

Boudica



Fieldnotes towards a Dynamic Film-Poem Form

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Contents

Abstract 5.

BOUDICA 7.

Boudica: Fieldnotes towards a Dynamic Film-Poem Form 55.

Introduction

Chapter One: Some Definitions of Ekphrasis

Chapter Two: The Process

Chapter Three: Reflections and Theory

Chapter Four: On Formal and Thematic Synergy

Appendix 115.

Abstract for a Film-Poem

The thesis comprises an original, book-length sequence of poems, *Boudica*, and a film-poem of the same name. *Boudica* engages in a topographical mediation on East Anglia, specifically the landscapes of Norfolk and north Suffolk. The subject of the sequence is Boudica, a young woman trapped within a stifling suburban upbringing and her dead-end job at the pub in her village. Structured in four parts, the poem explores her adolescent ennui, her ambivalence towards place and her small acts of existential rebellion against this condition. The verse itself is constructed of images *from* cinema and *after* cinema, images bound to the physicality of cinema. Poet and narrator are allowed access to the viewfinder: lines, images, and stanzas attempt to frame themselves within the logic of cinematography, a logic which asks that the poet's eye becomes the camera lens, exploiting cinema and ekphrasis by projecting meaning without making it explicit. The film is composed of images which have been suggested by the lyrics, the cinematic sequencing of these images has then dictated the order in which the lyrics appear in the collection. The thematic and structural links between the film and the sequence of poems are the subject of the supporting reflective essay. This paper explores my practice-led methodology and approach to the making of *Boudica*, offering key definitions with regards to ekphrasis and the hybrid film-poem form. It explores dynamic points of intersection between film and poetry in *Boudica* as well as case studies in recent writing and practice on ekphrasis, poetry and cinema.

The film is accessible on Vimeo using the following link and password:

<https://vimeo.com/216000214> (b0ud1c41v3s)

BOU

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CA

Part I



An Incantation

I am the vein of quicksilver,
rising to this slip of a mirror
the sky squints into, water lap
under rotten, overgrown wharves,

faint smell of Holland gin,
the bilge-rumour through sluice.
I am the web-fingered girl
drowned in a canal sack;

when the water deer skrikes
at dusk, a vole cough in rush,
the re-established otter,
harpoon poise of a heron,

wriggling perch fry & stickleback,
the belly-up carp in derv. I am
the sunken wherry, eel dreaded.
I am muttering in thick dialect:

The taste of treacle at Cantley.
The lick of salt when the river
brims to its levees. I am
the mill's sailless ruin, a chewed

finger to the wind. I am looking
down into my stab-in-the-dark –
orange-hazed night reflected
in the belly of the world.

Meanwhile...

It gets stickier & clouds tunnel
upward in search of deeper grey.

Beneath these thunder heads,
Boudica squats by an iron salt spring.

She drops, into upwelling water,
plump coins emblazoned

with wildflowers, stars, horse heads,
the names of her fathers;

ties clooties, blue wool, chamois
& frizzy plaits to the weeping ash.

“Quick now with your work, B—.”
A line of druids proceeds from the visitor centre.

*

What if the spring has depth,
contains the sunken cave
to your subconscious?

Hunker down in the hogweed
& cow parsley & dogwood,
look for a gloom or glinting

& put your head in. The body
will follow & the shot
inverts itself to give

the impression of surfacing
in another place, or the same
place but another time –

a rust & concrete Venta Icenorum,
where no one notices
the strange way you dress,

that soft tang of barley
& sheep shit. Donning shades,
you walk out across the lot

& fold yourself into
the idling car, setting a spill,
your lighter, to a Gauloise.

Tithe Barn Cinema

I'll tell you about this place where Boudica
took me for a date: A thatch & drystone
store for municipal grain, etcetera,
refurbished, with Arts Council approval,

as a two-screen cinema. Stale popcorn
& sarsaparilla from the kiosk, two tickets
to sit anywhere. The deco doors swish
& sound like kissed teeth. In the cave

of our threadbare love, we delinquents
rest our boots on the seats, breathe
the sour, porno theatre vibe, question
the empty stage, tackiness on the floor.

The curtains skate back. The projector
comes to behind our heads, it whirs
like a hawkmoth in a matchbox.
The screen blacks. Light comes between us.

Organosedimentary Avenue Blues

Lawns recline to red brick & angons
of buddleia. Sparrows drop from gutters
& chimney stacks to flip through
wasp-kissed plums. The pace of life
set to the tension of mortar, pint glasses
outside corner pubs, drained to a sup.

At a terrace house door, Boudica,
the environmental campaigner,
enquires of the man inside if he's heard
about the plight of the polar bear.
A moment later the thought strikes her
that no two scratched key holes are alike.

This is the work no one dreams of:
Tramping round estates with a clipboard,
slumping, at coffee break, with bin bags
on fly-tipped sofas. A letter, boot-marked
in the gutter, reads Private & Confidential.
The barefoot heart is hemmed in soot.

I Can't Steady My Hands When I Get Excited

& in another life, I might have been
lauded as an outsider artist for my refusal
to work in straight lines when I'm

running a half hour late for a date
with Mr Moustache & this white rabbit
can't get her eyeliner right & is failing

to grasp the funny bone in this smear-
wipe-repeat routine. Be calm. Not everything
can be try & try again. A rat-king

of five different bras has made a nest
on the bed. I'll get to fixing the....
Evening distils the deleted scene,

nicotine gum

more rain.

How Easy It Would Be Not to Think of a Quail

Add another minute to the pile.
 Sunlight in the bathroom on a dimmer
 of sudsy cloud. The world is quiet
 to listen to you piss. First thing. Make
 a bog-roll cigar of your tampon.

Time to study the tumbler gawping
 by the open window, the glass
 poured with a soda of upside down
 reflections: ramshackle garden,
 nettledockteasels, what passes

for a lawn where the covey strut
 to wet-their-lips & peck a few weevils
 & thistle seeds. It all seems a long
 way off in the glass, on the ledge,
 by the toilet. I need some more

details, to get your story straight,
 to match this scene's shades
 of green to their Pantone swatch.
 Even the birds know their eggs are –
 teasels nettles dock.

Castle Mal

Who arrives at the mouth
of our glass fronted cave
at night, thirsty among cars
parked like dozing testudo?
How did you end up as one

of this rabble, who stops
because she's seen something
she wants, perhaps, or wants
to stop & discuss a matter
of point-of-view. I look out

or she looks in. Pick a side
& place a gesture, the finger
or a half brick spinning
in slow-mo between us.
Action of the crowd from

the left keeps time moving
in the right direction & just
long enough for us to forget
about the glass fronting
our glass cave lately crazed,

the shivs of her arrival.
Now the pane, as pennies,
drops. Now she may come
to drink. My question:
What will come back of

those who refuse patience
& insist on seeing out
the horror of our liberation?
Come in. We've bottled
the water for you.

The Patio

After sundown, last light
marmalades the sky & you
must be outside, where
you agreed, summer
coming round the houses
in drifts of grass clippings
blown through the hall.

With one you feel at home,
sharing a drink, spitting
into the hedge where spiders
chew their toes. The gazes
of the kitchen door sentries
glaze over into the evening
as ice peels into a *G&T*.

So weather vane, chimney
& gables are spears pointing
out con-trails, while the two
do their guardly duty,
letting only, maybugs &
dandelion seeds in to where
plates & voices clack.

At dinner, her comrade takes
his leave by the gate, stopping
to piss on the log pile.
A blackbird clucks in the yew.
On the patio, tea-lights in jam jars
puddle inconsistent light.

Part II



How About Getting Just What You Want?

Sun stabbing down through willow;
dawn on Surlingham broad.

A heron, collar-up detective
of the tidal scroll, stands poised

where mist packets in reed shade &
colossal pike make rippling manoeuvres.

Light runs reflections along her grey,
the stippled chest, the harpoon

of her beak, its roving web camos
the inching forward – angle, steady –

then the next. Then she darts
to the water, the whole of her

in short pursuit, rising chained
with mud & weed but clenching

a splayed frog in her beak.
The water pulls smooth.

Cuddy is stomached. Light resumes
its light foreplay. Can you feel it?

A Vision for the Topographical Future of East Anglia

In quick-dry raiments, ecologist
 soldiers patrol concrete levees.
 The wind slaps jade North Sea
 over the tide barrier. Out in

the shimmering, amphibious
 trawlers sift sandbars for bivalves.
 Inland, the salt marsh goes on
 for miles of sea grass & sampha.

At dawn, Boudica punts her raft
 back to the stilt houses, a Celtic
 knot of eels in a bucket,
 her breakfast. She is tan, cinnamon

freckled with fishing everyday
 in brackish sun, how she lives
 since the re-wilding of the east.
 When the tide sits low

the dunes island like beached
 bull seals. On still days, water
 clears & she looks down
 on submerged bungalows,

the ruins of churches, hatchbacks
 crusted with barnacles. Sometimes
they come with their masks & cuffs
 but don't trouble her much.

She still rules her omega-three
 regency, eating congregations
 of fry & crustaceans fat from
 burrowing for corpses in the silt.

Suds & Oil

It's dishwater that slacks off the taut flesh of her hands. A close-up with stainless steel & burnt lasagne. High functioning on dope & caffeine, she glances to camera & says: "you too could have all of this." Meaning:

crescents of chuck steak, sweaty chips, balsamic black lettuce, all the leftovers you can eat. As drowsy Cronos, the wall clock, conducts the symphony of heat, Boudica, yawning split-shift worker, hoists another

crook in a slew of foam. "Our wine tastes of the carafe. Our knives are smeared with blue cheese." She dabs stuck minutes. Where fragrant water bubbles up, the glassy membranes are lens that watch her at work.

Scablands

A marsh harrier, shouldering sun,
rides updrafts & air currents above the gridwork

of arable England. The slow river
lays itself out like a junkie's twist of foil.

From such height, windrows of green manure
are reduced to zen rakings. She strings

the shallow bow of the valley, from horizon
to horizon, & all there is to see

is all you think she sees. Or – stubborn
old bird – sees everywhere to dismiss it

for squab, frogs, harvest mice,
late hatchlings, easy sweaty pickings.

Autumn flecks orange through the khaki
of late summer. Smoke rises as slim

columns from several fires. The pump outflow
is grown over with wild rye, goose grass,

vicious nettle. *Now you get it.* There's an orchid
whose flowers look just like a bumble bee.

*

Once again, the raptor:
Place yourself within the lens
of a camera slung beneath a helicopter.

Pass over the redbrick stack chimney
of the steam pump house – barrel
of an old service revolver aimed at blue funk.

Mass shadow tracks into view & you
have to look down. This is the creeping
realisation of your own sense of emptiness,

remembering the well which dad uncovered
laying the foundations for a greenhouse.
You, down in the dirt, over the mouth,

breathing chambery air, the nerves
ascending from where the dead-tooth
hollow point squats, just out of view.

Gunmetal& Pollen

Whatever are you rooting around for, Boudica,
under your parent's bed? The unmarked shoe box

you know & the snub-nosed Luger within –
oiled angles & pernicious black – handed to

her grandfather by a dying kraut, Juvigny, June 1944.
Tucked in her jeans, snug against her hip,

she takes it out to the corn field, plays at
Annie Oakley or Frau Tell, ripe cobs balanced

on the hessian head of a spud-sack scarecrow.
Perfecting the Mozambique drill: two in the chest

& one to the head over & over until
it's second nature. "Oh, she's the fastest gun

in the east," says the barrel, with its small o.
Again the hammer clicks like a crop-dust cough.

Tracking Shot, Boudica, Commuter Bus & Damp Hair

I can imagine how you smell,
wringing river from your hair.
The number seventeen corners,
throws you against the emergency exit –
should've been at work an hour ago.
You smell dank, like England's

well-mouth perineum & are putting on
a good show of being late again.
You mutter fuck, tie your hair back,
tug sleeves over the baroque woadery
of your tattoos. I could follow
in the wake of your expletives &

that smell, as you punch in
with your excuses, wrap yourself
in your apron, get to work –
as a friend leans in & plucks
the down feather that was stuck,
to the nape of your neck.

Tape Loop

Boots on gravel. Home late. From the sink,
she watches her father dapple the yard
with grain for the hens. They flap to him
like blown hats. He marches inside, heel-

to-toe – in steel toe caps, to the kitchen
where he greys the dark scrawl of his beard
with milk swigged from the bottle, his face
upturned, a Méliès' moon in profile.

Washes black from lined hands as the kettle
purrs up the window. Watches dandelions
nod, drunklike, on the lawn. She has her
theories about what stains him

between toast & now. He might dig potatoes
or varnish wood or set ink for eight, no ten
hours a day, comes home each night, hangs
his father's wax coat on the kitchen hook.

The way it falls invites the grandfather's ghost
back to it, hermit crab style, chewing pig fat
& barm cakes. While the family sit
to wholegrains, the old bastard belches

a bolsy homily on labour & dignity. Boudica,
spoons tahini from the jar. Her father mouths
his father's words

like he has an earworm.

The Evening Shift

Done with the day, she shuts her bedroom door,
faces the camera... let's pretend it's a mirror for now,
a two-way glass to where we sit in the dark.

She shrugs, petals off a lacy bra for plain cotton,
unpicks her gypsy plaits for a scraped-back knot,
smudges off concealer, lip gloss, eyeliner.

The monoxide of routine & resentment yawns her.
But there's something she abides about the thumbing
away of the self – civvies, say, to chef's whites.

Into uniform. Camouflage against the horn-leaners,
arse-grabbers, the heavy breathing envoys
of dog days who would quake at her single glare.

Fool them & us. See what you can overhear
from half open office doors, tell screams in the night
from laughter, the truth from grown-up lies.

