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How does the 21st century poet make poetry out of autobiographical material? Through process, remix, juxtaposition, assemblage and selection.

Abstract:
I write about the world and my experience of it by sieving an overload of information and textual material, heard, observed, read and seen. Through selection, editing and re-ordering I assemble narratives that try to make meaning of the world around me and my progression through it. My poems and prose-poems are fictions, there is little sense of 'personal truth' or 'actual experience' within them, yet their fast-moving and flickering structures seem to approximate how we live today, the effect of being awash in a confusing world where we collaborate with 'friends' on the other side of the word but do not know our neighbours. This paper is in part written using the same techniques as my poetry.

Biographical note:
Rupert Loydell is Senior Lecturer in the School of Writing and Journalism at Falmouth University, the editor of *Stride* magazine, and a contributing editor to *international times*. He has edited several anthologies of poetry and writing, such as *Troubles Swapped for Something Fresh: manifestos and unmanifestos* for Salt; and has many books of poetry and prose poetry in print, including *Dear Mary* (Shearsman, 2017), as well as *Encouraging Signs*, a book of interviews, essays and conversations. His critical writing has been published in *Journal of Visual Arts Culture*, *Revenant*, *English*, *Great Writing* and *Punk & Post-Punk.*

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> '[H]ow do we tell stories when we are confronted with a litany of overload, immersion and hyper-acceleration?'
>
> – Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid (Miller 2016: 199)

We cannot help but express ourselves in our writing. '[T]he suppression of self-expression is impossible' says Kenneth Goldsmith, later adding that '[t]he act of choosing and reframing tells us as much about ourselves as our story about our mother's cancer operation' (Goldsmith 2011: 9) Neither is there any right way for a writer to produce their writing. Poet-critic Charles Bernstein argues that:

> Whatever gets written gets written in a particular shape, uses a particular vocabulary & syntax, & a variety of chosen techniques. Whether its shape, syntax & vocabulary results from an attraction (or ideological attachment to) the organic & spontaneous, or to some other look, it is equally chosen. Sometimes this process takes place intuitively or unconsciously (the pull of influence comes in here, since somewhere in the back of the mind are models for what looks natural, personal, magical, mystical, spontaneous, automatic, dreamlike, confessional, didactic, shocking). Sometimes it is a very conscious process. Any way, you're responsible for what turns up. (Bernstein 1984: 43)

In case we miss the point, later in the same essay he clarifies the point: 'There is no natural look or sound to a poem. Every element is intended, chosen.' (Bernstein 1984: 44)

Bruce Andrews more radically declares that

> Language is the center, the primary material, the sacred corpus, the primum mobile, the erotic sense of its own shared reality. Not a separate but a distinguishing reality. Yet where is the energy invested?
>
> > There is nothing to decipher.
> > There is nothing to explain.
> > (Andrews 1984: 31)

But perhaps there is...

For the last decade or so my main way of writing has been to assemble phrases into a poem. These phrases come from my own notebooks, from books I am reading at the time (sometimes almost grabbed at random; at other times phrases I've jotted down whilst reading), from songs and CD covers, from newspaper and magazines, from in my head… a kind of ongoing diary of experience, reading and observations catalysed and changed by writing processes and my own creative and editorial process, which works towards poems that as more questions than answers, using collage and procedural writing as well as more traditional inspiration and personal confession.

Bernstein has suggested that 'Poetry is turbulent thought, at least that's what I want from it… It leaves things unsettled, unresolved – leaves you knowing less than you did when you started' (Bernstein 1999: 42-43), and my poems explore the world by association and analogy: the 'voices' or polyglossolalia of my work are present in the

way the poems have been constructed, they accumulate meaning by juxtaposition and ordering; ‘conversation’ and ‘conference’ are inherent in the way themes may continue through sequences, series or individual poems. Joseph Conte suggests that these ‘Serial and procedural forms provide alternative and complementary responses to postmodernity. […] The divine order as a single voice of authority has withdrawn to be replaced by a cacophony of channelled voices, or by no voice at all’. (Conte 1991: 17)

Themes emerge, tentatively appear and disappear in my poems. I try to keep my vocabulary everyday and readable, but distort syntax and linearity to make surprises, jumps, leaps of the imagination. What I read, see and engage with around me often gets directly collaged into poems, so the poems are in many ways very personal. It’s my voice because I made it, the process is much more refined than the terms ‘collage’ or ‘cut-up’ suggest.

