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Review

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REVIEW

Lyric Returns in Recent Black British Poetry

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This essay considers some reasons for lyric's return in black British poetics by first taking a broad look at the field, and then by attending to the work of several poets writing since the 1990s but publishing most visibly since the millennium – ranging from an innovative writer acclaimed even by the mainstream, Patience Agbabi, to one whose work has been so new in texture, tone and project that it still evades most poetic maps, D. S. Marriott. It argues that lyric in the general sense of being 'the genre of personal expression', which American lyric theorists Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins rightly critique as a twentieth-century invention, has long been interrogated in raced poetry in the UK for its tacit collation of personal and universal – a collation which ironically makes lyric the *least* personal of genres, in a sense (or in theory). And in fact, recent re-readings of modern aesthetics argue that the *really* personal was never welcome in New Criticism. So, after postmodernism's thorough-going investigations of how language overwrites the universalized lyric subject, *post*-postmodern lyric investigations of subjectivities neglected in such studies are proving increasingly necessary in black British poetry. And in particular the work of D. S. Marriott, where they point up what even the finest postmodern critiques both missed *and* disavowed precisely by not taking lyric's definition at its word – i.e., by not taking lyric 'personally' enough.

Keywords: genre; Lyric; raced; black; subjectivity; universality; Patience Agbabi; Anthony Joseph; D.S. Marriott

However irrevocably changed the west seemed after 2001 (or perhaps because of that), the number of surprising 'returns' it experienced also began to proliferate – among them the much-noted 'return of religion'¹ and, on a smaller scale, the phenomenon I contemplate in this essay²: the return of what postmodernist literary culture had so seemingly-roundly trounced, the lyric. Indeed, in the US, the first decade of the twenty-first century seemed all but powered in poetic terms by what its central literary organ dubbed in 2008 'the new lyric studies'.³ And even as that journal, *PMLA*, was planning its forums on the return of interest in lyric as a genre, millennial poetry

anthologies were simultaneously arguing that, after long rule by Language poetry – America's dominant avant-garde defined explicitly *against* lyric writing – we had suddenly entered an era of the 'post-avant', and that poets of all stripes were returning to lyric in new-century work. There are connections between this phenomenon and the renewed use of lyric in the work of black British poets; but the reasons for the latter's having, to a lesser extent, side-lined lyric for a time are different, and their reasons for re-exploring it are as various as the poets I bring in below. In any case, they add up to more than the pendulum swing that largely accounts for lyric's return stateside, where primarily – or rather, ostensibly – non-political, aesthetic concerns drive the mix-and-matching of modes dubbed the new American hybridity.⁴

This essay will consider some reasons for lyric's return in black British poetics by first taking a broad look at the field, and then by attending to the work of several poets writing since the 1990s but publishing most visibly since the millennium – ranging from an innovative writer perhaps too swiftly identified as mainstream, Patience Agbabi, to one whose work has been so new in texture, tone and project that it still evades most poetic maps, D. S. Marriott. I want to argue that lyric in the general sense of being 'the genre of personal expression', which American lyric theorists Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins rightly critique as a twentieth-century invention,⁵ has long been interrogated in raced poetry in the UK for its tacit collation of personal and universal – a collation which ironically makes lyric the *least* personal of genres, in a sense (or in theory). And in fact, recent re-readings of modern aesthetics argue that the *really* personal was never welcome in New Criticism.⁶ So, after postmodernism's thorough-going investigations of how language overwrites the universalized lyric subject, *post*-postmodern lyric investigations of subjectivities neglected in such studies are proving increasingly necessary in black British poetry. And, as I'll argue here, in particularly the work of D. S. Marriott, where such investigations point up what even the finest postmodern critiques both missed *and* disavowed precisely by not taking lyric's definition at its word – i.e., by not taking lyric 'personally' enough.

As Kwame Dawes argued in an influential 2005 essay,⁷ one reason that lyric was for a time left behind by black British poets was its association with white writing – whereas performance poetry, for good or ill, became unmistakably black:

Most of the Black poets working in Britain today have emerged through the performance medium – a medium that is seriously aware of voice, idiom, dialogue and popular discourse... The performative is linked to the language and the language is defined by elements that do not immediately link these poets to the private, arched lyricism of modern British poetry...

... The position of the Black poet in Britain has become inextricably linked to the notions of 'performance poetry' and the reductionist way in which the co-opted use of the term has created in many Black poets a desire to either run away from the label, or embrace it with defiance and a kind of statement of race and aesthetics.⁸

Intriguingly, it would seem from this description that black performance poetry's focus on the contextual provenance and materiality of language connected it to coeval US Language poetry. Yet the consequences for black poets, given the very popularity and marketability of performance work in the UK, was that 'Black British poets of note' as Dawes calls them, became the establishment *within* two-branched black writing: 'One is the branch associated', he goes on to argue, 'with what may be unfairly termed 'the establishment', which understands that the nation's poets are those who are published in the right journals and by the right publishing houses'; these poets (among them, in his view, Agbabi and Jean 'Binta' Breeze) 'are often associated with performance even when they have established quite creditable reputations as published authors'.⁹ This was true for Linton Kwesi Johnson too, as Dawes laments – frustrated that the great poet himself made clear that his works were far more than 'transcriptions of performance'.¹⁰ Despite the unquestionable gains performance produced in terms of community-creation, it fixed a far too narrow, conventional and confining image of the black poet 'for a long time', Dawes writes: 'that of the 'immigrant' author whose very presence was defined by the idea of otherness, where otherness represented alien and foreign'.¹¹ How might *indigenous* black lyric expression proceed from such a non-place, where one's 'very presence' has been defined as being 'other' to others *present*?