Now, are you ready for work? Boudica dabs a finger
in her ultramarine eye shadow & paints her cheeks
with warrior stripes. *Ready.*

The Evening Shift Redux

Twilight. Standing-water clouds curdle
on tarpapered, pebbledash extensions.
The kitchen door belches an aerosol
of oil & muscadet, Boudica &
the sous chefs, with plastered fingers,

shadow & smoke here, rack throats,
all I can taste is burnt fat, nothing less
than work. **Exit Kitchen Staff.** Dogends
smut across asphalt, Iceni land.
In the carpark, pomaded after rain showers,

birds squabble over a hangnail moon.
A breeze tugs the wet cuffs of her whites.
Traffic lights halt nothing. She's pale
in the soda light, it tricks her lips blue.
Skinny roll-ups shred another late shift.

Part III



Fen Raft Spider

So she's back, dipping two toes
 where minnows & the other
 gelid fishies gub on thin water
 like so many mouth breathers.

Now hiding in a skin of air,
 submerged, she's mirror'd
 in the plane she passes through.
 To surface, the image must

collapse on itself, leave her
 dry, clinging to a rush float.
 It's like not even water can
 stand to touch her, can abide

her arse hairs, her caviar eyes.
You squeamish cunt, to Boudica
 she's the living, striated fen light.
 She was away but now she's back –

omen of calamitous tribes,
 the redeployment of garrisons.
 "Boars & bears & wolves," says Boudica.
 "Oh my."

Why Don't You Smile?

& the next thing you know is Boudica
hurling her pint glass at the centurion
of stupid questions. It goes spinning
across the room like a nonic satellite
dropped from orbit & schwarzbier
looks stellar in slow motion, tipping

clockwise, halfway between her scowl
& the question everyone has learned,
the hard way, to stop asking. He ducks
behind the jukebox in time, though
the foam of suds & shards dare him
to ask again or tell her she'd be prettier

if she smiled a bit more. *Grow up.*
What has anyone got to grin about:
Dirty Bass? Chilli coated peanuts?
That it will be either rats or roaches?
In the bogs, we take it in turns to dry
our shirts on the hand drier,
don't talk about it.

Abbbbsbbbb

The tablet plops into the sweating glass.
Boudica stares into the effervescence

as if divining our hale & hearty futures
in the vitamin evanescence. "I'd sooner

hair of the dog, feather of the crow, tooth
of the shark than any of this wholesome

morning-after shit. In the Scorsese movie
of my life, I'm plotting an assassination

but instead of New York it's a market
town with a monastic name like

Caistor Saint Edmund, or Stoke Holy Cross.
Then I do something drastic like shave

my hair into a Mohawk. The stockpile
of nitro-glycerine in the garage,

by product of a homemade soap concern,
would be something from another film."

Who are you talking to, B- ? "Nobody."
Holds her nose & drinks it down in one.

Queen of Some Kind

Her green whip rises through
 the scale of gears. Low crops quiver
 along the A47. Cardioscopic blips
 of villages thrust churches
 to a pegged-out fiefdom. Distance
 is measured in bilked tanks of diesel.

From Sizewell B to Eel Island,
 the wreck of the Sheraton
 to Langley Staithe, nothing higher
 it seems than the eaves of sub-
 suburban bungalows where loose
 wind flaps pampas on front lawns.

A pheasant flares from wheat
 like igniting gas. Roads become lanes,
 become mohicaned with scrub.
Stop the car, B—. She rolls down
 the window. *Listen*: That slim
 trickle of water you can hear,

rumours all ways in East Anglia,
 if you trouble to follow them, end
 somewhere like this. Concrete slabs.
 Asparagus haulms. Russet grain silos.

Curlew.

The zing of piss & history.

Corpse Light Footage

Look, she says. *Look*.
& just then the marsh gas catches
under a layer of mist: bluegreen
aurora on a forefinger. It's dusk,

her voice traces along the rotten
boardwalk. Alive to the broken
light she runs her fingers through.
The slow river marks the parish edge.

A train whistles, mourning back
from the coast. Somewhere between
the horizon and here, a will-o-wisp
or local dibbuk pops. The reeds sway

in feather detail. Bats & maybugs fizz.
No more myth. No allegories. Please.
In the half-dark she climbs a cattle gate,
her body a trig point against a sky

crissed with cloud. She leans
forward, slow, deliberate, & topples
into the grass, smiling & breathing
like at last she's burst some charm.

A Childhood in the Multiplex

“You can’t live there.” – John Ashbery

Not in the present any more than
the Kuntshistoriches, John. Still
the public are pushing through
the museum to be in the gift shop
before closing time, picking out
the right Breughel prints, historico-
biographical shithouse reading.

You’re welcome to join us though
in the womb of red velvet, blackout
curtains, folding seats. We live
on nachos, six £ hotdogs, bruised
apples smuggled past the ushers.
The present is a window facing
anything & they’ve upgraded

the surround sound. We live well.
The view is mostly good, always
changing, perhaps a little way off
depending where you choose to sit.
Past, future, rain, dream, birdsong,
everything is modulated. I’m told
they show art films on Tuesday mornings.

Modernity Is...

Evian & Samsung. Not the train slowing
to the station halt but whole villages stockaded
by empty printer cartridges. Our garbage-strewn
plenitude. Crivvens, Ms Sontag was right.

Modernity is the ghost-train through it.
The phantom ride from London to any seaside town.
Think Sokurov. A single take. Zombie teen
suicides in tattered, branded sportswear,

charged the maximum penalty for trespassing
on the railways. So you drink instant coffee
with an ectoplasmic Walt Whitman, who weeps
for his dream, the whole way, into his salt-n-pepper beard.

Payphone

Boudica comes to finger
the coin-drop for uncashed

duds or a silver piece, finds
the bionic nutcracker maw

colder than she'd hoped.
Already the call box looks

like an artefact from an age
we dreamt of outer space;

greening now with moss,
peely paint, piecemeal rust.

She lifts the split-lip bakelite
receiver, thin spooling sound,

reeling reels & bicycle wheels,
she thinks. Or we trust

our thoughts to her – the ghost
in a shell etched with names

& numbers & *good times*.
If she called one, it would ring

& ring on. Leave her
in the blue grace of light

which lives in the glass
& what she's sure forgotten.

A Vision for the Future of the Local Rail Services

Wind, vetch, thistle seed confetti
& shimmers of moth in the light
above the waiting area. She climbs
down, with her man, to sprawl
on warm sleepers breathing tar.
“Real damsels in distress we are.”

Just imagine if a non-stop train
were to scream through, they'd be
bone meal porridge & brain jam.
Leave that image to sink in while
they turn their heads to look up
the line as if down gun sights

to where the tracks bend from view
among trees. Above their heads
the perseids drop like five pence
coins from a holey pocket. They talk
for hours about kitty cats, all the wars
still to come & by the time

they climb back onto the platform
the flag stones are cracked, sprouting
dandelions & salty looking grass,
the screen on the ticket machine
is blank, brambles climb signal posts....
“How long has it been like this?”

The Urban Regeneration of Her Tribal Land

Along the old branch line, she wrinkles
her nose at wafts of anaerobic rot.

Fly agarics thrust, syphilitic through
the mulch. Panties hang on hawthorn

like something flayed. The overgrowth
affords glimpses of potholed cul-

de-sacs, caved-in trampolines, the milk-
eyed stare of bathroom windows.

There's the iron ribbonry of council
commissioned sculpture to consider,

lit nightly by shallow, even LED light.
The piss-head's hotspot, a ruined

signal box draped in a ghillie suit
of fern & ivy where she puts an ear

to heaped rubble: "Through the insect
tombs," says Boudica, "I can hear down

to the ocean floor, past the din of industry,
years shovelling steam, centuries

of creaking tumbrels," to where the last
living tribesman of the east reanimates,

heaves himself from the fen & goes
in search of skewered meat.

Part IV



Picture Window Reverie

Clouds tatter east to west across the fens.
A binbag witch stakes out her sun spell
of rapeseed. Light goes to ground water

where mosquito larvae jig. You can have
this, but the few waders bow for a wriggle
in the mud, not because you can bring them

to focus. Prime real estate, while the flood
defences hold. A windshear sifts for Roman
coin or comes to graze at sweat patches

while bay mare & colt, champ the grass
which brims & empties shade.
The brackish word swells on the tongue.

Permanent Exhibition

A little dust & oxides following
 the news of executions abroad,
teevees spluttering Kalashnikov.
 But no respite at the provincial
 museum. All this glass & lottery

funding for more severed heads.
 The forte of a shank or machete
 slotted under the knot of the Adam's
 apple. Grab a hank of hair to keep
 the spine from slump. The cut begins

to blink. If there's a scream it will
 lather in the windpipe.
 "I'll second the worst of that," says
 the bronze head, Emperor Claudius
 cocked on his plinth of carbon

dated rubble, ivory combs, samain
 bowls, the evidence. A torn skirt
 of skin up-lit. The ethics of revolt.
 But what of the hand that grasped
 the hair? You turn to the knifeman

& seem to notice, in that moment,
 you share a glint in the iris, shade
 in the hair, angle of jaw. Too late.
 The head's already plugged into
 the civilisation support machine.

De-jugged Hare

The broken crock breaks its promise of stew
with some kind of ruddy stain. An oak leaf
& dried algae tagine you took your eye off.

Still, hare is back on the menu says the sign
beneath the pub sign, the swinging Roman
in a bear pelt. Purpose built pots, shuddering

in kettles, pinot noir & gamey flesh, the contents
of a moon cup. A reduction so thick it might
fuse ligament to bone, glue the beast together again.

We see it like this: The pot rocks. Once. Twice.
It tips & drops to the tiles. Out leaps the hare,
his mouth full of onion & celery, a hoagie-stogie

chantenay clenched in his jaw. He thumps
hind legs on the steel top, turns his coat right
side out, throws it on his back & pegs it out the door.

Let's Get into Character

Rape gets into the suburbs, gets down
among hawthorn & holly suckers, the clock
dandelions. Two actors mime it for a second day:

Wardrobe & make-up buttoning on loricas,
thumbing prosthetics; star & co-star to their
fat centurions. Clambering into claret tunics,

they work a dirt-paste of groundnut oil
& charcoal into their cheeks. Breakfast
on location: garum, black bread & podcasts

on affective memory. "How would I, the actor,
draw the deadbolt of my gladius?" Thinking there's
a BAFTA in this. "What's *my* motive?"

"The money," growls the director as he hitches
up the wool, gaffa tapes the man's dick to his leg,
calls *action.*

The chapped princesses of Anglo-Orientalum
wear mud-soaked tartan, dragged for hours
through nettles screaming.

Aquatic Ape Theory

Boudica, submerged to your top lip
in river water, you are clearly
in your element. The rucked surface

divides your face, ripples under
your nose where the shade
of a moustache baleens tannin,

fish scales, down, damsel fly wings.
Duck shit & algae are blurred
splodges, out of the depth of field.

You kick off from a rotting jetty
where summer hovels slump over
their boat ramps, a boiled-cloth

quality of light to this slopped moment.
A pike noses its quicksilver ceiling,
a water rail struts along the bank

with strops of dry rush, engines
of pleasure cruisers gargle bilge.
Boudica loves bath time.

For the Coming Flood

Summer high & dry, reed beds flower
purple-black, seven foot dusters flanking
the board walk where toads & darters
grill on chicken wire, wind chasing round,

looking for something it's lost. Purple black,
the mud the reeds sprout from, rainbows fan
in pools of water cupped in compost squelch.
Enter Boudica, followed by a hare,

followed by a man with a sickle to cut rush,
followed by a boy snapping stems for a chew.
The wind winds to each in turn, pours down
their throats. Or they make the wind unwind,

held in accord by elemental magic or scared
torture, the white noise of it all. Reeds part
to the world's scalp, wind comes round again
looking for its stuck boot. A snake skin

of dead leaves. Looking for its dropped hat.
Ripples make nets of shadow. "Look harder."
Its lost wedding band. "You're getting warm..."
The sun cools, wind burns. "...Warmer."

Boudica Addresses Human Resources

zum stell blaim gahd
 bud et's osterity
 rekt unuther
 generayshun, Hal.
 Rampent beestees
 ubroad en dailite

shuck & eskaypt
 tygers, Prasutugus
 messin', przoomed
 eetun, alung wiv
 mence uhthers gnoun
 boi there prufeshuns:

pohits und hors.
 Sumwere en thu fenn
 iz uh ded rhoot hollo
 full of steinkin bones,
 crakked jor
 uv discuntinyood

Albyon amung 'em,
 wer culaborators
 bough wiv oyl'd
 smylz. Et'sall supher
 on, wun morr dai,
 wun morr. *Aye no.*

The scene she loves, in which Kit
pours petrol from a jerry can
all over his girlfriend's baby grand.
Her hours of practise a day

were also his hours, also Boudica's,
also ours. It was the only way;
fuel glissading the keyboard so
the lovers might run away together.

Boudica thinks of her own piano
on fire. Smoke oozing down
the music rests where her teacher's
halitosis struck. Wood fibres

splitting in the heat. The strings
going one by one like storm cables.
Cadences of an avant-garde
last notes fugue against domestica.

That's what I wanted to write about
But then pianos started burning
everywhere: Steinways dumped
in borderlands, frosted with brick dust

in shelled precincts, piled with
junk mail in the hallways of home;
or the saloon bar upright Boudica
found walking in the dunes.

Half buried in the sand, its scales
have no key, every other note
strikes dead, its body warped, salt-
bleached. She thinks again of Kit

& the crazed maestros, rendering
their fingertips, playing on through
the burning with singed fringes until....
She tries to set it alight. puts her lighter

to a roll of paper & drops it inside.
Douses the keys with vodka.
But the damn thing won't burn,
being water logged, rotting, windshorn

& the alcohol cooks off before
the wood will take. I had hoped for
a twangling pyre to largesse this coastal dusk.
"It looked so easy in *Badlands*."

