases by providing a priming structure or formative idea. This situation demanded, I felt, rhythmic power (hence the poem's form) and I was sufficiently conversant with staff and pupils to know I could stir up the Lower Sixth with an uncompromising message for our time's pervasive (*in*vasive) infatuation with economics. More than that, in writing poems like 'Mutations' and 'I Am' I am expressing my resistance to performance as merely high-octane humour, transparent entertainment or a cavalry-charge of the ego. The Poeclectic input to performance can be wry, dramatic, moving, unsettling. For example, the rhythmic insistence of 'I Am' may appear, at first, slightly heavy-handed; but the Intertextual Poeclectic factor behind it is quite delicate and, ultimately, disturbing. (For those still unsure of the 'Implicit' input here, think of a nursery rhyme about a church and its steeple. Listen out for the amplified echoes of its rhythm.)

I AM

I am the locker-room handshake and snigger
I am the banker cooking the figures
I am the Emperor, never the boy
I am the whisper guiding the trigger

I am the pollster, the doctor of spin
who dresses the President, puts on his grin
I am the Hollywood-sounding Rob Roy
I am the group who can't even sing

I am the Minister's immaculate hairstyle
I am the Tyrant in comfortable exile
I am the Vivaldi beep on your mobile
You are the inch - and I am the mile

I am the logo on every jersey
and also the model past it at thirty
I am the right without obligation
I am the blood-stained allegation

I am the nursery's barbed-wire fence
I am sensation but never the sense
I am the very best form of defence
I am the pence added to pence

I am the ego that's simply galactic
I am the sex that must be fantastic
I'm in the poet writing an ad
I am the credit pressed out of plastic

I am the nation drowning in beer
The performance-enhancing chip in your ear
I am the planet's last Hamadryad
I am the death-bell no one will hear.

Note: Hamadryad - the spirit which lives in,
and dies with, a tree. Also, a king cobra.

Of course, the mere fact that Implicit characteristics within a Poeclectic piece were consciously engineered by the author does not mean their presence is necessarily made more patent to the reader/listener. In *Shrapnel and Sheets* [17] for instance, the sequence 'Sheets' ghosts some rhythmically-related lines of Italian folksong and lullaby. Some Italian air is, I feel, breathed into the English, where it combines with the off-pentameters (11-syllabled lines) to create a sense of haunting uncertainty. In the same collection, the poem 'Top Our Road, Bottom Our Road' adapts and 'futurises' the tone of a poor, yet motivated, African boy I knew as a child. Subtle Poeclectic acquisitions such

as these may not signal themselves immediately to the reader. However, they do extend a writer's opportunities beyond mere appropriation, or elaboration upon, subject-based content. What is more, intuitive experimentation in such areas can be wonderfully liberating.

Moving along the Poeclectic spectrum, more 'Explicit' experiments might involve, say, a tactic of *inversion* applied to platitudes or common sayings. Such methods can slip a mite too easily into facile humour; but '**Reflections**' (below) manages to reverse the logic of cliché to distinctly non-comic effect. Another, familiar case of Explicit Intertextuality, and one highlighted by the Kennedy quote earlier, is the Re-Writing of, and around, well-established narratives and characters. Carol Ann Duffy has used the approach famously in her 'Mrs…' poems [18]. Frequent source-texts for this kind of work will include myth, children's stories, fable and historical events. Hand-in-hand with it go those techniques which generate fresh narratives through the re-creation of a cultural character whose story is known only in a very limited or derived fashion [19]. These variations on the theme further underscore a powerful facet of Poeclectics: to invent new personalities for our times, capable of carrying archetypal or mythic weight. Indeed, the re-appropriation, hybridisation and re-invention of characters and their stories is one of the principal Poeclectic tools in current use. Which is hardly surprising. Our hunger for narrative is probably as old as language itself - in fact, our need for stories may constitute the original reason for text, its very 'DNA'. Poeclectic narratives can open up fertile creative (and perhaps political) spaces for the writer; they can also transcend, at least in principle, performance as an endless narration of the performer's ego.

REFLECTIONS

Bees will sting like a razor
The air will be clear as glass
A nut, tough as a tax-form
Hills as old as hats

Trees will be sturdy as girders
Hares, scheme-brained;
A feather as light as helium
Coal will be almost as black

as a space-time singularity.
Pie will be easy as numbers
Clockwork regular as citizens
And the button, that big red button

as bright as a child.

V. INTRA-TEXTUALITY and the TEXTUAL CONTINUUM.

At this juncture, and as a productive diversion from Poeclectics, I wish to introduce the notion of '**Intra**-textuality' [20]. It is a term for which there seems to be a real need in current Critical Theory and one that relates vigorously to the long-standing debate concerning the deep objective-subjective structures of texts. Now, Poeclectics and Intra-textuality may well be related, in that whenever I make an attempt to exploit or excavate Intra-textual effects I often feel I have moved very much into Poeclectic territory. But Intra-textuality is not about Poeclectics in its 'Explicit' assimilations of texts, or through Rob Pope's "Implied Intertextuality" [14]; nor is it the sophisticated Re-Writing of texts according to exterior (ie imposed) styles, tones or registers. It sits, rather, somewhere among the diffuse sets of ways of thinking about and using text which are not in any *clear* way 'Intertextual'.