The poet Ann Lauterbach has stated:

> I don’t want, and I don’t think it is necessary, to choose between fragments and wholes. I know this is confusing, but I have come to believe in the notion of whole fragments: pieces of experience, or language, which are understandable and complete in themselves, but which don’t necessarily link up with or to a Big Truth or Story or Conclusion. I think our real lives are made up of just such discontinuous fragments – a cup of coffee, the sight of a cardinal in a tree, a kiss, a poem, a scrap of overheard conversation, an image from an ad on TV, an article about Rwanda. The list is endless, and most of these are neither memorable nor important in 'the scheme of things', but taken together they make up our daily lives. (Lauterbach 2003: 105)

and then opens up the idea within a larger perspective:

> I think we need to be glad for these bits and pieces, and not insist that they have to fit into some big picture, some imposed coherence. If you extend the notion from one’s own personal life to the life of the planet, of the universe, you see how the notion of consistency and wholeness begins to waver; you see that the model is one taken from scientific paradigms in which everything fits. But many things don’t ‘fit’, and as long as we insist on the neatness of the fit, many things of potential significance will be left out, omitted, forgotten. Fragments in this sense suggest the possibility of variety and difference rather than coherence and sameness. They make us think again about what is considered important, or beautiful, or true (you can put in any value here), and so perhaps give us permission to resist moral or aesthetic absolutes. Reality is an invention, a selection, an artifice, not something that actually exists out there/in here in toto. (Lauterbach 2003: 105)

This, of course means the reader has work to do, not least in relating their own reality to the poems presented to them. The poet Dean Young has an interesting response to an interview question about the possibilities of misunderstanding:

> *Do you think your poems are defined by misunderstanding?*

> I think they're very much about misunderstanding. [...] I think to tie meaning too closely to understanding misses the point. (Young 2002: 86)

This misunderstanding is also about the discrepancy between language and reality, or object, which Lauterbach has also written about:

> The world, for many poets, is apprehended *as* language; language is the material of the world. Every object is simultaneously itself and its word. For some poets, the word has more significance than the thing itself; for others, the thing takes priority over its word, and for still others, neither word nor thing has precedence. Although this might be seen as a mere matter of shift in focus, the consequences, in terms of the poet's form, its construction, can be profound. Poets move around in the shadowy space between a word and its object, sometimes wanting to make the difference between the two appear seamless, and sometimes calling attention to the distinctions between them. (Lauterbach 2005: 61-62)

Not only this shadowy space is usable by poets, but the many diverse and specialist languages and objects the world offers are available as subjects. Dean Young responds to his interviewer asking about how he uses 'the physicality of the world' by referring to:

> The junk of the world, which is maddening and wonderful. One great thing about the twentieth century is that any discourse can be poetic. [...] For instance in ... I used mangled quotes from technical journals, which is not that experimental – it just allows tones to confront each other. That kind of collage is fun because it can really undercut what I'm doing. At some point I have to know what I'm doing, but that should be pretty far into the process. (Young 2002: 88)

Cole Swensen and David St John write that Young's

> more radical use of juxtaposition gives the surface of his work a certain edginess in which the many voices that inhabit it are never entirely at ease. Instead, they, like the reader, must be ready to shift direction, to follow a tumultuous flow that is often logical, but even more often a little odder than that. (Swensen and St John 2011: 502)

Of course, remixing and collage has to occur after something has already been created; you cannot remix an empty page. Daphne Keiller suggests that 'the selection, arrangement, and juxtaposition of the found bits of prior culture is the art.' (Keiller 2008: 143) Whether it is Lauterbach's 'bits and pieces' or Young's 'junk of the world', '[t]he fragments "impact upon each other to explosive effect" - through the artist's selection and arrangement she generates novel information'. (Keiller 2008: 143)

Keiller goes on to suggest that 'it may be a culturally productive act to simply discover and draw attention to a fragment of text, image or sound. Part of the mosaic- or collage-creator's art lies in the very process of rescuing the fragment from obscurity and showing it to people'. (Keiller 2008: 143)