The two-swing park goes from green
to blue, brash & bratty come burred
with gloom, greet you as if they know you.

They hang out in a lot of these places,
getting used to the dark, how it tastes
of aspartame & hydrogen-cyanide.

Friends come & go, keeping appearances
gives them their alibis. The other places
are recently grown over, weeds seeping

from even the hairline cracks in concrete,
smell of fox like your tongue on the taint.
They hang out in a lot of these places,

when the sky wont fold into night.
You close your eyes & inhale, open
your eyes & exhale. Another cigarette

burns in the evening. Closest thing to fireflies
we're going to get. Yes. The world has always
been this confusing. You know it when

you see it & know it when you hear it but
struggle to explain this & your studded-belt
attitude. Life is pizza by the slice. Just watch.

The garden at midnight is meagre
charcoaled splendour, moon &
shadow in hoary concentrate where
ivy skirts the pine trunks. This big hum
of insects & frogs singing in drainage
ditches, stirs you as you stand

at the back door. Your mother
is laying her crystals out on the lawn.
Pale, fragile, at the edge of visible
space & you realise with faint shame,
that she is naked. You want to call
out to her but can't raise the word

that will turn her back to the house.
So you enter into the silence:
the empty wine bottle on the table,
the burning sage, the salad bowl
gathering dew, patio lights entertaining
indiscriminate bugs, whatever this

hour of night might offer in terms
of blank gist. *Mum*, you might say
or keep mum & wonder if the neighbours
can also see, through the shrub rose,
that same dipping, spectral shape
where clover meets the cat-scratched fence.

Mosquitoes. They whinge about her face,
brought low under the honey-tarp of heat.
They cross her lips with banded legs
where she sits out into the night
on a white plastic chair, making a fetish
of air currents, open doors, *nothing doing.*

They fizz in her hair, wet black with sweat
& jungle formula. Insistent thoughts
or the dance of insistent thoughts that won't
be batted away but fetch up a nostril, down
an ear, or felch fluid from the corners
of her eyes with malarial kisses.

Liberation. It twitches smashed wings
in the palm of the right to rule. It hums,
vibrates, still tastes something it likes
in the knee-cappers, the cut-through
parliament of thieves, the tenement dogs
who, bitten, will scratch until they bleed.

BOUDICA: Fieldnotes Towards a Dynamic Film-Poem Form

Introduction

The *Boudica* project set out to explore the idea of an ekphrasis of cinema as a way of consciously acknowledging the influence of film culture in my work. The film and poem presented here is and are the result of that exploration and the processes by which I arrived at the *Boudica* manuscript are reflected on in this essay. The essay is divided into four parts: The first addresses my intentions, assumptions and pre-existing knowledge which lead into this project; the second recounts the physical production of the creative material; the third reflects on that and addresses key theoretical texts which have come to bear on the writing; the final part seeks to suggest how and why the film poem form is equal to the themes explored in the poetry.

So, is it a film or a poem?

Well it's both a film and poem. It is a sequenced manuscript of poetry which sits comfortably within in modernist lyric tradition and it is a film poem which provides an organic, cinematic backdrop to the text. Or is it a poem-film? So nebulous is the concept of film and poetry or the relationship or alliance or union of cinema and poetry it seems that each practitioner or theoretician on the subject is free to apply their own understanding of what the film-poem might be. British poet Tony Harrison styles it film-poem, meaning a poem which he intends to become a film like *Metamorphous* or *The Blasphemer's Banquet*. Films are often described as having a poetic quality when they enable significance to accrue around objects in the same way a poem will often seek to construct a significance around 'just what's there'. There is poetry which is written for film perhaps the most often cited example of this being W.H. Auden's verse commentary to the 1936 film *Night Mail*. Post-war, avant-garde filmmakers like Maya Deren, Bruce Baille and Stan Brakhage, referred to their films as poems, perhaps because of the structural and thematic elements which they borrowed from lyric poetry. At what might be called the opposite end of the spectrum, academic Christopher Wall-Romana uses the term cinepoem to refer to page-

based artefacts that take formal and imagistic elements from film. Zata Banks founded an art and research project in 2002 called PoetryFilm and similarly, Alistair Cook (who also does away with Tony Harrison's hyphen) founded his *Filmpoem* project in 2010: both Cook and Banks make and commission films made to accompany a lyric poem, a form comparable to the music video.

There are films that adapt poems or use poems as their source material (see action epics like *Troy* or *Beowulf* 2007.) It's tempting to offer a glossary on the subject – to define once and for all the various terms – *Boudica* does after all take elements from most of these things. I'm not sure that's entirely helpful, and perhaps the mystery and multiplicity is part of its endurance and intrigue as a form. What I'm interested in and what might be read as a statement of intent, is how the different disciplines and ideas of film and poetry relate to one other, cross over and interact in *Boudica*.

I'm also interested in film as an accessible, international culture. For the writer, it can provide ways of structuring a poem or collection and a source material from which thematic allusions might be drawn. *Boudica* is as much a poem about the places and landscapes of Norfolk as it is an experiment within the film poem genre. Chris Petit observes in *Est: Collected Reports from East Anglia*, the landscape of that region is “cinematic, perhaps in the quality of its light, perhaps because the empty topographies tilt away, unobstructed, into the future.”¹ My film views the region as a vast edgeland, foreign looking at times with its windmills and wild hops, demarked by drover's paths, Roman roads, waterways, old railway lines, ruined fortifications now built over but showing through like bones in a shallow grave. A similar approach has been taken by other writers and artists, many of whom can be said to have brought a topographical imagination to bear on contemporary Britain. In verse, there is Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. *Boudica* owes much to his diachronic view of the West Midlands, and Hill's book-length sequence does not go unacknowledged as a poetic antecedent to *Boudica*. In film, there is Patrick Keiller's trilogy of

¹ Chris Petit in *Est: Collected Reports from East Anglia*, ed. by M W Bewick and Ella Johnston, (Wivenhoe: Dunlin Press, 2015) (p 2).

films *London*, *Robinson in Space* and *Robinson in Ruins*. These not only lend form to *Boudica* the film but also inform the speculative realist philosophy of the poems, the focus on life prior to and beyond our own age and time. Also in *Est: Collected Reports from East Anglia*, David Southwell writes, “we are products of landscape, our stories so entwined with its narratives that to think of them as separate is a form of mental illness.”² For all the pessimism and ambivalence towards Norfolk, what I hope viewers and readers will mark in *Boudica* is the way in which allusions to cinema and the culture that has grown up around it are applied to a geo-specific locale, an inversion of the way Willard Maas treats the body in his 1943 film *The Geography of the Body* which turns the corporeal into the geophysical. In the context of *Boudica*, cinematic memes are presented cut-and-paste over topographical images of east England – think of one corner of a hoarding for the summer blockbuster lying in ditch full of nettles – so one arrives at a poetry film, film-poem, whatever, about the Norfolk landscape which includes ekphrastic lyrics after *Taxi Driver* on the soundtrack.

² David Southwell ‘The Empty Quarter’ in *Est: Collected Reports from East Anglia*, ed. by M W Bewick and Ella Johnston, (Wivenhoe: Dunlin Press, 2015) (p 12).

Chapter One: Some Definitions of Ekphrasis

I don't believe it would be useful for me to regurgitate a history of ekphrasis here. However, I do think it important to express what I mean when I say ekphrasis. At various junctures, both prior to and during the research and writing of *Boudica*, I have come across several interrelated definitions of ekphrasis and these have steered the work in particular directions. My original proposal was to conceive of an ekphrasis of film, poems written after cinema. I was also initially interested in demonstrating how a new sequential narrative might be constructed from these ekphrastic descriptions of film scenes. In doing so I hoped to realise a tangible cinematic logic and progression within the lyric sequence. To properly explore how that turned into the *Boudica* sequence it is essential for me to unpack how ekphrasis has informed my poetic sensibilities. Uses of the term ekphrasis in subsequent chapters must consider the definitions which follow:

The Representation of a Representation

Like most writers, my understanding of the ekphrastic mode of writing has been shaped by reading ekphrastic poetry rather than by reading the literary theory which surrounds it. As such, the ways in which poets encounter and begin to experiment with ekphrasis are unique and personal to the poet: from the moment I started reading and writing poetry, I was aware of and understood that there was a poetry which offered some kind of literary response to a work of art. I knew of Auden and Breughel, Keats and the Grecian urn, Ashbery and Parmigianino's self-portrait. However, my actual introduction to the word came not in a poem but in the form of a short essay. Tim Liardet's 'Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis' appeared in the summer 2006 edition of *The New Welsh Review*. In the opening paragraph Liardet defines ekphrasis as, "the distilling into

words of a visual representation”³ a rephrasing of James A. W. Heffernan’s definition: (“simple in form but complex in its implications”) “a verbal representation of a visual representation.”⁴ As a young poet, I eagerly accepted this. My own early verbal representations seemed to offer a window through which I could escape a phase of confessionalism that I was finding tedious. Turning my attentions towards visual art felt like a way forward, a way for me to begin to understand what Wallace Stevens meant by “description is revelation”⁵

Description is revelation. It is not
The thing described, nor false facsimile.

It is an artificial thing that exists,
In its own seeming, plainly visible,

Yet not too closely the double of our lives,
Intenser than any actual life could be,

Reading these lines considering the subject at hand seems to offer up some kind of manifesto on ekphrasis: what is represented is not recreated in “false facsimile” but exists apart from but related to its visual other, although, as Stevens says, visible, different and somehow more intense. Liardet – misattributing the quote to Michael McLaverty – also acknowledges Wallace Stevens’ gnomic “description is revelation”. “I might,” he writes, “even replace the word ‘revelation’ with ‘liturgy’.”

In my poems, I tend not to go for the symbolical afflatus that grows out of everyday experience; I invest more in the transforming nature of physical description, trusting in the fact that if you describe physical qualities with enough precision they will collect into something approaching liturgy.⁶

It might help to see this principle in action. A useful example would be his poem ‘A Futurist Looks at a Dog’ which first appeared in his 1997 collection *To the God of Rain*. It is an example

³ Liardet, Tim ‘Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis’ in *The New Welsh Review* (Summer 2006) (p. 106).

⁴ Heffernan, James A W *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004 edition.) (p. 3).

⁵ Stevens, Wallace ‘Description without Place’ in *Collected Poems*, (London, Alfred A Knopf, 1995) (p. 344).

⁶ Liardet, Tim ‘Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis’ *The New Welsh Review* 9 Summer 2006) (p. 107).

not only of Heffernan's visual representation represented in language – a widely accepted definition of ekphrasis (see Liardet, 2003) – but also the poet continuing “the work of translation the artwork began”⁷ as well as attempting to transform “graphic or sculptural stasis in process [and turn] arrested gesture in movement.”⁸

A Futurist Looks at a Dog

I do not see godmother's adoring pet
as you do, nor know him by name; neither can
I keep the present he keeps:
his six little steps to match godmother's one.

I see instead every stride the dog has made
in the last twenty metres at once,
the sum of strides per second jumbled up
on top of one another - its tail

a cactus of wags, its rapid legs
a sort of tailback of centipedes,
a strobile of stunted steps, a carwash brush,
two bleary propellers rotating.

Above it, the leash in flight is many leashes
whipping and overlapping,
a flung silver net, a soundwave,
each stride a new species of leash;

the dachshund once set in motion
embarks upon another existence,
and godmother's pet as you know him
vanished twenty, no, thirty strides back.⁹

At first glance, this might seem a straightforward ekphrastic representation of Giacomo Balla's 1912 painting, *Dynamism of a Dog on a Lead*. However, it turns up more than naked description. There is the oblique narrative of godmother and pet, where they are going and where they have come from, as well as – what we must assume to be – the voice of the poet, the “I”. Writing on the poem, Liardet points out that, “in ekphrastic terms, there are the ‘cactus of wags’, ‘the

⁷ Liardet, Tim ‘Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis’ *The New Welsh Review* 9(Summer 2006) (p. 107).

⁸ Heffernan, James A W *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2004) (p. 4).

⁹ Liardet, Tim ‘A Futurist Looks at a Dog’ in *To the God of Rain*, (Bridgend: Seren, 1997) (p. 340).

carwash brush', 'two bleary propellers rotating', 'flung silver net' and 'a soundwave'".¹⁰ Closer interrogations of the text have led me to the realisation that Liardet's language is attempting a return on Balla's idea of paths of movement, visually realised in his 1913 painting *Paths of Movement + Dynamic Sequences*, a "synthesis of light and motion, space and state of mind, objectivity and subjectivity, elaborated to the point of abstraction."¹¹ Balla has, in paint, attempted to translate stasis in forward motion or to simply represent movement while Liardet continues this impetus with his own whirligig diction. In this instance both painter and poet are seeking to transform stasis into movement.

The Representation of an Encounter

We can also read beyond Heffernan's presiding definition. In his book *The Ekphrastic Encounter in Contemporary British Poetry and Elsewhere*, David Kennedy redefines ekphrasis as "the representation of an encounter with a work of art."¹² To focus entirely on how Liardet translates Balla's dog into verse is to ignore the way Liardet encounters the painting. "I do not see," he begins, addressing us as though we were in the gallery with him. Considering the painting and the subject of this essay, this line, and Liardet's decision not to see, seems terribly important. Attention is deflected by his address-to-the-reader, "as you do," Liardet peers over his spectacles at his imagined reader in a game of Quixote and Sancho at the gallery. Liardet sees something else in the painting – he has a windmills-as-giants moment. While we see exactly what Balla intended for us to see Liardet chooses not to, or because of a sort of poet's psychosis sees the painting differently. He picks out images from the cultural conscious of the 21st century: the cactus, the propeller, the carwash, the nature documentary close-up of the centipede, a

¹⁰ Liardet, Tim 'Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis' *The New Welsh Review* (Summer 2006) (p. 106).