One such 'non-Intertextual' manifestation occurs when the phonemes, words and phrases of a chosen piece of text (that is, of its *substance* [21]) are re-organised so as to generate a variety of profound and subtle outcomes. This is the workshop exercise we all know - where one cuts up a text in order to internally rearrange it or to draw the bits at random from a bag so as to make a new text: the 'cut-up poem'. Dénouements may include dislocation, productive solecism, peculiar forms of parataxis and polysyndeton-asyndeton, or glints of surrealism or onomatopoeic mood. It is uncanny that violent textual rearrangements such as this (even random ones) still do not give *complete* non-sense. Why is that? In fact, the cut-up poem is an excellent place from which to begin our interrogation of Inter- versus Intra-textuality. One might ask, for instance, whether the outcomes of cut-ups are simply generated within the re-formed text by the reader? Were they 'planted' there in the first place by the re-writer (raising a query over the true 'randomness' of the process)? That is, can one trace the effects back (at least in principle, if not in practice) to the reader's/re-writer's own linguistic/ semiotic/ semantic/ sub-textual expectations, patterns and codes, so that all the effects become 'Intertextual', in its broadest sense?

Patently, the answer must include a 'yes' somewhere - but only up to a point. I cannot see how one can rule out the possibility that various patternings of uttered sound or visual signal may exist (with their semiotic constituents) whose effects upon us are difficult to pin down by *any* Intertextual route. And some outcomes originate outside the text/content altogether, through (for instance) the mobilisation of the medium (its *substance*): by fragmenting the paper upon which the text rides, cut-ups generate new textual events that would not occur to the eye through conventional Intertextual reference *between* sheets of paper. Text-fragments can end up inverted, overlapping, or synchronous (two or more scraps pulled from the bag together). These sonic and material effects have little to do with Intertextuality as defined in the introduction to this paper (and as commonly construed). They can be re-interpreted, rather, as a rich and important feature of Intra-textuality.

Some may claim, at this point, that the above questions have been disingenuous. That is to say, my differentiation between Inter- and Intra-textuality can be taken as already understood, or as little more than a matter of definition:

> *'Intertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located…'* Roland Barthes [22].

In other words, authors such as Barthes and Julia Kristeva would probably see Intra-textuality (as I have outlined it so far) as nothing more than a set of highly Implicit ('anonymous') Intertextualities. However, if such Intertextualities are, by their nature, virtually untraceable then there can be no useful means of distinguishing between them, or between the streams of their consequent effects; nor can one test in any meaningful way to what relative degree such effects are generated through (for instance) some obscure Intertextual content as opposed to (say) responses generated within the pleasure-centres of the brain by certain combinations of sound or typographic forms. In these types of textual and sub-textual space I find the term 'Intertext' unhelpful, and close to oxymoronic. When origins and sources become attenuated to the point of extinction, have we not defined some kind of boundary beyond which 'Inter' no longer sensibly applies? In saying 'boundary' here I am not claiming that the transitions from Intertextuality to Intra-textuality are characterised by membranes rather than capillaries - this, I just do not know. What I am relatively sure about is that in using Intra- rather than Inter- in describing such spaces one avoids the implied or overt assumption that these regions can be colonised *completely* (or dismissed) simply by extending Intertextuality into them in a vague quasi-structuralist way. As any empiricist will tell you: just because many attributes of a text turn out to be traceable to other texts, this does not constitute in itself a proof that *everything* about the text *must* be. And in designing Barthes-like definitions of Intertext to exclude or eliminate this challenge, all one creates (for me) is an argument having a suspiciously round shape.

I cannot go any more deeply into whether or not Intra-textuality is a red herring, or build here a more detailed case against the assumption that texts are, *a priori*, completely 'Intertextual'; I simply propose that adopting an Intra-textual contrast to Intertextuality may prove useful, and that 'the Intertextuality of all text' is a hypothesis deserving of scrutiny, particularly at the fundamental levels of textual generation and pre-textual motivation. It certainly does no harm to revisit constantly, from various angles, this Intra-textual 'dark matter' of our linguistic universe. I suggest, as one such angle, that the terminology be refined by placing Explicit Intertextuality and Intra-textuality at the extremes of a **continuum**, or spectrum, of 'textuality' (with Implicit Intertextuality sandwiched between) [23].

Intra-textuality	Implicit Intertextuality	Explicit Intertextuality

This textual continuum incorporates various degrees, gradations and types of Intertextuality, but not in a reductionist or measurable way: it is an **analogy** rather than a model. The manner in which a text may then be 'placed' on (or 'profiled'/mapped along) it therefore depends on how the continuum is interpreted, what it is in the text which interests us, and the stage of composition/ reproduction/ reception at which these issues are addressed. The continuum itself consequently becomes a new site of Intertextual discourse centred on the text. Pedagogically this is most useful, not only in raising issues concerning how one 'maps out' Intertextuality in the first place, but also in generating dialogue over what is meant by any proposed Inter/Intra-textual qualities of the text. One of my main reasons for proposing the Intra-textual regime has been that it opens up this kind of discourse whilst immediately offering a finer structure for the more 'Implicit' extremes of Intertextuality.