In 1995 Robert Sheppard categorized his poem sequence thus: ‘The project *Twentieth Century Blues* is a “net/(k)not work”. One of its current aims is to link the unlinkable.' (Sheppard 1999: 54)

Three years earlier in 'Poetic Sequencing and the New' he had discussed this in broader, more playful terms:

> A network but not a work, a knot of works, not works as labour, but as ‘necessary business’. Several networks. Net: the shape of a 3D figure laid flat. Subject to no further deductions. The take home pay. Network: a system of units, stations for broadcasting the same programme. Not: a word expressing denial, negation, refusal. Adv. Same as naught, nought. Knot: Interlacement. Twisting. In some particular form. A bond of union. A difficulty. The main point of a tangle. A complex of lines. A measure of speed. A node or joint in a stem. Knotwork: ornamental work made with knots. Granny knot: a knot like a reef knot, but unsymmetrical, apt to slip or jam. A tangle or careful design? Slip knots let the world through. The net works to capture, the knot works to hold the net. Work: Working the Work, earlier notes on poetics. Working on. Effect directed to an end, that on which one works, the product of work, a literary composition, a book. Works: walls, workshop, an action in its moral aspect. To produce effects. To sail a course, to put in motion, to purge. To provoke. To excite.
> Or not any of these.
> (Sheppard 1999: 39)

which could be summarised by Joe Amato’s ‘Everything in dialogue with everything else’ (Amato 2006: 99) or considered the subject of discussion in another comment by Ann Lauterbach:

> Some poets stitch a kind of linguistic web between sites of picturing (description) and sites of telling (narration); some poets make clusters of sound which do neither and both at once, calling attention to the constellating properties of language, its capacity to confound temporal and spatial reality into a third thing: an event which participates in the construction of that reality. The idea that a poem can be granted the status of an *event* that shifts the course of cause and effect in a writer’s or reader’s life, has little to do with the idea of a poem as a bauble of verbal expressivity. (Lauterbach 2005: 61-62)

The poet and critic Brian Louis Pearce asked me in an interview entitled 'Ordering and Shaping', ‘How do you pattern your mosaic? Order your (found) dislocation?’, to which I replied ‘Same as all poets do. By theme, association, sound, rhyme, assonance, word count, syllable counts, visually, intuition.' (Loydell 2013a: 101)

Pearce had previously challenged the very idea of collage and appropriation:

> *Wouldn't it have been better to choose your own phrases and ideas?*
>
> Than what? I did choose the titles, I chose every word, phrase and piece of punctuation [...] Each and every one of those poems is mine. My ordering, my words, my phrases – even if they are appropriated phrases, they are given a new

> context and meaning because I have put them alongside or with other phrases. Collage is only a working method, not an end in itself. (Loydell 2013a: 93)

Whilst Young suggests that when ordering and shaping a poem, at a certain point:

> the poem takes on some kind of density, and it starts to coalesce. I may feel like there's a particular trace in it – like a narrative trace – that I can highlight a bit, to establish enough of a center of gravity so that other materials can be organized around it. Then I make selections in terms of musicality and measure. (Young 2002: 88)

Lauterbach is adamant that:

> There are only fragments. The world is far bigger and more complex than any picture or whole we mere mortals can come up with. Language is a nice structure into which to place your fragments. If you learn its complexities, vagaries, subtleties – how malleable it is – if you understand language as a sort of fluid whole, a multifarious thing, then your fragments will be fine. You can make wholes from them if you need to, or you can leave them as fragments, as long as you care for (pay attention to) the language itself: how it 'works'. (Lauterbach 2003: 109-110)

In reference to fragments, David Shields states that ‘collage teaches the reader to understand that the movements of the writer’s mind are intricately entangled with the work’s meaning. Forget “intricately entangled with the work’s meaning”: *are* the work’s meaning.' (Shields 2013: 161)