The 'second branch', as Dawes defines it, sounds similar to the first. It involves the 'ad hoc performance scene': poets who appear on stages in bars and sometimes

even 'massive platforms' to perform their work, and 'who develop a following that is often linked to some music scene whether it be hip-hop, reggae, punk or rock and roll'.¹² 'They have to do more than read,' he writes; '[t]hey have to establish a presence on the stage, they have to have some theatrical force and they have to connect directly with their audience'.¹³ Even Breeze, one of the well-'established', rebelled against these fixed expectations – in, for example, one interview that touched on why her 1991 album, *Tracks*, 'didn't sell'. Three things interest me most in this interview; it will take me the whole of this essay to explain. But first is what her interviewer reveals with this question: 'The American company that recorded your earlier songs did not want to record the album because they thought your work had become too personal'.¹⁴ Breeze responds by wondering whether 'it was the woman's voice' that was at issue, because her earlier works like 'Aid Travels with a Bomb' were 'overtly political' and disconnected from her own experience as a woman and a mother.¹⁵ Though this particular prejudice mirrors what many female poets were contesting in the 1980s, it targeted black poets differently; here, it seems that when too female and personal, Breeze's work did not seem 'black' enough to her US promoters, which provokes questions about how 'personal-ness' is 'coloured' and read. It seems that the stage presence required of black British poets – the inverse of the non-presence required of US Language poets at the time – derailed some black lyric projects, necessitating instead political/rhetorical stances. It thus diametrically *opposed*, but also *mirrored*, the aesthetic production of presence in New Critical lyric, which, as the new lyric studies make clear, quite ironically reacted '*against* the Romantic notion of lyric as expression of intense personal experience' – preferring what could believably *stand in for it* in order to solidify universal sensibilities.¹⁶ But the unspoken requirement for black writers was that their 'lyrics' represent something demarcated 'universally' as *different*: the 'alien,' as Dawes put it, the 'foreign'.¹⁷

So it is that Patience Agbabi has long attempted to spring such complicated traps through sheer, not-be-refused *versatility* as well as irony in her work – from her 'signifying' on the term 'alien' in 'Ufo Woman', to her deployments of traditional form ('the sestina mainly and the sonnet', as she describes them),¹⁸ to her rewritings of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (alongside Breeze and others). Though rap, disco,

Northern Soul and other music forms continue to inform her work, as a whole it signals 'both a more complex poetics and the cultural shifts in contemporary Britain', as Nicky Marsh writes, quoting Stuart Hall's call for an 'unsettling ... hybridization and 'cut-and-mix' aesthetic' deemed 'necessary to the reconceptualization of ethnicity in British racial politics'.¹⁹ Unlike the new 'American hybrids', however, this hybridity was aimed at shifting identity politics. Therefore Agbabi's 2000 collection, *Transformatrix*, 'has a sonnet at the end and a rap poem at the beginning',²⁰ which of course by frame undermines the page/performance split – as does the last couplet in my excerpt from its first poem below, which suggests ambidexterity between 'stage' and 'page'. As critic Lauri Ramey notes, the speaker of this volume's first poem, 'Prologue,' 'is a verbal diva to the British literary manor born, which she then remodels to suit herself in the present moment'.²¹ Indeed, in this opening poem Agbabi, like a games-caller with her audience, focuses on language as infinitely malleable and constructive of new realities (and you might even hear in it a literal manifestation of Hall's "cut-and-mix" aesthetic' put into play):

Give me a word
any word
let it roll across your tongue
like a dolly mixture.

Give me a word
give me a big word
let me manifest
express in excess
the M I X
of my voice box.
Now I've eaten the apple
I'm more subtle than a snake is.
I wanna do poetic things in poetic places.
Give me my poetry unplugged

so I can counter silence.
 Give me my poetic licence

 Give me a stage and I'll cut form on it
 give me a page and I'll perform on it.²²

Reading this poem from a gendered angle when it first appeared, at the very start of the 'noughties,' I found it exhilarating in its post-deconstruction constructivism-in-excess, which I related to that of a performance writer in the UK whom I knew Agbabi admires (and who, despite the stereotypes, is not black), Caroline Bergvall.²³ I understood the first lines here as not only about sucking 'dolly mix' sweets, but as inspired by Bergvall's sexually-explicit wordplay around disassembled and reassembled dolls, beginning with the life-sized ones troublingly manipulated by artist Hans Bellmer, and ending with Dolly the sheep cloned in 1996. Dolly the sheep – created by herself, so to speak – seems appropriately invoked in Agbabi's book, whose title refers to a womb (given the etymology of 'matrix' as she notes it), and whose overall project she describes as 'a celebration of my own creativity'.²⁴ *Transformatrix* is, in other words, constructive of new realities 'transformed' and re-'mixed' by and *in* the poet, if minus some of the troubling sense of external manipulation that haunts Bergvall's work. All Agbabi's speaker needs is to be given that word – which, like the sexual knowledge gained via Edenic transgression, makes her works multiply: 'I wanna do poetic things in poetic places,' as one line has it above. Blunt desire – in part for self, 'me manifest' – expressed with blunt verbal power – anaphoric 'Give me's' – thoroughly thrills here, perhaps in part because, turning to the second point of interest in Breeze's interview, 'it's about time', according to her, for black women's poetry to 'get much more sexual'.²⁵ Though speaking of Caribbean women's work in particular, Breeze's thoughts echo those of postcolonial artists more broadly in querying the constraints against such expression. As poet-critic Donna Aza Weir-Soley put it in 2010:

More than a century's worth of internalized censorship is due to 'western discourses' that have 'grossly misrepresented and impugned' black women for being 'over sexed', when 'in reality ... many were in fact sexually guarded – so that no one would get the impression that the stereotypes had any basis in fact'.²⁶

Agbabi's poetry has been at the forefront of what Breeze calls for, in order to upstage 'men ... defin[ing] women's sexuality *without* women'. Like Bergvall, Agbabi shrugs off policing sexual tags and merges explicit bi-sexual desire with linguistic/life forces that engender her 'creativity'.

But reading Ramey's description of this poem later, in 2004, I find myself struggling with the kinds of categories that concerned Dawes. Ramey identifies black poets via what she calls, however self-reflexively, 'two tags': either 'urban griots' (storytellers), or 'tricksters' – with Agbabi falling into the latter role. Such methods of mapping the field are in danger of draining lyric specificity into new/old stereotypes – even if the poets *do* 'profess connections to practices of the African diaspora,' as Ramey carefully explains.²⁷ That said, Agbabi *can* indeed play the trickster figure in control of the game – and thus be read within the tradition of Louise Bennett's 'trickster aesthetic', as Jahan Ramazani has described it.²⁸ Ramey writes that other 'poets using trickster identities [among the ones she names are SuAndi, Roger Robinson, Benjamin Zephaniah, Lemn Sissay, Anthony Joseph, LKJ, Lorraine Griffiths] hold up British culture to a mirror, providing *knowing* reflection and pinpoint critique', usually through a 'sly double-voicing often associated with African American poetry and the archetypal personae of Carnival' (my emphases).²⁹ '[K]nowing' used in this sense is ubiquitous in Ramey's criticism; it returns us to traditional notions – both black *and* white – of authorial power and unperturbed 'poetic licence', as Agbabi seems to reclaim it above. One can certainly reread her poem as a 'sly double-voicing' of the Caliban trope in black writing.³⁰ Here, fed both Prospero's European language and 'licence', this high-tech black 'Eve on an Apple Mac' having a 'rap attack' promises to exceed the original snake in her 'subtle' undoing of *all* 'creation'. Yet such claims of 'archetypal', alternative knowing also 'return' black poets to outsider – or 'foreign' – status, and the task of speaking *for* one's race.