For the sake of clarity, I should say a little more about the possibilities of what Intra-textuality may be. My first conception of it had its roots in the Dadaists, in the notion of 'Third Mind', and in the Symbolist grail of those meanings behind language towards which language is a process of ongoing suggestion [24]. These precursors colour my impression that the Intra-textual regime is essentially speculative, provisional, hypothetical, empirical: as a consequence, the term remains usefully open to interpretation, conflicting theorisations and practical explorations. It may be proposed, for example, that Intra-textuality incorporates a 'materialist aesthetic' for language which relies on

the tangible qualities of text (which, as I understand it, and put plainly, comprises those meanings connected with ink and paper, with typographic shapes and forms). It may also include Guy Cook's [25] phonologically-structured utterances, or what he describes as the "sense of rightness" perceived in texts (both of which belong to that family of sound-pattern perceptions not relying on conscious access to governing rules). There are also certain phonetic combinations (hinted at earlier) where language - even in randomised texts - can establish "…an atmosphere and the communication of feelings rather than of ideas", as in the "kind of noises that a mother makes to her baby, a lover to his mistress and a master to his dog" [26], effects often gathered under the term 'phatic' (coined by Malinowski). I cannot resist adding that Poeclectics might also include those sounds the mistress or the dog makes back! Clearly though, poems such as 'Mutations' achieve much of their effect through the phatic possibilities they prise open. This Intra-textual domain encompasses a variety of sub-/low-level linguistic codes, from the echoings of all kinds of obscure semiotic signals, through the emotional/phatic values associated with (say) whistling, to neurological stimulations prompted by vocalisations such as fricatives or plosives. These may have a musical, or fractal, character rather than a linear, associative or grammatical logic. I offer the above thoughts as a first stab at some of the ways in which I understand Intra-textuality to exist and to be distinct from Intertextuality.

Evidently, many of these comments on Intra-textuality are ideas-in-progress and the subject is far from exhausted by my treatment of it. I have also been wondering, for instance, how the Intra-textual regime (actually, *any* proposed section along the textual continuum) may relate to authorship, especially in terms of 'originality' or the presence behind texts of a unique writing-subject. While the Explicit extreme of the spectrum may be used to emphasise text as derived object, the Intra-textual extreme may point to origin, subject, or a willed/desiring textual 'source' - polarities that are linked through the 'medium' of text. Another question might be: could Intra-textuality constitute a potential site for Intertextual 'absence' or (to quote Rob Pope in a recent conversation) for an 'Intertextual Unconscious'? This requires far more detective work than I can currently muster - but I can raise possible clues. Certain aspects of a text's Intra-textual qualities, for instance, may come to light only when its dominant conscious meanings (eg referential and syntactic) have been removed or severely disrupted. Some associated effects may even persist when the text is apparently randomised. If this is so (and in the light of Cook's ideas in the previous paragraph) it is not entirely incidental in this context to register my strong suspicion that these various Intra-textual processes - and certainly their phatic elements - may function as semi/sub/un-conscious guiding forces behind the close editing and re-working of text (activities often conducted in a quasi-trance-like state). Given that periodicities and patternings of sound are deeply significant in poetry (particularly for performance) but are often under-considered in critical theory, a greater attention to these aspects of Intra-textuality would thus seem thoroughly appropriate in poetics, and vice versa. (Which is not to say that Intra-textuality is irrelevant in prose; simply that certain rhythmic and phatic effects in poetry generally have greater impact than in prose.)

It should by now be clear that in developing the notion of Intra-textuality I have not pursued (after all) an irrelevant detour from Poeclectics, but introduced a sibling concept that may be essential to its future discussion. Some of the ideas and theory have been quite involved, and I have already presented a 'phatic' poem in the form of 'Mutations', so it feels apt to round off this section with a very simple performance piece arrived at via that familiar and perhaps key 'Intra-textual technique' - the cut-up. One strength of Poeclectics-as-praxis is evidenced by the sheer physical fun I had in constructing this poem, ravaging photocopies of an old Routledge book on letter-writing etiquette. In this, I used a fairly clear-cut extension of Tzara's method. My fragments were line-segments rather than individual words and I allowed myself several attempts, with an eye for the humour and ironic undertow appropriate to certain types of popular (yet clued-in) performance setting. Rather than attempt to draw out any last-gasp Intra-textual issues here, I would prefer simply to point out that audiences are surprisingly receptive to aggressive 'Re-Writes' of this kind, particularly if one can muster an atmosphere of audience complicity in the enterprise.

THE COMPLETE LETTER GUIDE

I have just heard about your intended
engagement to Mr Bird. I must just write this line

to congratulate you. I will just write this short note
to say how deeply affected I was at the untimely death

of your Chihuahua. It is a very difficult thing for me
to say anything to you about the loss you have sustained.

I am convinced you will bear it like a man. I enclose
the bill for the repair to my car caused by the collision.

VI. PUBLIC POEMS: PERFORMANCE POEMS WITHOUT THE PERFORMER ?

I have already drawn attention to the fact that, in recent years, poems and poets have been deployed increasingly in public spaces in the UK (eg, as part of Lottery-funded community activity). I have worked on several such projects, and there is much that can (and ought to) be said about them. I do not want, though, to inflate the role of Poeclectics in this to false levels; so I shall first raise some theoretical points of a related but more general nature. Once this has been done, I will feel more comfortable about drawing in issues of particular relevance to Poeclectics.

A major point here is that whenever poems are sited off the page so as to draw the viewer into some further act beyond reading (or into some other type of conceptual process) there is a sense in which the poem operates as a performance piece *without* a performer. This entails the orchestration of a special relationship between the text and its '**situation**' (= "the properties and relations of objects and people in the vicinity of the text, as perceived by the participants" [21]). Naturally, poems in books have 'situations' too; but an example of the kind of innovative situational development I mean is provided by '**Trench**', part of my *Poetry Hunt* at the Imperial War Museum. It involves a telescopic sight, down which - invariably - children cannot resist looking. When they do, they read a poem fixed on a distant pillar at about head height, on a flight of stairs heavily used by visitors.