¹¹ Fagiolo dell'Arco, Maurizio *Giacomo Balla: abstract futurism*. (London: Finarte. 1995) (p. 18)

¹² Kennedy, David *The Ekphrastic Encounter in Contemporary British Poetry and Elsewhere*, (London: Ashgate, 2012) (p. 6.)

soundwave, “a range” as he puts it “of highly familiar visual objects that are only defamiliarized when placed in the service of a little dog in motion.”

I put my trust in the innate powers of description, implicitly leaving the rest to the ellipsis of [...] the unspoken ‘elsewheres’ which, it is to be hoped, are drawn into earshot and imagination via ekphrastic description.¹³

As I mentioned before, Liardet parrots James A. W. Heffernan’s contention that ekphrasis is a verbal representation of a visual representation. In his introduction to *Museum of Words the Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, Heffernan states that ekphrasis “evokes the power of the silent image”¹⁴. His language is more sophisticated than Liardet’s “shortcuts to meaning”. Heffernan understands that the image may be used as an objective correlative, a formula for the emotive affect a poem attempts to convey, and idea laid out by T. S. Eliot in his 1919 essay ‘Hamlet and His Problems’. He also appreciates that the relationship between text and image “is not impressionistic”¹⁵ but rather “declared by the very nature of ekphrastic representation.”

Liardet’s essay builds towards an ekphrasis of cinema which utilises its signs and I wanted to further examine and explore whatever that was. He argues that more than anything it is the moving image that has come to shape the imaginative subconscious of contemporary poets.¹⁶ He stresses that it is the role of images in the ekphrastic poem is to convey a meaning, or a “dream-like likeness which becomes the shortcut to a meaning which is never quite disclosed but nonetheless lived out to the full.”¹⁷ However there is also the opportunity to experiment with the lyric sequence in a similar way to Homer and ‘The Shield of Achilles’. That is to sequentially arrange those images, signs and various meanings, to transplant them from an existing work similar to the way Homer’s description of Achilles’s shield was imitated by Hesiod in his

¹³Liardet, Tim ‘Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis’ in *The New Welsh Review* (Summer 2006). (p. 109).

¹⁴Heffernan, James A W *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). (p 5.)

¹⁵ Ibid. (p. 6)

¹⁶ Liardet, Tim ‘Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis’ in *The New Welsh Review* (Summer 2006). (p. 109).

¹⁷ Ibid (p. 110)

description of Heracles' shield and later when W. H. Auden re-imagined completely the shield in his poem 'The Shield of Achilles', replacing Hephaestus's images of everyday Greek life with ones depicting the brutality of the first decades of the 20th century: barbed wire, shelled fields, rape, murder, military checkpoints and bureaucratic politicians. Instead of thinking about poet-to-poet influence, I have thought about influence as holistic and multimedia. When viewed in this way one might come to regard an ekphrastic sequence as an image sequence as Moholy-Nagy thought of it: the ekphrastic lyric becomes "a structural element of the related whole"¹⁸ or enters a "dynamic relationship which gives truth [meaning] only in the process of unfolding."¹⁹

Open and Closed Ekphrasis

Heffernan introduces his reader to the theories that have helped shape his understanding of ekphrasis. He draws from Michael Davidson's idea of two distinct ways of writing about visual images. The first, let's call it Ekphrasis A, is classified by Davidson as a "classical painter poem"²⁰ like Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' or Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts'. These poems are, as Murray Kreiger writes in his essay 'Ekphrasis & the Still Movement of Poetry', part of a literary principle to which all ekphrastic writing belongs: the frozen world of the visual image serves to halt the motion of literature. The digressive nature of ekphrastic description, its attention to detail, is a desirable thing because it brings the stream of images across the imagination to a halt for long enough for them to be appreciated. Movement is stilled or – more likely – a sequence of images is flashed across the mind which build to a larger whole. This is further evidenced when Krieger states that the ball in Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress' represents the narrator's mastery of time, a ball being "one of the most pure objects which may come to represent self-

¹⁸ Laszlo Moholy-Nagy 'Image Sequences/Series' in *The Cinematic* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2007) (p. 83).

¹⁹ Blake Stimson 'The Pivot of the World: Photography and its Nation' in *The Cinematic* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2007) (p. 91).

²⁰ Davidson Michael 'Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter Poem' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Arts Criticism* 42 (1983) pp 69-89. (p.70).

containment”²¹. Krieger attempts to turn ekphrasis from a representation of a representation into a principle of poetics. He writes that “all poetry must use ekphrasis to still movement, to stop time for long enough for the poem to assert its integrity.”²² As Davidson reminds us, we recognise this as the ekphrastic desire to replicate the self-sufficiency of the object that it describes.²³

This is a problem, it ignores the desire to turn stasis into movement which I observed in Liardet’s poem and the contemporary practice of drawing images from the collective consciousness which are then “de-familiarised” in the service of describing the subject of a painting. Davidson also takes issue with Krieger’s theories. He suggests that Krieger seals literature within “a well-wrought urn of pure self-enclosed spatiality.”²⁴ The poem is then placed within the urn and “hermetically sealed”. The poem could not exist without the urn. If the urn is smashed and poem spills out it will be forever read against its dependency on the visual other. Any poem written about a painting will suffer from this dependency.

The second kind of ekphrasis – Ekphrasis B – Davidson calls a painterly poem. This is a poem which “activates strategies of composition equivalent to but not dependent upon the painting itself.”²⁵ The work at hand is not regarded from the museum’s velvet rope but the poet “reads the painting as a text” or “reads the larger painterly aesthetic generated by the painting.”²⁶ This is clarified somewhat by the poet George Szirtes in his foreword to Philip Gross and Simon Denison’s verse-photoessay *I Spy Pinhole Eye*. “A picture is *what* it depicts and *how* it depicts it.”

The picture of a vase of flowers on a table depicts a vase of flowers and a table in a certain relation, the painting is not so much a solid naked object on which marks have been made, more an accumulation of significances. The materiality of the work, while

²¹ Murray Krieger ‘Ekphrasis and the Still Movement of Poetry; or, Laokoon Revisited’ in *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1967) (P. 267).

²² Davidson (P. 72).

²³ Davidson Michael ‘Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter Poem’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Arts Criticism* 42 (1983) pp 69-89. (p.71).

²⁴ Ibid (p. 72).

²⁵ Davidson Michael ‘Ekphrasis and the Postmodern Painter Poem’ in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Arts Criticism* 42 (1983) pp 69-89. (p.75).

²⁶ Ibid (p. 75).

not bypassed, becomes secondary except as metaphor, because materiality too is regarded as a container.

The shift is towards language and the dictionary. A thing is not only a thing: it is what it hides, and what it hides can be interpreted in terms of linguistics, psychoanalysis or ideology.²⁷

Davidson uses the idea of equivalent strategies to analyse Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror' but his contention can be observed elsewhere in the ekphrastic canon as well as in my own writings. For comparative purposes, I will look at another Liardet poem, 'The Blood Choir', the title poem in Liardet's 2004 collection; this might present a useful comparison with the first poem in a sequence of ekphrastic poems after Vincent van Gogh which I wrote in 2011 titled *Saint-Paul-de-Mausole*.

Liardet's poem in five sections evokes the moment a classroom of young offenders, brought together through confinement, boredom and restlessness, become as Liardet puts it, a single "organism", "glued together by shared assumptions, shared deprivation, shared hunger." His visual antecedent is Francisco Goya's, the *Pilgrimage of St Isidore*. A detail in that painting shows a mob of figures which seem to at once reel back and rise-up into one being, bound together by fear or surprise or the threat of violence. This is a recurrent image detail, not only in the paintings of Goya, but throughout art history.

The Blood Choir

After Goya

1

Consider how a young man sheds his name
and number, his boot blister and tattoo,

his lisp, his wrist-scar and dental history;
how he sheds, in short, all that could not

be anyone's but his, the ancient encryption
of his fingerprint, the mole on the ball of his foot.

It is a terrible thing to witness the speed with which

²⁷Szirtes, George 'Foreword' in Denison, Simon and Gross, Philip *I Spy Pinhole Eye* (London: Cinnamon Press, 2009) (p. 3)

he and twenty other inmates are drawn up,
 stumbling backwards, into one another; how they grow
 eerily identical webbed feet, webbed fingers,
 webbed ears, and melt their bone-marrow down
 to the kind of red glue that welds them together
 at the pelvis, the abdomen and the chest
 as if, well, some slow-moving animal penned
 by a single rope, tugging at each wrist; some rhythm
 of oars rowed, without a drum; some engine
 which drives a sort of spirit replica straight through
 the savage razors of the wire without a scratch.²⁸

This time the painting is not described. Instead, the detail is enacted in a kind of tableaux vivant by the prisoners who Liardet has been tasked to teach. It is haunted he says, “by the rhythmic ghost of Goya, by the darkness of his vision and the manner in which human flesh seems to flare out of that darkness, Rembrandt-like; the way each of his protagonists is part hero, part ball bearing of history.”²⁹ It also brings into focus the idea of schema plus variation in cinema: the way a director will present a visual idea or image rather than making those ideas explicit. For example, in the 2004 adaptation of Stephen King’s *Secret Window*, Johnny Depp’s psychological crisis is represented as a cracked mirror that divides the reflection of his character. A corresponding visual metaphor for a shattered psyche can be found in Darren Aronofsky’s 2010 film *Black Swan*. This same rather blunt metaphor for a shattered psyche is used again by Darren Aronofsky in his 2010 film *Black Swan* and much earlier in Billy Wilder’s *Apartment* (1960). “It makes me look the way I feel,” admits femme fatale, Fran.³⁰ The broken mirror or looking glass is re-purposed or its same meaning is used in another context. These same techniques can be observed in the opening part of my extended lyric sequence *Saint-Paul-de-Mausole*. My visual other is not Goya but instead perhaps one of the most recognisable works of art in history: Van

²⁸ Liardet, Tim ‘The Blood Choir’ in *The Blood Choir* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004) (p.56)

²⁹ Liardet, Tim ‘Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis’ in *The New Welsh Review* (Summer 2006). (p. 109).

³⁰ Wilder, Billy Dir. *The Apartment* (MGM Video, 2008).

Gogh's *Starry Night*, a study in the terrifying synaesthetic visions which accompanied van Gogh's mania and epileptic seizures.

Above the asylum the sky is a slick
of spilt milk, of broken glass stars.
Across the chimney stacks of Saint-Remy,
the wind moves in laboured breaths.

Tonight, that same wind squalls
round this little suburban garden,
lifting the gate in the alley from its latch,
flinging umber leaves in savage arabesques.

It comes alive where it finds the spaces
Between clothing and skin, comes alive
in the hairs on the nape of my neck.

It's as if you leant one cheek
against the still wet canvas of the world
and sighed – and sighed – and sighed.

Like Liardet in 'A Futurist Looks at a Dog', the first stanza brings some detail of the painting into view. I draw from a cache of stock footage: stark trails of milk that recall water and other liquids whorling down a drain, the violence or threat of violence which broken glass represents. There is also the formation of loose narrative, place is announced and the biographical details of the artist's life are drawn in. However, I do not speak to the reader from the velvet rope as Liardet does when describing Balla's painting. Instead, I use the painting to perform a match cut, a technique in film which forms the basis for continuity editing, and according to Bordwell and Thompson in *Film Art* "emphasises spatiotemporal continuity between different objects, different spaces, or different compositions in which two distinct images are linked graphically."³¹ Famous examples include the cut from bone to space station in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 *2001: A Space Odyssey* or the cut from a flaring match to a desert sunrise in David Lean's 1962 *Lawrence of Arabia*. In the poem at hand, this technique draws a graphic and psychic link between Van Gogh

³¹ Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2001) (p. 268)

and my narrator, flashing forward to England in 2012 and pasting that same star-scape above my narrator's house.

In both instances, the painting becomes fluid in light of the text, existing outside of time, and can transform itself, re-purpose, re-apply itself and then transform back. In my work, this is achieved by the final stanza, when the poem finally addresses the artist in the process of the creation of the image. It is in these moments when ekphrasis attempts to transcend its otherness. In these moments, the text, encounters its semiotic other: The cosmic swirls or the “melting down of bone-marrow,” the savage arabesques, “the spirit replica”³², sensing that terrible wind being able to touch you anywhere, all of these things owe something important not just to the efforts of post-modern poets to elevate ekphrasis from poems-about-paintings but to a mode of writing which enters into a dynamic conversation with the visual arts but also to the advent of cinema and the “triumph of cinematic physicality while building that otherness; the dream-like likenesses which are a shortcut to meanings they never quite disclose but nonetheless live out to the full.”³³

While academics wrestle over the differences between, for example, postmodern, Romantic or classical ekphrasis, or the differences between painterly poems and poems about paintings, the power of ekphrasis for the poet is presented here in Liardet's poetry and in my own, both of us looking to cinema's history of on-screen metamorphosis and the art of film editing to make the projected emotions and fears of the authors visual, superimposed – in Krieger's words – onto the air, or more accurately onto the page.

³² Liardet, Tim 'The Blood Choir' in *The Blood Choir* (Bridgend: Seren, 2004) (p.56)

³³ Liardet, Tim 'Ekphrasis and Ekphrasis' in *The New Welsh Review* (Summer 2006). (p. 109).

Notional Ekphrasis

It is interesting that the first recorded example of ekphrasis in literature should represent a fictional shield. The shield of Achilles is described in Book XVIII, lines 478–608 of Homer's *Iliad*. In the poem, Achilles lends Patroclus his armour to lead the Achaean army into battle. Patroclus is killed in battle by Hector, and Achilles' armour is stripped from him and taken by Hector as spoils. This event prompts Achilles to return to battle, while his mother Thetis commissions Hephaestus to provide replacement armour for her son.³⁴ Homer's description of the shield has garnered attention from literary historians in the 20th and 21st centuries, providing as it does one of the first known uses of ekphrasis in ancient poetry. The ability of Homer to produce such a vivid image of a mythological object is pertinent to this project in its attempt to produce a vivid image, or vivid anticipation rather, of a film that does not (yet) exist.