But in the title poem that closes the book, the speaker's positioning is rendered in more intimate, lyric relation – if with the sonnet form itself, which is transformed into a dominatrix. 'I wanted to subvert the feminist vision of the sonnet as corset', Agbabi told Ramey; 'I think constriction can give you freedom'.³¹ What exactly is freed remains unclear, but in the volume's titular poem, 'Transformatrix', *desire* certainly seems sparked by the form's very confinement. For example, the last line of

the first quatrain confesses in sprung but disciplined, ten-syllable pentameter: 'Salt peppers my lips as the door clicks shut' (as in Yeats's famous 'poem com[ing] right with a click like a closing box'). 'Madame's orders' for the 'strict consonants' and 'spaces' of sonnet form come to the waiting 'I' of the poem, along with conflicting gifts of 'a safe word' *and* a 'red light'. '[B]ut,' the speaker says, sonnet-turning early in the last quatrain,

I'm breaking the law, on a death wish,
ink throbbing my temples, each vertebra
straining for her fingers. She trusses up
words, lines, as a corset disciplines flesh.
Without her, I'm nothing but without me
She's tense, uptight, rigid as a full stop.³²

Asserted as 'nothing' 'Without *her*' – meaning the dominatrix, a stiff-upper-lipped representative of British *formality* – the speaker nonetheless distinguishes herself in this painful/pleasurable meeting between writer and 'uptight', colonizing form which seems locked, too, in panting desire for 'transformation'. Images of violence longed for yet threatening to one's very bones – or 'vertebra[e]': one's structuring spine – are reciprocated by the speaker's self-description as 'slim as a silver stiletto', which cuts both ways as a seductive heel *and* an Italian dagger (as well as a word drawn from the Latin *stilus*, meaning a thin Roman writing instrument). And both require the other for things to 'flow' – so the intimate transgression that connects, in ABBA near-rhymes, end-words like 'wish' and 'flesh' in a whispered, excitingly clandestine 'sh' relation finally erupts in that orgasmic 'me' – ee, *free* – sound unmatched by the last line's unrhyming and silencing end-'stop' illustrating what happens *without* 'me' and such release, such relation. Although a trickster-like capacity for upending authority remains here, the very intimacy of this 'relation' so related suggests the necessary co-production of transformative freedom gained. It also suggests a new necessity to augment the public/political role of black British poets with such 'lyric' investigations of 'private' desire – here for the other *as self-constituent* – and for polarity-popping transgressions of raced 'lines'.³³

And yet, as Heidi Safia Mirza argued in 1997 in *Black British Feminism*, declarations of freedom from past structures in favour of unfettered self-re-invention 'engage in the risky business of strategic tactical cultural re-inscription which makes the hegemonic discourse of race, class and gender imperceptible'.³⁴ Something of that may be true here in Agbabi's sonnet – in large part because its writer's dilemma and delight are seemingly universalized. And indeed, as she herself puts it, 'From the form [the audience] wouldn't know' she's black.³⁵ In other words, her reasons for returning to lyric seem at times to involve its purported, traditional transcendence into universality – even though that illusory power caused radical poets in the US to abandon it for some time, and black poets in the UK to question its 'arched' representativeness of (white) subjectivity at home.

Along the spectrum from Agbabi's new uses of lyric is the surprising turn to it by poets read as far more experimental, such as Anthony Joseph and David Marriott. Joseph's work, according to two of our most important poetry critics, Michael Thurston and Nigel Alderman, displayed 'textual strategies' at the start that were even more 'aggressively difficult' than Marriott's,³⁶ and as Ramey writes, 'no group is more consistently excluded' in black British poetry 'than those who are formally innovative' – the result being that discrimination *within* the field has over time worked to reinforce 'racial and cultural stereotypes'.³⁷ Therefore both Joseph and Marriott have until recently gone almost entirely unmentioned in criticism and unpublished in major anthologies. Yet while their early-1990s experiments could not have been more different – Marriott's were, according to John Wilkinson, 'evidently under the spell of J. H. Prynne',³⁸ while Joseph's were under the spell of US Language poetry – both have since the millennium adapted lyric to new acclaim that puts them in sudden dialogue.

Discussing Joseph's 1997 volume, *teragaton*, Ramey writes that:

Joseph's means and goals are entirely normative for a contemporary poet interested in decentering and reconceptualizing identity, examining one's personal and literary lineage across time and space, and interrogating language as a system of discourse – his poetry and thought would be right at home in *In the American Tree* or a critical study such as Peter Quartermain's

Disjunctive Poetics, which addresses such relevant topics as 'Writing as Assemblage'.³⁹

But neither of the texts she mentions, published over twenty years ago, included more than a token look at black poets, or *any* writing 'reconceptualizing identity'. (Marriott indeed critiqued Language poetics twenty years ago for its deconstructive avoidance of 'the traumatic excess associated with referential markers of sexual and racial difference'.)⁴⁰ Perhaps what Ramey sees as Joseph's ongoing focus on identity unprofitably warred with what he described his early form as doing: producing 'departures from sense, syntax-logic, conscious focus, preset matrices into an explosion/implosion of raw word and solid thought matter'.⁴¹ In any case, Joseph – alongside 'post-avant' lyric revenants in the US – made a full about-turn into lyric expression and exposition in his 2009 volume, *Bird Head Son*, which must have surprised his readers with its suddenly *highly* accessible, first-person storytelling and relation of intimate memories of life in Trinidad that relinquished altogether his Language-like experiments.