TRENCH

Sniper, Sniper, in your tree -
has your eye closed in on me?
Did your sights hot-cross my head
before you chose young Phil instead?
If looks could kill, would I be dead?

Sniper, Sniper, the one you get
doesn't hear your rifle crack.
They're saying here that you've the knack.
They're telling me I've lost a bet -
they say I'm dead. I just don't know it yet.

'Trench' does more than bring to the attention of visitors (Intertextually?) one narrative strand of the Museum's archives (in this case, the grotesque camaraderie and practical joking sometimes engendered by war). Nor is it a gimmick. Rather, visitors' reactions to this piece in its site-specific context suggest that the poem creates a kind of para-textual space (termed 'synaesthetic space' [27]). Not only is a complex and multifaceted response elicited in the reader through the careful construction and location of an apparently 'linear' text, but that text is also 'activated' by readers into new types of association. In effect, the poem's *situation* acquires, as well as delivers, opportunities for the text to be 'read' multidimensionally (and beyond mere content), with text, reader and environment drawing on one another for new and extended resonances (hence the 'synaesthetic' term). In 'Trench', the *substance* of the poem has been extended into the optical system of the telescopic sight, a move designed to both frame and modify the way in which the text is read. This telescopic *situation* is heightened through certain formal aspects of the poem, with the language conditioned by the new space. For instance, the hard end-rhymes emphasise a sniper-like scanning of the eye, while the familiar child-like naïveté of the opening lines (reminiscent of 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star') evokes vulnerability together with an ironic sense of the morbidly sinister game the soldiers are playing. These textual factors combine with the physical action of 'sighting' the poem to generate a matrix for reception far more resonant than that of the page alone.

I find Poeclectics a productive and natural mode to adopt for *situational* writing. The effects are most arresting, it seems, when the poem is connected intimately to Contexts (= "everything around the text" [28]) such as physical environments having a distinctive quality or character, or to local Intertexts (eg familiar folk narratives). The siting of '**Missile**' on a Museum ceiling, aligned with the principal axis of the Exocet missile suspended there, is a case of strong Contextual synergy. The Exocet's difficult Context (visitors have to crane upwards to see it, and normally look for just a few moments) guided the poem's composition towards a stark and immediate concrete message, forged in a highly resonant spatio-visual form. I would describe the poem as loosely Poeclectic: its Contextually-sensitive 'performance' relies on a primitive characterisation that is accessible and role-specific, yet deeply suggestive.

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        I'LL  MISS


        SI'L  LMIS


        SSI'  LLMI


        ISSI  'LLM


        MISS  I'LL
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Also written with an overt and public Poeclectic remit in mind, is '**Thames**' [29]. Composed for a Year-of-the-Artist project, this sequence is a poetic exploration of the geology of the Thames Basin. In Poeclectic terms, *Thames* represents a creative form of translation: the various tonalities, styles and rhythms of its segments attempt to 'translate' into poetry the personalities of gravel, sand, clay, and the underlying chalk/slate characteristic of the area. It strikes the key-note of a collection which probably constitutes my most sustained, targeted and concentrated use of Poeclectics to date. If Poeclectics required PR, I would cite in its favour not only the warmth of reception for *Thames* among local residents, but also the degree to which its writing so thoroughly engaged me, freed me up. The given extract demonstrates one of the several anarchic interludes within the sequence, in the voice of an 'erratic'. Erratics are a kind of ectopia whereby boulders are transported to geologically unrelated areas by glacial action; the last Ice-Age brought many erratics to Essex. Here, I appropriate from popular song - always an effective performance technique - but the central dialectic of the poem is to be found in the erratic mismatch (ironically informed) between form and content.

Extract from 'THAMES'

'Don't take your bones for granted -
someone might find them someday.
And if they were to need carbon-dating
'porosis might get in the way.

So, make the scientist happy -
drink milk-shakes and lie in a bog.
In a million years you'll be famous
in some Museum's catalogue.'

Recalling the Scots invasion of 'Mutations', I must add that this 'erratic' segment nudges me into mock Irish! *Thames* also alludes to cockney, business-speak and a register suggesting scientific analysis [29]. The fact that *Thames* is now 'performing' a variety of educational functions across a multitude of public sites in the London Borough of Havering in ways which do not require actual performers, does not mean that human utterance is consequently a less-valued social and private outlet for the work. Indeed, from the outset, *Thames* was intended for multi-vocal delivery (as a collaborative *ShadoWork* piece, in fact [30]). This use of multiple voices in polyphonic collaboration (or of one voice across a range of styles, speeds, accents and tonal qualities) is still an under-utilised form in Poeclectics. Which is a pity. So many potential Intra- (as well as Inter-) textual possibilities remain untapped and uncharted in contemporary writing and performance simply because of the paucity of collaborative contexts on the current scene.

VII.   THREATS and OPPORTUNITIES.

In summary then, the diverse Poeclectic tactics utilised by an increasing number of poets bear real kinship with Post-Modernism and the avant-garde, in that the techniques engender a probing vitality and Intertextual 'play' which may be used to deadly-serious as well as hilarious effect.   The family resemblance grows more striking when we acknowledge that Poeclectics can delineate the potencies of text modulated and hybridised via other 'textual' forms (including, of course, in electronic/ multi-media settings, an area I have not covered) or texts activated through 'non-textual' processes and codes.   A separate strength, however, of Poeclectics is that this avant-garde strand in its DNA intertwines and co-exists in a revealing and organic manner with conventional codes in writing and their more usual Intertextual methods.   At first glance, one might consider Poeclectics to have a lot going for it.