So far, only ekphrasis as a representation of, or encounter with, something that is extant has been discussed. Notional ekphrasis however describes a visual representation or encounter which exists in the imagination of the writer and, if successful, the reader. While critics argue over distinctions between classical and contemporary ekphrasis and how to define them, many ignore the distinction between a representation of a work of art which pre-dated the poem(s) and has a continued existence apart from the poetry and a representation of a painting which only exists in the imagination. The distinctions between what John Hollander defined as notional and actual ekphrasis are developed in Peter Barry's essay 'Picturing the Context: Contemporary Poetry and ekphrasis' collected in his 2007 book *Literature in Contexts*. Here he presents us with a family tree of ekphrasis that dovetails at notional and actual ekphrasis. He unpacks this, detailing further subgenres of ekphrasis: Open and closed ekphrasis are approximately equal to the Ekphrasis A and B previously detailed. Poems about paintings like Auden's 'Musée des Beaux

³⁴ Homer 'Book XVIII' in *The Iliad of Homer* trans., Richmond Latimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). (p. 365 – 366).

Arts' are closed. Open or 'unframed' ekphrasis refers to poems which do not mention the work specifically: Barry uses Blake's 'The Tyger' as an example. *Notional* ekphrasis on the other hand either describes a fictional work of art, as in Browning's 'My Last Duchess' or a conceptual work of art such as Homer and the shield of Achilles. Homer's description of the shield of Achilles is an enduring example and serves my purposes well, constructed as it is from "filmic scenes which play out on it:"³⁵

The Shield of Achilles

His first job was a shield, a broad one, thick,
 well-fashioned everywhere. A shining rim
 he gave it, triple-ply, and hung from this
 a silver shoulder strap. Five welded layers
 composed the body of the shield. The maker
 used all his art adorning the expanse.
 He pictured on it earth, heaven, and sea,
 unwearied sun, moon waxing, all the stars
 the heaven bears for garland: Pleiades,
 Hyades, Orion in his might,
 the great bear, too, that some have called the Wain
 pivoting there, attentive to Orion,
 and unbathed ever in the ocean stream.

He pictured, then, two cities, noble scenes:
 weddings in one, and wedding feasts, and brides
 led out through town by torchlight from their chambers
 amid chorales. amid the young men turning
 round and round in dances: flutes and harps
 among them, keeping up a tune, and women
 coming outdoors to stare as they went by.
 A crowd, then, in the market place. and there
 two men at odds over satisfaction owed
 for a murder done: one claimed that all was paid.
 and publicly declared it; his opponent
 turned the reparation down, and both
 demanded a verdict from the arbiter,
 as people clamored in support of each...

Upon the shield, soft terrain, freshly plowed,

³⁵ Peter Barry 'Picturing the Context: Contemporary Poetry and Ekphrasis' in *Literature in Contexts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) (p. 137)

he pictured: a broad field, and many plowmen
 here and there upon it. Some were turning
 ox teams at the plowland's edge, and there
 as one arrived and turned, a man came forward
 putting a cup of sweet wine in his hands.
 They made their turns-around then up the furrows
 drove again, eager to reach the deep field's
 limit; and the earth looked black behind them,
 as though turned up by plows. But it was gold,
 all gold—a wonder of the artist's craft.³⁶

Homer's account in verse of how Hephaestus – immortal blacksmith – forged the shield of Achilles is at once lyrically descriptive while also driven by narrative. The shield is constructed in five sections that Hephaestus adorns with images of the earth, the sky, the sea, the sun, the moon and stars. He also emblazons on the shield images of two cities, a wedding, a criminal trial, war, farm animals and other wild beasts, a field being ploughed by ox, the grape harvest and dancers. Literary history has revealed that ekphrasis during the Greek period often included “descriptions of such battle implements, as well as fine clothing, household items of superior craftsmanship (urns, cups, baskets), and exceptionally ornate buildings.”³⁷ As such, much of the criticism levelled at ekphrasis, particularly within narrative-driven poetry, is that these passages exist as a kind of ornamentation, tangential from the main narrative. C. S. Baldwin has argued that ekphrasis is a form of narrative interruption. In his 1928 work, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic* he writes that ekphrasis is a form of “Alexandrianism, perverting description because it frustrates narrative movement.”³⁸ To accept this argument is to ignore the representation that is the shield as well as the representations detailed on it; it was written and then wrought and therefore side-steps the criticism of poetic superfluity. Heffernan reminds his readers that ekphrasis differs from pictorialism and iconicity in that it “explicitly represents representation itself. What

³⁶ Homer ‘Book XVIII’ in *The Iliad of Homer* trans., Richmond Latimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). (p. 365 – 366).

³⁷ Academy of American Poets, ‘Ekphrasis: Poetry Confronting Art (01.05.2017) (<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/ekphrasis-poetry-confronting-art>)

³⁸ C.S. Baldwin *Medieval Poetic and Rhetoric* (New York, Macmillan, 1928). (p. 24).

ekphrasis represents in words, therefore, must itself be *representational*.”³⁹ He goes on to assert that if ekphrasis frustrates the narrative then we might read it as a form of protest against the impetus of narrative, a refusal to submit to it. Heffernan calls it “an ornamental digression which refuses to be merely ornamental.”⁴⁰

The most interesting examples of ekphrasis seem to offer both narrative and description, “a rival or supervening narrative,”⁴¹ a narrative response to pictorial stasis. I don’t believe that narration and description are things apart, instead they coexist in ekphrasis to live out Linda Nead’s idea that visual art is haunted by the desire for motion, symbolised by the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea. Homer’s ekphrastic passage is alive with a kinetic language that appears to set the figures on the shield in motion. He speaks of the cattle on the shield as “wrought of gold and of tin and thronged in speed with lowing / out of the dung of the farmyard to a pasturing place by a sounding / river, and beside the moving field of a reed bed.”⁴² Active verbs and modifiers, together with enjambment, urge the reader on, carrying the breath into the next line, establishing a seductive forward momentum. He describes them as being depicted between the farm and field, at a pregnant moment between the past, the farmyard dung, and the future, the pasturing field beside the lively river and reed bed. This is narrative motion: the cattle go from Farm A to Field B. There is also something comparable to the montage sequence at work in Homer’s passage: Achilles’ shield is described as it is being made. According to the literary theorist G. E. Lessing: “Homer does not paint the shield as finished and complete, but as a shield that is being made. [Thus transforming] what is coexistent in in his subject into what is consecutive and thereby [making a] living picture of an action out of the painting of an object.”⁴³

³⁹ Heffernan, James A W *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004) (p. 4.)

⁴⁰ Heffernan, James A W *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004) (p. 5.)

⁴¹ Heffernan, James A W *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2004) (p. 5.)

⁴² Homer ‘Book XVIII’ in *The Iliad of Homer* trans., Richmond Latimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). (p. 366).

⁴³ G E Lessing *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* Trans. Edward Allen McCormick, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984). (p. 36).

Heffernan unpacks Lessing's statement by explaining that we arrive at the finished shield, blow by blow, as Hephaestus "forged, fashioned and placed the figures" on it. However, each "frame" is penetrated and the figures within it "animated"⁴⁴. I find it hard to read the passage as anything other than a screenplay or verse storyboard towards a cinematic montage. The poet's eye becomes a tracking camera, a slow, dreamlike sweep or drift across the shield's surface, in a sequence of extreme close-up images which come together to give a complete picture of the shield.

A similar principle is at work in the earlier examples we saw from Liardet. I am reminded of his refusal to see a "god mother's dog" but only the dachshund in motion. Liardet does not describe the picaresque of motion in the same way that Homer does, the cattle going from farm to field, but instead realises in verse a more cinematic movement: The steps, the car wash brush, the propellers: these are motion without narrative and harken back to the early experiments of cine-cameras which were the first to explicitly live out the desire to set stasis into motion. Peter Barry claims that the most interesting examples of ekphrasis blur the lines between the various definitions of actual, notional, open, closed, fictional and conceptual ekphrasis. Liardet's 'Blood Choir' is an exemplar of this, inhabiting a painting but harnessing its qualities and contexts and applying them to personal experience. *Boudica*, it strikes me, takes elements from all the ekphrastic genres and subgenres: it mentions actual films, but is also open to drawing points of reference from many different filmic sources. It seems to describe a fictional film but is also conceptual, "also imaginary" as Barry says, also "supra-realist."⁴⁵ I would however, argue with him when he goes on to state that such art as described in notional-conceptual ekphrasis "could not exist." The detail of Homer's ekphrasis has allowed artists to act out the role of Hephaestus, creating through a process of dynamic reverse ekphrasis, actual versions of the shield. English

⁴⁴ Heffernan, James A W *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* Chicago, University of Chicago Press 2004 edition. pp 4. Page 12

⁴⁵ Peter Barry 'Picturing the Context: Contemporary Poetry and Ekphrasis' in *Literature in Contexts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007) (p. 137)

sculptor, John Flaxman's *The Shield of Achilles* is perhaps the most famous of these, adorning as it does the cover of Heffernan's *Museum of Words*. I can't help but notice that it looks like a zoopraxiscope, the early motion picture device designed by Eadweard Muybridge. I wonder if you gave Flaxman's shield a good spin the images wouldn't start moving.



Chapter Two: The Process

When I started writing the collection I was looking for a way to construct a cine-poem which used ekphrastic lyrics to construct a narrative logic. I think here of Christian Marclay's *Clock* – an artwork which manages to construct a functioning clock from film clips which feature a clock, watch or some other timepiece in them. Marclay edited his collected fragments in such a way that time on screen corresponds to actual time: reel time becomes real time. While my intentions were different, the concepts are rather similar – I was to write poems after scenes or images from many different movies which would then be sequenced (edited) together utilising film logic to create a film collaged from fragments of ekphrastic poetry. I use the term collage rather than montage since – had I persevered with this incarnation of the project – *Boudica* would have consisted of disparate sources coming together to form a new whole.

Not many poems survive from this initial effort in the 'theatrical release' version of *Boudica*. One which did is the poem 'Aasshhh', which remains perhaps the most highly allusive poem in collection which uses Martin Scorsese's 1976 film *Taxi Driver* and to a lesser extent David Fincher's 1999 adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* to underscore Boudica's anarcho-primitivist tendencies. The poem begins with a close-up image of an effervescent multi-vitamin tablet being dropped into a glass of water. This image finds its visual other with Travis Bickle fixated on a glass of seltzer in the diner scene early in *Taxi Driver*. The allusive and filmic nature of this poem is my attempt to engage with the way that a language of film has developed. Mark Cousins in his book *The Story of Film* explains that a shot of a character ruminating over a bubbly drink has been used many times before in film. Carol Reed uses it first, in his 1946 film *Odd Man Out*. Cousins writes: "Reed and his team asked how they could portray [the character's] crisis in an imaginative new way."⁴⁶ They came up with the solution of a tiny reflection of the

⁴⁶ Cousins, Mark *The Story of Film* (London: Pavilion, 2011). (p. 12 – 13).

character within a bubble in a glass of ale shown in extreme close-up. This image also found its way into *Boudica* during the pot-wash scene ‘Suds & Oil’. Twenty years later Jean Luc Godard uses the close-up of bubbles in a drink in *Deux au Trois Choses que je Sais D’elle* (1967). Cousins points out however that “cinema had changed since Reed’s day and Godard’s use of the image is more intellectual than his predecessor’s.”⁴⁷ Cousins goes on to draw a link between the development of this species of cinematic sign and Richard Dawkins’ writing on genetics. Memes, units of culture, “just as genes, replicated and evolve”⁴⁸. These images become a universal sign for a moment of self-reflection or deep focus for the character, a vertical moment within the horizontal temporality of conventional film. The same image is reconceptualised in a process which Cousins refers to as “schema plus variation.”⁴⁹ The genetics of imagery have also long been evident in poetry, which is “an echoing auditorium of recurring symbols and figures, borrowings, allusions, re-appropriations, visual quotes, nods, homage.”⁵⁰ Poetry – like film – has long demonstrated an economy of influences, a trade and exchange of ideas both knowingly and unconsciously. It now appears that I and other poets have also entered into the language of cinema: R. F. Langley’s modernist lyrics often display his engagement with cinema perhaps most nakedly in ‘Cakes and Ale’⁵¹, a verse rumination on what must be in part the Mos Eisley cantina scene from *Star Wars Episode IV* (itself based on the saloon bar scenes in many spaghetti westerns). Margaret Atwood too, in ‘Werewolf Movies’⁵², borrows from the transformation scene in John Landis’ 1981 *An American Werewolf in London* as a sort of ekphrasis in the form of film theory, engaging with cinema’s history of metamorphosis which was touched on previously. I have also noted a repeated use of match cuts in Liardet’s 2017 collection, *The World Before Snow*. In his poem ‘Self-Portrait with View of the Greater Chihuahuan Wilderness’⁵³ he runs an image

⁴⁷ Cousins, Mark *The Story of Film* (London: Pavilion, 2011). (p. 13).

⁴⁸ Ibid. (p. 13).

⁴⁹ Ibid. (p. 6).

⁵⁰ Farley, Paul Farley ‘Wavelength and The Dark Film’ *Eng208: Film and Poetry* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 2016).

⁵¹ Langley, R.F. *The Face of It* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2012) (p. 4 – 5)

⁵² Atwood, Margaret *Selected Poems 1976 – 1986* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). (p.134)

⁵³ Liardet, Tim *The World Before Snow* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2015). (P. 30)

of the eponymous desert against an image of his subject's parched, cracked lips, thus creating in the reader a sense of thirst and heat and want in the same way a filmmaker would. What this tells us is that poets, by offering their own variations on cinematic schema, are using verbal representations of cinematic memes to create implicit meaning in their work.

