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Sean Bonney's Hate Poems

'We are [...] unalterable rebels, without gods, master or fatherland; irreconcilable enemies of all despotism, moral or material, individual or collective, in other words, of law and dictatorship (including that of the proletariat) and passionate lovers of our own culture.'

Fernand Pelloutier, 1900¹

There nis sickness but health it doth desire,
Nor poverty but riches like to have,
Nor ship in storm but that steering it doth require
Harbour to find so that they may her save.
And I, alas, naught in this world do crave
Save that thou list on him to have mercy
Whose death it is out of thy sight to be.

Thomas Wyatt

Sean Bonney's poetry is some of the most passionate now being written. It takes seriously the deadly proclamation issued in Sergei Nechayev's *Catechism of the Revolutionist*, and reverberating throughout Bakunin's *Statism and Anarchy*, that hatred is essential to revolutionary survival. 'The revolutionary', states article 4 of the *Catechism*, 'despises public opinion. He despises and hates the existing social morality in all its manifestations. For him, morality is everything which contributes to the triumph of the revolution.' Article 13 is yet more absolute and unequivocal:

The revolutionary enters the world of the State, of the privileged classes, of the so-called civilization, and he lives in this world only for the purpose of bringing about its speedy and total destruction. He is not a revolutionary if he has any sympathy for this world. *He should not hesitate to destroy any position, any place, or any man in this world.* He must hate everyone and everything in it with an equal hatred.

'Our task', says article 24, 'is terrible, total, universal, and merciless destruction.'² Bakunin wrote that the 'only allies' of the International Working Men's Association 'from the bourgeois world are

¹ From Pelloutier's address to the *Congrès général du parti socialiste français*, Paris, 1900. Cited in Georges Sorel, 'The Decomposition of Marxism', in Irving Louis Horowitz, *Radicalism and the Revolt Against Reason*, London: Routledge, 1961, 252.

² <https://www.marxists.org/subject/anarchism/nechayev/catechism.htm>. Marshall S. Shatz, the translator of Bakunin, writes that the authorship of the *Catechism* remains uncertain, and that it may be the work of Bakunin, at least in part. But Shatz is careful to distance Bakunin, whose anarchism he says 'has served as the conscience of political thought', from Nechayev, who in his judgment was a despicable, vile individual, and describes the *Catechism* as 'a horrifying credo of the revolutionary as nihilist, a cold-blooded individual who has severed all the personal ties and human feelings binding him to conventional society the better to destroy it.' Michael Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, trans. Marshall S. Shatz, Cambridge: CUP, 2002, xxiv, xxxvii.

those few individuals who have come to hate the existing political, economic, and social order heart and soul, who have turned their backs on the class that begot them and have devoted themselves utterly to the people's cause. Such people are few, but they are precious—though, it goes without saying, only when they have learned to hate the general bourgeois desire to dominate and have suppressed within themselves the last vestiges of personal ambition.³

'Such people are few.' On the other hand there is a great superfluity (in Marx's ironically taxonomic terms, a grotesque species of 'surplus population') of 'people who see nothing and understand nothing', about which Bakunin is perfectly blunt: 'there is no use talking to them.'⁴

Like Nechayev, Bakunin commands the revolutionary not only to discipline himself in hatred, giving his whole life over to it, 'heart and soul', but to make hatred erupt in social destruction. Of the passion for destruction, Bakunin writes:

This negative passion is far from sufficient for achieving the ultimate aims of the revolutionary cause. Without it, however, that cause would be inconceivable, impossible, for there can be no revolution without widespread and passionate destruction, a destruction salutary and fruitful because out of it, and by means of it alone, new worlds are born and arise.⁵

Without 'negative passion' put to the test in socially destructive activity, 'revolutionism inevitably degenerates into rhetoric and becomes a disgusting lie.'⁶

The dedication to hatred as a necessary way of life pervades Bonney's poetry's form and content (a distinction that the poetry implicitly preserves, by siding with Marx when he famously says that for the revolutionary who is not drunk on narcissistic fantasies of tragic heroism, 'the content goes beyond the words.'⁷ Hatred shapes the texts on the page, decides the content, determines what language is usable and in general keeps the filter of negative passion clean, to stop the poetry getting clogged up with fatty affects. At least in this single way, anarchist hatred is compatible with Ezra Pound's 'antiseptic intolerance'.⁸ 'The nature of the true revolutionary excludes all sentimentality, romanticism, infatuation, and exaltation,' states Nechayev's article 7. The revolutionary state of nature can be kept alive only through the ruthless total excoriation of bourgeois emotional artifice: self-hatred too must be disciplined, not a mess of unidentified persecutory impulses scrambling up the Id but a method of clarity, a definite stricture of feeling, imperatively conscious and painstakingly, even unendurably, internalized. It cannot be what Hegel called 'the hatred which stems from being-for-self', it can only be the reverse: a hatred that keeps alive the possibility of being for others by right now and indefinitely, for as long as it takes, being against the self.⁹ The revolutionary 'must accustom himself to torture', states article 5. Torture is nature, for so long as the world that cannot

³ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 6.

⁴ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 62.

⁵ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 28. Cf. 133: 'The anarchist social revolution [...] arises spontaneously within the people and destroys everything that opposes the broad flow of popular life so as to create new forms of free social organization out of the very depths of the people's experience.'

⁶ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 123.

⁷ Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx Engels Collected Works, Vol. 11, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1979, 106.

⁸ Ezra Pound, 'The Teacher's Mission', *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T.S. Eliot, London: Faber, 1954, 58.

⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977, 420.

be lived in, ‘the people’s prison’ that is the only world there is, is all there is and remains undestroyed.¹⁰

Bonney’s ‘Still: 7 Love Poems’ is a set of seven blocks of justified text, pressed flat between hard left and right margins.¹¹ The blocks are all individually titled. Three of the seven poems—‘Dancer (after Emmy Hennings)’, ‘On Bomb Scares’ and ‘In Fear of Memory (after Pasolini)’—are shorter than the briefest of Baudelaire’s *Petits poèmes en prose*, about the size of the two shortest pieces in Kafka’s *Betrachtung* (*Looking to See*). These literary historical coordinates are not irrelevant. ‘Still’ is a passionately literary, European, not English, text. The brevity of the individual blocks is ambivalent. Its sound is distinctive: never the familiar compressed gasp of the short poem at the discovery of an unfamiliar clearing for lyric, nor the strangled headlong velocity of Beckett’s self-segmenting voice flickering in and out of recorded earshot in *How It Is*, but an uneasy, frequently ugly mixture of resolution and despair, getting to the point and not being able to get past it. The brevity of the block is sometimes an explicit vulnerability to being violently cut off in the act of narration, or thinking, or lamenting, by not being able to go on. ‘Desperation is a sharp, passionate feeling.’¹²