A cynical reader might find Joseph's next turn to performance equally at the foundation of his new popularity; as Dawes suggested, audiences have expected it of black poets 'for a long time'. But I see it as repurposing his earlier modes in a new attempt at a globalized, 'Black Atlantic' mode. One *Guardian* reviewer of his 2011 album *Rubber Orchestras* called his a new, 'wildly eclectic' sound, and poet Hannah Lowe (of Chinese/Jamaican heritage) writes in review of its lyrics that:

...the surrealist mode of these poems will be a challenge to some readers, but I enjoyed their psychedelic aesthetic and the bravado of Joseph's writing in which multiple cultures are collided, the narrator journeying across and within poems from African civilisations to the Harlem of the Jazz Age to the past and present day Caribbean. The phrase 'I came from' and its variations serve as testimony and refrain, embedding the narrator as witness and agent.⁴²

Certainly some might find this to be 'lyric' exploration renewing itself for a new era. But getting at last to the third thing I found interesting in Breeze's interview: it was

her refrain about being 'schizophrenic' – 'that's a word I use a lot', she laughs, in good-humoured reference to her own history of mental illness. But she 'think[s] the whole Caribbean is naturally schizophrenic',⁴³ not only due to its censored sensual sensibilities, but also to the near-necessity for its writers to manage two- to three-world-living-and-writing. Joseph, in his new, hyper-linked moment, is not so much burdened by such schizophrenia as he is unproblematically drawn into it, surfing all its conflicting voices at once in what he describes as his exuberant liminalism. Lowe reads it as a state 'in which fixed identities dissolve in favour of [an] openness and indeterminacy' that allows Joseph 'to resist confinement through the criss-crossing of spatial and temporal borders'.⁴⁴ This *seems* a new kind of free-wheeling black British poetry written with what Ramey calls 'freedom and immediacy'⁴⁵ – if also with the transcendence of historical entanglements that lyric has traditionally afforded, even as, as Mirza argued, hegemonic discourses persist.

Marriott's recent work also explores 'the foundations of identity', particularly since his 2006 volume, *Incognegro* – yet by radically rethinking it, rather than reasserting control over it in ways that *seem* formally new, but depend on old paradigms of 'poetic licence'. Rethinking lyric most importantly in terms of content has long been at the heart of his work, though even our finest contemporary critics seem to have missed that; as I suggested earlier, some argue that because his poems have long-tended to 'begin at the left margin of the page', 'his sentences are complete and grammatical', and his speakers are 'even ... content to call themselves 'I,' he has seemed less 'innovative' than Joseph.⁴⁶ His work may indeed be said to be more 'lyric' than Joseph's, or Agbabi's, but only, in my view, via re-definition of the genre as finally admitting the long-disavowed *personal*; his rendering of personal lyric makes lingeringly New Critical, '*impersonal*' sidestepping of it into the 'universal' seem dishonest, and lingeringly postmodernist, playful dissolution of it seem impossible. And as Wilkinson writes, 'Marriott's syntax remains largely correct because this is poetry to be followed into the folds of painful experience, not contemplated as an aestheticized object'.⁴⁷ Yet another much-admired poet/critic who, like Wilkinson and Marriott, is associated with the Cambridge avant-garde, Peter Riley, reacts negatively to the work precisely because he finds it to be, intolerably, 'a psycho-drama of the self', as well as freighted with Marriott's reading – 'the entire theoretical library

which props it up'.⁴⁸ Of course, his objections illuminate the critical obstacles to such writing more than the poetry itself. Should lyric expression *avoid* the self? Or pretend to leave its informative reading behind, inextricably connected though it is to thinking – particularly for a thinker as accomplished as Marriott? What generic purities or lyric universalisms are being protected here?

Minus much of Joseph's bravado, Marriott's poetry's thinking is indeed often related through what Riley calls 'phantasmagoric scenes [that] dissolve into anguished personal statements'.⁴⁹ Though he misreads symptoms for 'statements', Riley may be right that the poems *can* seem unremittingly nightmarish, or seem to preclude poetic escape from a violent past perceived as palpable in everyday private experience, as well as in the continuing operations of the global present – or as *Incognegro's* back cover puts it: 'what happens, happened, and what keeps on happening'. But Riley's most telling difficulty with these poems is that they express 'a black psychology, the anguish and anger of which are things for which we are all responsible'; 'if you agree to the contract', he objects, 'you are implicated in all the harm'.⁵⁰ Yet that reaction is precisely the target of this work, steeped as it is in forgotten black trauma and the poet's current experience of the consequences of its disavowal. All of which, in psychoanalytic terms, suggests it will 'keep on happening' until acknowledgment and mourning change both black and white psyches, and through them the course of history. Offering *not* tacit universalization, then, but rather historical vision of epic proportions, Marriott's lyrics read less well as conventionally (and conveniently) discrete short poems, which attest best to the anodyne fragment/whole harmony 'lyric' has come to sing. But the reward for sustained attention to any one of Marriott's complexly unfolding volumes is transformative, as Wilkinson puts it with bracing honesty and precision:

Marriott's poetry permits no release into the ludic, nor self-ironising into moiré ripples of self-reflexivity. It asks me where I stand but not in the sense of demanding or taking for granted a political allegiance. That would seem frivolous, cost-free.... When this poetry registers slavery, to which it returns as a dynamic constituent of every moment's experience historically,

psychologically and philosophically, I am forced to know that for me to figure myself as anti-racist would be ridiculous. But for me to figure myself abjectly as a racist would be a disgrace. D.S. Marriott's poetry engages in a struggle to insist *there are no others*.⁵¹

The alarming singularity of the affective economy disavowed *even* by the most well-meaning respect for 'difference' and 'others' is, as Wilkinson writes, what Marriott's work insists we see, and see ourselves *in* – is, I want to say, key to his work's startling new vision of 'universality'. In other words, his lyric registry is of the imbrication of *all* subjectivities in a continuing history of violence whose 'cost' is still borne only by its sufferers, 'cost-free' as it is for others – even those who take up 'political allegiances' against it – selectively disinheriting as that economy's operations continue to be. In Marriott's work they pre-empt triumphant self-expression, like Joseph's, though lyric response to even the lacunae they still produce exposes the entanglements, power perversions and resultant unresolved psychic injury which, he laments, has no name by which it might be confronted; I think again of Breeze's continual references to 'schizophrenia', lacking as she does a dedicated word. But in Marriott's nightmarish vision such operations bind us all, and not in conscience's 'moiré' displacements – here of self-castigation into self-congratulation – but rather in a tsunami of still-unprocessed, gathering violence that masks itself in all discourse. It may find itself revealed most visibly in racist state responses to crises like Hurricane Katrina, which Marriott's work has ever since 'remembered' and mourned, but it courses too through all our internalized responses, our supposed 'private' lives and intimacies – even love, one of Marriott's recurrent studies.