I became interested in constructing my own narrative from the sort of cinematically allusive lyric I have described above. Indeed, early drafts of the *Boudica* poems were an attempt to establish a formal logic within which the sequence would operate. It was at this point imperative that the form and shape of the poem to suggest something about its content and subject, that there be a graphic element to the poetry which points up the dialectic between the two media. I began to craft a sequence of poems that would look like a reel of celluloid film. In my first experimental attempts, I tried to include the sound strip and the perforations in the film which allow it to be fed through a projector:

I'll	tell you about this	place
where	Boudica took	me
for	a date. A thatch &	dry
stone	store for munici	pal
grain	etcetera. Refurbish	ed,
with	Arts Council appro	val

This form did not last, being imitative and with the inherent danger of presenting a relationship between film and poetry which was literal and without synergy. Nuance is compromised in favour of a rather obvious analogy with the materiality of film. I view its failure as a result of having failed to understand Philip Gross's graphic ekphrasis in his 2009 book *I Spy Pinhole Eye*. In this book, Gross writes in response to a series of photographs by Simon Denison that depict the concrete feet of electricity pylons. His experiments with the use of line breaks were hugely influential in the early drafting stages of *Boudica*. Gross breaks on the prefixes or first letters of a word, for example: "a / ppears" or "un / seeing."⁵⁴ In his own endnotes to the

⁵⁴ Gross and Denison *I Spy Pinhole Eye* (London: Cinnamon Press, 2009) (p. 75).

collection, he helpfully explores and outlines his rationale behind these uncompromising enjambments. They are an attempt to mimic the way pinhole camera (the tool Denison used to make his photographs) images are made. They catch the moment of something becoming (something inchoate). Coming to the end of a line and finding an “a” or an “un” is a little like, Gross explains, the pinhole photographer not knowing what the camera [has] seen until the negatives [are] scanned.⁵⁵ He suggests an out-of-focus penumbra of language at the line break, as a kind of textual analogue to the pinhole image which is unknown until the camera is opened and the film developed.

In a sense the poems become graphical, their appearance on the page echoing that which they represent. However, we are not in the territory of Apollinaire and the shaping of verse text into various objects in his *Calligrams*; these aren't poems made up to look like the concrete blocks photographed by Denison. Rather than using a graphic stencil to give the poem formal shape, the Gross form comes to illustrate the process of image making. I see this impulse manifesting in some of my early drafts of poems such as ‘Modernity Is’. Though not breaking in the middle of a word, the short, broken lines of the poem “villages stockaded by / empty printer cartridges” or “the phantom ride from / London to any seaside town” nevertheless leave the reader with a similar sense of something inchoate, that something is just coming into view. I too was thinking of form in a graphical sense, the even blocky stanzas designed to look like a strip of 35mm film laid down the page. But the line breaks also sought to create a sense of continuity and continuousness. I am mimicking the way sequences of images are run through a projector at breakneck speed but also the way a sequence of cinematic images progress under their own logic. In this way, the line can be viewed as a cut in which some new perspective or narrative point is reached. The image of the stockade around a village which conjures the image of a fortified township much like the hill forts of Iron Age Britain is then subjected to the extreme close-up of

⁵⁵ Gross and Denison *I Spy Pinhole Eye* (London: Cinnamon Press, 2009) (p. 76).

the materials used to construct the barricade, empty printer ink cartridges. The reader's expectation might be pleasantly subverted; the fortification becomes a self-imposed prison in the poem's dystopian vision. Image A cuts to Image B which equals Connotation C. None of this is made explicit. I use an ekphrasis of the phantom ride, an experiment in early cinema, which saw cameras operated from the front of moving trains filming the industrial landscapes of early 20th century Britain along with film logic to construct the poem. What Gross and I have in common is highlighted by George Szirtes in his foreword to the book. The question he says is not "whether the arts address common needs or desires in us but how they address *each other*" (my emphasis). He uses Frank O'Hara's poem 'Why I am not a painter' to illustrate this. "O'Hara's poem is not ekphrasis [...] it is a mode of address. The way the poet addresses the realm of orange is the same way the painter addresses *sardines*."⁵⁶ Gross's poetry addresses not the concrete feet of the pylons but the photographic process. *Boudica*, in my example, addresses the way cinematic images are made, projected and received by the viewer.

My own Apollinaire style approach to writing a graphic poem was just that. A concern voiced during an early meeting between my supervisor Paul Farley and myself was that such a form prefigures the text; that is, the form presents the reader with a hurdle which must be crossed to access the poem. I then reconfigured the lines, keeping the short lines, in six to eight line stanzas (each measuring roughly 3.5cm by 3.5 cm). What was left was a series of square(ish) blocks of text which looked almost as if they had been stamped down the page, akin to French poet Pierre Reverdy's 'poem↔intertitle' experiments: "blocks of text modelled on the squarish aspect of intertitle card texts ... overdetermined by the squarish aspect of the filmic image."⁵⁷ I was still aiming for the simulacra of film stock:

as a two screen cinema.
Stale popcorn & sarsaparilla
from the kiosk, two tickets

⁵⁶ Gross and Denison *I Spy Pinhole Eye* (London: Cinnamon Press, 2006) (p. 5).

⁵⁷ Wall Romana, Christophe *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) (p. 39).



to sit anywhere. The Deco
doors kiss their teeth
in the cave of our thread

bare love where we delinquents
rest our boots on the seats,
breathe the sour porno theatre
vibe, question the empty stage,
the tackyness on the floor.
As the curtains skate back,

In this shape, the form exerted a curious pressure on the poems. The pressure of the short, enjambed lines created a sense not of something coming into existence but passing rapidly by, a sensation which recalls the film reel being passed through a projector at the right speed to create the persistence of vision. I even considered printing the poem on a single long strip of paper, relegating the titles to a contents page or ‘scene selection’ page so as not to disturb the desired formal impact and instead placing between the lyrics a cue dot (see page corner). Many cinemagoers will remember the character of Tyler Durden in David Fincher’s *Fight Club* drawing the viewer’s attention to those blips that used to appear fleetingly during a film showing (usually in the top right-hand corner of the screen) when one reel changes over to the next: “In the industry, we call those cigarette burns.”⁵⁸ This was, I felt, more of a nuanced way to think about form as a suggestive device. Gross develops the line in a way that is suggestive of the process by which Denison develops a photograph. Even in this context though, there seemed to be a wider pre-existing background for thinking about framing a poem in the way that a filmmaker or photographer thinks about framing an image. One might think of Margaret Atwood’s ‘This is a Photograph of Me,’ from her 1964 collection *The Circle Game*, in which her language moves from general and abstract to specific, proper nouns, focussed language, echoing the process of chemically developing a photograph in the darkroom. These observations served to remind me

⁵⁸ *Fight Club* dir. David Fincher (20th Century Fox, 1999).

that the right margin was there for me to use, if I wanted to, but where the line breaks will put the reader in a particularly (hopefully receptive and focused) frame of mind.

Re-Thinking Form

We talked, Paul and I, in the spring of 2015 about creating an installation piece once the sequence was finished. We came up with the conceit of obtaining a roll of 35mm film stock and etching the poem onto this. Once complete, the reel of film would be run through a projector (think Brakhage's *Mothlight*) in which insect wings and casings are laid on celluloid before development). The resulting film would then be transferred onto a digital format and looped. Played back within a black box space, the film was to be presented alongside the poem, which could be read by hanging the original film against a light box. My intention was to create a poem artefact or a highly unusual and allusive way to encounter a poem. This way of writing however became restrictive in both form and subject matter: I found it difficult to find appropriate film clips to write about and, even in the age of search engines, the poems were too *recherché* and obscure, a closed ekphrasis which shut out all but the highly film literate. I also felt that the idea of turning the poem into an installation piece wasn't true to the spirit of the project. The idea of scratching a poem onto film seemed to speak more about the materials of film rather than its subject, language or processes and by October of 2015 this line of experimental enquiry had reached an impasse. To counter this, Paul encouraged me to think again about my subject and to break with my form and return to a ten beat, blank verse line. Looking back, it seems that trying to think, as it were, horizontally about writing a poem in that form was creatively stifling. By freeing me from it, I could once more mine the vertical seam common to both cinema and poetry. Brakhage reports a similarly liberating moment of creative clarity in his introduction to *Metaphors on Vision*. "I grew very quickly as a film artist once I got rid of drama as a prime source of inspiration. I began to feel that all history, all life, all that I would have as material to work

with, would have to come from the inside of me out rather than as some form imposed from the outside.”⁵⁹ *Boudica* as a cine-poem needed to come from within me out, to rise like the Delphic source of poetic inspiration or the upwelling river Source at Fontain-de-Vaucluse which features in the works of Petrarch, tying to the source’s lyric poetry the rivers of the Norfolk landscape, the Yare, the seat of time and history in Norfolk. I needed to conceive of it, like Homer does with Achilles’ shield, as true notional ekphrasis. Since Brakhage had been influenced by Pound in this fashion, I too turned to the imagistic writing of Pound. I recalled Pound’s three aspects of poetic composition: Melopoeia, the musical charge of words; logopoeia, the “dance of the intellect among words;” but especially phanopoeia, which I read as the projection of visual images on the imagination.⁶⁰

I should stress that at this point I still conceived of *Boudica* as a cinepoem as defined by literary theorist Christophe Wall-Romana: “Cinpoetry comprises only page-based artefacts,”⁶¹ writes Wall-Romana in his book *Cinpoetry Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry*. In his introduction to this text he writes that he is responding to observations of phanopoeia in 20th century poetry. He even goes as far as to say the “the future of poetry is somehow linked to cinema.”⁶²

At its most basic, cinpoetry is a writing practise whose process is homological: it consists of envisioning a specific component or aspect of poetry as if it were a specific component of cinema, or vice-versa, but always in writing. The screen becomes the page, a close-up becomes a metaphor, or the irregular spacing of words on the page is meant to evoke the movement of images on screen. Poets took cinema and film culture to be reservoirs of new textual genres and practices, but they also meditated on the apparatus and industry as potential fields of poetic expansion. When such possibilities were foreclosed they fell back to envisioning cinema as an imaginary medium for utopian experiments in abeyance of social transformation.⁶³

Taken from his introduction to the book, Wall-Romana attempts to offer a manifesto on a page-based poetic engagement with cinema. The book deals with the Modernist French poetry of

⁵⁹ Brakhage, Stan ‘Metaphors on Vision’ *The Essential Brakhage* (New York: Documentext/McPherson, 2001). (p. 6).

⁶⁰ Sitney, P Adams *The Cinema of Poetry* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) (p.108).

⁶¹ Wall-Romana, Christophe *Cinpoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) (p. 3).

⁶² Ibid (p. 4).

⁶³ Ibid (p. 4).

Mallarmé, Cocteau, Epstine and Breton, working under the assumption that cinepoetry was “a privileged channel to explore the shift in the literary imagination that cinema had triggered in modernity.”⁶⁴

Considering *Boudica*, I was drawn to his chapter on Raymond Roussel’s epic 1902 poem ‘La Vue’. The poem is written after a photograph viewed in a Stanhope pen. It is a poem which exemplifies ekphrasis, as Wall-Romana points out, of a subject which is artless and authorless – in this instance a beach scene. The poem itself describes the scene in near forensic detail, without lyricism but the language “surreptitiously [wrestles] with temporal description.”⁶⁵ He brings into focus a piece of wood that a boy is about to throw for a dog. “The piece of wood is cracked; the crack not only occurred in the past [but] also within duration, so [the poet re-inscribes] onto the description of the photograph the (imaginary) temporality.” The poet creates a potential of ballistic energy, “everything in it cries out for duration and movement.” Because of how the photograph is being viewed, the poem must switch between the micro and macroscopic, a “mobile POV” which circumvents temporal arrest. By writing it in such a way we enter, through language, a three-dimensional space which may be equated this with “stereoscope, cinema itself, 3-D films and more recently ‘bullet-time’ [the] enacting of a secondary temporality akin to that which Roussel’s poem seeks out. Wall-Romana goes on to write that “the poem’s lines are like POV “bullets” [...] reconstructing via a hybrid of ballistics and ekphrasis the motion of wind, clouds, waves, objects, animals and people.” It is not surprising to discover that Roussel – like many of his contemporaries – was a keen moviegoer. Because of this he could construct an imaginary film – using film techniques and ekphrasis – from a visual stasis. But we might follow his formal logic even further than this: the poem is framed by the narrator holding his Stanhope viewer to a window to light it up and the poem ends with the light leaving, “brightness / decreases in the glass and everything darkens.” His parenthetical lightening and darkening evokes

⁶⁴ Wall-Romana, Christophe *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013 (p. 5).

⁶⁵ Ibid (p. 5).

a movie screening. Wall-Romana also reads the poem in terms of shots: “we go from the boy at the edge of the sea (more or less equivalent to a LS [long shot]) to the stick he holds (MS) to the configuration of the crack in the stick (ECU). Reading this recalled a lecture by Paul Farley titled *The Dark Film* which looks at some of the relationships between poetry and film. He begins by looking at Michael Snow’s film *Wavelength* but I won’t delve back into avant-garde film just yet. I am more interested in how Farley too observes the play of stillness and motion in early cinema, linking it back to poetry.

