

Conclusion

I began this book with a discussion of Geoffrey Hill's fourth lecture as Oxford Professor of Poetry, in which he railed against the misconstruction of democratic writing as merely 'accessible', and conceded that he felt 'marooned' in the 1950s with the work of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound.¹ Hill returned to these themes throughout his tenure: in his eleventh lecture (11 March 2014), he warned that 'it is public knowledge that the newest generation of poets is encouraged to think of poems as Facebook or Twitter texts [...] the poem as selfie is the aesthetic criterion of contemporary verse'.² What might it mean, I asked at the beginning of the book, if contemporary poetry had a 'rule' instead to exasperate rather than to assuage?³ As I argued in the second and third chapters, Hill's poems form exemplary examples of metamodernist poetry in their assimilation of modernist antecedents in order to create the enigmatical poetics of *The Orchards of Syon* (2002) and *Scenes from Comus* (2005). The questions that his fourth lecture posed have concerned me throughout the writing of this book, and the close link between Theodor Adorno's conception of enigmatical art and these two collections might suggest that Hill's evaluation of contemporary poetry should also be received as exemplary. Yet the allusive and elusive poems I have discussed in the last two chapters by Sandeep Parmar, Ahren Warner and James Byrne clearly contradict Hill's statements about the insalubriousness of twenty-first-century poetics in his lectures as Oxford Professor of Poetry. Indeed, Hill's comments on contemporary poetry in these orations are often as provocative, generalised and untrustworthy as those in Don Paterson's maligned introduction to *New British Poetry* (2004). Moreover, the twenty-first-century authors that Hill does mention in his Oxford lectures have been brought to his attention by the very processes of commodification that he attacks in his fifteen orations. He has demonstrated critical pertinacity in ignoring two generations of poets from the London and Cambridge Schools – most notably, J. H. Prynne – who write with the 'semantic energy' that Hill claims is

absent in contemporary poetry, and who are equally committed as Hill to responding to the formal legacies of modernism.⁴

In contrast to the claim in these allocutions that there is no one writing like Geoffrey Hill anymore, so that he endures as a 'freak survivor' and 'holy fool', other critics have argued for a 'recrudescence' of modernism in contemporary literature.⁵ David James and Urmila Seshagiri's account of the contemporary novel's engagement with revolutions in form in early twentieth-century literature has provided an important critical context for this book on enigmatical poetics.⁶ Their research has also been indicative in its resistance to any sense that contemporary literature is merely an adjunct to modernism, a poor relation that continues under its spell in an attenuated form. Hill characterises himself instead as a 'high modernist' in his eighth lecture, and they would argue that he does so erroneously.⁷ Modernism is a discrete cultural 'moment' or 'mythos' in James and Seshagiri's work, whereas Hill's comment suggests it endures, and that he persists as an anachronistic disciple of its definitive tenor.⁸ Alternatively, if Hill were to deploy the term 'late modernism' instead, how late, we might enquire, can 'late' become? A century after the publication of *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Waste Land* (1922), it might be more persuasive to emphasise that modernism is paradoxically over, but not finished.

Rather than apply James and Seshagiri's account of metamodernism and the novel to a different literary form, I have drawn on their critical framework in order to formulate a narrative about the formal recalcitrance of contemporary poetry from both the mainstream and 'innovative' traditions. These poems form the missing context in Hill's rudimentary account of contemporary poetry in his lectures as Oxford Professor of Poetry. When considering arguments about metamodernism and contemporary fiction in relation to poems, distinctive technical issues and conceptions of literary history have clearly been at stake. The numerous debates surrounding the term analysed by critics such as James, Seshagiri, van den Akker, Alison Gibbons, Timotheus Vermeulen, Andre Furlani, Luke Turner, Nick Bentley, Usha Wilbers and Dennis Kersten have provided an important critical context for this book, but I have not simply applied them to the poetry in instances of critical determinism.⁹ Rather, these insightful critical interventions have allowed me to focalise the primary concern of this book, that the concept of enigmatical poetics should be central to any discussion of 'innovative' and mainstream poetry influenced by modernist antecedents. Close readings in this book have engaged with poems by Hill, Prynne, Geraldine Monk, Ahren Warner, Sandeep Parmar and James Byrne which still allow for a 'remainder' – aspects of the texts that, for

