Ordinariness: The Ultimate Transgression and the Source of Transformation

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Setting out to read a paper titled "Ordinariness" may make any reader feel that he or she is about to do penance through submitting to 30 minutes of boredom. I do want to discuss boredom, but I hope to do so in a fascinating way, and I'm going to speak from my own perspective as a writer – a writer who has been fascinated with ordinariness for a long time. Ordinariness has been fundamental to my poetry almost since I began writing but no critic has ever picked this up so I'm here pointing it out to them in the clearest and perhaps most narcissistically possible way. Ordinariness is an unusual subject in literary discussions – there is, for example, no entry for it in the 1600-page *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* or in M.H. Abrams's famous *Glossary of Literary Terms.*[1] It is partly for this reason that I want to suggest that it is the ultimate transgression but it also is the source of transformation.

Literature, and all the arts, by their nature, are generally seen to seek out and present the extraordinary. The English art critic Clive Bell said that art is one of "two roads by which men [sic] escape from circumstance to ecstasy"[2] while Oscar Wilde argued that "It is […] through Art only that we shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence."[3] In a largely bureaucratised and organised world the daily elements of our lives are often thought to be routine and boring. Ordinary life is perceived as banal, and creative writers, especially poets, are often seen to have a mystique about them because they are lifted out of that banality, and might take us with them. At the furthest extreme is that most Nietzschean of novels, *Crime and Punishment*, in which Raskolnikov decides:

> all men are divided into 'ordinary' and 'extraordinary.' Ordinary men have to live in submission, have no right to transgress the law, because, don't you see, they are ordinary. But extraordinary men have a right to commit any crime and to transgress the law in any way, just because they are extraordinary.[4]

More moderately, Wallace Stevens said "poetry that involves us vitally" provides "the feeling of deliverance, of a release, of a perfection touched, of a vocation so that all men may know the truth and that the truth may set them free;"[5] Stevens was part of those generations at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century for whom the arts took over the role of religion. Listeners say to his poet-guitarist,

> […] "You have a blue guitar,
> You do not play things as they are."
>
> The man replied, "Things as they are
> Are changed upon the blue guitar."[6]

Sir Philip Sidney, in the late 16th century argued that "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as divers poets have done […] Her world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden." The writer "with the force of a divine breath […] bringeth things forth surpassing her doings."[7] Sidney's thinking is firmly based in that of Aristotle; so these ideas go back to the foundations of Western aesthetics. Aristotle, in recounting the history of Greek poetics, said:

> Poetry […] diverged in two directions, according to the individual character of the writers. The graver spirits imitated noble actions, and the actions of good men. The more trivial sort imitated the actions of meaner persons, at first composing satires, as the former did hymns to the gods and the praises of famous men.[8]

In other words, literature presented actions either grander or meaner than those of ordinary life, the meaner only for satire, and later, comedy.

Even more romantically, the German Idealist philosopher Hegel declared: "Poetry is the universal art of the spirit which has become free in itself and which is not tied down for its realization to external sensuous material; instead, it launches out exclusively in the inner space and the inner time of ideas and feelings."[9] It is hard to tie such grand spirits down to the demands of doing the shopping and putting out the garbage bins, at least on the correct night!

The 20th century saw a turn away from portraying princes like Hamlet or army leaders like Coriolanus to a rendition of more ordinary men and women, in plays such as *The Glass Menagerie* and, most famously, *Death of a Salesman*. However, both plays present heightened dramatic events, as the characters' worlds are destroyed around them. This is also true of that contemporary realism which *is* set in the ordinary world of suburbia, the television soap opera. Like most contemporary television, these are works of melodrama whose rush of catastrophes and emotions would give any of us a weekly heart attack. In my own literature, Australian literature, our foundational playwright Louis Esson declared in the early 20th century that "The suburban home must be destroyed. It stands for all that is dull and cowardly and depressing in modern life. […] It denies life. Young men it would save from wine, and young women from love."[10] Thus the poet-critic Garry Kinnane observed in 1998, "the continuing failure of our creative writers to come to terms with that vast suburban middle-world that our culture-spinners have loved to hate, though it happens to be the physical and cultural space in which the vast majority of Australians do their living."[11] Our most famous writer Patrick White created an imaginary suburb, Sarsaparilla, which he excoriated in successive novels and plays.