This understanding by the reader can also be seen as evidence of what Barbara Guest calls ‘The poem’s concealed autobiography. A memoir of itself which is released as it becomes a presence existing in time’ (Guest 2003: 40), although this ‘concealed autobiography’ can also be perceived, suggests Lauterbach, as the poet ‘creating a self, in which the self (and so the world) is an anthology under constant revision’ or perhaps as a style or tool, where sincerity is appropriated as a poetic device, or voice. (Lauterbach 2005: 65) Young claims that in his poems ‘there is usually some vestigal evidence that the narrative voice is aware of itself as a construction, but it may break through that construction to approach something which seems, at times, a lot like sincerity.' (Young 2002: 92)

This mix of confession and apparent sincerity is one of the things I have been interested in producing in my work, and that the anthology *Smartarse* which I edited served as research for. (Loydell 2011a) I wanted to write narratives and stories yet not return to ideas of ‘self-expression’ or the egotistical narrator who ‘shares his experience’ with the reader. My back cover blurb stated that:

> The poetry I want at the moment is smartarse: a whirlwind mix of comedy, fiction, collage free association, confession, bravado, parataxis and storytelling. It uses or may use experimental or linguistically innovative techniques, be rooted in modernism or postmodernism, but maybe not so that you as a reader would notice. (Loydell 2011a)

and I went on to suggest that:

> this poetry is rooted in the freedom of young USA writers who haven't been involved in the sad poetry wars we've seen in Britain. USA writers such as Dean Young and Josh Bell, along with many others, have taken techniques, processes, ideas and poetics from anywhere they choose, without anyone arguing whose poetry it is or whether it's experimental or not. They've revisited the lyric, the confessional, post-Poundian and post-Eliot as well as the Black Mountain schools. They've looked to Ginsberg as much as Frost, Blackburn and Berryman, the New York School, the second New York School, the Narapo Institute, the West Coast, the mid West, to zen and the South.
>
> (Loydell 2011a: back cover)

In his Introduction to *Smartarse* Nicholas Rombes argues that this freedom 'comes from a weird diffuseness borne of the internet' (Rombes 2011: 5), going on to expand his thesis by stating that:

> The web in the West – at least in its first iteration – has been a metaphor for freedom, for free-range grazing, for genre-hopping, for the sort of mass turbulence that shattered distinctions between high and low. The web is the commercialized result of postmodernity a place where all the theoretical buzzwords of that movement (identity shifting, hybridity, irony, randomness, self-reflexivity contingency) coalesce in the most pubic of spheres.
>
> (Rombes 2011: 5)

and later goes on to also point out 'a renewed attention to the vernacular' and a 'sense of playfulness'. (Rombes 2011: 5)

This playfulness is important to me. When interviewed I suggested that '[p]laying with words, syntax, rhythm, visual layout for a poet all helps the writer understand how language works.' (Loydell 2013a: 81) The poems in the title sequence of *Leading Edge Control Technology* use the language of 'instruction manuals, technical handbooks and newspaper to produce strange, complex texts whose exact meaning is hard to pin down, but whose coercive and questioning power is unmistakeable' (Loydell 2013b: back cover), as is – I hope – the humour evident in the often ridiculous juxtapositions and conceptual jumps in the work.

The series of poems entitled 'Animals Are Not Your Friends' which form a kind of poetic spine in *Wildlife* (Loydell 2011b) were written in response to a magazine call for poem submissions upon that theme. I ended up writing 22 poems, all sharing a common form of four verses with five lines each plus a final spoken or quoted phrase, along with repeated or almost-repeated phrases, and variation of phrases: 'the point of thinking' in the first line of verses 1 and 3, and 'Animals are not your friends' at the start of the second and fourth verse. Here is the nineteenth of the series, which draws on the work of land artist Richard Long:

> ANIMALS ARE NOT YOUR FRIENDS
>
> I am thinking about what you have made,
> those drawings with water, circles of stone,

marks left on the hills or the beach;
about how you then let time and weather
blow them away into memory's book.

Animals are not your friends. They plunder
for their nest and forage for their food,
they run away and don't return, fight
other cats at night. It's no use limping home
to me, you'll get no sympathy.

I am thinking that it doesn't really matter
if you made those marks or took these walks,
or if you're who I think you are. There is
still mud on the wall and your photographs
where text and landscape blur.