The first poem of the seven, ‘Dancer’, slams shut after six lines on the isolated last word ‘Knife’, a *Wortsatz* or holophrase that sounds remotely like an act of self-castration. ‘Nothing mesmerises me. Open the borders. Knife.’ The ripple or flex of contradiction along the line, manifest in the unlinking of the sentences, is muted but distinct: ‘Open the borders’, an antinationalist slogan demanding free entry into a prosperous state for migrants and refugees, runs straight into ‘Knife’, at once a noun and an imperative verb, and either way an instruction, which not only shuts the poem off (like a scythe through a power cable) but twists up the slogan preceding it into material for a suicidal mishearing, *open the wrists*; and then the poem is arrested at its own border, the ancient right margin that for these justified text blocks is not only a pillar of the establishment of meaning but the site of the proscription of enjambment, fortified at random by whatever word makes it there. The three shortest poems all end in pain like this, cut off at a point of impassable contradiction or unendurability, stopped abruptly dead.

The four longer poems—‘On the Refusal of Spite’, ‘Memoir (after Miyó Vestri)’ , ‘IN FEVER: Notes on Les Chimères de Gerard Nerval’ and ‘On the Hatred of the Sun’—are roughly as long as Baudelaire’s shorter pieces, his lower limit cases of the *petit*. Unlike Baudelaire, for whom *en prose* typically meant broken up into paragraphs and kitted out with the *guillemets* scattered throughout novels to mark up prolific life in dialogue, Bonney restricts his poems to single blocks and single voices. There is no dialogue (though there is frequent apostrophe and lots of conversation), no manifest parable, not much in the way of the cutting and pasting of modern life; the poems are not sociable but resolutely, desperately anti-social. The question whether or not they are prose or what exactly prose might be is not something they waste time playing around with or milk for literary irony. The exceptions to the pattern are ‘Memoir’, which is not unambiguously in paragraphs, but which does come in two separate blocks, set apart or distanced from each other by a blank line and by the typographical difference that the second block is all in italics, and ‘IN FEVER’, which is a stack of six blocks, all virtually identical in size, with six lines of text per block and the last line of each block stopping just short of touching the right margin (by the width of a conjunction or definite article: *and* or *the* would fit the block flush against the edge), so that all six blocks are rectangles with their bottom right corners chipped off.

The titles of the poems are defiantly world-literary. The grateful acknowledgment of poets from Germany, Italy, Venezuela and France, all of them not only figures Bonney

¹⁰ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 50.

¹¹ Published online at <https://www.dataleedzine.com/sean-bonney-issue-8>.

¹² Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 31.

could be expected to admire in a spirit of comradeship, but individuals who suffered, loved and hated exceptionally, pronounces by omission his antinationalist repugnance toward Anglophone literary culture, as currently represented in the persons of no interest and campus cul-de-sacs of the U.S. and U.K. poetry scenes, whose poems mostly do nothing of any significance to so much as ruffle the derivatives of their paymasters (most of these poets are university leftists: 'By his very nature a scholar is disposed to intellectual and moral depravity of every kind', explained Bakunin).¹³ The recycling of the classical formula of the essay title copied by Bacon out of Montaigne, Cicero and Seneca, and repeated by Hazlitt for many of his best known essays ('On the Pleasure of Hating', 'On the Fear of Death', 'On the Want of Money'), gives notice that these blocks, and possibly the whole set, belong somewhere in that tradition of the profane meditation or worldly essay, rather than in the prose of novels, newspaper ephemera and *faits divers* that Baudelaire meant by *en prose*, as well as in the company of the many poets who already helped keep the same tradition alive in verse, from Marvell's 'On a Drop of Dew' through Wordsworth's 'On the Power of Sound' and beyond to hundreds of later examples. Bonney's use of the formula is consciously classicizing and may be knowing, but it is not merely a witticism, and it certainly is not a clever gregarious pleasantry, as in O'Hara's 'On a Birthday of Kenneth's' (which begins 'Kenny! / Kennebunkport!') or his 'On a Passage in Beckett's Watt & About Geo. Montgomery', which jokingly indexes the pomposity of its title by being a thoroughly bad sonnet. The poems know that their titles are marbled with erudition and that they risk sounding mannered, but they do mean them: they are affirmations of literature, not pastiches of it.

Just as the classical character of the titles matters, so also does every individual acknowledged in parentheses. They are not just names dropped to signpost a political identification or to represent anything, they are individuals. The writings, passions and suffering of these individuals and the histories they created and had to live through are invoked, either implicitly or by quotation or reference, in the poems dedicated to them.

The first individual to be named and acknowledged is Emmy Hennings. Hennings was a German poet, novelist, autobiographer, puppeteer, doll-maker, singer, artist's model and avant-garde performer born in Flensburg in 1885. After the death of her first child and her desertion by her first husband in 1906, Hennings 'joined a traveling theatrical troupe and lived a gypsy-like existence' for almost nine months, before giving birth to a second child, whom she took with her back to Flensburg and left there in the care of her mother. She then 'embarked on a career as a vagabond performing artist [...] in roadshows, operettas, and nightclubs in such cities as Moscow, Budapest and Cologne.' She performed at the Cabaret Simplizzimus in Munich, where in 1913 she met Hugo Ball; they got married in 1920. After the outbreak of war in 1914 she was arrested for forging a passport to help a friend dodge the draft and imprisoned for six weeks. Together with Ball she founded the epochal Cabaret Voltaire in 1916, and was its 'star performer';¹⁴ the *Zürcher Post* called her the 'shining star of the Voltaire'.¹⁵ She wrote intense, metrically sculpted, rhymed and unrhymed, realist and visionary poetry, often voiced in the first person plural, about prison, war, God, dreams and drugs. She wrote about death a lot. In a diary entry singled out by Ruth Hemus in her book *Dada's Women*, Hennings muses on the best way to go out: 'Ein Theatertod, ein richtiger Varietéod wäre eigentlich das Gegebene für mich.' ['A theatre

¹³ Bakunin, *Statism and Anarchy*, 134.

¹⁴ Thomas F. Rugh, 'Emmy Hennings and the Emergence of Zurich Dada', *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Spring - Summer, 1981), 1.