the present, remain beyond interpretation – in poetry conventionally located in either of these categories.¹⁰ As in Harrison's *Metamorpheus* (2000) and Warner's 'Métro', I have also discussed the moments in which a 'convergence of modernist forms and modernist histories' occurs, but a 'remainder' fails to arise.¹¹ In focussing on enigmatical poetics, and critics' attempts to breach the 'secret' of artworks 'that one can never quite grasp', I have argued for a kind of writing that resists the enduring bifurcation of contemporary British poetry into mainstream and 'innovative' writing.¹² Nevertheless, these distinctions continue to be valuable: whereas many mainstream poets have resisted the 'remainder' in order to court the 'general reader' of poetry, there is undoubtedly an intensification of modernist legacies in the Cambridge and London Schools with writers such as Prynne and Monk, who – with all the incumbent internecine warfare – have been aligned with the 'innovative' scene. However, the formal achievements of supposedly mainstream contemporary poets such as Hill who have embraced the concept of enigmatical poetics have been misconceived within the categories of the mainstream and 'innovative'. In addition, a younger generation of writers – including Warner, Byrne and Parmar – have attempted to renegotiate the strictures of this binary. These poets draw on aspects of both traditions to create enigmatical works such as 'Nervometer', *White Coins* (2015) and *Eidolon* (2015), rather than exploiting the 'innovative' in acts of short-term aesthetic piracy.

In *Post-Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (2012), Jeffrey Nealon responds to the legacies of modernist art in a very different way to these writers and this book. Nealon would concur with Hill's statement in his eighth lecture as Oxford Professor of Poetry that artists have to respond to 'the habit of thought' that insists that 'in order to survive an age of commodity, the art of poetry must itself become a form of commodity'.¹³ However, whereas Hill argues in this lecture that commodified poems become 'a vehicle of entertainment, somewhere between someone's idea of a stand-up comedian in a scout hut and a sex hang-up agony column', Nealon discusses 'innovative' writers' responses to this conundrum. Nealon argues that the capitulation of art to the prevailing market needs to be contested from within the economy's own terms now that creative resistance appears as a distant efflorescence of an outdated modernism. However, Nealon's book forms one example of how the relationship between experimental and mainstream poetry can be misunderstood, and how an account of enigmatical poetry can aid in recalibrating the distinctions between modernist, mainstream and 'innovative' writing. He contends that poetics of resistance – akin to enigmatical poetry's challenge

to accommodation that I have focussed on in this book – are simply a “modernist” mistake’, since Fredric Jameson contends that ‘Everything does in fact exist on the same flat surface of culture’ (p. 153).¹⁴ Yet Nealon and Jameson ignore, for example, the alternative publishing strategies of independent presses, and social networks that allow for experimental reading series, such as the Other Room (2008–18): instead, they insist that ‘we’re all inexorably forced to work through the omnivorous levelling logic of “the market”’ (p. 154). In a misreading of *Aesthetic Theory* (1970), Nealon argues against Adorno’s concept of literature as a ‘noncommodity par excellence’, with its ‘contentlessness’ and ‘aesthetic self-autonomy’ (p. 154). In fact, Nealon reduces literature to one side of Adorno’s paradox in *Aesthetic Theory*, that literature cannot be understood, whereas Adorno also emphasises that, in addition, art *must* be understood. Adorno does not argue that literature is ‘contentless’, but that the artwork is a ‘congealed process’ between ‘impulse’ and ‘form’ in the section of *Aesthetic Theory* precisely on ‘truth content’ (p. 129). The ‘truth content’ consists of how well this synthesis is achieved, rather than a hermeneutic insistence on what the artwork simply means.

Nevertheless, Nealon continues his anti-Adornoian proposition that art’s ‘semi-autonomy’ should be negated in the form of a post-postmodernist literature whose force lies in ‘its *imbrication* with contemporary economic forces [. . .] a positive (maybe even joyful) form of critical engagement with bio-political and economic life’, otherwise ‘all you have left is a kind of saddened nostalgia’, with ‘a “tiny minority” upholding and venerating tradition [. . .] in a world where most people don’t have time or inclination to care about preserving the past’ (p. 154). Given Adorno’s dialectical approach to tradition, Nealon’s thinking can only appear as a capitulation to the commodifying processes that he and Jameson criticise. Nealon advocates Kenneth Goldsmith’s marshalling of pre-existing language, and Bruce Andrews’ ‘relentless provocation’ in poems ‘where there’s no attempt to “mean” something’, as an ‘effective arsenal against the present and its ubiquitous post-postmodernism of speed and production’ (p. 169). Yet Andrews’ ‘provocation’ in books such as *I Don’t Have Any Paper so Shut Up* (1992) is indistinguishable from the ‘aesthetic self-autonomy’ that Nealon dismisses as an aspect of outdated modernism; a modernist ‘mistake’ of ‘contentlessness’ as he terms it earlier in his book (pp. 153–4). In contrast, Goldsmith’s amalgamation of pre-existing material presents a different formal (and postmodernist) approach to Andrews’ work, one which exists alongside, and arguably complicit with, commodifying processes rather than – as Nealon argues – presenting a Foucauldian