Not set in the suburbs but in the depressingly everyday is perhaps the most famous play of the 20th century, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. It is a play set "in the midst of nothingness," and in its opening line, Estragon, "*giving up again*," declares, "Nothing to be done."[12] The famous quip is that *Waiting for Godot* is a play in which nothing happens in the first act and then it happens again in the second. Beckett's work and thought, or anti-thought, had philosophical precedents, not least in a famous student of Göttingen University, Arthur

Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer valued the arts, including literature, because they presented or facilitated awareness of universal ideals. Clearly he never saw or read *Waiting for Godot*! In Robert Wicks's summary of Schopenhauer's aesthetics, apprehension of a work of art "lifts a person above the flow of mundane details, dissolves the feeling of time, and precipitates an outlook that transcends individual interests." This is valuable because the world is not just a place of "mundane details" but of pointless, miserable suffering; life, for Schopenhauer, is like a soap-bubble that "we blow out […] as long and large as possible, although we know perfectly well that it will burst."[13]

"There's nothing to do," says Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*; "We wait. We are bored […] we are bored to death, there's no denying it."[14] What makes *Waiting for Godot* entertaining is that it is full of inventive morose, morbid, miserable comedy. In this way it may owe more, amongst philosophers, to Søren Kierkegaard than to gloomy Schopenhauer. Again Robert Wicks summarises intelligently:

> Unlike Schopenhauer, for whom boredom is annoying, depressing, and debilitating, Kierkegaard presents boredom entertainingly as having a productive, comical, aesthetically interesting, and explanatory side. God was bored, and so God created the world; Adam was bored alone, and so God created Eve to provide some relief; Adam and Eve soon became bored as a couple and so they created their children; the resulting society then became bored, and so decided to build a tower to the heavens – a boring idea in itself […].[15]

Kierkegaard believed in a Christian God, which guarantees some purpose to all that mundane boredom in ordinary life, an idea that is hinted at, but only played with, in *Waiting for Godot*.

The modern work that may come to mind as presenting everyday life as interesting is James Joyce's *Ulysses,* which tracks two characters through an ordinary day in Dublin. However, Joyce famously attempts to lift it out of the ordinary by paralleling events with those in Homer's *Odyssey.* It is difficult to decide the extent to which this parallelism is parodic or serious, and I think the extent of it is often exaggerated, including by Joyce himself. Either way, the novel is so experimental and so complex that the representation of characters and events does not seem ordinary at all. This introduces a crucial complication because of the distinction between ordinariness in content and ordinariness in treatment. In literature, treatment –, that is, form – is not ordinary at all; that's what makes it literature. Structures are more organised than in everyday life, expression more concise and more imaginative, rhythm is more evocative. Treatment may be conventional – the romantic novel may end happily, the poem be written in quatrains, the play or film may move from exposition to development of a situation before resolution in the final scenes – but it will always have tighter form than everyday events.

The key figures I have skipped over in reaching the modern age are the Romantics. The Australian critic, Andrew McCann points to "two opposed and