Yet this poetry is not irremediably negative, as Riley claims – quite the contrary. Not only is it rhythmically beautiful, and often comic, but it thinks through the psychoanalytic and philosophical ideas that Riley would deny it in order for the poet to, in part, play analyst to his own 'lyric' expression. No bookish knowledge is needed to hear this happening in the work; its dreamscapes-cum-theatre – whose roles the poet himself plays out, as his sometimes-inserted initials remind us – open up articulately enough to our analysis, too. We're just not allowed to remain outside the work.

So in Marriott's update on old modernist ensnarings of the reader – 'You! hypocrite lecteur! – mon semblable, – mon frère!' – we *all* end up on stage instead, responding to something like a psychoanalytic version of call-and-response writing. So different from Agbabi's rap poem quoted earlier, its 'role-calls' or prompts issue from within the playing-out rather than from the expected 'stage presence', as Dawes described it, of the black performer eliciting the familiar, 'overtly political' response we heard Breeze, too, wishing to complicate. Because yes, what we encounter as players alongside Marriott in his work are multiplying perversions in which we *are* implicated; we 'play' our part – in D.W. Winnicott's sense – in this shared art, struggling for our lyric *ex-expression*, too (in the etymological sense of *exprimere*: to press out), from within the white whale of western/world culture.⁵² Peter Riley is indeed right that Marriott's 'psycho-drama of the self' makes for costly rather than 'cost-free' reading – but it doesn't just dourly put us as readers in our place; it teaches us how to 'play'.

Nowhere is this more clear than in *In Neuter* (2013) – whose title suggests, as Wilkinson writes, '*in utero*', an image of living-and-not-living that both rewrites T.S. Eliot's in *The Waste Land* and dialogues with David Dabydeen's bleak vision of black subjectivity as stillborn cast-off in his more recent anti-epic, *Turner*.⁵³ Although *The Waste Land* deployed similar images of blithe mercantilism and moral vacancy flowing down the drain, Marriott's ever-present flood imagery – which in this volume references Hurricane Katrina, but also all real and mythical floods that leave us exposed or threaten to annihilate – is far less world-denouncing than Eliot's. It's also less devastatingly destructive than Dabydeen's erosive ocean waters in *Turner*, whose self-implosive final line, 'No mother', follows hundreds of lines of his speaker's suspect attempts to re-imagine one for a stillborn cast off a slave ship – i.e., to fictionalize for it a nurturing past. Marriott's work, on the other hand, honours another *kind* of fictionalizing or imagining: the kinds we play-act *with* one another (rather than foist upon one another); for him they express not only yet-inchoate desires which might change social relations, but they also, potentially, reveal the roots of psychic injury and thus enable its transformation. Such 'art' is, as such, even re-possessive of 'civic space', as he puts it in his prose: 'not a refusal of the world, but its repossession from the irreality in which it normally exists'.⁵⁴

Yet *In Neuter's* comic epigraph ominously warns of the difficulties involved in this hopeful enterprise. After a metapoetical address to himself – ‘Now DS’ – it asks: ‘Don’t you know better than to mess with Mister In-Between?’ Which of course recalls the refrain from the hit song of 1945, ‘Accentuate the Positive’, whose ‘sermon’ (so-described) in its opening lines directs us to ‘latch on to the affirmative’, ‘eliminate the negative’, and above all, intriguingly as well as repeatedly, *not* mess with Mr. In-Between. Bing Crosby most famously performed it in black-face, playing up its black sermon’s rhythms and illustrating everything Marriott fears – i.e., that *any* authentic black response to black oppression has long been co-opted and turned against itself, into whiteness sermonizing *as* black to preach that ‘Jonah in the whale’ and ‘Noah in the ark’ also accentuated the positive despite being at best quite literally in those discomfiting spaces ‘in-between’. Such socially enforced repression to produce the civic ‘irreality’ of accentuated positivity leaves raced lyric little to say; so instead of an answer to the question in the epigraph, we get the mute etymological root of *ablative* – ‘taken away’ – when offerings of heartfelt signs, or *oblation* rather than ablation, is what the whole of this volume looks and longs for, even as obliterating floods threaten to annihilate us all. (‘Accentuate the Positive’ was, by the way, first heard in the Paramount film, *Here Come the Waves*). Indeed, this volume seems to suggest that the ‘in-between’ is a space so guarded by the powers-that-be because it’s one to conjure with – meaning, to conjure signs in, *between* words like ‘positive’ and ‘negative’, and between people, all *playing* with signs as provisional, helpful objects, *transitional* objects, that can move silenced trauma into exchange. Therefore Marriott, who early on, during the driest moments of Language poetry’s poststructuralist angst, expressed concern about ‘signs [being] taken for signifiers’ rather than ‘wonders’ – as Homi Bhabha more productively re-described colonial texts that undergo hybridization in his famous work by that title – seems to have coupled for his own use Bhabha’s early and ground-breaking visions with those of Winnicott’s playful practices.⁵⁵ Winnicott, in search of the repressed ‘true self’ (which would otherwise remain buried, infantile, unable to express itself, or assert itself, which he viewed as a necessary form of aggression), entered and honoured the chaotic and conflicted world of each child he treated – encouraging, for example, the

famous self-named 'Piggle' to invest her soft toys and other transitional objects with her own names (and therefore desires and inchoate fears), and allowing himself, too, to be named by her while 'playing' *with* her in their mutually-created, improvised theatre. Such imaginative enactment of new relations through evolving creation of signs works via trauma's *ex-expression* and, as a result, transformation: its recognition by another, its memorialization in story, *and* its collaborative rewriting in play.