¹⁵ Isabel Wünsche, 'Exile, the Avant-Garde, and Dada: Women Artists Active in Switzerland during the First World War', in *Marianne Werefkin and the Women Artists in Her Circle*, ed. Tanja Malycheva and Isabel Wünsche, Leiden: Brill, 2017, 55.

death, a real variety-show death would be the thing for me.}]¹⁶ A review of her performance at the Cabaret Voltaire in the socialist Dutch newspaper *De Nieuwe Amsterdamer* noted with admiration the ‘hate and sarcasm’ vibrating in every word she sang and described her ‘thin face ruined by morphine’.¹⁷

Here is a poem by Hennings called ‘Morfin’. ‘Morfin’ is the Danish spelling of ‘morphine’ that Hennings and her friends used in their letters and conversation.

Morfin

Wir warten auf ein letztes Abenteuer
Was kümmert uns der Sonnenschein?
Hochaufgetürmte Tage stürzen ein
Unruhige Nächte - Gebet im Fegefeuer.

Wir lesen auch nicht mehr die Tagespost
Nur manchmal lächeln wir still in die Kissen,
Weil wir alles wissen, und gerissen
Fliegen wir hin und her im Fieberfrost.

Mögen Menschen eilen und streben
Heut fällt der Regen noch trüber
Wir treiben haltlos durchs Leben
Und schlafen, verwirrt, hinüber...¹⁸

Literally translated, to get the sense of the words, that is:

Morphine

We wait for one last adventure
What use is the sunshine to us?
Heaped up high the days collapse
In restless nights – prayer in purgatory.

We don’t read the daily mail any more
Only sometimes we smile in silence into the pillow,
Because we know everything, and slyly
We fly about in a cold sweat.

¹⁶ Cited in Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women*, New Haven: Yale UP, 2009, 209, fn.22.

¹⁷ Cited in Nicola Behrmann, ‘Emmy Hennings DADA: Genealogie und Geschlecht in der Avantgarde’, unpublished doctoral dissertation, New York University, 2010, 276. My translation.

¹⁸ *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916. For a facsimile of the first printing of the poem and a short summary of its meaning, see Hemus, *Dada's Women*, 38-9. According to Hemus, “‘Morfin’ has wide resonance, beyond the theme of drugs, in its depiction of despair, frustration and hopelessness. It describes a withdrawal from daily life, from sunshine itself [...] and from the terrible reality of politics.’ Surely in this context *withdrawal* is not the right word for Hennings’s attitude toward daily life.

People can hurry and strive
Today the rain comes down more drearily
We drift out of control through life
And sleep, deranged, done for...

Wherever the truth of lyric is, if there is any, the world of rushing and striving is definitely somewhere else. The only voice still able to speak here begins in distance, like an originary echo: distance from *Menschen* and their fatuous exertions, the unexamined *eilen und streben* of clockwork capitalist anxiety; distance from the world war of news and its idiotic orchestration of daylight rolling flashes and updates; distance from healthy curiosity, healthy appetite, everything healthy, health itself, even from being alive; and distance from everyone not in this loop of craving, pushing and drifting, everyone not *verwirrt*—and that emphatically includes you, faraway reader, busy trying to get this poem clean into sense, or ‘interpret’ it. *Weil wir alles wissen...* Because we know everything, there is nothing to learn, nowhere to get to, no point in scavenging for a foothold. We are *haltlos*: rudderless, untenable, too weak to hold on, let go.

Commentary in the first person plural on the futility of other people’s activity (what we think about their labour, their movements, their pleasures, their desire to get on, how easy they find it to live and know things) recurs often in Hennings’s poetry. It is virtually the theme of her first book of poems, *Die letzte Freude* [*The last Pleasure, or The last Joy*], published in Leipzig on the slope to war in 1913. ‘Striving’ is given up again in ‘Ein Traum’ [‘A Dream’], where (by design or not) the old Schopenhauer motif is prominent and explicit: ‘Wir streben und wünschen und willen nichts mehr. / Wir haben kein Verlangen.’ [‘We strive and wish and will no more. / We have no appetite.’].¹⁹ The renunciation of the will is better on morphine than as a mere logical consequence of pessimism: actually being plunged into a delirium antithetical to worldly reality at least gives a foretaste of the destruction of the ‘the people’s prison’ by sensuous immersion somewhere else. Other people’s futile enjoyment of the undestroyed world is the same as other people’s futile labour: both are the same empty rush. The distance is restated in the first person singular in ‘Ätherstrophen’ [‘Ether Strophes’] (Hennings was addicted to ether):

Die Menschen sammeln sich am Gare de l’est
Und bunte Seidenfahnen wallen.
Ich aber bin nicht unter ihnen.
Ich fliege in dem großen Raum.
Ich mische mich in jeden Traum
Und lese in den tausend Mienen.

(ll.3-8)²⁰

The people gather at the Gare de l’est
And wave their gaudy silken flags.
But I am not among them.
I fly into the massive space.
I mingle in with every dream
And read into the thousand faces.

¹⁹ Emmy Hennings, *Die letzte Freude*, Leipzig: K. Wolff, 1913, 9.

²⁰ *Die letzte Freude*, 5.

Hennings was a poet committed to unflinching public embarrassment (in this respect she was a comrade of John Wieners: Hennings's 'Morfin' links arms with Wieners's 'Cocaine'.) Lots of her poems are records of using drugs, sometimes (as here) styled as reveries from another world, or from invisible cavities on the underside of this one. In case anyone should try to doubt that this is what they are about, by going looking for ambiguity, the titles make it indisputably clear. Reaching after interpretations more palatable to the poetic bourgeoisie (couldn't she really mean dreaminess, like Keats, or sad feelings, or some other thing we all go through in general?) is ruled out from the first word. She means being plunged every day into a state of extreme sensuous intensity and amazing interior psychic turmoil by using drugs, and being cut off from the world and from people like you who don't use those drugs, and increasingly being able to live only in that state, where you have never been and about which you know nothing. *La vraie vie est absente. Nous ne sommes pas au monde.*

Bonney's poem 'after' Hennings—inspired by her and in homage to her work and her life—begins 'I been sitting in this room maybe a thousand years and I'm guessing they've put me on their death-list.' The first word is the poet's own pronoun and the first sound of the poem is of transcribed speech or a monologue: 'I been', minus the regulation 'have', spells out that this is mimesis—of the poet's voice, or a proletarian voice, or blues, or all these and other voices outcast from English grammar strictly speaking. The next sound is a microtone more literary, as the subject who speaks recovers its auxiliary verbs: 'and I'm guessing they've put me...' The complete first sentence sounds like music lyrics. (Everyone's associations will be different; I think of Howlin' Wolf's 'Killing Floor'). It won't turn out to be a refrain, but it sounds like it should. The 'death list' is an allusion to Hennings's poem 'Tänzerin' ['Dancer'], which opens:

Dir ist als ob ich schon gezeichnet wäre
Und auf der Totenliste stünde.