exclusive realms […] – the aesthetic and the everyday" that exist "within traditional Romantic thinking."[16] The Romantics' interest in the mysterious and the irrational that might transfix a wedding guest is enough to make us see what prompts McCann's observation. However, the attitude of the Romantics to the everyday is much more complex than his comment suggests. Wordsworth presented in his poems ordinary rural figures such as the farmer Michael, the solitary reaper, and the leech gatherer. He sought "to choose incidents and situations from common life […] as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men," in fact "a plainer and more emphatic language" than "the gaudiness and inane phraseology" then in vogue.[17] However, that "as far as was possible" may give us pause; Wordsworth wanted to "throw over" those incidents "a certain colouring of the imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way."[18] It is this thinking that leads eventually to much contemporary literature, and certainly to a great deal of contemporary popular culture: even though we have passed on to Victorianism, Modernism, and Post-modernism, we have never entirely left Romanticism behind. Wordsworth does not stop there: "above all," he says, he wants "to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them […] the primary laws of our nature."[19] This is something about which we might feel more ambiguous, having seen what assumptions about common humanity led to in the days of European empire and its belief that military superiority went hand in hand with social and cultural superiority. It has encouraged in us critiques of the Enlightenment and a good deal of adherence to cultural relativism, but the idea of common human nature goes back through Schopenhauer and Kant to Aristotle and Plato. It seems to me that we are now in the position of needing to emphasise that the concept of common humanity, and in literature of the common reader, does not necessarily signal cultural imperialism. The idea is at the core of one of humanity's great documents, the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, and is implicit in both efforts of translation and our tendency to identify with the speaker of a poem or characters in fiction or drama.

The other great piece of Romantic theory, if we don't count Keats's letters, was written by Percy Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*. Shelley, writing 21 years after Wordsworth, was very much a Platonist in his thinking, but his most important idea for us could be seen as a very down-to-earth one. "Poetry," he wrote, "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar."[20] This aesthetic may derive from the idea of seeing through the Platonic shadows of the world to glimpses of the Forms that they copy, but as with Wordsworth, it does allow for attention to ordinary things such as the west wind and the skylark. Shelley's Platonism, though, often makes his treatment of them seem ardent, idealistic, and even adolescent.

The Romantics put great stress on originality, an aesthetic that I think is still too much with us, because it easily leads to gimmickry, escapism, and artistic elitism. I think it is important to value thoughtful evocativeness rather than orig-

inality *per se*, especially in a period in which literature is struggling to keep its attention and stature. The societies of the developed world are saturated in easier, alternative ways for people to spend their time; television, film, video games, and the internet require less effort than reading literature and are readily available. Bookshops are closing, publishers are struggling, and literature has proportionately a smaller audience than in the last three centuries. Poetry has hardly any audience at all, and fiction might be heading in the same direction. What saves literature, and poetry in particular, is that its audience is dedicated and enthusiastic, seeing literary reading as necessary as breathing (almost). It is important in this context to deal with the world as people experience it and seek originality in treatment which evokes that shared world meaningfully.

Much of my own poetry has as theme the value of the ordinary. In a 2007 poem called "The Gift,"[21] about landing in Singapore while *en route* back to Australia, I referred to the "gift of banality" and the poem declares, "the most valuable elements of our lives are hardly noticed." The whole poem reads:

The Gift

Small clouds flock outside the window
like phlegm in the sky's throat
that we fly into, hoarser and hoarser,
the engines coughing above cut outs
of paddy fields, deep olive green
plantations intersected by water,
and dry strips of land, where men
and women work: nature is being
put in its place. Lower and lower
until we are being whispered about
by destiny, or chance. We hang
dangling at speed, in fragile air;
but today luck chooses us, the
headlines will escape our names, we will enter
the miraculous serenity of procedures,
of routines, all our fear buckled up
in a gift of banality, of schedules
that even we will quickly forget;

then the rumble and crack of wheels
on the ground, hooked by gravity and
weighty again. The most valuable
elements of our lives are hardly noticed.
Now the sun's gleaming off the wings
and we're heading homeward in the light
at last unperturbed by its luminous
and utterly ordinary silence.[22]

The poem points out how lucky we are not to be in "the headlines" with our 15 minutes of fame because we were in a plane crash. Procedures for flying and

landing are complex and have taken years to develop, and it is wonderful that we can ignore them and enjoy a "serenity" that actually is almost "miraculous." The poem, in short, aims to lift the veil from the familiar. A related thought is conveyed in G.K. Chesterton's underrated novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday*, when his spokesperson character Gabriel Syme argues that wild poetry is "prosaic" whereas he can "read a [railway] time-table with tears of pride."[23]

The Man Who Was Thursday is ostensibly concerned with anarchism and was written in a period of uncertainty about cultural and moral values. The novel is preceded by an untitled poem dedicated to a friend[24] which begins:

A cloud was on the mind of men
  And wailing went the weather,
Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul
  When we were boys together.
Science announced nonentity
  And art admired decay;

I hasten to add that the novel is much better than the poem! Many will see a parallel with our own day. While the value of the ordinary is a rare theme in literature in English it may seem increasingly important in a world in which terrorists seek to disrupt a society's daily order and in which an increasingly prominent popular culture, from James Bond to *Game of Thrones* to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, is marked by escapist fantasy. At the other end of the scale is the poetry of Thomas Hardy who wrote during the Great War a small poem that is important beyond its size, "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations.'" The phrase "The Breaking of Nations" comes from Jeremiah (51.20); the King James Version reads "with thee [that is, Israel] will I break in pieces the nations" and verse 22 declares: "With thee also will I break in pieces man and woman; and with thee will I break in pieces old and young; and with thee will I break in pieces the young man and the maid." Hardy subverts this, in content and tone; his poem has a grand declamatory title, followed by three quiet tetrameter stanzas:

I

Only a man harrowing clods
  In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
  Half asleep as they stalk.

II

Only thin smoke without flame
  From the heaps of couch-grass
Yet this will go onward the same
  Though Dynasties pass.

III

Yonder a maid and her wight

Come whispering by:
War's annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die.[25]

Like Schopenhauer and Beckett, Hardy was a pessimist and by all accounts a grumpy, difficult person. However, his poems are full of an unforced human warmth – more than his novels – and here he claims a persistence of the human in simple, daily rituals. Written during "the war to end all wars" by an agnostic, or perhaps an atheist, it is a wonderful poem of affirmation. It is also not a one-off but a repeated feature of Hardy's creative work. In the poem "Afterwards," using much longer lines, he imagines his neighbours speaking of him after his death:

Afterwards

When the present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
"He was a man who used to notice such things"?[26]

For a personal elegy it is a remarkably serene poem. In the middle of the poem a neighbour "may say, 'He strove that such innocent creatures [as the hedgehog] should come to no harm.'" The last stanza employs grander, more official phrasing until the poem's last line:

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
"He hears it not now, but used to notice such things"?

Technically, the last line's shift in tone might be described as bathos, but there is none of the comic effect usually associated with that trope. Rather, there is pathos, because the simple speech is in its own way grander than the "bell of quittance," "new bell's boom" phrasing, as are the maid and her boyfriend grander than the Great War. While the poem is a musing about what people will say, it is hard not to read it as a wish, and Hardy's wish is to be remembered as one who loved the daily effects brought by the change in the seasons, including animal movements and the winter skies.

Hardy was incredibly important to another English poet who has been incredibly important to me, and for the same reason. Philip Larkin credited Hardy with making him a poet, by turning him away from Yeatsian poeticness towards the world in front of him. Like Hardy, Larkin was a grumpy pessimist, believing that "most people *are* unhappy,"[27] but his poetry is full of warm human understanding. Larkin wrote that "When I came to Hardy it was with the sense of relief that I didn't have to try and jack myself up to a concept of poetry that lay outside my own life."[28] This shifted Larkin from writing lines such as:

Some must employ the scythe

Upon the grasses,
That the walks be smooth
For the feet of the angel.[29]

Or "And the waves sing because they are moving./And the waves sing above a cemetery of waters"[30] to lines such as:

[…] We ran
Behind the backs of houses, crossed a street
Of blinding windscreens, smelt the fish-dock; thence
The river's drifting breadth began,
Where sky and Lincolnshire and water meet.[31]

Larkin is a rarity among modern poets: someone who wrote poetry of the highest quality that sold well without being set on education syllabuses. Interviewed in 1982, he said that in his poetry he tried to use "words and syntax in the normal way to describe recognizable experiences as memorably as possible."[32] Of course, this sounds simple but is extremely difficult to do. Larkin had a hard-nosed view that "Poetry is an affair of sanity, of seeing things as they are."[33]