“strong” power of the false’ that is resistant to modern practices of power (p. 162).¹⁵ In contrast, enigmatical poetry initiates a powerful critique of commodification, even if this criticism resides in the ‘essentially powerless power of poetry’.¹⁶

Metamodernist poems that assimilate early twentieth-century antecedents in order to resist the ‘reality principle’ should not be dismissed in Nealon’s terms as symptomatic of anachronistic nostalgia.¹⁷ Enigmatical poetry fills in the gaps in Hill’s account of contemporary poetry in his Oxford lectures, and forms a potential rejoinder to his claim that the ‘general prospect’ for contemporary poetry ‘is bleak’.¹⁸ If the recalibration of mainstream and ‘innovative’ poetry in the context of enigmatical poetics were accepted, it would not be necessary to conceive of poems today as entirely in thrall to a desiccated market, desperate to become a ‘vehicle of entertainment, somewhere between someone’s idea of a stand-up comedian’ and an ‘agony aunt’ column.¹⁹ Prynne, Monk, Warner, Parmar and Byrne have all published poems that display the qualities that Hill claims are lacking in contemporary poetry, such as an understanding of the ‘electrical tremor’ between words.²⁰ It would be foolhardy to attempt to prove, for example, that Prynne’s poems do not display a sensitivity towards ‘semantic strata’.²¹

In order to further this research on the ‘semantic energy’ of twenty-first-century poetry, the relationship between metamodernism, enigmaticalness and recent poems could be considered further in the following ways:

1. To think through the legacies of modernist writing, but in relation to specific conceptual or formal devices, such as my analysis of enigmatical poetry in this book. How might further critical discussions about contemporary poems develop around, for example, lyrical epiphany, minimalism, multivocal writing, defamiliarization, parataxis, implicitness, polyphonic subjectivity, mixed registers, discontinuity, indeterminacy, ‘flick imagery’ or collage?²²
2. To consider a postcolonial ‘turn’ in studies of metamodernism. Does postcolonial poetry beyond the UK respond to enigmaticalness? Given that metamodernism more widely has responded to the configuration of Western capitalist societies, is there a danger of homogenizing disparate postcolonial experiences through the term? If metamodernism is indicative of these Western societies, then must it be resisted, even if the term itself inherently contains the notion of critique?
3. To deliberate further the overlaps, bifurcations and fault-lines between the mainstream, and the London and Cambridge Schools. Are there

other formal or conceptual categories that might account differently for this schism? Whilst stressing the dangers of critical simplification in relation to these terms, what other narratives might wish to sustain them? Is a new skirmish originating in the poetry wars imminent, such as that of the indignant response to Paterson's introduction to *New British Poetry* (2004), that would revitalise these categories? Or will they persist as formal immanence in twenty-first-century poetry?

4. Would an account of a metamodernist poetry be possible in terms of the version of the concept outlined by van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen? How might the distinctive formal traditions of contemporary poetry account differently for affect, post-irony and sincerity? I have indicated above that there are specific formal and conceptual problems in discussing the latter's manifestation in relation to contemporary poetry, as opposed to the contemporary novel. However, their overall project suggests a critical mapping that extends beyond metamodernism itself, that constantly puzzles over the development of contemporary art and literature. How will future 'structures of feeling' manifest themselves in relation to contemporary poetry?
5. After considering Adorno's ruminations on modern artistic endeavours in *Aesthetic Theory*, and Geoffrey Hill's irritable and impish response to contemporary poems in his fourth lecture as Oxford Professor of Poetry, how might critics respond to an accusation that the poetry scene exults in an increase of publishers and laurels, yet the most lauded contemporary poetry still does not qualify as art?