Animals are not your friends and art critics
are all snakes. What do they know about life
or being alone for a week? A stone is a stone
is a stone is a stone. Look at where the path
might go, at the patterns in the sand.

'I prefer to leave things unsaid.'

(Loydell 2011b: 65)

Throughout *Wildlife* the collaged elements of the poems have been reworked and smoothed over so that grammar and syntax apparently make sense. Yet the parataxis and jumps in thought and/or image remains. In a similar fashion – and as described above – my own poems (with perhaps the exception of *Ballads of the Alone* [Loydell 2013c], discussed below) mix biography with fiction and quotation, often via processes or forms.

The group of poems entitled 'Spray Painting in the Dark' in *An Experiment in Navigation* (Loydell 2008: 94-100), which gathers together the selected and edited results of Google searches, make evident the collage process in visual form by re-presenting the typeface and size of the text found online:

Paper Securities

motorways in the rain
offices with empty shelves
the sound of diesel engines in the dark
no show students

recognising the celestial highs
an art form all in itself

fast moving sun

a magpie with a beak full of orange peel flies overhead

wet light glinting on the grid of coloured cars

on the roof of the multi-storey

the grass is always greener

break language down from simple narrative use

labyrinths are everywhere

jolting awake in just the right way

the impression of conversations with an angel

scattered debris among the ruins

we're living the answer even now

terrified of returning home

there is no mistaking or escaping the author

my photo on the wall two hundred miles from home

(Loydell 2008: 98)

These six poems adopt a rawer form than 'A Poem's Not for People' (Loydell 2008: 11-13) which is a list poem used as a preface in the same volume and was also written using the results of a Google search. Here is the first third of the poem:

A POEM'S NOT FOR PEOPLE

a poem's not for people
who are afraid the sun won't rise tomorrow
who can help themselves but choose not to
who think giving advice is beneath them
who know the what but not the why

a poem's not for people
who are in a hurry to get a job
who want to work from home
who want their entertainment predictable
who hope their hotel room comes with an internet connection

a poem's not for people
who are easily dissuaded or discouraged
who can't follow a running gag
who pick and choose which laws they obey
who need to have simple answers

a poem's not for people

who pay attention to television
who have merely expressed an interest
who are easily offended
who giggle every time they see naked breasts

a poem's not for people who have never contemplated Helen of Troy
and wondered at a face that could launch a thousand ships

(Loydell 2008: 11)

Elsewhere I have used a small number of texts as the same word pool for a group of poems, 'Endlessly Divisible', (Loydell 2008: 46-64) which touch upon the true events relating to a suspected cancer growth behind my knee but mix it with fantastical voyages of 'the sun boat' and ideas to do with belief and doubt. In 'Secret Lifes' [sic] (Loydell 2008: 102-111) real characters in the village we had recently moved to are juxtaposed with fictional and real memories as well as heard of and imagined events in the past, an imagined yet real social history of our new location. One poem, 'The Secret Life of the Igloo' (Loydell 2008: 105) nods knowingly towards the sequence 'A Fire in the House of Ice' (Loydell 2008: 114-133), a series of poems written 'after Mario Merz', the Italian artist who constructs igloos out of glass, steel and other material, and also uses the Fibonacci series to structure his work, as I did in the opening and closing poems of the sequence.

Borrowing an idea such as Merz's use of the Fibonacci series as a structural device gives room to one voice in what, as the title of a previous book of poems, I have called 'a conference of voices'. (Loydell 2004) Using collage and parataxis, the poem can contain many voices, indeed *give voice* to those whose work I have sometimes collaged together.

In *Ballads of the Alone* (Loydell, 2013c) a book containing five sequences of poems about named photographers, each artist is given a voice via quotations from statements and interviews, not to mention descriptions of the photographs; as are critics – via reviews and essays; along with my own written responses, which are sometimes direct responses written in notebooks, or fictional or creative responses to photographic images, but also via my own contextualisation (art or photographic histories, or even what else I am reading at the time or associate with the work under consideration). I am also present as editor and shaper of the collages, and as author, but there also seems to me to be a new, hybrid voice emerging from the juxtaposition of ideas and phrases. The fourth sequence, 'Different Chemistry' is subtitled 'after Joel-Peter Witkin' with the prefatory quote 'I'm alive and in need'. The fourth poem clearly collages together verbal descriptions of Witkin's photos with critical writing about the work:

4

fruit around a baby's corpse
disguising things that hurt
excellent excellent extra
fearless image-maker
never drops the mask

blurry timeless image
scratched tissue paper fuzz
endless enticing everyone
silence does the talking here
another kind of work

being disciplined she burnt it
starts the whole process again
expansive eye candy explode
accepting the unquestionable
the condition of our lives
(Loydell, 2013c: 62)

This poetic voice is of course mine, but distanced from self-expression. Tony Hoagland states that:

> Collage is really the practice of a theory of knowledge. Antirational and semi-intentional, it takes disorder, coincidence and chance materials as part of its methods and inspiration. By eliminating transition, it embraces ambiguity, improvisation, speed, and multiplicity of meaning. It is expressive, but not primarily self-expressive. It places priority neither on closure, nor on conventional notions of completeness. (Hoagland 2006)

He discusses the idea of voices, too, as well as noting how '[i]n the constant conversation between unity and disunity, juxtaposition plays with omission and collision. It loves the energy of disruption and dislocation. '(Hoagland 2006)

In *Ballads of the Alone* I also undermine this created new voice (or voices) by running found lists of words through the poems, to remind the reader that this is language on the page, that as the poet Cole Swensen says:

> if writing on art (or ekphrasis) is a way of looking at art, the degree to which it's conducive lies in the looking and in the viewer, not in the artwork itself. I'm interested too in slightly changing the terms of ekphrasis, which is considered writing that looks at art – I'd rather consider a writing that makes what it looks at into art by the way it looks at it. (Swensen 2005: 90)

In *Ballads of the Alone* I write about photographs by referencing them via the artist, via my own response, via critical responses and also other material which has somehow become related to it through reading, word or thematic association. Brian Louis Pearce questioned this approach:

> *When you take phrases, words, slogans from magazines, adverts, songs or overheard conversations or your own notebooks, what is the associative/integrative process you are aiming at?*
>
> It differs I think. I may organise a poem through word count, syllabics, by the alphabet, by the number of lines, or through a theme or concept. In the end I think associative is the word – I believe that the phrases and interwoven language in my

> poems gradually builds up a web of allusion and intertextual and imagistic links which the reader can then assemble some kind of meaning from. This is unlikely to be a narrative or a coherent argument or statement. It is likely to be open-ended and not offer epiphany or transcendence as any kind of grand closing statement. (Loydell 2013a :94)

The poet John Taggart has also used this approach and articulates it in his 'A Preface' (Taggart 1994: 74) where he discusses how his poem 'Slow Song for Mark Rothko' uses ideas of Gregorian chants, medieval stain glass windows, and Steve Reich's minimalist music to 'work out language equivalents for the qualities of stained glass and Rothko's painting'.

My ekphrastic poems do not actually try to re-present the visual in words, they attempt to do more, to contain creative and emotive responses from myself and others, the artist's or photographer's own poetics and theory, as well as conjure up some associative ideas and images to do with the work. (Interestingly, presenting the *Ballads* poems in 2013 at an informal meeting for researchers, we ended up discussing whether a reader would immediately search for the named photographers online, thus precluding any possibility that the reader might not have some idea of the work, but also meaning the poems could not [or were unlikely to be] read in isolation from the source or subject material.)

In my most recent book, *Dear Mary*, (Loydell 2017) I not only write about colour and the Italian landscape, along with Renaissance painting – particularly Fra Angelico's annunciation paintings, but invent several annunciations by contemporary painters such as Francis Bacon, as well as contemporary annunciations exploring themes such as surveillance, alien abduction, online dating, and the weather forecast. In the title poem I create a new hymn, or song about Mary, assembled from the lyrics of Creedence Clearwater Revival, Dido, The Faces, Patty Griffin, Her Name is Calla, Janis Joplin, Mary Mary, Elvis Presley, Bruce Springsteen, Porter Wagoner and Hank Williams Jr, along with other texts:

DEAR MARY

Mary, you're covered in roses, in ashes,
you're covered in rain, and in babies.
In the morning you'll be alright,
in the morning the sun's gonna shine.