In apparent contradiction of this claim is the poet-novelist Ben Lerner's recent depiction of "the urgency and purity of the poetic impulse towards alterity from the merely real."[34] Writing in the *London Review of Books* on 18 June Lerner notes, "Many cultural critics, with a kind of macabre glee, proclaim 'the death of poetry' every few years."[35] He is not one of them; his essay is aimed at the inevitable but noble failure of an actual poem to live up to its ideal. He quotes Keats's "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter." He could also have quoted Shelley's declaration in the *Defence of Poetry* that "the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet." Lerner cites the poet and critic Allen Grossman who

> tells a story (there are many versions of this story) that goes like this: you're moved to write a poem because of some transcendent impulse to get beyond the human, the historical, the finite. But as soon as you move from that impulse to the actual poem, the song of the infinite is compromised by the finitude of its terms.[36]

This may sound Shelleyan and very non-Larkinish, and seem to be speaking against the kind of realism and placement of poetry in the midst of our ordinary lives that I have been advocating. However, it is crucial to realise that this is not necessarily true because a spiritual impulse *is* a part of everyone's life, and an aesthetic that omits or refuses it will produce dull work of merely sociological or political interest. The Larkin poem I quoted earlier, "The Whitsun Weddings," about a train journey to London, ends:

[…] walls of blackened moss
Came close, and it was nearly done, this frail
Travelling coincidence; and what it held
Stood ready to be loosed with all the power

That being changed can give. We slowed again,
And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain.

This moves beyond description into the psychology of human aspiration and hope, and further, through imagery that has a religious dimension. The important thing is, especially in materialist societies like our own, that this expression is earnt by the references to brakes and the earlier observation of windscreens and fish-docks.

I can illustrate this by reference to my own poems. My early published work was influenced by the American Deep Image poets, such as Robert Bly, W.S. Merwin and William Stafford. The first poem in my first book reads:

The First of the Last Evenings

The rain starts. You watch it and it does not stop.
From somewhere outside there is a child's scream.
The mother in you says it is a wolf a howl no human sound.
The rain packs down, hard like ice.
A ceremony pervades this night: the wind rushes against the earth
Like the father of a maimed child.
All you wish for is some grace, silence.
The father in you whimpers.
What awaits him is the life you had wished him never to live.
The sky gives out nothing but the ceaseless rain.
The fields give forth nothing but echoes of the sky.
The crops give up on the fields and go home.
Now the future must silence the past. Outside
Remains the ministry of noise. Listen!
It is the thrum of that old visitor.
You must leave.
And you wonder
And you go on wondering for the rest of your life…[37]

I've published three different volumes of *Selected Poems* and I've never included it. I once read it at a poetry reading by announcing that it was a bad poem; some audience members, poets among them, protested later that it's a good poem. It's actually an okay poem of a bad kind. I still believe in the power of images to express what is just beyond the capacity of humans to perceive exactly and of language to say – so I agree with Grossman and Lerner. However, such imagery must be anchored in the real world so that the extraordinary is intimately linked to the ordinary. I could illustrate this, I hope, through an elegy for Larkin – although he's not named in the poem – which I didn't manage to write until two years after his death. Larkin was a leading librarian as well as poet, but he was also racist, sexist, and politically deeply conservative; he never travelled outside the United Kingdom, said he didn't believe in foreign lan-

guages, and he loved jazz, all of which I can’t stand; so the poem refers to differences between us.

Late Letter

Late in the day
to be thinking of you, two years
too late. Outside in the turgid wind
all the birds have emptied
out of the sky. There are no lines to the dead
beyond that single bohemianism of ink
whose strength is
that it never dies
unless we let it.
Death chooses us
but rewards words;

and, oddly, the words I think of most
present the bits of you I never liked:
your little Englishness, and love
of ageing jazz, your determination
that everything worthwhile
must be experienced alone.
Unwillingly, I’ve practised loneliness
but you made it an art.
Was it a wilful belief
that dogs, lovers and telephones
do little when it comes to this:
perpetual non-existence
after life’s feeble forms of bliss?