A 'Structure of Feeling' and 'Recrudescence': Two Metamodernisms

In the following section, I shall begin to respond to some of the ruminations in the fourth set of questions above. The work of Furlani, James, Seshagiri, van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen has been invaluable to this monograph as a critical background to centre my discussion of contemporary poetry around the notion of the enigma. However, my account of enigmatical poetry in this book could be paralleled by a completely different narrative about metamodernist poems. This section illustrates how further research on poetry and metamodernism could develop in the context of van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen's specific sense of how the concept might respond to the waning of postmodernism. Whereas Furlani, James, Seshagiri and this book stress the perpetuation of

modernist legacies in recent literature, Gibbons, van den Akker and Vermeulen have formulated an influential narrative of post-postmodernism. In the following discussion, I suggest ways in which studies of contemporary poetry might learn from the capaciousness of the term, emphasise divergences from current narratives about contemporary fiction and art, and resist metamodernism's temptations of over-determinism.

In this book, I have analysed the work of poets who respond to modernist authors as diverse as Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, H. D., Antonin Artaud and Bertolt Brecht.²³ In contrast, Vermeulen and van den Akker argue that metamodernism primarily attempts to account for the emergence of a wider 'structure of feeling' in the twenty-first century that responds to our historicity, bound up with the aftermaths of 9/11, the financial crash and austerity.²⁴ Vermeulen and van den Akker's specific framing of metamodernism continues in their book with Alison Gibbons, *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth after Postmodernism* (2017), in which the term engages with a 'structure of feeling' in contemporary western societies that 'emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism' (pp. 5–6). Vermeulen and van den Akker quote a review of an 'Altermodern' exhibition – an alternative term for metamodernism – at Tate Britain in 2009 (p. 3): Adrian Searle asserts that 'postmodernism is dead, but something altogether weirder has taken its place'.²⁵ Within this 'weirdness' – that Gibbons characterises in *Metamodernism* as enacting an 'affective turn' (p. 84) – Vermeulen and van den Akker contend that 'what is needed is a new language to put into words this altogether weirder reality and its still stronger cultural landscape' (p. 3). Postmodernism is not repudiated, but considered in a dialectical relationship to modernism, in which contemporary artists 'attempt to incorporate postmodern stylistics and formal conventions while moving beyond them' (p. 2).²⁶ Importantly, for these two critics such artistic endeavours are also coupled with an underlying postmodernist doubt about the efficacy of such concepts. Such polemical assertions attest to the admirable scope of van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen's version of metamodernism, as it attempts to define the machinations of the contemporary. Conversely, these critics are also aware that their broadly historicist approach to metamodernism risks ridicule, since the contours of the present only become clear belatedly; they openly concede that 'the hubris of delineating a historical moment and describing a social situation in terms of yet another "–ism" opens us up for Homeric laughter at best and fierce scorn at worst' (p. 3). Indeed, whereas

metamodernism could be regarded as one of many 'structures of feeling' in wider contemporary culture, these critics sometimes discuss it interchangeably with post-postmodernism, as a telling comment in the acknowledgements section of *Metamodernism* indicates. As in their influential online journal *Notes on Metamodernism*, van den Akker and Vermeulen have sought since 2010 to 'document and conceptualise developments in the arts, aesthetics and culture that are symptomatic of the post-postmodern or, rather, metamodern condition' (p. xi, my italics). Metamodernism is 'today's dominant structure of feeling among a host of subordinate structures of feeling that [Raymond] Williams dubbed residuals and emergents' (p. 8, my italics). In contrast, James MacDowell, one of the contributors to *Metamodernism*, admits that this particular 'structure of feeling will only be one of many such localised "structures" at work in a particular time and place'.²⁷

Inauthenticity and the 'Implicated Subject' in 'Near St Mary Woolnoth' and *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted*

