

**I**n off the street.  
Coffee burnt my mouth before I walked  
back here head down without attempting to be flâneur  
and THANK FUCK for that: stop trying  
start doing

Get up in the library gallery<sup>1</sup>  
and look over the dusty bookcase tops  
in their rows below,  
each sanctified by fluorescent haloes flying from wires.

I can say sanctified because  
I read last year some research  
asking people of different social classes  
what a library most reminded them of,  
and as people earned less  
more said  
it was like a church.

[My girlfriend told me last week about her friend in the chorus of a musical who goes on the wires and gets £50 extra a week 'flying money' because the union says so. Because it's extra to her usual wages she says she can spend it on shoes without feeling guilty.]

Dark outside with clocks gone back.  
Lights on over each desk, lights on to show  
the scratched in letters of wannabe tourette's.  
Sound of turning pages  
heels clicking between the rows.

Most of the poems I'm reading at the moment  
are more-or-less poems about poems.  
Some have exciting lines, like  
'Speak against the tyranny of the unimaginative'  
that have a little taste of what stirs me up in Baudelaire,  
but in words I understand.  
(My French is bad.)

Few people – I am one –  
Few listen to the sounds of a library  
and meditate on the sound  
of a book  
being pulled  
off the shelf.  
Sitting here, I find that sound  
more and more climactic,  
especially in nice library hard backs:  
the crescendo only heard in a quiet room of fabric rubbing against fabric  
on both sides of the book, increasing in pitch as every woven thread  
moves over every other woven thread and then  
as the enquirer has the book  
in her hand<sup>2</sup> and<sup>3</sup> off the shelf  
culminating in the great  
release  
of silence. And then thumbs  
searching softly  
over pages.

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<sup>1</sup> Refs. German B – German N; German Folios

<sup>2</sup> Utterly!

<sup>3</sup> Completely!

The smell off the pages.  
If you're still attending to these words  
then you too probably sublimate a little bit of your sexuality  
into both the material object  
and the conceptual content  
of books.  
This makes us abnormal – but harmless.

*Harmless.*

I want to interrogate that word.  
I want to: tie it to a chair  
beat it  
spit on it  
and other things I've only seen on screen.  
I want the *Daily Mail*<sup>4</sup> to accuse me of  
'offenses à la morale publique',  
but of course they wouldn't say it quite like that;  
  
with a bag full of Shklovsky I might settle for  
disturbing the peace.

[a friend of mine who used to do English  
but switched to Law thought about  
writing a dissertation starting by looking  
at the actions of Jack Bauer in *24*, and  
how it justifies torture to the American  
public.]

I want words to be infectious  
but everybody is well vaccinated against them.

Or, more accurately:

Words are still very infectious, but everybody is so well vaccinated against poetry that it  
has almost disappeared in this country, except where strains are carefully kept alive in  
university laboratories  
just in case it ever breaks out  
and we need  
to brew up by the gallon or litre  
an antidote in regular metre.<sup>5</sup>

Now all these words.

Now I've added all these words to the quantity of poems-about-poems, and so I'm part of  
what I think about when I think about modern poetry: that it collaborates in its own  
ghettoisation. Our poems are very referential about literature, probably not because we're  
reverential about literature, but because we like feeling clever (everybody does, I'm not  
saying this isn't OK)  
and nobody else  
is going to tell us  
that we're clever.

[I'm looking for a job and I don't think many  
employers will particularly congratulate me  
for, amongst other things, charting the  
shifting role of the abject in 1930s travel  
writing.]

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<sup>4</sup> a.k.a. *The Dirty Tale*, *The Daily Hate*, *The Misogynist Male*, *The Gaily Jail*, *Anything Obnoxious & Horrible* etc.

<sup>5</sup> Tuberculosis is a suitable metaphor here, because of its role in the deaths of many literary figures: Keats, selected Brontës, Laforgue, Kafka and Orwell, to name just a few. However, a decrease in vaccinations has meant a slow rise in the number of cases in the UK over the last decade, thus denying the application of this metaphor with any really biting force.

[Cuts in local authority budgets, which my prejudices trace back to Thatcher, led to the end of compulsory vaccination in Avon, meaning I've never had my BCG jab. Occasionally I make jokes about this; how dying of Tb is probably the most 'poetical' thing I could ever do.]  
Vincent Clay

I WANT TO WRITE POEMS ABOUT SUNSETS!<sup>6</sup>

I want to write poems about roses  
about how my girlfriend is very beautiful  
about the way the light falls on November afternoon streets  
    and the little changes as the days go by  
        because I want people to notice things like that;  
        because I think it would make their lives better.

I want to write simple and illuminating poems.

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PINTOFPRIDE.

THANKS.

[*move to seat*]

NO. I DIDN'T SEE IT.

HAVEN'T SEEN IT FOR AGES. NEVER DOING NOTHING AT THE RIGHT TIME.

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH KARL AND SUSAN?

THE ONLY STORYLINE I CARE ABOUT.

REALLY?

AH.

[*pause*]

I WROTE A POEM THIS AFTERNOON. Oh shit.

I SAID I WROTE A POEM THIS AFTERNOON, BUT I'VE JUST REALISED I LEFT IT IN THE LIBRARY.

I LEFT IT IN THE LIBRARY.

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<sup>6</sup> Including urban sunsets, suburban sunsets (because these are the sunsets most people see most often) and sunsets in late summer, watched from the seashore with just one other person only.