So you shuffled dewey numbers
and rhymes, where clocks hung from the wall
with laughing hands, shuffled
your bachelorhood
a score of times,
muffled all
writing and refused
to believe your reputation.
You knew what we were stuck with
and simply waited
to enter that time
when the dark veins
weave in and out
bleeding names.

Yet, when I think of you whole
I think of a shining humaneness.
You convinced me
not to be frightened
of life’s littleness,

to value the ordinary,
to see the grand
pomposity of literature
for what it is, to laugh.

Laugh, on a day like this
when outside the trees
are beaten about the sky.

Perhaps you were our century's
most important
eighteenth century citizen.
But you died, and the years
went on regardless
as every line you wrote
said they would. "Would" with its sense
of perhaps –
"I would have" … "I should have" …
"I nearly did".
You knew that you did not
and could never pretend.
The ending, when it came,
would only ever be the end.

You left me daring
to hate your uncaring politics
and value your lines
with their immense
message of caring.
Today I gaze at the broken trees,
wondering if we can be
elated by desolation,
and your words
fly through my mind like birds.[38]

I admire writers who pursue this link between the ordinary and the extraordinary; however, it is only in and through the ordinary that I think true 'poetry' can be found, whether in verse or prose. So I admire writers whose work dwells there. The great Australian poet Kenneth Slessor wrote, in 1963, that

> no human being can pass the age of 50 without having managed to survive a whole whirlpool of desperate adventures, so mortifying, terrifying or shameful that the mind recoils from their recollection and so common that they are seldom recognised. Having offspring, being cured of pneumonia, flying from Sydney to Melbourne, paying off a house or a hire-purchase washing-machine, the occupational hazards of the city and the social crises of the suburbs, all of these can be as racking and shocking experiences as being shipwrecked or pursued by head-hunters.[39]

Another such writer I admire is Virginia Woolf. Here is the end of *Mrs Dalloway*, when the party has finished:

> Richard and Elizabeth were rather glad it was over, but Richard was proud of his daughter. And he had not meant to tell her, but he could not help telling her. He had looked at her, he said, and he had wondered, who is that lovely girl? And it was his daughter! That did make her happy. But her poor dog was howling.
>
> "Richard has improved. You are right", said Sally. "I shall go and talk to him. I shall say good-night. What does the brain matter", said Lady Rosseter, getting up, "compared with the heart?"[40]

Those of us in the English-language tradition are lucky to have, as our foundation great writers, two figures whose work is just like this. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* includes stories by a Knight and a Friar and a Franklin, but also by a Miller "dronke of ale,"[41] a Cook, and the five-times married Wife of Bath. In Shakespeare's plays, the kings and other authority figures are so often as scheming as any contemporary politicians and more bloodthirsty, or as self-pitying as Richard II or Duke Orsino in *Twelfth Night*, while down-to-earth rogues like Falstaff, Sir Toby Belch, and the half-drunk porter in *Macbeth* are presented warmly. Great literature is not snobbish. As the English poet and theorist Donald Davie wrote: "For poetry to be great, it must reek of the human, as Wordsworth's poetry does. This is not a novel contention; but perhaps it is one of those things that cannot be said too often."[42] Where we are most human is in those things we have in common, and which are so much part of our lives that they can seem ordinary. In the introduction to her collection of essays, *The Common Reader*, Virginia Woolf favourably quoted Dr Johnson's "Life of Gray": "I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers, uncorrupted by literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtility and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claim to poetical honours."[43]

It seems to me that the diminished role of literature in developed societies, and especially for poetry, provides the risk of handing these judgements to professional readers, academics, who often see ordinary life as belittling and banal.

Notes

[1] Roland Greene et al., eds., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton UP, 2012); M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace, 1993).

[2] Clive Bell, *Art* (New York: Frederick A Stokes, 1914) 115, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/16917.

[3] Oscar Wilde, "The Critic as Artist," *CELT: The Corpus of Electronic Texts,* University College Cork, pt. 2, 168, http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E800003-007/; accessed 12 Feb. 2015.