That's 'To you it's as if I was already marked / And put down on the death list.' 'Tänzerin' is confrontational from the first word. Right away it gets in the face of the second person, who is every reader as well the single reader this poem has in mind (both are indiscriminately apostrophized with the informal dative 'Dir'). The poem is metrical from the outset. The first line is the hendecasyllabic that is everywhere in classic German poetry, which English translators habitually cut and tuck into a decasyllabic, to avoid having to think outside the iambic pentameter. The opening of Bonney's poem contains at least the semblance of an echo of the opening of Beckett's *Molloy*, where another voice speaks from a room it is now in and may have been in forever, in suspicious tones about what 'they' are doing, without saying who 'they' are. The similarity is not very exact, but the comparison helps with the tuning: both are in an ambiguously confessional idiom made to resemble diary prose, both overtly issue from a scene of writing, both are paranoid, and both speak intimately and from a distance as if to no possible audience, or at least, as if deliberately reckless of what might be heard. But Bonney's second sentence veers off to a different isolation, still close to Beckett's abyss but more obviously an English dead end: 'I'm not too bothered.' The idiom of that gesture is different from anything in Hennings's poetry, which is in a literary German, in orderly metrical verse, and usually in rhyme; but the content of the gesture makes it an effective reecho of her original echo, a comradely refusal to care, human and hurt but embarrassed and out of the world. Bonney lets go of the 'you' that kicks off Hennings's poem (almost as if by a silent elision, to preserve

some privacy or be discreet) and gets straight to the suspicion of ‘they’. Like hers his poem resounds from the outset with accusation, reechoing her echo.

A similar isolation opens the next poem, ‘On the Refusal of Spite.’ This first use of the classical title is also the most obviously punctilious: ‘Refusal’ and ‘Spite’ are both words selected with care and even with the appearance of tact. The title is not ‘On Not Giving a Fuck’. Implicit in the tact (possibly quite far in) is a parody of the discursive propriety of the eighteenth-century public intellectual, another echo from a faraway alien culture that implies that these are not to be taken for any old nouns but as distinct moral categories. Hume can be heard, just about, rattling in the background, reciting his ‘Of the Dignity or Meanness of Human Nature’, or ‘Of Impudence and Modesty’. This poem too opens in diary prose: ‘On the fourth day of my sickness I lay in bed getting more and more freaked out by the status of a memory I couldn’t shake...’ The scene is again a scene of writing, as of trying to expel an addiction, but this time the impossibility of the audience is implied more definitely, even with a whiff of the outright Robinsonade. There follows an ekphrasis that bristles with knowingness, and knows it—a description of ‘the early scenes in Michael Haneke’s film *The Time of the Wolf*’ (the diarist forced into isolation by his sickness is, he says, ‘slightly’ reminded of these scenes):

You know the bits I mean. The father has just been shot dead. They have yet to reach the wasteland. Great gusts of silhouette. No shelter to be found. The countryside a splinter of spiteful knives. Blah blah. It put me in mind of the mass incineration of farm animals that happened in Britain, in 2001.

(‘On the Refusal of Spite’)

There is a mortifying tendency to the growth of narrative as it starts to fill out into an ekphrasis. The more imaginatively the scenes are described, the more *poetry* starts to creep into them, the closer they are to being scorned. ‘Blah blah’ is a riposte to the whole film, to the whole act of description and to bothering with it at all; but what *trips* the riposte is a sharply intruding consciousness that the poetic imagination has begun working itself up and getting over-exercised, as the straightforward factual accounting of sentences 1 and 2 begins to flow over into the lyrical enlargements of 4 and 6, ‘Great gusts of silhouette’ and ‘a splinter of spiteful knives’, the only bits of poetry so far. The reader, who is the proxy for no possible audience, an envoy from the undestroyed world, at once invited in and screened out, is in on the deflation before it starts: ‘You know the bits I mean.’

Read this way, ‘Blah blah’, a signature style of deflation in Bonney’s writing (similar gestures crop up in Verity Spott’s, too; her work is at several points indebted to his), is nothing more than a straightforward anti-poetic slapdown: a more hateful and stinging, less stoner and numbing equivalent of the American ‘whatever’. But there is more to it, for those who know what he means. The scornful, deflationary gesture is at the same time a (consciously or not) coded allusion to a specifically anarchist literary history. The anarchist newspapers of the 1890s were full of similar gestures. Émile Pouget’s anarchist *Almanach du Père Peinard*, published in Paris from 1889 with the mockery of a strapline, ‘Farci de galbeuses histoires et de prédictions épatarouflantes’ [‘Stuffed full of comely stories and shocking predictions’], regularly fired off a similar phrase to punch the same sort of hole in inflated French. Pouget wrote a prose described by John Merriman as ‘defiantly vulgar and profane’ and ‘virtually unintelligible to outsiders’ because it was written in the slang of the poverty-stricken Parisian *faubourgs*: an anarchist vernacular ‘that only the enemy [who speaks it every day and lives in the world that it alone makes sense of] can understand’, to

apply a thought from Bonney's 'Letter on Riots and Doubt'.²¹ (The next sentence in the 'Letter' is 'We both know what that means.'). A distinctive feature of Pouget's prose was his frequent use of '*kif-kif*', a loanword from Maghreb Arabic that literally means 'like-like' and that was frequently used by Parisian anarchists as a scornful comment meaning 'it makes no difference' or 'it's all the same'.²² The anarchist punctuated his comic, violent invectives against the clergy, lawyers and the rich with '*kif-kif*', similarly to how Bonney breaks off his ekphrasis with *blab blab*. Blah blah nods gravely across the wastes of intermitted history to *kif-kif*: on the surface neither is anything but a disposable throwaway gibe at vacuous bourgeois morality and the pretensions of the literary imagination, but behind the hand of each is a fixated, conscious gesture of contempt with a specific anarchist gravity, at once an anti-poetic silencing and a literary homage by pointed reecho that will be 'unintelligible [or at least inaudible] to outsiders'.