Therefore this volume's nightmarish sign-making and role-playing which invites us into it might best be seen as driving toward the sources of trauma, simultaneously inner and shared-historical, 'the stink that reveals the kill', imagined from *In Neuter's* start as a cave filled with dead black boys 'stretched out in the ashes' – yet surrounded by treasure awaiting discovery.⁵⁶ The 'positive' is, in other words, right away located cheek-by-jowl with the 'negative', *both* buried; and the painful but joyful lyric 'art' of ex-pressing them is suggested by the volume's opening lines, 'I danced, with my shirt soaked and bones broken I danced because the pain made me smile'. On this first page, a lyric poem in stanzas of growing length therefore appears, cheek-by-jowl, alongside horrifically violent prose in which our dreaming speaker is lynched/crucified: 'left ... for hours hanging from my arms'. We learn here that, like a Christ harrowing hell, he'd tried to 'exit the gates' of that subway-cum-cave with the dead black boys he sees there 'in the ashes' – the latter a sign inextricable from genocide in post-Holocaust history, and evocative of total annihilation without recourse to recovery, burial and memorialization. Re-playing the many familiar, shared texts that arise to become re-signed, or transitional objects repurposed toward that end, our lyric speaker takes on an 'heroic' role, if we recall the telling of Christ's successful harrowing of hell and saving of all the only-seeming dead – but also a vulnerable, self-sacrificial role, since ultimately death on the cross effects it. The dual nature of such 'offering up', or oblation, of expressive signs is signalled by this choice of role to play; rather than those of the trickster or self-reinventer, this role in other words requires pain in the recollection of boyhood trauma and disinheritance, a kind of death in remembrance of loss. But ultimately the story behind it promises 'return', of course, as well as inordinate historical change in exchange for one homeless man's death; it is in other words 'comic', in the Dantean sense.

And dis-covering loss through the 're-mixing' of signs (and earlier texts, or 'wonders', like Eliot's) is indeed, as per Hall's call, part of the 'redeeming' act here in this first poem entitled 'The Redeemers'. Thus we are encouraged to put its darker references to Dante's *Inferno* – one of Eliot's favourites, wherein his early poems dwelled, one might say irredeemably – into 'play' here instead with, very importantly, *Peter Pan*: that immensely popular, widely shared children's theatre-work about innocent 'Lost Boys', stalled youth, and ice caves in Neverland. Somewhere *in between* J. M. Barrie's imagined strange state for boys who can never grow up (and become part of 'life') and the boys in his later fiction who *do* grow up, but lose all touch with their playfully productive selves, is the fruitful place warned against in 'Accentuate the Positive'. Both states are 'unreal', or 'irreal' in Marriott's update on both Eliot and Barrie, locked out of the molten present by fear of loss's acknowledgment and growth. The lyric stanzas that therefore grow alongside the painful prose on this first page abjure 'the redeemers' – reminiscent of Eliot's gatherers of fuel in ancient lots – to comb instead for 'the thinnest shards of plentiful loss' – to 'make the task take the heart forward,|lest all be lost|to abandon, to a world without hunger or restraint'. 'Abandon hope all ye who enter here' – but Marriott's interpretation of loss is more acutely a loss of hunger, meaning an evisceration of the imagination as well as of the flesh. Because while Lacan updated Freud's developmental Oedipal processes by arguing that there must be an hystericization of discourse to reveal the object of desire from which the subject is split, all desire is under threat of being suspended in Marriott's poetry due to those black boys' exile from discursive signs themselves. Or 'Names of the Fathers', as the title of an early poem has it (my emphasis): 'we need the trauma that predates us|the issues and the summons|weaned into the loving memory of death and of nothingness,|... in whose name should we remember you?' Marriott's is, chillingly, lyric work about not being *able* to access lyric feelings and develop his own 'true self' (as Winnicott would have it) outside white hegemonic tutelage. ('Accentuate the Positive' was originally released by Johnny Mercer and The Pied Pipers.) His limbo between hunger and restraint, life and death, isn't due like Eliot's to forgetting culture's monuments but rather to forgetting, as Walter Benjamin famously put it *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, the 'documents of barbarism' that

underwrite each one. Yet as Marriott suggests elsewhere, poets working similarly to analysts intersect with both feelings and forgotten barbarism in 'subversive ways that shift discourse and social bonds'.⁵⁷

One of Marriott's 'subversive ways', like Agbabi's, is via sexual exposé – and indeed, his work illuminates her S/M sonnet 'Transformatrix' discussed earlier, and vice versa. Wilkinson writes that 'through Marriott's poetry there runs a thread of sadism and masochism which dissolves attributions of purity', or lyric righteousness – which it certainly does, I agree, as well as much more. He notes that readers may find distressing the amount of exploitative violence in *In Neuter*, coupled as it is with sadomasochistic turns of love, but these uncensored expositions are crucial to the playing out of both destructive and self-destructive power 'relations' in the work. For example, in the poem 'Noticeboards', an Israeli soldier and an Arab boy act out potentially potent transgressions that tip over into the sanctioned violence that overwhelms desire in their 'irreal' landscape of dehumanizing power dynamics. In this case, initial affection sparked is turned by frustrated orgasm to 'fury that demanded a sacrifice' – 'a dream', the boy says, 'I do not recall waking from'.⁵⁸ But the boy, though here caught up like all of Marriott's speakers in borderless dreamscapes, one leading to another, also dreams, like our very first speaker in the volume, of dancing out the pain of it – of '*danc[ing] freely across the border ... [a]t the end of the earth*': '*I will ... crawl towards him just before I am shot. The trains will pass by swifter than hatred, and the placards propped up by children, written in Arab-Israeli script*'. The imagined, shared, Arab-Israeli 'script' in the boy's imaginative theatre would somehow pre-empt by sheer speed – and indeed substitute for – an emotion like 'hatred' in his vision of his fellow children's collaboratively renewed 'signs' accompanying his self-delivery as that 'demanded sacrifice'. Though 'perverse', certainly, as he himself calls it, this acting out is of perversion by its etymological meaning, too – meaning a 'turning around' to end up in between his own self-sacrificial self and his deadly 'master', and going against (by legal definition) the direction of accepted 'judgment' to effect an outcome of his own and 'shift social discourse'. Because in this poem whose title focuses on precisely that, the boy's is an imagined triumph in

impacting power-discourse at last: '*murals of me scrawled on noticeboards, ... on mud and cement, and out of these combinations, written down in ashes and blood, my most perverse strength*'.⁵⁹ Making of his pain and imagined destruction in this dream *writing*, the boy reanimates the Christ-role played in 'The Redeemers' and reanimates those fearful, unexpressive ashes that lay the scene for so much of the action in this volume; he does so by revising the 'script' via 'noticeboards' that, we might say, reveal 'splits', as well as by 'crawling towards' his destroyer and thus shifting 'social bonds' through further 'transgression' of lines once again. Borderless dreamlands can, this volume suggests, be a good thing – but only if the playing includes a full cast of dreamers.