But there are warnings that must be sounded.   One has to accept, for example, at least the possibility that Poeclectics may be sidelined by the mainstream, whose recognisable modes and sometimes reactionary goals Poeclectics can undermine.   The Poeclectic poet also lacks the coherent 'brand-name' aesthetic or stylistic presence which mainstream image-making often demands.   If this sidelining were to become actual (or if it has already become so) then contemporary poetry is deprived of - if nothing else - a key source of challenge, virtuosity and vim.   At the same time, it is also possible that the avant-garde - far from being an ally - will perceive Poeclectics as a watered-down or compromised experimentalism, one that is unable to break free of conventional codes and which operates from an inferior position because (apparently) it excuses itself from any patent or underlying theoretical or political intention.   Such a response to Poeclectics would fail to appreciate its revealing (albeit precarious) positioning with respect to contemporary artistic identity, a position usefully occupying those frequently parched spaces between the avant-garde and the mainstream (subject always, I grant, to what these latter terms are taken to mean).   Another reservation about Poeclectics is that it may describe a relatively brief and distinct phase of British poetry and thereby hold little water as a wider or contemporary theoretical model.   Although Poeclectics did appear to gain strength throughout the 1980's in Britain (as indicated by the poets featured in *New Relations* [11]) Kennedy has now revised his perspective and suggests that several of my candidates for Poeclecticism may have since retreated from their earlier attempts at opening up the mainstream in this way [31].   If that suggestion is borne out, the status of Poeclectics as a middle-term phenomenon in poetics is, admittedly, shaky.

This perceived rotting-on-the-bough of Poeclectic fruit may have some origin, and credibly so, in the limited opportunities afforded by the swamped and shrinking state of recent mainstream poetry publishing in Britain.   It is also a perception, however, in some conflict with my subjective experiences around the country of grass roots workshops and residencies whose many participants often display a remarkable enthusiasm for, and facility with, Poeclectic ideas.   I really cannot prove whether Poeclectics is on an upwards incline, or on the downturn of a cusp.   As ever, time will tell.   But it is worthwhile restating here what I have maintained at various points throughout this paper: that I do not intend Poeclectics to be designated solely as a term descriptive of actual practice or of fresh trends; it can also denote varieties of *potential* praxis.   It will always retain some validity, then, as a set of possible attitudes, approaches, interpretations and concepts to which contemporary writers, or those of any future period, may wish to respond.

I must, nonetheless, drive on to consider how some readers - regardless of their verdict on the above reservations - may yet see Poeclecticism (and Re-Writing in general) as a manifestation of poetry's degradation, as a sterile denial of the inner personal voice.   Even EM Forster's acceptance of eclecticism in prose, given towards the end of his well-known *Aspects of the Novel*, is nevertheless a guarded one:

> "*The human mind is not a dignified organ, and I do not see how we can exercise it sincerely except through eclecticism. And the only advice I would offer my fellow eclectics is: 'Do not be proud of your inconsistency… It is a pity that Man cannot be at the same time impressive and truthful.'* " ([32] p.133).

I am all too aware that Poeclectic practice might be turned to what many would regard as 'untruthful': the merely ad-hoc or quirky; the purely cerebral or emptily Post-Modern; gratuitous conceits, satisfactions and entertainments; the tailoring of literature to a niche-driven, consumption-oriented ideology.   It is telling, and surely no accident, that Poetry and Rock-n-Roll have come to be such dust-jacket bedfellows.   We should also heed the warning that: "whereas music, and to some degree the pictorial arts, may maintain its integrity under patronage, it is harder for the verbal arts to do so" (Cook [33]).   I take liberties with the term 'patronage' here, but I do believe Cook's point may hold for commissions and public art.   Rebecca O'Rourke joins the fray when she indicates how "conflicts of expectation" can occur in such projects between writers, administrators and participants, causing writers to work for others rather than themselves [34].   These latter threats to poetry's authenticity are indeed very real, and Poeclectics may seem particularly under-defended against them.

I know I cannot convincingly set down any reply to this without first accepting that labels such as 'authenticity', 'truthfulness' and 'value' are indisputably problematic.   However, although I am prepared to enter into infinite

negotiation about what these expressions mean, I am not prepared to abandon them altogether. Some attempt must be made, therefore, to assess Poeclectic texts in terms of their genuine value to the author's growing 'collage' of collected work, and - by extension - to literature more generally. For me, works do not gain a free pass onto page, plinth or dais by virtue of novelty per se. Nor does the dubious endorsement of public commissioning exempt work from quality control. And to those who fear that Poeclectics may put another gash in the aesthetic/ canonical boat in its struggle through the high seas of performance verse, I would put a question. How on earth can range, high-impact and delight in delivery (not unlikely outcomes of a Poeclectic approach, and not altogether wide of the mark as the aims behind much of my own performance output) constitute - in themselves - sinking factors? Performance, viewed in its broadest berth, is not an inferior case of poetry - whether on or off the page. It is relevant to all writing, and to its crucial corollaries: reading and listening. I constantly explore and reassert Poeclectics as a means through which ALL types of text (read aloud, or otherwise) are rendered as authentic communicative 'performance' experiences.