The *Almanach* for 1893 opens with Pouget's 'Ruminades sur le Calendrier' ['Ruminations on the Calendar']. Top left on the page is a cartoon of a naked old man with Death's scythe stuck in his armpit, pedaling on a penny farthing with clocks for wheels, staring grimly into the oncoming print as if into a brick wall, like this:



The text of ruminations then commences:

On appelle *Calendrier* le découpage et l'étiquetage des morceaux de temps. C'est grâce à ce classement que nous nous retrouvons dans le dévidage de l'existence.

Sans calendrier nous ne serions bougrement pas à la noce: on vivoterait à l'aveuglette, kif-kif les animaux.

The *calendar* is our name for the cutting up and labeling of bits of time. It's thanks to this arrangement we that can find our way around in the unraveling of existence.

²¹ First published on Bonney's blog, abandonedbuildings, 5th August, 2011. Subsequently included in *Letters Against the Firmament*, London: Enitharmon, 2015. The 'enemy' is not identified, but it seems clear that it is ourselves: 'Remember, a poetry that only the enemy can understand. That's always assuming that we do, as they say, understand.'

²² See John Merriman, *The Dynamite Club: How a Bombing in Fin-de-Siècle Paris Ignited the Age of Modern Terror*, New Haven: Yale UP, 2016, 57.

Without the calendar we wouldn't be in such a fucking mess: we'd scrape by blindly, same as the animals.²³

'Same as the animals' also means, or will do as code for, 'who gives a fuck.' Blah blah. 'We both know what that means.'

Blah blah is also an associative trigger that the poem sees coming. The excoriation sets off a memory prepared earlier. The next sentence is 'It put me in mind of the mass incineration of farm animals that happened in Britain, in 2001.' The shift up into a literary idiom ('it put me in mind of') is subtly, but clearly, *stagey*: the poet is not just thinking of something, he is performing a reminiscence. The text knows that the scene brought in for the purpose of this reminiscence (the mass incineration of farm animals) is by this point in the authorship liable to seem generic. An associative trigger in a poem by Bonney, seen coming or not, will not put the poet in mind of a nice Christmas. Association doesn't work like that, especially not within the prison of the prose block, and certainly never in a 'Love Poem.' This too is part of the stagey consistency of the text, which knows (as you also know) that writing is now, in the contemporary eternal *dévidage*, either a stranglehold on devastation or a longwinded airy load of bullshit and nothing. 'The poetic moans of this century have been, for the most part, a banal patina of snobbery, vanity and sophistry', reports the 'Letter on Riots and Doubt.' Timid, ineffectual complaint is the same as a lyricizing gasp of sexual pleasure: the poetic *moan* needs shutting up, which means being blocked in at both ends, lament and *jouissance*, since they are really the same end. Much better than either of these snobbish, vain and sophisticated ejaculations that readers who are happy to be mesmerized like to pretend are expressions of the truth of feeling is the frank stagey fuck you of totally unfree association that fills out the block until it stops. The unit of association is a shortcut to nowhere, like cultural history:

The absolute content of the 1990s. From the Poll Tax Revolt to the death of Diana Spencer. From the Criminal Justice Bill to the insipid immolation of Britpop. Bang Bang. All of it compressed and spun, baked and loaded, until it was transformed in its sleep into incinerated invisible villages. That type of thing. Obviously I was right.

(“On the Refusal of Spite”)

The general revilement is always also historically specific, comical in the anarchist style, not just anti-poetic but at the same time literary and erudite. More or less protuberant allusions are stacked alongside the outright references. A bathetic revival of Hegel ('absolute content') indexes the vapidness of today's 'time apprehended in thoughts.'²⁴ Bonney's swipe seems not to be at Hegel directly (it does matter whether Hegel, the great optimist and inspirer of Marx, is the specific target), but at the 'time' that his or any philosophy (according to what has become Hegel's famous dictum) would now be obliged to 'apprehend', the 1990s, a stretch of dead end too abhorrent to grasp in concepts, only fit for poking. The denuding of the ludicrous phantasm 'Princess Diana' to her equally ludicrous material reality as Diana Spencer evokes the revolutionary determination after 1793 to refer to the executed king Louis XVI by name, not by title, as Louis Capet ('Let

²³ *Almanach du Père Peinard*, Paris, 1893, 2. My grateful thanks to Abigail Lang for her help translating Pouget's prose.

²⁴ *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon, 1965, 11: 'Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts.' The phrase 'absolute content' appears at numerous spots in Hegel's works, e.g. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, §794, §796. Here it seems not to refer any particular passage in Hegel but to stand for the sort of philosophical aspiration to abstract knowledge of historical reality generally associated with Hegel.

us strip the subject of figures of rhetoric, and no englishman need be alarmed at the execution of an individual at Paris’, wrote William Frend, whose seditious sermons at Cambridge were ‘vigorously applauded’ by the young Coleridge. ‘The supreme power in the nation declared, that France should be a republick. From that moment Louis Capet lost his titles.’²⁵ The Criminal Justice Bill and Britpop are two ends of a single block, A to B (really A to nowhere). The delirious, hallucinatory, industrial, dreamworklike transformation of everything that happened, as tokenised by these random offcuts of devastated history, into ‘incinerated invisible villages’ is promptly pigeonholed as yet another thing ultimately not worth specifying that you already know about: ‘That type of thing.’ The Rimbaudian derangement, like the ekphrasis of Haneke, is for present purposes all box, checklist and category. There is no room for doubt and nothing to argue about: ‘Obviously I was right.’

Does no room for doubt also mean that hope is difficult, and may even be impossible? The *Catechism* starts by *sealing in* the identity of the only person who will really be capable of knowing what it means; this is article 1:

The revolutionary is a doomed man. He has no personal interests, no business affairs, no emotions, no attachments, no property, and no name. Everything in him is wholly absorbed in the single thought and the single passion for revolution.²⁶

The fantastic idea of the total absorption of the contents of a person in a ‘single thought’ and a ‘single passion’ is theological despite the manifest atheism. More than the fantasy of a devoted believer, it is the idea of God, as ebulliently rammed home by Anselm in his *Proslogion*: whatever God is ‘in any way or at any time’, he is ‘wholly and always that.’²⁷ The excoriating anarchist sweep-out of ‘all sentimentality, romanticism, infatuation, and exaltation’ by ‘negative passion’ easily might be mortification straight into a dead end like God. It might even be the defensive intellectualization of a state of feeling that one poet, notable for his degenerative perseverance in everything that the *Catechism* commands the revolutionary to abandon, described as ‘lastly, utter loss of hope itself / And things to hope for.’ Does it matter whether hope is possible, for so long as the thing hoped for is not?

The anarchist ‘blah blah’ gets a second outing later in ‘On the Refusal of Spite’, not far from the end.