Emotions split from intellect, spirit split from flesh,
a joyful affirmation of the female in salvation.
She gave me a sign, she heard me pray,
let me know this dark night won't last always.

She said she'd call but that was weeks ago;
paradox is echoed in a new spiritual age.
A woman's body is to be celebrated
as central to nature transformed.

Were you ever in doubt?

Does it help to know you're not the only one?
This dark night won't last always,
nothing's quite as pretty as Mary in the morning.

I can live with the moods of Mary
if that's the way it has to be.
A child of confusion, she runs to the hills,
past the willows of illusion, trying not to cry.

Sweet Lady Mary has to rest her poor head
in a sacred place that is rooted in tradition.
Chasing the rainbow in her dreams so far away,
she wakes in the morning to breakfast in bed.

She speaks with the voice of an angel,
she smiles a heavenly smile,
with occasional hints of assertiveness
and the power of Mother Eve.

O Mary don't you weep and don't you mourn,
we are all divided creatures, fundamentally,
and I never lost one minute of sleepin'
worryin' 'bout how things might have been.

Lord, tell me the place women occupy
in creation and society.
I just brought these flowers for Mary,
I haven't seen Mary for years.

(Loydell 2017: 72-73)

In other poems, critical writing about colour theory and surrealism are collaged together, angels as well as Joseph are given voices, and I explore what artists might have been thinking as they painted, as well as offering a 'Silent Annunciation' where 'The angel has nothing to say.' (Loydell 2017: 69)

The poet Louise Glück, like myself, is 'attracted to ellipsis, to the unsaid, to suggestion, to eloquent, deliberate silence. The unsaid for me exerts great power: often I wish a complete poem could be made in this vocabulary.' (Gluck 1994: 73) More information often means more questions to ask and potentially be answered, an ever growing network of information and ideas that we constantly have to edit and control to enable us to live our lives in some semblance of the culturally and socially ordinary.

Glück suggests this is:

> analogous to the unseen; for example, to the power of ruins, to works of art either damaged or incomplete. Such works inevitably allude to large contexts; they haunt because they are not whole, though wholeness is implied: another time, a world in

> which they were whole, or were to have been whole, is implied. There is no moment in which their first home is felt to be the museum. (Gluck 1994: 73)

and declares that

> It seems to me that what is wanted, in art, is to harness the power of the unfinished. All earthly experience is partial. Not simply because it is subjective, but because that which we do not know, of the universe, of mortality, is so much more vast than that which we do not know. What is unfinished or has been destroyed participates in these mysteries. The problem is to make a whole that does not forfeit this power. (Gluck 1994: 74)

There is obviously a discussion to be had about this power, and what a poet might make of this. My 'conference of voices' along with constructed narratives that resist confession is one way of stepping away from the idea of a poet somehow sharing an original experience, a way to resist the implied egotism of the declamatory 'I' in poetry, although there remains a nagging doubt that, as Dean Young puts it: 'I KNOW MY POEMS ARE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL, I JUST DON'T KNOW WHO THEY ARE ABOUT.' (Young 2010: 142)

My poems remain personal, but not confessional, self-expressive but mediated through form and construction. Associative and hybrid rather than linear or narrative, as I explained to Brian Louis Pearce:

> All I'm trying to do in my recent work is order and shape ideas, but also allow the reader to construct their own poem. I think my structures reflect the way we think, which isn't in a linear fashion, but by skittering all over the place, in a strange network of leaps, bounds and regressions. My poems hover around and above a theme or idea, throwing associative matter, themes, ideas and images into a patterned whole, and – hope – slowly allowing the poem and reader to move along. (Loydell 2013a: 84)

I have no wish to dictate or tell the reader something; that seems to me to hold the author up as having something to say. I'm more interested in discussing and sharing experience and information with readers. Perhaps together, using process, remix, juxtaposition, assemblage and selection, we can learn to write together in the way Mark Amerika suggests:

> Once you teach yourself to formally compose an on-the-fly remix that samples from the date of your experience and the experience of all your creative co-conspirators, opportunities start opening up that enable you to invent new social media art practices that nurture your creative trajectory. (Baker 2012)

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