I would also stress here a positive political role for Poeclectic pluralism. Arguably, the politics of Poeclectics may be perceived as less radical than those of Post-Modernism or the avant-garde; but this does not mean Poeclectics is apolitical. Far from it. As the poetic mainstream begins to yield (a little more) to non-academic and minority voices, the Poeclectic focus on hybrid praxis can provide an open, flexible, modern and accessible methodology-rationale for non-academic/ non-theorist writers who may have to meet many diverse demands in their creative and freelance work. And, undoubtedly, most readers of this paper will already have made, for themselves, strong input-output connections between Poeclectics and the recent reclamations within literature-criticism of politically under-acknowledged and historically excluded voices. Poeclectics is by no means unconvincing as a term of annotation for a number of techniques represented in, and contributing to, key political themes in literature now taught under such titles as gender studies and post-colonial studies (though, as we have seen, Poeclectics describes wider purlieus than, say, the politically-motivated 'ventriloquism' or 'projected confessionalism' (my term) used by poets with various degrees of concertedness; it can encompass broader, more occasional, and on occasions deeply experimental, conceptions of 'voice'). All of this, taken together, represents - loosely speaking - a 'democratising' impetus steered towards mildly radical quarters. True, by facilitating commissions (in the ways that it does) for particular events or places, Poeclectics may run the risk of pandering to the lowest common expectations of its funders; but it can also support and empower those wishing to visibly delve into or challenge (yet not exclude) the conventions and traditions surrounding authenticity, authorial self, identity and poetic subject or style. And by exploring identity and the 'situated subject' in ways that straddle the conventional and the esoteric there is a potentially broad appeal in Poeclectics which could allow it to gain a foothold among audiences and commissioning agencies where the avant-garde has been excluded. This appeal is magnified by the multiple/ multiplied stance of Poeclectics (through making-gathering, creating-criticising and a multi-faceted subjectivity) and because writers struggling with issues of identity (whether or not those writers are politically marginalised) can take advantage of the fact that Poeclectics generates and exploits a space between (on the one hand) the fluidities/ extinctions of self implied by extreme forms of Post-Modernism and (on the other) the appropriations and levellings of self enacted through monopolising cultural globalisation. Poeclectics is therefore poised and activated in a politically distinct way relative to Post-Modernism, because it is "not deconstruction of identity, but acts of identification" (an aphorism coined with Rob Pope, [23]). [*Marginalia.* I cannot resist sign-posting here a suggestion of some political as well as theoretical significance: that certain analogies and distinctions might be drawn between Poeclectics (in its pick-and-mix leanings, its tendency against a hierarchy or centralisation of techniques) and 'rhizomatic' structures such as the Internet [35].]

Thus (returning to the earlier Forster quote) the overall tenor of this more recent thrust towards eclecticism may represent a genuine attempt by poets to continue the project of openly examining the complexities of modern consciousness and its associated problems of identity (along with contingent subject-matter), but using a profile of techniques freshly emphasised so as to allow the affiliations and possibilities, as well as the inherent 'inconsistency', of the contemporary sensibility to be more closely approached, rendered and revealed. Within this context, Poeclectics *is* radical - and it can succeed in being both impressive *and* 'truthful'. There are signs that this willingness, and ability, to identify with/through texts across a variety of roles is set to grow in importance in public projects. Already, my Havering poems (including *Thames*) have been: (a) Published conventionally, as book and pamphlet; (b) Sited in public, in relation to their originating contexts, on billboards and other mountings (which includes one poem acting as plaque/caption for David Gerstein's new statue by the A12 of Roman horsemen); (c) Performed mono/poly-vocally (according to several scriptings, collaborative rewritings and choreographies) on radio and at local and inter/national venues; (d) Reproduced in a 'Study Pack' for local schools which annotates and 're-captions' the poems towards a variety of educational aims; (e) Deployed illustratively/ theoretically in university seminars and in academic contexts (like this!). Such is the type of extended receptional matrix (consisting of a number of spatio-aesthetic and functional contexts) into which poetic texts may increasingly have to step - with or without their authors - particularly if paper poetry continues to decline. I have the distinct impression, at the moment, that not insignificant sums of money (European, Lottery and other) are stacking up behind regeneration programmes and the Cultural Strategies of Local Councils nation-wide, projects in which site-specific art often seems to be accepted as a key feature. Poeclectics is one of the few approaches poised to meet this diverse and intricate challenge.

Finally, it would feel terribly insufficient to close this paper without an emphatic acknowledgement of the 'something else' that goes on between artist and text, concerning *why* texts are brought into being in the first place. This internal creative dialogue transcends technique (whether Poeclectic or not) or at the very least brings technique into organic relationship with motivation. In my own writing I go further, and argue that Poeclectics should not trample the essential mystery [36] of creative processes - what Charles Simic calls "translations from the silence". I find it vital to try and maintain a creative space where poems have the chance to arrive with their own palpable agendas, traditional or otherwise. I keep alive the constant sense of Poeclectics as an opportunity and tool (one among many) - not a new dogma. Poeclectics does not supplant other views of writing, or other approaches: it supplements and extends them. If seen as such, and if the aforementioned dangers can be averted, Poeclectics may emerge as the seeding influence for an ambitiously wide-ranging and liberating attitude within the overall praxis and contemplation of poetry. In short, something writers, readers and educators alike can look forward to.

9800 words

References and Notes.

[1]   **Mario Petrucci**, *'Poetry Workshops - Sea-change or Algal Bloom?'*. **Agenda** (Winter/Spring 1998, Vol. 35/4 + 36/1, combined issue; p.42). Also the interview in: **Magma** (Winter 2001, issue 19, p.46).