New bombs squealing. New reasons to be fearful of the stars. Oh blah blah. To hate the stars. To dream that one day you will go out into the streets of this quite possibly non-existent village, and it will be very quiet, and there will be new constellations in the sky, and you will know they are new because they will already have names. The Body Fluids of the Electorate. The Kids Who Jumped Into the Fire. The Boiling Bones of Boris Johnson. The Blood of Horses. The Strangled Bird. The Broken Strings. The Incineration of Pigs. The Deserted Houses. The Marriage Feast. The Defence Speech of Emile Henri.

²⁵ William Frend, ‘On the Execution of Louis Capet’, in *Peace and Union* (1793), Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1991, 45.

²⁶ The original Russian of that first sentence is ‘Революционер — человек обреченный.’ ‘Doomed’ is literal. There is the suggestion too of terminal illness or condemnation. My grateful thanks to Rosy Carrick for help with the Russian.

²⁷ Anselm, *Monologion and Prologion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996, 113.

Here it performs a correction: 'blah blah' (now fronted by a witheringly ex-emphatical, undead-Wordsworthian 'Oh') exposes and swipes away the feeble poetic tension of 'New reasons to be fearful of the stars', definitely only incidentally a line of iambic pentameter, and reinstates the sort of emotional reality compatible with total absorption 'in the single thought and the single passion for revolution': 'to be fearful of the stars' is corrected to 'To hate the stars.' The otherworldly infinitive proliferates in a shimmer of anaphora: 'To dream...' This stacking up is the *syntax* of these blocks, the violent, exclusive opposite of Derrida's hospitable *grammar*, destroying falsities not in order to distend thought and relax writing but to purge and wipe out fake satisfying feelings and ramp up real tension. It is uneasily almost, or actually, a parodistic syntax, despite the undoubted authenticity of the violent feeling that powers it and the history of real self-destruction that it chronicles. Uncertainly parodistic, rather than openly parodic, because the stacking and proliferating of sentences in the block is both the very action of absorption in 'the single passion', the sound of being sucked further in with every step (forward or back, round and round), and at the same time, a commentary on that progress, if not ever altogether or unambiguously ironic then at least inconclusive about its tone, and with at least a crack in the sky for something like irony to rain out of and cool the burning head, however cursorily. The overt drive is toward suicide, but the consciousness leading the way, though splitting with psychic pain, is not yet irrevocably devastated. The last act of *Much Ado About Nothing* begins with Antonio's counsel to his desperate brother Leonato, who is now almost suicidal with hatred, to stop turning this pain against himself. The enjambment on 'grief' drives the point home with terminal clarity:

Ant. If you go on thus, you will kill yourself,
 And 'tis not wisdom thus to second grief
 Against yourself.

(V, i, 1-3)

The reply that comes back is complex and simple at once. Simple, because passionately intense, full of unanswerably strong feeling, and unsusceptible to the emollients of reason, irony, or any effort of what Engels called 'the quiet instructive language of the thinker'; complex, because it is obviously the best passage of poetry in the play.

Leon. I pray thee cease thy counsel,
 Which falls into mine ears as profitless
 As water in a sieve. Give not me counsel,
 Nor let no comforter delight mine ear
 But such a one whose wrongs do suit with mine.

(V, i, 3-7)

Leonato is totally absorbed, unalterably single-minded, a doomed man. Because he is in a comedy, doom will shortly give way to jubilation, when at last the errors are made known and the happy truth is unveiled. But for now there is nothing but devastation. The passage needs hearing in its entirety:

Bring me a father that so lov'd his child,
 Whose joy of her is overwhelm'd like mine,
 And bid him speak of patience;
 Measure his woe the length and breadth of mine,
 And let it answer every strain for strain,
 As thus for thus, and such a grief for such,
 In every lineament, branch, shape, and form.
 If such a one will smile and stroke his beard,
 Bid sorrow wag, cry 'Hem!' when he should groan,
 Patch grief with proverbs, make misfortune drunk
 With candle-wasters, bring him yet to me,
 And I of him will gather patience.
 But there is no such man: for, brother, men
 Can counsel and speak comfort to that grief
 Which they themselves not feel; but tasting it,
 Their counsel turns to passion, which before
 Would give preceptual medicine to rage,
 Fetter strong madness in a silken thread,
 Charm ache with air, and agony with words.
 No, no, 'tis all men's office to speak patience
 To those that wring under the load of sorrow,
 But no man's virtue nor sufficiency
 To be so moral when he shall endure
 The like himself. Therefore give me no counsel:
 My griefs cry louder than advertisement.

(V, i, 8-32)

The syntax of Bonney's blocks is implicitly competitive in its protection of psychic pain from the blandishments of other people's well-meaning counsel. Behind the stacking up of sentences that are at once passages of absorption and units of devastation can be heard a challenge, muted but unsilenceable, much like Leonato's: 'Measure your woe the length and breadth of mine, and let it answer every strain for strain, as thus for thus, and such a grief for such, in every lineament, branch, shape, and form.' Essential to the poem's own conception of the integrity of this challenge (which is not mere boastfulness, but a genuine invitation to revolutionary single-mindedness, for anyone who is really able to go there) is the refusal of therapy. To 'give preceptual medicine to rage' is as good as to strangle the only still living part of the doomed man until it caves in and turns into a liberal. In 'Memoir', the third of the seven poems, Bonney spits this refusal straight out. Here is the beginning:

I would wake up. I would hate. I would fuck. I would rarely think about Bakunin. I would walk around the town. I would think about the careful differences between anarchism, epilepsy, addiction, psychosis, the dialectic, various syndromes and panic. I would think about their rhythm. I would refuse to leave the house. I would spend 20 euro on a bag that was barely worth 5 then consider murdering the dealer. My biggest fear is that one day I will murder someone. I like the rain. I won't tell you why. Instead I will tell you how much I am fearful of food. I chew it thirty times. I spit it out onto

the ground. It makes me sick. I am losing weight. I don't care. When people tell me I am losing weight I say so what the sun, the sun too is losing weight. It is the law of the cosmos. I actually do say that. After I say it I start to cry. Someone puts their arms around me. I rarely care who. I think about the wind and the insects that live there and make a mental note of the number of my friends who are in analysis. I am not in analysis. I would rather be like the insects who live in the wind and do something remarkable with silk but instead I am crying in a strangers arms and they would really rather I would stop and this has fuck to do with the magnificent silk made by the laughter of insects. I remember meeting a hippy once who told me I was going to have a very long life. Shit in your mouth, I murmur, to the memory of the hippy.