Important to Marriott are bell hooks' thoughts on sadomasochism:

... the space of transgressive desire is one location where historical relations of power and powerlessness are rendered less fixed and immutable. S/M sexual pleasure becomes the context for mutuality, where subject positions are fluid... Pleasure is in the space of utopian possibility.⁶⁰

While Agbabi's sonnet assertively illustrates this point, Marriott's particular kind of exposé exposes the 'historical relations' beneath the decidedly still non-utopian, self-destructive relationships his speakers continue to suffer even as they 'watch the dense and rising waters running over [their] feet'.⁶¹ Poetic transcendence by fiat of social ills and catastrophes is never possible in his work, although accentuating positivity of a *different* kind *is*, I would argue – beginning with lyric speech erupting from the censored but shared in-between. So I perhaps 'perversely' see his final, composite speaker fortunately-falling into the volume's oncoming flood, as into the heart of violent language – not because it leads to self-dissolution and purging, as with Eliot's Phlebas the Phoenician sailor, but on the contrary because it seems to carry with it yet-'unrecognized' traumatic insolubles. And though it 'drowns' like a 'noun', the nonsensical rhyme suggests a paradoxical relation between such death-dealing drowning and potential return to consciousness and language of the unmemorialized, the 'unburiables', that 'like bone[s]' are swept along in its wake:

The rain that falls
 and drowns – like a noun

 the disappeared – unrecognized,
 but walking
 beside you –

 street by street, as you veer away;
 the noun
 unburiable, like bone, in a blue of fear,

 relentless
 on the ice-floes
 of each syllable

 and breeches the low-keel
 as it spills, over the rims.⁶²

What spills over these 'rims' is the return of those nouns, those discursive objects that have been lacking but 'unburiable', like the black boys from the start of this volume. And they are made like, too, 'the designated one|always beside you' in the next lines, which clearly refers to the tomb-skipping Christ on the way to Emmaus, as in the equally-dream-like conclusion to *The Waste Land*. Wilkinson argues that the word 'designated' suggests 'de-signed', written out, linking it to the dead boys – but they're clearly also coupled here with 'the redeemer', which to me is crucial. The 'disappeared' are always *there*, above, 'on each syllable' – and I would argue the boys, too, are always there because of psychic processes that preserve most palpably the disavowed and displaced. This is how hope arises in Marriott's writing, which is always about the possibility of going back, under and *in* to discover a way forward. So it is that his speaker falls here, like Phlebas, 'to the bottom' of 'everything that I ever was'. But he doesn't surface in an Eliotic purgatorial desert of potential self-salvation, only; rather, he emerges 'washed ashore like all the others', rendered rich and strange by the tempest's more benevolent 'neutralizing' relations, so that:

... we all
began to dance again: manservants, hustlers, slaves.⁶³

Calling up the fantastical ending to Shakespeare's *Tempest*, its alternative social relations artfully imagined into being by an imperfect book-lover recalling past traumas with some measure of forgiveness, in a play that dwells on utopian possibilities and release from master/slave relations, Marriott makes his own potentially brave ending – complicated, however, by that 'again'. All over again? Would emergence be from irreality's nightmare into yet another charmed state, as with the bard's dancing sailors? Or is this the kind of 'dance' that 'again,' as at the start, *ex-presses* dis-covered trauma and suggests positive hope? Marriott is, after all, playing Prospero as 'redeemer' here, 'being good' with his art, as this poem's title has it. And in his greatly updated way, as I have tried to suggest, Marriott does seem to agree that we *are* such stuff as dreams are made on – and that therefore art, lyric art, and its interventions in dreaming culture *can* work to alter its self-destructive course. But whereas Prospero (after St Paul) confidently affirms a both personal and end-times release from the past – 'yea, all which [the great globe] will inherit, shall dissolve' – Marriott's fears are for the meantime, the 'in-between'-time, and all that within those suppressed and disinherited might dissolve irretrievably before we're through.⁶⁴

I might sum up by saying that a discomfitingly new sense of 'universality' informs Marriott's lyric writing, wherein the raced 'personal' is always both other *and* not, always historically swept along (or violently disavowed) through shared language. His concern is for, as he puts it in his epigraph to *In Neuter*, what was 'taken away' – 'eliminated' as in the old song by, ironically, *both* white-washing twentieth-century lyric practice *and* raced oppositional strategies that dissolve the very 'subjects' they would universalize. Marriott's broken 'action hero' who would save them should perhaps rivet us in the poetry world's equivalent of the movies (with its tiny box office), since it offers huge returns, nothing less than globe-sized redemptive visions – but perhaps that's not what we really want, not at the cost.

Notes

- ¹ See, for one millennial example, Gianni Vattimo's *Belief* (Stanford University Press, 1999; *passim*). As with the return to lyric, there are of course both very conservative and very radical forms of return to religion in our century; I attend to the latter with great interest elsewhere.
- ² This essay is a reframed and expanded version of "Genre Crossings: Rewriting 'the Lyric' in Innovative Black British Poetry" which appeared in *The Cambridge Companion to British Black and Asian Poetry 1945–2012*, Deirdre Osborne, ed., Cambridge University Press, 2016. 'Lyric Returns', its new title, may make it sound too much like an investments update or new action movie – though neither possibility is entirely left out of the mix below.
- ³ *Publications of the Modern Language Association (PMLA)*, Special Issue, 'The New Lyric Studies', 123.1 (2008).
- ⁴ *American Women Poets in the 21st century: Where Lyric Meets Language* ed. Claudia Rankine and Juliana Spahr (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), 2; *American Hybrid: A Norton Anthology of New Poetry* ed. Cole Swensen and David St. John (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2009). For example, Spahr in her introduction to the first of these texts writes that she felt it was important not to suggest any collective (read: political) poetics in it. Indeed, she defends the return to lyric against what she calls 'the debate about [it as a] retreat' by, a little surprisingly, admitting that it 'has not transcended the limits of aesthetics much recently': '[e]ven this collection which makes room within lyric for language writing's more politicized claims, focuses mainly on formal and aesthetic issues' (10, 2).
- ⁵ The quote appears on p. 2 of Jackson and Prins's "General introduction" to *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014). After introducing us briefly to a number of divergent ways of looking at the lyric, they write: 'These may seem like competing definitions of the lyric in our contemporary moment, but their difference is only apparent inasmuch as they share a general sense that the lyric is the genre of personal expression, a sense assumed whenever we talk about "the lyric I"'.
- ⁶ See Stephen Matterson, who makes clear that 'deeply felt personal statement' was never welcome in New Critical lyric ('The New Criticism,' in *Literary Theory and Criticism: An Oxford Guide*, Patricia Waugh, ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; p. 173). See also Jonathan Culler's 'Why Lyric?' (2008 *PMLA* forum; see note xii, p. 201), where he argues that our narrativization of lyric constitutes the continued 'reaction' of criticism and pedagogy 'against the Romantic notion of lyric as expression of intense personal experience'.
- ⁷ Kwame Dawes, 'Black British Poetry: Some Considerations' in *Write Black, Write British: From Post Colonial to Black British Literature*, ed. Kadija Sesay (Hertford: Hansib Publications Ltd, 2005), 282–99.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 286, 285.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 283.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 298.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 287.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ Jean 'Binta' Breeze and Jenny Sharpe, 'Dub and Difference: A Conversation with Jean 'Binta' Breeze', *Callaloo* 26:3 (2003): 607–613, 611.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 611.
- ¹⁶ Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?' in *PMLA* 123.1 (2008): 201–6, 201.
- ¹⁷ Dawes, 'Black British Poetry', 298.
- ¹⁸ Molly Thompson, 'An Interview with Patience Agbabi' (2001), *Write Black, Write British*, 147–164, 163.