[2]   This paper has its roots in the presentation I made at the NAWE Conference on Re-Writing, 25 November 2000 at Oxford Brookes University, where the key ideas were set out. Some of these ideas have been followed up and reproduced in: "Public Poems: Performance Poems without the Performer?", NAWE Higher Education Forum, in: www.NAWE.co.uk, issue 2 of 'The Creative Writing in Higher Education Journal', Autumn 2001.

[3]   **Alan Robinson**, *'Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry'* (Basingstoke; Macmillan, 1988) p.8.

[4]   **Ian Gregson**, *'Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement'* (Basingstoke; Macmillan, 1996).

[5]   **Rob Pope**, 'Textual Intervention (Critical and Creative Strategies for Literary Studies)', Routledge (London, 1995). Pope's deployment of the term 'Re-Writing' is my primary reference point for its meaning.

[6]   Although **Ian Hamilton** is disparaging about the trend, he lends weight to my sense of a kind of fluidisation in contemporary poetry when he notes (*Poetry Review* 87/4, 1997/8): "I do feel that poetry's become more of a rag-bag - more inclusive… more discursive, more of a receptacle for amusing observations" (p. 29) and "The drift of poetry has been to make itself like other things in order to win audiences or to keep itself alive" (p.30).

[7]   For more on Bakhtin: **David Lodge**, *'After Bakhtin'* (Routledge, 1990) and *'The Art of Fiction'* (Penguin, 1992).

[8]   There is more on the emphasis on poems rather than poets in: **Mario Petrucci**, *'Born, Made, Or Thrust Upon Us?' (Envoi* 123, June 1999, pp. 46-48). Poem-centred anthologies and collaborations are also touched upon in this essay.

[9]   **Jo Shapcott & Matthew Sweeney** (eds.), *'Emergency Kit: Poems for Strange Times'* (London; Faber, 1996) p. xvi.

[10]   **Clark and Holquist**, quoted in (1990) [7], p. 96.

[11]   **David Kennedy**, *'New Relations: the Refashioning of British Poetry 1980 - 1994'* (Bridgend; Seren Books, 1996).

[12]   **Ken Edwards**, *'Grasping the Plural',* in: Denise Riley (ed.), *'Poets On Writing: Britain, 1970—1991'* (Basingstoke; Macmillan, 1992) p.27.

[13]   **David Lodge** (1990): see [7], p. 44.

[14]   A useful overview of Intertextual modes (such as 'weak' and 'strong') was provided by **Rob Middlehurst**, in: *'New Tissues of Past Citations: Discussion Notes',* a handout presented during his talk at the NAWE Conference on Re-Writing (Oxford Brookes University, November 2000).

[15]   The use of 'strong' and 'weak' for Intertextuality can also be found in **Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle**, *'An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory: Key Critical Concepts'* (Prentice Hall / Harvester Wheatsheaf, London /New York,1995). On p. 201the authors speak of: *'… the strong sense of a text's strictly unbounded capacity for referring to or linking up with other texts.'* I find this use of 'strong' unhelpful, a view I aired at the NAWE Conference and which I underscore here.

[16]   'Centripetal' and 'centrifugal' have already been deployed in various ways (eg [4], p. 3). Gregson's centrifugal relates to 'estrangement' whereby poets avoid association with any monologic world-view. I use the term more generally, for any writing that shrugs off the familiar so as to generate new/ hybrid forms (as in 'Mutations'). But Gregson's 'estrangement techniques' would certainly sit within my term.

[17]   **Mario Petrucci**, *'Shrapnel and Sheets'* (Headland Publications, 1996).

[18] **Carol Ann Duffy**, *'The World's Wife'* (Picador, 1999).

[19] For example, see: **Mario Petrucci,** 'Miss Muffet' (published: 1997 'Coast to Coast' Competition Anthology; also forthcoming as 'Miss Patience Muffet' in *Flowers of Sulphur*). This poem nudges at the Electra Complex through the famous children's rhyme, whose protagonist (not the arachnid!) may have been based on Patience Muffet, daughter of a 16th-century entomologist.

[20] **Intra-textuality** is an expression which (as far as I know) is used in poetics for the first time here.

[21] **Guy Cook** defines '**substance**' as "the physical material which carries or relays text" ['*The Discourse of Advertising'* (Routledge, 1992) p.1, where '**situation**' is also defined]. I extend the term to include the sum of the text's typographic components, attached to their supporting medium (or media) - particularly where the components are 'fluidised' via mobilisations or alterations of that medium (as in cut-up poems).

[22] **Roland Barthes**, *'The Theory of the Text'* (1981). In R. Young (ed.), *'Untying the Text'* (1981); quoted by Rob Middlehurst (University of Glamorgan) - see [14].

[23] This Inter/ Intra-textual continuum (and its application to critical theory) was explored in detail, along with a number of novel scientific analogues for Poeclectics/ Re-Writing, at the 22nd All-Turkey English Literature Conference on **'Re-Writing in/and English Literature'**, 25-27 April 2001 (Selcuk Univ., Konya, Turkey; in collaboration with The British Council, Ankara). Co-presenter: Rob Pope.

[24] 'Third Mind' - what Gerard G. Lemaire calls "an absent third person, invisible and beyond grasp, decoding the silence". As for Symbolism, one recalls Mallarmés "state of mind" derived through language "by a sequence of decipherings".