The declaration to the world (in the person of the reader as proxy for no real audience) that 'I am not in analysis' is both just another step or unit and also a potential pivot or opening. Besides the fact that it reports, what does this sentence say? The perfect simplicity of the grammar, the elementariness of the negation, covers over a deep crack. Most people are not in analysis, for any number of reasons; many people don't know that such a thing exists. As a definite passage of the total absorption in 'the single passion', 'I am not in analysis' erects a wall against a whole continent of logic and possible self-transformation that the revolutionary reach of the poem will not explore. In the same spirit in which Bonney 'considers' murdering the dealer, consider this complex thought of the psychoanalyst André Green. '[The] logic of despair has one constant goal: to produce evidence that the object is really bad.' For this logic, 'love is always uncertain, hatred is always sure.' Pursuit of the 'one constant goal' means that 'the result of an increase in meaning is always a reduction in being.' The upshot of which, in an analytic nutshell, is this: 'the fixations on hatred are much more tenacious than the fixations on love.'²⁸ The threat to total absorption in 'the single passion' of revolutionary hatred is obvious the moment that this line of thought is followed according to its own careful syntax of explanation. Bonney's prosodistical musings on 'anarchism, epilepsy, addiction, psychosis, the dialectic, various syndromes and panic' are restricted to the 'rhythm' of extreme states, disordered thoughts, and destruction; the rhythm of steady analysis audible in Green's self-possessed specification of the meaning of despair is not admissible into the total chaotic polyrhythm. But the really intolerable thought belonging to psychoanalysis, the one that these poems everywhere vividly loathe, whose passionate renunciation resounds in 'I am not in analysis', is some version of this thought by Christopher Bollas:

I think that many extremist political movements indicate a collective certainty that their revolutionary ideology will affect a total environmental transformation that will deliver everyone from the gamut of basic faults: personal, familial, economic, social and moral.

This 'certainty' (which underwrites all the others and echoes in every repetition of 'Obviously I was right') Bollas calls a 'psychopathological manifestation' of the 'first object.' In other words, it is a mentally ill clinging on to the breast that for the baby was the absolute difference between life and death, the original provider of the experience of a 'total environmental transformation.' Bollas continues:

Society cannot possibly meet the requirements of the subject, as the mother met the needs of the infant, but in the arts we have a location for such

²⁸ André Green, *On Private Madness*, London: Karnac, 2005, 22-4.

occasional recollections: intense memories of the process of self-transformation.²⁹

The absolute inadmissibility of this logic to the ‘true revolutionary’ life is one explanation for the scorn Bonney repeatedly heaps on bad culture: as anyone who ever listened to Radio 4 well knows, the idea that ‘the arts’ will have to do as the substitute for a society that makes possible the fulfilment of the subject is so grotesque and appalling that the only rational response to it would be to destroy art altogether. The authors of thoughts like these, psychoanalytic therapists, may not be directly mentionable inside the block, whose syntax is unalterably irreconcilable with their steadying and holding logical rhythms; but the poem tacitly acknowledges their uncomfortable proximity to the block, by introducing a stunt double to impersonate their projected voice, on to whom the violence really meant for them can straightaway be diverted: ‘I remember meeting a hippy once who told me I was going to have a very long life. Shit in your mouth, I murmur, to the memory of the hippy.’ This is how the syntax gets parodistic: it doubles at least the basic motions of the logic that it refuses admission, by demonstratively going through them and doing things that that logic has already defined: substituting, repressing, projecting, negating, even (in this instance) a virtually specific allusion to Klein’s account of infantile aggression, ‘Shit in your mouth’. The question how far the poem is conscious of this doubling is probably undecidable, and in any case the point is not to answer it. The point is that some real space does open up between the violence of self-destructive single-mindedness, the drive toward suicide of the manifest diary prose, and the whole poem as the expression of that drive and the block that finitizes it. ‘My griefs cry louder than advertisement’ does not necessarily mean there is no advertisement, or can or should be none, but only that the advertisement of pain is quieter than pain itself.

What looks like a random catalogue of titles close to the end of ‘On the Refusal of Spite’—‘The Body Fluids of the Electorate. The Kids Who Jumped Into the Fire. The Boiling Bones of Boris Johnson. The Blood of Horses. The Strangled Bird. The Broken Strings. The Incineration of Pigs. The Deserted Houses. The Marriage Feast. The Defence Speech of Emile Henri.’—or a sequencing of dissociations, was never really going to be random: the last title is the point, the judgement on the run-up of the others. Émile Henry was the son of the Communard, Fortuné Henry. Fortuné was an elected leader of the Commune, a member of its central committee. He represented the working class tenth arrondissement. When the people of the Commune were savagely massacred by the French army, he escaped dressed as a painter and fled to Spain, where he worked as a miner.³⁰ The event in which Émile’s father played such a prominent role was the catastrophic tipping point into a long period of revolutionary melancholy, increasingly mortifying, interminable and entropic, still the life we have now. The consequences of the defeat were profound. Revolution slipped from being the greatest possible promise of self-fulfilling subjectivity, the dream that human beings will erupt into the life owed to them through courageous acts of sacrificial violence and even that they will be exalted to the verge of immortality by love, hope and freedom (‘Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive’), into a knot of despair, a discipline of destruction internalized by the torture of psychic pain that only the implacable enemy truly capable of hatred for everything could possibly survive or understand. Solitariness became the pure form of the revolutionary subject, the logical outcome of a mortifying absorption in ‘the single passion’ that by definition can only be too intense and too obscene for almost everyone else to keep up with. The distance from Wordsworth’s

²⁹ Christopher Bollas, *The Shadow of the Object*, London: Routledge, 2018, 13-14.

³⁰ Merriman, *The Dynamite Club*, 26.

philosophic song about the immortalizing power of revolution to rejuvenate life to Nechayev's rule book for killers is beyond measure: 'He is not a revolutionary if he has any sympathy for this world. He should not hesitate to destroy any position, any place, or any man in this world. He must hate everyone and everything in it with an equal hatred.' Émile Henry once stole a cow and gave it to a starving homeless woman. As an adolescent he was erotically infatuated with an older woman he knew as a child and could never realistically have got together with, and he felt killed by the dead end. 'To those who say: hate does not give birth to love, I reply that it is love, human love, that often engenders hate', he said.³¹ He became the most notorious anarchist of his generation when he threw a bomb into a crowded café, the Terminus, in Paris and wounded many people and killed one. The act of killing was premeditatedly random; that was the point. The enemy is everywhere. Randomness was given a new meaning by this act of Henry's, and the relation of anarchism and of revolutionary violence in general to randomness was pronounced and transformed. Could the most random violence be the purest, and could the test of a true revolutionary be his readiness to perform the most random destructive act?