Despite MacDowell's judicious response, van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen's attempts to pinpoint a 'structure of feeling' in contemporary culture could provide fruitful ways to engage with poetry in a very different way to the account of enigmatical poetics in this book. An alternative approach to Warner's poetry provides an example of how this critical trajectory might flourish. As opposed to his grappling with the 'nebulous' mental states of Artaud's *Le Pèse-Nerfs* (1925) in 'Nervometer', and the neo-modernist extrapolations of 'Métro' and 'Lutèce, Te Amo', Warner flirts with, and then rejects, a postmodernist approach to contemporary culture in 'Near St Mary Woolnoth' from *Confer* (2011), that resonates in the context of van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen's version of metamodernism.²⁸ The title alludes to part two of *The Waste Land*, in which 'St Mary Woolnoth kept the hours | With a dead sound on the final stroke of nine': Warner's poem may be located 'near' Eliot's Anglican church, but we are only 'near' *The Waste Land* in the sense of an intertextual 'departure' from the modernist text.²⁹ Warner replaces Eliot's 'Unreal city', a traumatised space with neurasthenic commuters after World War One (p. 53), with a postmodernist metropolis, in which the poet-narrator even doubts the authenticity of his arboreal interlocutor. Nor is this the utopian space of the modernist city imagined by Le Corbusier: Warner presents the reader instead with a postmodern city of expensively dressed City businessmen, who lord it over the London vista with their '*phallus*' ties

as if they had escaped from the pages of Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* (1991).³⁰ Deploying second-person narration in the same way as 'Métro', the poet-narrator invites the reader to assimilate his pastiche of the élitist, modernist poet who lords it over the city on a high balcony, the urban equivalent of Charles Baudelaire's symbolic albatross, that, like the proto-modernist poet, soars 'through space', 'rejoices in the tempest and mocks the archer down below'.³¹ A neo-modernist overlord thus views a postmodernist London in which the city is merely a 'playground adventure', a myriad of playful 'loopholes', akin to John Ash's 'The Building', in which cities are 'no longer centres of government, military operation or bureaucracy', and 'exist solely to be enjoyed' as places for 'lawless amusements'.³² However, the last line of the poem undercuts this vision: the narrator declares that to stare at a tree and doubt its authenticity is to 'miss the point entirely' (p. 41).

It would be too magniloquent to interpret the poem as symptomatic of the waning of postmodernism discussed by van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen, but the closure certainly looks beyond the playful antics of the city and narrator in the first five stanzas. One potential reading of this line might be to accept it as an invitation to embrace and not reflect upon this postmodernist city. However, the 'point' here is ambiguous: the imperative 'Know' appears overly insistent, and can be resisted. Wondering whether a tree's bark has been 'planned' – with a pun on 'planed' – may be to 'miss the point' in terms of imaginatively constructing a postmodernist city that might be fundamentally flawed in its conception. This closure thus opens up a space for metamodernism in Gibbons, van den Akker and Vermeulen's understanding of the term: scathing, ironic and postmodern *ennui* gives way to an alternative landscape beyond the remit of the poem – and discussed further in Warner's *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted* (2017) – which is not beholden to preconceptions of surface reality, and the disposable glitz outlined elsewhere in 'Near St Mary Woolnoth'.³³ In contrast, in *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted* we are presented with a markedly different poet-narrator who is attentive to the historical atrocities underlying contemporary culture, and the permutations of Michael Rothberg's 'implicated' subject. No longer wallowing in élitist banter on a London balcony, the poet-narrator in Warner's third collection wonders what it means to be a 'global subject' in the contemporary world, where government taxes, elections, and economic disparities can no longer mean that his behaviour can be conceived as taking place in a postmodern city in which nothing matters, because nothing is 'true'.³⁴