In the early years of cinema, the play of stillness and movement was an important aspect of what attracted people to the new medium - one of whose early names was *kinema*, from a Greek word meaning ‘movement’ (cinematograph means, literally, ‘motion picture’). Early screenings opened with a still - a freeze frame - which then, magically, sprang to life: the still image animated, brought to life (*bioscope*: ‘seeing life’).⁶⁶

Farley sees this new medium as significantly changing the way we look at the world. It is not just a novel way of recording life and human behaviour but “an actual shift in the experience of looking, and being looked at.”⁶⁷ Continuing in the fashion of Wall-Romana’s reading of Roussel’s ‘La Vue’, Farley gives us a reading or rather a viewing of a very different poem, one which has nothing to do with cinema or ekphrasis. He uses perhaps Seamus Heaney’s best-known poem, ‘Digging’ (the first poem in his first collection *Death of a Naturalist* in 1966), and marks out on the lecture slide observed shots and camera angles used by Heaney to construct a film logic within the lyric.

Digging

CLOSE UP Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests; as snug as a gun.
MEDIUM SHOT Under my window a clean rasping sound
When the spade sinks into gravelly ground:
My father, digging. I look down
Till his straining rump among the flowerbeds
Bends low, **FLASHBACK** comes up twenty years away
Stooping in rhythm through potato drills
Where he was digging.

⁶⁶ Paul Farley ‘Wavelength and The Dark Film’ *Eng208: Film and Poetry* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 2016).

⁶⁷ Ibid.

CLOSE UP The coarse boot nestled on the lug, the shaft
 Against the inside knee was levered firmly.
 He rooted out tall tops, buried the bright edge deep
 To scatter new potatoes that we picked
 Loving their cool hardness in our hands.⁶⁸

As with 'La Vue', there is a mobile POV that creates three-dimensional depth within the two-dimensional page: We first see the writer's pen in synecdochal close-up. The poem then appears to track out of the window of the room where we joined the narrator. Note how the sound of a spade is placed before the line break echoing the way film will often present a sound and then track the camera to find its source. What's new here is Heaney's use of flashback. This is both a horizontal cut – we are going back in time – but also a vertical one; a match cut from the spade in the poem's contemporary moment to the spade, still digging, twenty years earlier. What is achieved might be read as a cinematic showing of the lyric's exploration of sense memory.

This research has been hugely influential in how I have approached writing *Boudica*. Examining an early draft of 'Aquatic Ape Theory' will serve to give evidence of how an approach has been made towards writing with a cinematographer's sensibility: the poem is part of a suite within the body of the sequence which explore the poetic possibilities of establishing shots. The archetypal establishing shot is long, often a track, often taken from a crane or using aerial photography. Its purpose is to drop the viewer into the film with a degree of temporal and spatial context, enough for them to be getting on with at least. The poem which emerged as a response to this was somewhat disembodied, floating over its subject in a rather removed fashion. When it came to subsequent drafts my task was to think about how I wanted *Boudica* to be seen and what the poem meant to the rest of the sequence. Beyond introducing the landscape within which the poem is set, I wanted the poem to carry an image of Boudica submerged to her top lip in water, not drowning or trying to drown but rather conveying a sense that this is a

⁶⁸ Seamus Heaney 'Digging' in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002) p. 4.

woman in & of her element. In the poem's current incarnation, I have settled with the use of an extreme close-up, curiously counter-intuitive to my initial intentions. It begins:

The woman submerged
to her top lip in river
water is clearly in her
element. The rucked
surface divides her face.
Ripples under her nose

where the shade
of a moustache baleens
a tannin of fish scales,
down & damsel fly
wings.

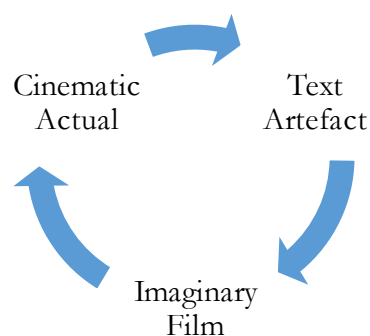
Bordwell and Thompson in *Film Art: An Introduction*, suggest that long shots stimulate a sort of intellectual curiosity by offering the viewer multiple points of focus.⁶⁹ Here I argue that the same can be said of extreme close-ups: The closer the viewer is placed to the subject the more detail emerges and attention is once again divided and is asked to settle: on the left eye, then the right; on an eyebrow; on a stray hair or a blackhead or all of the above. The viewer is overwhelmed or feels claustrophobic. Now that this image has been established it is possible to pan out to further unpack and understand the context in which we are looking at this woman. It is the reverse of Snow's *Wavelength*, which uses a creeping zoom to focus, at last, on only one detail in the room, filling the entire screen. 'Aquatic Ape Theory' sets up with the woman in her element and then zooms out from there to explore and record that context. This is merely theoretical. It wasn't enough for me to just *read* the poem as a film, I needed to find a way to *prove* that I had written a cine-poem or, better yet, to find a way of making film and poetry happen together in a dynamic instance, responding to a Wittgensteinianism of demonstrating a method by example.

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⁶⁹ Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 2001) (p. 268).

It was only after I had completed a draft of the sequence that I could begin the work of making the film. I allowed each poem to suggest an image to me, one which might create right sort of tension within the figurative distance between the textual and the visual, something which I viewed as essential for the creation of new meaning (practical detail of this process with photographs is illustrated in the appendices). At this point, many of the more allusive poems in the sequence were lost because they were unable to suggest an image which differed from their ekphrastic other. In a process which might be called reverse or notional-anticipatory ekphrasis I began storyboarding one of many possible film versions of *Boudica*. The nature of this experiment created a pleasing ouroboric effect. The poem is written and begets an imaginary film, the images within the film and the order they appear not only guide future readings of the poem but also the sequencing of the lyrics. What I have is a method which binds filmmaking and writing poetry through creative processes rather than as separate illustrative or narrative driven entities. In *Figure A*, I have created a diagram to illustrate my process – I would like to draw your attention to how its shape links back to film reels, early motion picture devices and the shield of Achilles.

Figure A



The editing of the film is where the true work of sequencing began. In the appendix below, I have provided detail of my working method with scans of drafts, how I approached

writing a shooting script for the film with stills from the shoot. I have done this to illustrate how, once I had an image for each poem, I could approach the sequencing as a filmmaker, working out which image would follow on from which and why. The film was shot over one week in August 2016 on a Sony HDVR and a Panasonic Lumix DSLR. Until this point I left space for some flexibility with the images so while some of the storyboard will be familiar to you from the film, like the garage door in sunlight as suggestive of the ennui of inner city suburbs – other images were ‘found’ or allowed to suggest themselves to me while filming like the fitful lights of the Castle Mall sign. Once I began working with the rushes I found the poems were quickly rearranging themselves and forming a film order.

The poet Chloe Mayo was cast to narrate the poem and her balanced, affirmative reading provided an appropriate delivery of the poetry. At the time of the recording I noted how her reading provided an access point to the work for the reader as well as providing the point of contact between the images and the text. It struck me that *Boudica* the poem and *Boudica* the film, like the visual and textual in Maas and Barker, Keiller and Robinson, Gross and Denison, are figuratively related but superficially distinct. What I have taken from their work is the idea that by experiencing poem and film or language and image simultaneously, a new meaning or sequence of new meanings are created which are apart from either the poem or the film but are unobtainable – or not fully realised – without the two together. It can be represented by a rather trite equation (*figure b*) in which the value X represents an almost unlimited and indeterminate number of possibilities of meaning and association which any given reader might arrive at in the process of comprehending at once both text and image.

Figure B.

$$\frac{\textit{Textual}}{\textit{Visual}} = X$$

In the ‘Tithe Barn Cinema’ scene I have chosen to pair a reading of a poem about memories of going to the cinema as a teenager coupled with a sequence of images depicting the ruined city walls of Norwich. If we are to take each alone then they are just that, however when put together we get a host of new associations coming into play. Perhaps this is the cinema before it was a cinema or maybe these are the post-apocalyptic ruins of the cinema described. Other ruined buildings both recent and ancient feature significantly in the film: there is the Roman fort at Burgh Castle near Yarmouth and the abandoned railway station where non-stop trains still scream through and passengers crane their necks to read the name of the forgotten station. Fusing text and image in this way creates something of a dystopian landscape like Maas’ imaginative terrains in *The Geography of the Body* and I will explore this further in the next chapter since not all of the visual/textual relations have been chosen to give this effect. Rather the figurative distance between the poem and image has been modulated – sometimes the images are brought into ‘earshot’ and allow themselves to be illustrative of the poems. ‘Organosedimentary Avenue Blues’ for example pairs a poem about working door-to-door in the suburbs with a meditation on the sort of garage door one might find in that part of the urban landscape. In ‘An Incantation’, a close-up of water and the calligraphy of wind and light across its surface pairs with a poem that purports to be the voice of the landscape, so the narrator appears to be translating directly from the water. It was never in my interest to illustrate the poem with film and, since I did not manage to write the narrative poem I set out to, a conventional adaptation also seemed irrelevant. I don’t rule them out totally but leave them for other filmmakers who might want to interpret the poem and explore the further possibilities of poetry-film. Instead I have modulated the figurative distance between text and image allowing for the viewer to become located and de-familiarised within *Boudica* and to open-up spaces in which specific meanings and associations might manifest. In *Cinema II* Gilles Deleuze offers up an idea of disciplinary relationship which seemed pertinent to my work. “The encounter,” he writes, “between two disciplines doesn’t take place when one begins to reflect on another, but when one

disciple realises that it has to resolve, for itself and by its own means, a problem similar to one confronted by the other.”⁷⁰ *Boudica* recognises that the problem of sequencing a poem and editing a film are similar and by augmenting Deluze’s contention here I have aimed to show that one may resolve this issue *on behalf* of the other one.

⁷⁰ Deluze, Gilles *Cinema II: The Time-Image* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) p. 205.

Chapter Three: Reflections & Theory

It can be helpful, at a certain point, to think again about the early influences for a project; I thought again about collaborative efforts between poets and filmmakers, films such as the Basil Wright and Harry Watts film *Night Mail* which was commissioned by the GPO Film Unit in 1936 and used W. H. Auden's poetry as a soundtrack, or the film-poems of Tony Harrison – particularly *Metamorphheus* – or Willard Maas' experimental film *The Geography of the Body*. In the first instance Auden composed poetry while watching Wright and Watts' completed film, a mode of writing approaching ekphrasis but also “writing with the help of a stop-watch so that each snatch of verse would fit the film shot.”⁷¹ Working with filmmaker Oliver Taplin, Tony Harrison's *Metamorphheus* follows the journey of Orpheus' head as it sings its way down the Hebrus, into the Mediterranean and on to Lesbos. Maas' 1943 film fuses the poetry of George Barker with close up shots of the naked bodies of Maas and his wife Marie Menken. Sitney observes the way Mass avoids identifying the possessive pronouns of the poem with the images of himself and his wife. By the time the third image appears – the close-up of an ear – the phrase we hear, “At the entrance to the Hyderbadean temple no acolytes await us,” identifies the aural canal with the temple “entrance.” Later, the image of toes rhyme with “these rare Choric shells in which the Sirens have been imprisoned.” Through the alchemy of poeticometaphorical relations – those storm cables of meanings which yoke language and image together – the body parts become an “imaginary terrain through which the verbal personae move.”⁷² I was also reminded of Patrick Keiller's Robinson trilogy – *London* (1994), *Robinson in Space* (1997) and *Robinson in Ruins* (2008) – which pair language (though this time prose) and images of late-capitalist England and the English landscape in much the same way as Maas, Menken and

⁷¹ Davenport-Hines, Richard *Auden* (London: Vintage, 2003) p. 144.

⁷² Sitney, P. Adams *The Cinema of Poetry* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) p. 109

Barker. Language here both explains and censors its images, according to Iain Sinclair's essay 'London: Necropolis of Fretful Ghosts'. The viewer's attention is drawn to and away from certain elements of an image based on what the disembodied voice of the narrator is describing. Language holds together disparate elements⁷³ in such a way as to auteur our viewing of tenuously related, or non-vertically sequenced images. In layman's terms, we are asked not just to see, but to see this or see *like this*.

The works identified by Willard Maas and Patrick Keiller are exemplars of two lines of precursory theoretical discussion which are fundamental to the Boudica project. The first is a line of thought treats cinema as a synecdoche for modernity while the second explores how certain practises within film-making can open certain ways of combing cinema with poetry.

Cinema as a Symbol of Modernity in *Boudica*

Cultural theorist Linda Nead views Eadweard Muybridge's experiments with early motion picture devices as part of an innate human desire for cinema and motion. Her book *The Haunted Gallery* tracks this desire from the earliest camera obscura and oil powered magic lanterns to its realisation in the late Victorian era with George Méliès, the Lumiere brothers, Hubert von Herkomer and the industrialised motion picture. In her book, Nead writes about how the mind is opened in the presence of projected and moving images. She quotes from the memoirs of children's writer Alison Uttley, who recounts an evening spent with a magic lantern. "A sheet was hung from the clothes line, across the room, to take the pictures..."

The lamp was extinguished so that the place was in darkness... My brother stood on the chair and manipulated the slides: the tiny lantern sent a stream of smoke to the low ceiling, and there was a delicious odour of hot japanned metal. The brightly coloured pictures filled us with joy and we looked at them over and over, inventing tales about them, swept into a world of romance... The wind then blew through an open door, and

⁷³ Sinclair, Ian 'London: Necropolis of Fretful Ghosts' in Patrick Keiller dir. *London* (London: BFI, 1996) p. 16.

the little lantern flame flared up; the sheet flew out like a sail, and the circular picture of a ship in a storm rocked violently as it was flung...⁷⁴

Reading it reminded me of the opening scenes in Giuseppe Tornatore's 1988 film *Cinema Paradiso* in which the young Salvatore gazes out from the back of the eponymous Sicilian theatre at the projector beam caught with curls of cigarette smoke. In both instances, the mind becomes receptive to as Nead later puts it "the magical power of the projected image"⁷⁵. On a literal level, the beam of light carries an image or sequence of images from the projector that "reconstitute and take form when the light meets an opaque surface."⁷⁶ We don't know what images the beam of light contains until we have established a screen on to which they may be projected. One possible assumption one could make of this uncertainty is that the beam signifies the entirety of visual culture, "a powerful sign of memory and visual imagination."⁷⁷ This sign, something of a postmodern trope, becomes an unsealed urn which holds not only the visual culture but also the desire for motion which is bound to that culture. This is potently realised not only in *Cinema Paradiso* but also in Ingmar Bergman's *Persona*, Terence Davies' *Distant Voices, Still Lives* and Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*, all of which feature a preoccupation with the projector beam.