The single most random act ever yet committed was also, for Henry, the single most necessary.³² A week after the bombing, Henry, now a prisoner of the state, wrote a letter to his mother. It begins like this:

My dear little Mother,

You must have suffered when newspapers reported what I did last Monday. Believe me that before I committed that act, I thought very much about you and all those who are so dear to me. But what can one do? Motives that you cannot understand won out, and I threw my bomb into the Terminus [the name of the café in Paris]. Since my arrest, I have often thought of you, and I have suffered because I realize the sadness into which you must be plunged. Nevertheless, dear Mother, you must overcome your pain. You must not let your tears be paraded before the spiteful and the indifferent. You must not believe those who will say that your son is a criminal. You know me and can say to them that the real criminals are those who make life impossible for anyone with a heart, those men who uphold a society in which everyone suffers. You can tell them that those who in our society refuse to accept a role that their very dignity rejects will take vengeance. On the side of the people, they devote themselves totally to their emancipation. Understand that very well, my Mother. Far from being embarrassed by me, whom you have nursed and given heart, be proud of what I have done. You will carry with you the esteem, the sympathy, and the affection of the only people who should really matter.³³

The defence speech of Émile Henry was delivered at his trial that began on the 27th April, 1892. Henry was not merely unrepentant, he was exultant. He proudly admitted all the charges, and to the question why he had chosen the Terminus and not another café, he replied that the Terminus was 'a grand café, frequented by the bourgeoisie', and that other cafés that he had walked past earlier had not seemed suitable because 'there weren't enough

³¹ Cited in Merriman, *The Dynamite Club*, 60. This book tells the story of Henry's life and his infamous action.

³² According to Merriman, this was the first ever random bombing with a political motive: Henry was the first 'terrorist' in the contemporary sense of an individual who destroys random innocent individuals with a political motive.

³³ In Merriman, *The Dynamite Club*, 167-8.

people. The apéritif hour of these folks was over.’ ‘You have contempt for the lives of others?’, the presiding magistrate, Judge Potier, asked him. ‘No’, he replied, ‘Only those of the bourgeoisie.’³⁴

‘The Defence Speech of Emile Henri’ is the point of the other titles in the catalogue. It is the hardest thing to take: not the easy ekphrasis of an art film, an easy alliterative swipe at Boris Johnson, a gothic image, or something scary or ridiculous, but the first great reaction to revolutionary catastrophe, specifically a unique point in the history of revolutionary public speech, when the origination of a new kind of revolutionary violence was defended and justified by an individual who knew that he was about to be killed by the state for putting his principles into practice.

Bonney’s poetry is painfully lonely. The first block of two in ‘Memoir’ ends:

Its 3 in the morning and there is very little traffic. I go crazy again and start to recite poems. The ancient poems known to all of us. The ancient poems that could kill us if they wanted, each single syllable. I fall asleep in the bar. I don’t go home. I think a little about the moon, its relation to marxism, to the riots of five years ago and the predicament we find ourselves in now. Its a full moon. It hides very little. There is great pain in my chest. Please don’t leave me.

This is the syntax of a ‘doomed man.’ It is honest, hurt and short. The implicit impatience with culture (news, stories, analyses are unnecessary; we know very well what we mean by ‘the predicament we find ourselves in now’ and need not enlarge) is a sinkhole back to archaic violence: the ‘ancient poems that could kill us if they wanted.’ The plural pronoun comes under new pressure here, increased by intoxication and by being alone. Unless they really are demons from hell, the ancient poems really are not going to kill us, and they don’t want anything, and the ‘us’ that is under threat is therefore hard to square with any ‘us’ as we really are. This is a fever of the poetry, but it is a conscious risk, not a blindness. The poetry knows that its collective pronoun will not straightaway be embraced merely on the strength of its anarchist vintage, and it fucks with the missing audience and its proxy, daring us to say yes, this is our life too. But it knows that almost everyone will not say that this is their life too. The plea at the end is conspicuously the last word: ‘Please don’t leave me.’ Does the poem accept this cry, or is this a ventriloquism meant to be spat out?

More might depend on the answer to this last question than the image of the poet, who is either vulnerable and imploring or else a vivisectionist of conventional despair, depending on the ring of the plea. More than an invitation to draw up a caricature of the poet by deciding whether his pain is really being communicated, the plea is the resounding of a dilemma of profound urgency for the survival of revolutionary passion. Either someone is there, and the plea ‘Please don’t leave me’ is really uttered direct to a present individual, face to face, or it isn’t yet or can’t yet be uttered but is still meant for others, such as the individuals named in the titles and throughout the poems, who in fantasy at least might make up a society of solitaries for the poet, full of the music of their fugal re-echoing from similar states of desperate isolation, or nobody is there, and the plea is wasted on the air, knowingly, uttered or not, and is another unit of self-destruction and passage of absorption in ‘the single passion’, absolute for the future and indifferent to the power of what it already says. These are not mere options. The dilemma of the plea is a last ditch yes or no, shouted in silence, to feel out by echolocation the most intimate limit of solitariness. The plea not to be left, the demand to know if someone is there, is a test of single-minded solitariness as the limit case form of revolutionary subjectivity. If it is not, if solitariness is not the answer because in the end it can’t be endured, if the pain of it at

³⁴ Merriman, *The Dynamite Club*, 180-1.

the limit is too much to live with and in the end it is absolutely better not to be left, then the only revolutionary way on is toward the other: really toward, not secretly away from. Like every conclusion, this one is factitious; it is hanging by a synthetic thread of optimism. If it is right, then the idea of revolution as the greatest possible promise of self-fulfilling subjectivity might gradually be allowed back, even if, to start with, only in grainy bits of vision from the depths of intoxication and wastedness, and even if only as the future default of the previous default, the expiration of revolutionary melancholy. 'Not with these began / Our song, and not with these our song must end.' The obvious danger with this optimistic twist of Bonney's meaning is that it will be placatory, installing a fantastic calm at the far end of the inescapable turmoil and lifting up the prospect of happiness over reality as it is right now, the truth of which really is hateful. Optimism might drown out the poetry, or make the advertisement louder than the pain. But the poetry itself may yet want to be twisted, maybe even by someone who really is there and who wants the best for it. If it does, the title 'Love Poems' is not a joke.