



School: School of Creative Industries

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Project Title: Subverting the Sonnet: Poems (2016-2020)

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300-Word Statement

The sonnet tradition presents many difficulties: the compression of the form can produce congestion, the diction can be disfigured and the intended meaning distorted. I have attempted to steer these difficulties towards increasing the form's expressive potential in a voice more attuned to the destructive realities we inhabit. My starting-point is the controversial proposition that the metrical and stanzaic form of the traditional sonnet is incompatible with contemporary linguistic tropes and subject matter.

In these sonnets, therefore, the length of the line is frequently extended to as much as seventeen syllables: a means of increasing space and therefore the emotional and intellectual range of the voice that speaks as the poem's instrument.

In each poem the idiosyncratic and strange diction does not succumb to the form and is not disfigured by it. If anything it imposes its own demands: 'Whatever littlest grief / is a magnified self, which lowers, then cranes its neck.' Such lines combine Hughes's visceral intensity with Ashbery's elusiveness, to approach a transatlantic euphony.

Viewed together, the eleven poems constitute an experiment in how far the form can be expanded without loss of contact with the traditional ingredients. Each poem retains the volta and one other characteristic of the original, be it couplet, octave or sestet. The volta, however, changes location in each, appearing in the third line, the fifth, the sixth—in one poem even the second—in an attempt to heighten a sonnet's register by varying the beats in a line and thereby changing the overall euphonic effect. Poems 1) and 2) set up a call, and answer: they speak to one another in antiphony. In effect, the sonnet is no longer self-sufficient: the first poem has to regard itself in the mirror-refraction of the second, or is incomplete. Thus it expands the emotional range.