[25] **Guy Cook**, in: J. Maybin and N. Mercer (eds), *'Using English: From Conversation to Canon' (Routledge/ O.U.P., 1996)* p. 209.

[26] **J.A. Cuddon**, *'A Dictionary of Literary Terms'* (Penguin, 1979) p. 504.

[27] **Mario Petrucci**, *'Anaesthesia or Synaesthesia?'*. **Public Art Journal** (vol. 1, no. 2; October 1999).

[28] 'Context' defined in **Rob Pope**, *'The English Studies Book'* (Routledge, 1998) p. 234 [2nd edition forthcoming]. See also Guy Cook (1992) [21] for an alternative definition.

[29] See: **'Thames'**, a sustained Poeclectic performance sequence (by the author) in *'The Stamina of Sheep'* (Havering Arts Office, 2001). Available via: 020 8366 3733.

[30] **Mario Petrucci**, *'ShadoWork - Poets Doing the Unthinkable'*. **Writing in Education** (Issue 17, Summer 1999). Also: www.shadowork.co.uk.

[31] **David Kennedy**, private correspondence.

[32] **E.M. Forster**, *'Aspects of the Novel',* edited by Oliver Stallybrass (London; Penguin, 2000).

[33] **Guy Cook**, see [21] p. 230.

[34] **Rebecca O'Rourke**, *'Lifelong Passions: creative writing in and against education',* in: NAWE on-line HE Magazine. [http://194.205.189.34/nawe/Magazine%209/rourke.html]

[35] See: **G. Deleuze and F. Guattari**, *'A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia'* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). 'Rhizome' theory has already been related to the Internet by R.B. Hamman (*'Rhizome@Internet',* http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/rhizome.html) and has gained a finger-hold in some quarters of contemporary theorising. Rhizomes possess certain characteristics that might be applied, perhaps through analogy, to Poeclectics - a fascinating area for further discussion and analysis.

[36] **'Mystery'** - not intended here to imply an essentialist fortress; rather, returned to its root *muein* ('closing eyes or lips') so as to denote the hinterlands lying beyond the fluxional interface between origin and praxis. T/here, creativity cannot be observed objectively, categorised or pinned down.

Mario Petrucci holds a PhD in optoelectronics, degrees in Physics and Ecology, and is Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Oxford Brookes. His dynamic performances and unusual workshop methods attract international recognition. He freelances widely in schools and as part of the *Poetryclass* project (Poetry Society/DfEE). Mario co-founded *ShadoWork*, a collaborative writing, performance and voice-training group (London Arts & Arts Council funded). He is the Imperial War Museum's first and only poet-in-residence, now Literacy Consultant there and inventor of 'Multi-Captions' designed to operate across many educational/aesthetic levels. His Poeclectic leanings can be traced back to the PBS-Recommended *'Shrapnel and Sheets'* (Headland, 1996; £6.95; 38 York Avenue, West Kirby, Wirral, L48 3JF, U.K.) but they occur more overtly in *'Lepidoptera'* (KT Publications; 1999, 2nd ed. 2001; £5.50; 16 Fane Close, Stamford, Lincolnshire PE9 1HG, U.K.) and in *'The Stamina of Sheep'* (from the author, Tel: 020 8366 3733). His Poeclectic work will also be showcased in the 2nd edition of *The English Studies Book* (Rob Pope, Routledge, forthcoming).

Note for Romana on development of paper at Oxford Brookes:

'Potting on' is the dirty but necessary work essential for a plant to grow and flourish. Bonsai trees are testimony to that. I brought along a sapling - vigorous, but in a rather smallish pot - to the NAWE Conference at Brookes in November of 2000. Murmurings and stem-tappings ensued. 'That's an interesting hybrid. I've not seen one *quite* like that before…'. (Rob Pope). I handed my plant over for inspection to gardeners at Brookes whose hands were far more callused than mine. In corridors, over the 'phone, across scribbled sheets, I got back valuable clues. Cracked, the pot whose root-ball I believed to be close to fully-formed. 'You should check it's the variety you think it is. And are you absolutely sure it's yours?' (Romana Huk). Sadly, mine seemed the kind of root-system you couldn't just ease out, pull free-and-clean. I had carried the straggly thing along to Romana and Rob, and later to David Kennedy, at key points in its growth in the hope, I suppose, that they might confirm how terribly well it was doing. I knew I was at best a weekend gardener; but I sensed there might be a natural tint of green to my fingers - maybe. And perhaps they'd have some idea of where I might put it. In the hall? The conservatory? In a private collection? Right in front of my house?! Hmm. I came away from each consultation with some crocks, my sapling in a plastic bag, and gentle yet firm suggestions to find a particular fertiliser or type of peat. I'd probably been slightly over-sure, perhaps, of my knowledge of contemporary landscaping. And stage by stage, the focus shifted from gardener to plant. I could pose with the tree, certainly; but that was all. So, I potted on. And on. Along the way, once or twice, I got asked to put my tree on show. That forced me into some furious work. I learned about proper drainage, pruning, the firming that roots need if they are to extend, draw water. And PDQ. Always my muscles, my trowel; but over the fence came significant noddings and shakings it was hard to ignore. The playful yellowness of the leaves gave way to a darker and more serious chlorophyll. To let this happen was my choice - I might have let it stay a bonsai. I am grateful now to have something planted in the municipal park - young still, subject to vandalism, pollution and frost; but in full view and enjoying the possibility of season, squirrel and sun. It looks okay. May it one day offer a little shade.