- ¹⁹ Nicky Marsh, "Peddlin Noh Puerile Parchment of Ethnicity": Questioning Performance in New Black British Poetry', *Wasafiri* 45 (Summer 2005): 46–51, 49.
- ²⁰ Agbabi quoted in Lauri Ramey, 'Contemporary Black British Poetry' in *Black British Writing*, ed. R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey (New York and Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 109–136, 132.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 131.
- ²² Patience Agbabi, *Transformatrix* (Edinburgh and London: Canongate Books; first published by Payback Press, 2000), 11.
- ²³ Conversation with Agbabi, 2000.
- ²⁴ Agbabi, 'An Interview', 162.
- ²⁵ Breeze, 'Dub and Difference', 613.
- ²⁶ Donna Aza Weir-Soley, 'Creating a Safe Space' in *Caribbean Erotic: Poetry, Prose & Essays*, ed. Opal Palmer Adisa and Donna Aza Weir-Soley (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2010), 13–21, 16.
- ²⁷ Ramey, 'Contemporary Black British Poetry', 111.
- ²⁸ Jahan Ramazani, 'Poetry and Decolonization' in *A Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry*, ed. Nigel Alderman and C.D. Blanton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 111–133, 123.
- ²⁹ Ramey, 'Contemporary Black British Poetry', 111, 113.
- ³⁰ For a darker treatment of the trope see Dawes' 'Crime of Passion' in *Requiem* (Leeds: Peepal Press, 1996), 16.
- ³¹ Ramey, 'Contemporary Black British Poetry', 132.
- ³² Agbabi, *Transformatrix*, 78.
- ³³ Omar Hena, 'Multi-ethnic British Poetries' in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 517–37, 529.
- ³⁴ Heidi Safia Mirza, 'Introduction: Mapping a genealogy of Black British Feminism' in *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, ed. Heidi Safia Mirza (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–28; 14.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.
- ³⁶ Michael Thurston and Nigel Alderman, *Reading Postwar British and Irish Poetry* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2014), 273.
- ³⁷ Ramey, 'Contemporary Black British Poetry', 120.
- ³⁸ John Wilkinson, 'Review' of *In Neuter* in *Blackbox Manifold*, available online at: <http://www.manifold.group.shef.ac.uk/issue11/JohnWilkinson11.html>.
- ³⁹ Ramey, 'Contemporary Black British Poetry', 124.
- ⁴⁰ David Marriott, 'Signs Taken for Signifiers: Language Writing, Fetishism, and Disavowal', *fragmente* 6 (1995): 73–91; 79–80.
- ⁴¹ Anthony Joseph, *teragaton* (London: poisonenginepress, 1997), 15.
- ⁴² Hannah Lowe, 'Smoke and Mirrors', in *Poetry Review* 102:2 (Summer 2012), available online at: [http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/lib/tmp/cmsfiles/File/review/1022/1022%20Lowe%20Smoke%20and%20mirrors\(1\).pdf](http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/lib/tmp/cmsfiles/File/review/1022/1022%20Lowe%20Smoke%20and%20mirrors(1).pdf).
- ⁴³ Breeze, 'Dub and Difference', 613; 608.
- ⁴⁴ Lowe, 'Smoke and Mirrors'.
- ⁴⁵ Ramey, 'Contemporary Black British Poetry', 122.
- ⁴⁶ Thurston and Alderman, *Reading Postwar British and Irish Poetry*, 273.
- ⁴⁷ Wilkinson, 'Review'.
- ⁴⁸ Peter Riley, 'Poetry south of the Antilles' in *The Fortnightly Review*, June 7, 2014, available online at: http://fortnightlyreview.co.uk/page/4/?s&wpmp_switcher=mobile.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Wilkinson, 'Review'.

⁵² For my own explanation of D. W. Winnicott's role in Marriott's work, see my Preface to Marriott's *Hoodoo Voodoo* (Shearsman Books, 2008). This volume thinks through various narratives, one of them *Moby Dick*, which accounts for my last image in this sentence.

⁵³ T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1922); David Dabydeen, *Turner: New and Selected Poems* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2002).

⁵⁴ *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (Rutgers University Press, 2007), xi.

⁵⁵ Bhabha's argument in 'Signs Taken for Wonders' has of course been much-discussed and critiqued since it appeared in *Critical Inquiry* in 1985 (Vol. 12, Number 1) but remains inspiring for its hopeful thinking forward through the work of Lacan, Derrida and others; I bring it up here in part to remember its far less anodyne way of imagining 'hybridity' long before the word's use in the recent anthologies I mention at the start of this essay. I also again reference Marriott's 'Signs Taken for Signifiers', brought up in note 40 above, to recall how long he has been thinking about the valence of signs in postmodernist discourse.

⁵⁶ David Marriott, *In Neuter* (Cambridge: Equipage, 2013), 7.

⁵⁷ Seminar description, Lutecium (see luteciumfoundation.com).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ bell hooks, *Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1996; reprint 2009), 93. Marriott's prose book *Haunted Life* (2007) quotes this work.

⁶¹ Marriott, *In Neuter*, 18.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁴ William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, IV. i (156–7).

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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