[4] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett, part III, ch.V, 22 June 2015, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/2554.

[5] Wallace Stevens, "The Figure of the Youth as Virile Poet," *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination* (London: Faber, 1960) 51.

[6] Wallace Stevens, "The Man with the Blue Guitar," *Collected Poems* (London & Boston: Faber, 1984) 165.

[7] Sir Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry*, ed. J A Van Dorsten (London: Oxford UP, 1973) 24-25.

[8] Aristotle, "Poetics," IV.7, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art,* trans. S.H. Butcher, 4th ed. (New York: Dover, 1951) 17.

[9] G.W.F. Hegel*, Introduction to Aesthetics*, trans. T.M. Knox (1842; London: Oxford UP, 1979) 89.

[10] Louis Esson, "Our Institutions," *The Time Is Not Yet Ripe*, ed. Philip Parsons (1912; Sydney: Currency Press, 1973) 73.

[11] Garry Kinnane, "Shopping at Last!: History, Fiction and the Anti-Suburban Tradition," *Writing the Everyday: Australian Literature and the Limits of Suburbia*, ed. Andrew McCann, spec. issue of *Australian Literary Studies* 18.4 (1998): 42-43.

[12] Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (London: Faber, 1965) 81 and 9, respectively.

[13] Arthur Schopenhauer, qtd. in Robert L. Wicks, *European Aesthetics: A Critical Introduction from Kant to Derrida* (London: Oneworld, 2013) 102.

[14] Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 74 and 81, respectively.

[15] Wicks, *European Aesthetics*, 133-134.

[16] Andrew McCann, "Introduction: Subtopia, or the Problem of Suburbia," *Writing the Everyday* ed. Andrew McCann, ix.

[17] William Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads,*" *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. W.J.B. Owen (London & Boston: Routledge, 1974) 71; 70.

[18] Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," 71.

[19] Wordsworth, "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*," 71.

[20] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Defence of Poetry*, *Project Gutenberg*, 18 June 2015.

[21] Dennis Haskell, "The Gift," *Asiatic* 1.1 (Dec. 2007), http://asiatic.iium.edu.my/issue1/index.html.

[22] Haskell, "The Gift."

[23] G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908; London: Penguin, 1986) 12-13.

[24] The friend was Edmund Clerihew Bentley, the inventor of the clerihew.

[25] Thomas Hardy, "In Time of 'The Breaking of Nations,'" *The Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy*, ed. James Gibson (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976) 543.

[26] Hardy, "In Time of 'Breaking of Nations,'"553.

[27] Philip Larkin, *Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955-1982* (London: Faber, 1983) 47.

[28] Larkin, *Required Writing*, 175.

[29] Philip Larkin, "The Dedicated," *Collected Poems*, ed. Anthony Thwaite (London: Marvell P & Faber, 1988) 10.

[30] Larkin, "The Dedicated," 7.

[31] Larkin, "The Whitsun Weddings," *Collected Poems*, ed. Thwaite, 114.

[32] Larkin, *Required Writing*, 75.

[33] Larkin, *Required Writing*, 197.

[34] Ben Lerner, "Diary," *London Review of Books* 18 June 2015: 43.

[35] Lerner, "Diary," 43.

[36] Lerner, "Diary," 43.

[37] Dennis Haskell, *Listening at Night* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1984) 1.

[38] Dennis Haskell, *Abracadabra* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1993) 105-107; rpt. in *Acts of Defiance: New and Selected Poems* (London: Salt, 2010) 52-54 and *What Are You Doing Here?: Selected Poems* (Diliman, Quezon City: U of the Philippines P) 68-70.

[39] Kenneth Slessor, *Bread and Wine: Selected Prose* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1970) 20.

[40] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925; St Albans, Hertfordshire: Triad/Panther, 1976) 172.

[41] "The Canterbury Tales," l.3128, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F.N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford UP, 1957) 47.

[42] Donald Davie, "The Reek of the Human," *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000*, ed. Jon Cook (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 329.

[43] Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (1925; Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1938) 11.