In contrast with the postmodernist environs of 'Near St Mary Woolnoth', in *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted*, this metamodernist collection in Gibbons, van den Akker and Vermeulen's sense of the term engages with atrocious history, the implicated subject, prostitution and everyday violence. Echoing Keats's 'Ode to Melancholy' in the first line of the collection, the poet-narrator aligns one of Budapest's museums with Keats's 'Lethe': 'Today, you will not go to the House of Terror' (p. 10).³⁵ His refusal registers the potential pornography of violence in a name that intertwines the history of the Fascist and Communist regimes with the gothic. The photograph of an anonymous apartment building on page eleven bears a striking resemblance to the House of Terror, but without the latter's gaudy 'TERROR' banners draped from its roof. Warner's implication is that 'ordinary' violence commodified in the museum actually occurred in these European buildings, where 'gouls' of a 'bygone pogrom' line the pavements (p. 10). Thus the attendant photograph functions as the 'ghost' of the museum, and then registers the 'ghost' of the prostitute referred to – in parentheses – in the opposite lines. Prostitutes in Warner's work are always, partly, intertextual reworkings of Baudelaire and Voltaire's outsider figures. Nevertheless, Paul Batchelor criticises Warner for his representation of sex workers, which chimes, for this reviewer, with the collection's overall misogyny: 'the book's most striking characteristic is [its] blatancy [...] women are and suffer. Rape, murder and pimping prostitutes are typical activities for a man; whereas, when we finally see a woman doing something, she is likely to be serving the poet food, or giving him a blowjob'.³⁶ However, to depict instances of systemic violence towards and exploitation of women is not necessarily, of course, to endorse them. Here, the poet-narrator's desire registers his implication in this objectification of women, but he refuses to engage in a symbolic act of violence: he will not push his finger into a 'shrapnel-rent seam of render', an image that recalls Paul Muldoon's recourse to similar imagery in 'The Loaf', when the poet sticks his digit into 'the hole they've cut for a dimmer switch' (p. 10).³⁷ 'Render' forms a recurrent Surrealist image in Warner's collection: the 'rendering | around a point' in 'Nervometer' (p. 67) anticipates the cracked 'render' – a mixture of sand and cement – in the photographs in *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted*, as well as the metaphorical 'rendering' in part one between commodified totalitarianism and sexual violence.³⁸ Rather than a blatant re-inscribing of misogyny that Batchelor detects in these tropes, there is certainly an aesthetic frisson in the refusal of 'render', in which the potentially prurient writing is formally complicit in the violence it deplores. Nevertheless, the poet-narrator is well

aware of this potential for formal exploitation, as when, later on in the sequence, he notes that an artist in Lisbon received awards for pictures of emaciated prostitutes, 'whose bones jut like those of death-camp Jews' (p. 96).

In part one, the poet-narrator thus investigates his post-postmodernist implication in the pornography of history and the commodification of women. The implicated subject here acknowledges, is tempted by, but ultimately rejects the sex worker's swaying hips, and the temptation of commodified history. Yet he is still inextricably part of a post-postmodernist culture in which tourist museums, pimps and the 'prostitution' of history thrive, and a beneficiary of a system 'that generates dispersed and unequal experiences of trauma and well-being simultaneously'.³⁹ At the end of this section, the poet-narrator's response to this marketisation of history and systemic violence is to turn to the abjection that permeates *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted*, with, for example, 'scum' (pp. 14, 22), 'piss' (p. 14), 'shit' (p. 18) and gloopy innards, as he implores the reader to beat their muscular tissue of the heart ('myocardium'), 'until it weeps' (p. 12). In an echo of Samuel Beckett's famous phrase from *The Unnameable* (1953) – registered in Warner's 'index' at the end of the collection (p. 123) – 'This is', the poet-narrator intones, 'the only way to go on' (p. 12). This assertion constitutes an attack on false sentimentality as a response to structural inequality, a theme that runs throughout *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted*.

In the most extensive metamodernist exploration of the implicated subject in *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted*, the poet-narrator describes a walk to a ballet with a female companion: this cultural excursion is undercut by an encounter with a drug addict that then spirals into ruminations on numerous incidents of violence and capitalist exploitation. The addict's 'desperate ecstasy' consists of a cheap mixture of crack cocaine, 'kerosene, rat poison [and] carbonic acid' (p. 74). (The use of laundry detergent, laxatives, caffeine or boric acid would be a more conventional way in which to 'cut' the drug [p. 74]). The oxymoron of 'desperate ecstasy' neatly summarises the contrast between the exclusive pleasures of the ballet – Poppy is 'dressed in a pretty dress' – and the addict's desperate 'hit': the link between drugs and bourgeois culture links with Brecht's conception of the 'culinary', and Harrison's depiction of heroin addicts outside the Frankfurt opera house in *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (1992). However, unlike in Brecht and Harrison's work, the emphasis in this section is on the contrast between the two parties: in a moment of Célinian harshness, the phrase to describe the unknown addict, 'Hag', is

emphasised at the beginning of the line; the wizened woman is 'the same age' as Poppy, who is further infantilised since the poet-narrator has just helped her to bathe (p. 74). The characters' implication in a culture unable to cope with the suppression of drugs at the same time as high levels of addiction continue then spirals out into the subversion of the ballet excursion with various allusions to rape victims, orphans and 'everyday' trauma in Laura Berlant's sense of the term, such as the reference to the explosion in Tianjin on 12 August 2015 (pp. 74, 76).⁴⁰ As I recounted in Chapter 4, this incident was due, as the poet-narrator intimates, to the subterfuges of companies dominating the port, and traffic on the Hai river towards Beijing: with little external oversight, inter-family corruption and illegal hiring practices, the explosion was a direct result of unregulated capitalism, rather than merely an accident. Such passages in *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted* have drawn the ire of critics such as Batchelor and Benjamin Myers: the former refers to Warner's litany of 'tortures and atrocities perpetrated on and by Johnny Foreigner'.⁴¹ However, these critics miss the irony of the ambiguity of the final statement in this section, in which the second-person narrative throughout the collection is intensified to stress the reader's implication in the depicted violence: 'you're right, there's nothing you can do – there's nothing to be done' (p. 76).

A metamodernist approach to a world riven with everyday trauma and exploitation thus pervades *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted*: the poet-narrator is implicated in a post-postmodernist world of 'simmering tensions [. . .] and—to be frank—frightening developments' that anticipate 'a clusterfuck of world-historical proportions'.⁴² The poet-narrator confides that, looking back, postmodernism did not indicate the perpetuity of liberal democracy, as in Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), but a hiatus between the post-*Wende* era in Europe, and the return of maximalist politics as an inversion of the centrist thinking of Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder (pp. 12–13). '[H]istory is here again', the poet-narrator declares, just as for van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen, we are moving towards an apocalyptic 'clusterfuck' (p. 17). The poet-narrator feels keenly that the 'distant pity' he felt as a child for young victims in Rwanda should now be seen as the 'historical luxury' of the implicated subject, as someone who, according to Rothberg, contributes to, inhabits or inherits 'regimes of domination but [does] not originate or control such regimes'.⁴³ However, the problem with the conception of history in this passage in *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted* is that the focus on a postmodernist hiatus is undercut by its own examples: the massacre of the Tutsis who sheltered in the Pallothian mission church in

Gikondo, for instance, occurred on 9 April 1994. Similarly, the poet-narrator draws attention to the reader's implication in the systemic violence of racism through his overstatement that 'angry white cops shoot blacks repeatedly' in the US (p. 102), but when Rothberg discusses the murder of Trayvon Martin in 2012, he underscores the historical continuity of this violence from the era of lynching and the Jim Crow laws rather than outlining a lull in violence during the postmodern era.

Oscillate Wildly

My analysis above of Warner's 'Near St Mary Woolnoth' and *Hello. Your Promise has been Extracted* thus indicates the potential for analyses of contemporary poetry to respond to van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen's account of metamodernism. Of course, this approach has been contested: compared to the certainty with which Vermeulen and van den Akker outline the historicity of metamodernism in their first article on the topic, for Peter Boxall, 'the historical language which is required to describe the passage past the far horizon of postmodernism is lacking, or unformulated'.⁴⁴ In relation to contemporary poetry, therefore, this version of metamodernism risks over-determinism, as with an intertextual approach overly reliant on the influence of modernist antecedents. Nevertheless, Linda Hutcheon still challenges us to find a 'new label [...] and name it for the twenty-first century'.⁴⁵ Outside of the 'knife fight in a phone booth' characteristic of contemporary British poetry, metamodernism certainly has the advantage of allowing for potentially more nuanced conceptualisations of post-postmodernism, whether in relation to a specific 'structure of feeling' in current historical developments, or a stratum of literary forms responding to early twentieth-century literature.⁴⁶ In other words, metamodernism risks over-determinism, but it also promises future nuances that Nealon's account of post-postmodernist poetry fails to achieve.

An objection to the term 'metamodernism' as discussed in this section so far might be that it merely joins a long list of equivalent critical terms such as 'neo-modernism', 'hypermodernism' and 'altermodernism'. Indeed, in 'Notes on Metamodernism', van den Akker and Vermeulen list Gilles Lipovetsky's 'hypermodern', Alan Kirby's 'digimodernism' and 'pseudomodernism', Robert Samuels' 'automodernism' and Nicholas Bourriaud's 'altermodernism' as related, but not identical, terms (p. 3).⁴⁷ The first coinage in the list above, 'neo-modernism', echoes the neo-Victorian interest in novels such as Sarah Waters's *Affinity* (1999) to bring

a postmodernist sensibility to bear on fiction set in a specific Victorian period. Tom McCarthy's *C* (2010), for example, is comparable in that it draws the reader's attention towards the birth of modernism in the technological advancements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet the term metamodernism resonates beyond this concern with modernist origins and pastiche. Following a similar logic, but coming to a different conclusion, Motonori Sato has critiqued metamodernism as betraying its inextricability from postmodernism due to its reflexive prefix.⁴⁸ Far from registering a simple perpetuation of postmodernism – or constituting a critical anachronism – for Turner, van den Akker, Gibbons and Vermeulen, the term actually registers the legacy and continuing pertinence of postmodernism in Hutcheon's new, as yet unlabelled, period of history. For these critics, 'meta-', deriving from Plato's *metaxis*, allows – as Turner proposes – for 'an oscillation and simultaneity between and beyond the diametrically opposed poles' of modernism and postmodernism.⁴⁹

What, however, does it mean if contemporary British poetry is conceived as 'oscillating', when it is already preoccupied with its own tensions between mainstream and 'innovative' poetry? Does the shuttling category of 'temperate' modernism, as it operates within these categories, merely oscillate wildly without formal distinction?⁵⁰ This 'meta-' in metamodernism is not unproblematic, since 'oscillation' (and 'shuttling') risks reifying opposing concepts, in which cultural critics can pick and choose between the two terms, rather than considering the particular historicities of modernism and postmodernism. As I argued in the Introduction, there is no instantiation of an uncontested postmodernist poetry, so how can contemporary poetry 'oscillate' with that which it does not and cannot recognise? Nevertheless, Plato's sense of *metaxis*, meaning 'in between', is pertinent to my engagement in this book with poetry that sits uneasily within rather than vacillates between the mainstream and the London and Cambridge Schools. In addition, 'meta-' denotes the self-reflexivity associated with postmodernism, yet the work of contemporary poets I have discussed in this book may be self-conscious about its deployment and transformation of the legacies of modernist writing, but it is not in itself a manifestation of postmodernism. The 'meta-' in metamodernism means 'with' and 'after' modernism: the prefix indicates that contemporary culture has not eluded the formal legacies of modernist literature, that are encapsulated in contemporary writers whose emphasis is on innovation, difficulty, generic and formal disruption, and 'hating' tradition properly through the revitalisation of modernist writing rather than playful negation.⁵¹ 'Meta-' also evinces a necessary critical distance that resonates in terms of the modernist

legacies discussed in this book: metamodernism in both intertextual and historicist understandings of the term does not, of course, indicate an uncritical endorsement of the Eurocentrism of early twentieth-century modernism, imperialism and the extreme right-wing politics of Pound and Wyndham Lewis. In Furlani's account of the concept, metamodernism denotes a 'derivation' and 'resemblance' to modernist literature, as well as 'succession' and 'change'.⁵² As Furlani argues, metamodernists 'develop an aesthetic *after yet by means* of modernism. Where "post" suggests severance or repudiation, "meta-" denotes both change and the continuity apparent in metamodernists' efforts to engage with, and transform, modernist writing'.⁵³

As I have argued throughout this book, the problem with this account of contemporary literature is that the 'transformation' of modernism can result in formal conservatism. In contrast, I have considered enigmatical poetics as a specific instance of contemporary writing that draws on modernist antecedents, but then transforms them into 'exasperating' poetics in collections as formally dissimilar as Hill's *Scenes from Comus* and Prynne's *Acrylic Tips* (2002). Adorno begins *Aesthetic Theory* with a claim that 'All efforts to restore' such elusive work 'by giving it a social function—of which art is itself uncertain and by which it expresses its own certainty—are doomed' (p. 1). Yet fifty years after Adorno's rumination, poetry is corralled into an equivalence with utilitarian texting or attenuated with instrumentalist attempts to make it representative of something other than the 'in-itself' of the poems themselves (p. 125). Only through the glorious uselessness of poetry that stubbornly resists all attempts to regulate it 'is the present domination of instrumental reason defied'.⁵⁴ The lyric poet thrives in '*désinvolture*', an artistic 'dispensation from the strictures of logic': any critic who attempts to apply 'extra-aesthetic' or 'causal' criteria to art 'blunders and trips in the twilight of the work'.⁵⁵ Instead, Adorno asserts in *Aesthetic Theory* that 'Great works wait' for their interpretation (p. 40). Due to the 'remainder' of Hill and Prynne's poetry that endures after the analysis of enigmatical poetics in this book, these 'Great works' are still waiting (p. 121).