Another related idea is the equation of the film screen and the windscreen of the motor car: English artist and moral critic Hubert von Herkomer was, among many things, a keen motorist. He was inspired to enter the fledgling film industry after observing the landscape of England as he saw it framed in the windshield of his motor car. Nead argues that motor driving offered a "changed visual perception." Prior to this only rail travel allowed for an individual to observe the landscape at speed. No longer was the landscaped framed by the peripheries of vision but by the windshield of the motor car. No longer were the hills, woods and cities viewed

⁷⁴ Nead, Linda *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography and Film C.1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). (p. 145).

⁷⁵ Nead, Linda *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography and Film C.1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) (p.145)

⁷⁶ Ibid (p. 145)

⁷⁷ Ibid (p. 145)

“continuous and unfolding,”⁷⁸ from the vantages of horseback, bicycle or pedestrian motion. The more sedate modes of viewing give way “to a rapid succession of images; perhaps it is possible,” says Nead, “to define this shift as a move from a panoramic to a cinematic aesthetic.”⁷⁹ This change in aesthetic and perception occurred in tandem with cinema: I am curious as to whether the cinematic aesthetic was a response to the industrial revolution and mechanised transportation or were the modes in which we choose to travel responding to a changed sensibility in how we view images? Or were both cinema and motorised travel realising for one another this desire for kinaesthetic images?

Herkomer believed so. He believed that the industrial revolution had changed his way of seeing. Nead draws from an interview with Herkomer in *The Haunted Gallery*: “I get nature framed – and one picture after another delights my artistic eye.”⁸⁰ The man still sought images, composed and framed but now they pressed “themselves on his vision in rapid succession, while the hood and glass front of his car create a screen for nature’s moving images.”⁸¹ Even now, perhaps even more so now, the driver’s experience and the cinematic experience can be equated. Thinking back to Chris Petit’s foreword to *Est: Collected Reports From East Anglia* he writes of driving east: “the road, frame by the windscreen, becomes like a movie. Driving and cinema are both forms of controlled projection capable of freeing the mind; the car and the movie theatre are among the only spaces of secular meditation and retreat.”⁸² We sit and look out on a screen, an enclosed space within which we and our fellow passengers are the ghost in the machine. What other two ways of seating are designed with built-in cup holders? This might be a bit of a stretch. Plus, this idea is undermined some pages later in *The Haunted Gallery* when Nead reminds us that

⁷⁸ Nead, Linda *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography and Film C.1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). (p. 155).

⁷⁹ Nead, Linda *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography and Film C.1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) (p.155).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. (p.155).

⁸² Chris Petit in *Est: Collected Reports from East Anglia*, ed. by M.W. Bewick and Ella Johnston, (Wivenhoe: Dunlin Press, 2015) (p 2).

early motorists had none of the Baudrillardian out of body experiences which characterise 21st century driving. Instead what was reported was an intense, “sensory relationship between motor and body.”⁸³

Nead’s theories on modernity, the impulse towards movement and their relation to cinema are frequently realised in *Boudica*. ‘Queen of Some Kind’ attempts to convey something of landscaped viewed in motion. I was interested in capturing a childhood activity of finding different perspectives from which look out of the car, lying across the backseat or clambering into the boot to look out of the rear windshield. “Rising through the scale of gears,” the senses are engaged. The roving line of the Norfolk horizon is broken by trees or small hamlets which speed reduces to a flash on the screen like a cardio scope reading. The poem then goes car advert – name checking East Anglian landmarks – and you’d be forgiven for expecting a slow-motion close-up as the car splashes through a ford or huge puddle. Instead, the poem maps the terrain by linking these places with the tracking shot which the car journey represents. I have mentioned previously that early cinema (and indeed the desire for motion) is expressed in the equation of stasis into movement, “mobilisation and velocity” as Nead puts it and the various states in between. ‘Queen of Some Kind’ reverses this, beginning with motion and then finding stasis. Just as light seems brighter when the shade is deep, the physicality of cinema and speed finds expression in its opposing state.

Stop the car, Boudica. She rolls down
the window. *Listen*, that slim
trickle of water you can hear,

rumours that all ways in East Anglia,
if you trouble to follow them, end up
somewhere like this: Concrete slabs.
Asparagus haulms. Russet grain silos.
Curlew.

The zing of piss & history.

⁸³ Nead, Linda *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography and Film C.1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). (p. 155).

The language becomes heavier with detail once the motion described comes to a halt. There is also a case to be made for the syntax of the poem, which becomes increasingly staccato by the end of the passage. Sentences shorten to phrases and nouns placed within a syntactical flow, like a sequence of close-ups flashed on the screen. This technique is repeated throughout the sequence both in text and image: (see ‘An Incantation’ & ‘How Easy It Would Be Not to Think of a Quail’ or the non-stop train tearing through a disused railway station).

When the theories are tested in practise, the change in state from motion to arrest and vice versa appears to sharpen the senses somewhat and seems to put both poet and reader in a more receptive state. Compare this sentiment to a passage from Herkomer written in 1904: “Once we stopped, drawing up by the fragrant roadside; and as the pulses of the engine died away, so died the strange sensation of giant divine life with which its breath had endowed us...”⁸⁴ Nead equates Herkomer’s experience of speed and motion to the reactions of early film audiences. We all know the stories of audiences supposedly fleeing from screenings of the Lumière brothers’ 1895 film *L’Arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat*. Reports that people thought the train would bust through the screen are now understood to be exaggerated but there was a bodily reaction, a similar sensory relationship between the viewer and the image. I believe that this relationship endures, that we are not passive recipients of the visual spectacle, at least not all the time. Rather cinema, moving pictures, are, as Nead writes, “affective form[s] of communication [which create] motivated public response.”⁸⁵ I am reminded here, of Krieger’s view of ekphrasis as a desire to still literature’s turning world. I’d argue that in *Boudica*, my use of an ekphrasis which engages with the cinematic culture opposes that view. Instead, it might be thought of as another tool for sating a desire for motion. & perhaps, if you can accept that idea, the idea of cinempoetry and film poems have always been with us in the form of ekphrastic poetry.

⁸⁴ Nead, Linda *The Haunted Gallery: Painting, Photography and Film C.1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). (p. 155).

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* (p. 161).

That ekphrasis has always been an attempt to set in motion the frozen images which would remain frozen until the advent of cinematic technologies.

Poetry and Slow Cinema

When it finally did occur, the film – poetry encounter happened very quickly. Modernist French poetry frequently collided with film efforts of the Surrealists and avant-garde filmmakers like Mallarmé and Man Ray as well as in early mainstream films by Jean Cocteau such as the 1932 *Sang d'un Poete* and the 1946 *La Belle et La Bête*. There endures a tendency within the avant-garde to invariably refer to short, dreamlike films as poems: I am thinking here of Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon*, Stan Brakhage's Vancouver Island films and Bruce Baillie's *All My Life*. For a brief time, Brakhage even identified himself as a poet in the Poundian tradition and a book has been written on how his films fit into an American modernist literary context (c.f. Elder 1998). He was not a successful poet but a visionary filmmaker; in *The Cinema of Poetry*, titled after Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay of the same name, film theorist P. Adams Sitney focuses on how impressionistic, European filmmakers like Ingmar Bergman and the avant-garde filmmakers in post-war America were applying the language of poetry to their films. In his introduction to the book he quotes from the Cinema 16 symposium in which several writers and filmmakers, including Dylan Thomas, met in New York to discuss the developing relationship between film and poetry. An essay by one of its panellists, Parker Tyler, called 'Dream Structure: The Basis of Experimental Film', asserts that "we must learn to interpret the symbols in experimental films not as psychoanalytic but as *poetic* material."⁸⁶

During that same symposium, Maya Deren observes two lines or axes of time within cinema. One she calls horizontal and one vertical.

⁸⁶ Tyler, Parker 'Dream Structure: The Basis of Experimental Film' in *The Three Faces of the Film* (New York: A.S. Barnes and Co., 1967). P.45).

The distinction of poetry is its construction and the poetic construct arises from the fact that it is a ‘vertical’ investigation of a situation, in that it probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned in a sense not with what is occurring, but with what it feels like or what it means”⁸⁷

Sitney also picks up on this in his book and defines them thus: the horizontal is “the development of plot over sequential time.”⁸⁸ This is cinematic time with which we are all familiar; the image of a gunman riding towards a frontier town is followed by an image of the same gunman riding past the shadow of the water tower and onto the main street. The vertical temporality is harder to pin down. Sitney calls it “the exploration of the associations of a moment. Deren equates this vertical line with poetry. Poetry, she says, is “an approach to experience [...] a vertical investigation of a situation [...] concerned with its qualities and its depth [...] concerned not with what is occurring but with what it feels like or what it means.”⁸⁹ While Dylan Thomas is supremely scornful of Deren, I agree with her contention and am interested in the idea of a dialectic within cinema: one concerned with linear time and the other concerned with the present, with its depth and ramifications; after all, the image according to Pound, is “an emotional and intellectual complex caught in an instant of time.”⁹⁰ “Tape Loop’ is an excellent example of this.

Another filmmaker who frequently combined film and poetry is the great Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky. His work has been hugely influential to this project; indeed, it was the realisation that Tarkovsky’s father was a poet, and the use of his father’s poetry in his films *Nostaliga* (1983) and *Mirror* (1973) which set me on this line of research. The stillness and sweep of his images are seductive to a poet in the way they construct significance around places, moments and objects. What interested me is that his mode of filmmaking leaves space for an

⁸⁷ Deren, Maya speaking in Maas, Willard (chairman), “Poetry & The Film: A symposium” in *Film Culture* 29 (Summer 1963) (p. 56).

⁸⁸ P Adams Sitney *The Cinema of Poetry* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) (p.108).

⁸⁹ Ibid. (p.108).

⁹⁰ Pound, Ezra ‘A Few Don’t by an Imagiste’ in *Poetry Magazine* (30/10/2005, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/artides/detail/58900>).

intersection of film and poetry rather than simply the harvesting verse meaning from the visual. While his films were influential to the creative work, reading Tarkovsky's manifesto on film *Sculpting in Time*, translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair, helped me begin to understand why presenting a film-poem is an appropriate form for *Boudica*. His is a species of film which straddles the experimental, the avant-garde and the verticality of cinema and the horizontally structured closed romantic realism of Hollywood action cinema. This is what is often defined as slow cinema, cinema which takes its time. Slow cinema is considered honest and offers a means "of mediation on the fraught relationship between the appearance of the world and its meanings."⁹¹ Tarkovsky was a practitioner of slow cinema, as was Pasolini and Bresson, as is Sokhurov, Michael Snow, Steve McQueen and Terence Davies.

Film theorist Ira Jaffe has written extensively about slow cinema, picking up on the writing of Deluze in *Cinema II* Jaffe points out that "Deluze finds spatiotemporal lacunae"⁹² in the so-called time-image (the record of the flow of time which a cinematic image, according to Tarkovsky, should seek to capture). Figures within these images, often of empty or seemingly empty or deserted spaces, are observers or seers as opposed to agents. Something happens to time when action slows down. Like Deluze we can think of the time-image as the thinking-image (c.f. Pound). I equate this to the lyric poem itself, which, as Farley reminds us "is more concerned with building something out of time, rather than offering narrative or strict chronology (*Poeien*: to make)."⁹³ Jaffe writes that "the physical stillness, emptiness and silence in slow movies may instigate, for instance, pensiveness about the non-existence that precedes and follows life, or about the metaphysical emptiness in the human soul."⁹⁴ Or in the case of Terence Davies's *Distant Voices, Still Lives* it encourages contemplation on memories of family and growing up in working class Liverpool. In Ben Rivers' and Ben Russell's film *A Spell to Ward off the Darkness*

⁹¹ Jaffe, Ira *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014) p. 30.

⁹² Ibid. p. 31.

⁹³ Farley, Paul Farley 'Wavelength and The Dark Film' *Eng208: Film and Poetry* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 2016).

⁹⁴ Jaffe, Ira *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014) p. 16.

stillness is about the present but also about *presence* – a sense of being in and of the world. They present “discrete moments that could be happening at the same time or in any order” and use editing strategies to show different perceptions of time: conventional editing for the passage of days and weeks, the long take for an extended or stilled moment as “glacial time”⁹⁵ or a time which aspires to the rhythms of nature rather than human life. I see these as comparable to Wordsworthian ‘spots of time’ (c.f. *The Prelude* 1888). In *Boudica* I have attempted to present a way of writing that absorbs these modes of filmmaking. As with the films of Tarkovsky, Rivers and Russel, and Davies, the images in *Boudica* are sometimes uncomfortably slow or still. The decision to follow their lead was based on the ways in which individual lyrics already isolated imagery within them. In these moments, the lines come back to Liardet’s idea of ekphrasis as a frictional and liminal point in language as it seeks to make present the visual. This impetus comes into friction with the desire for narrative and exposition. I began to ask myself what would happen if you could reduce the lyrics to a single elemental image or its suggested atmosphere? The sequence would become one comprised of poems which might be a single grammatical unit, a single line or even a lone word. A case could be made for doing this but the reading experience would be slim. The decision to make *Boudica* as a film and test it against the text presents an effective and affective way of allowing *Boudica* to not only be at once a poem and a film but for the two media to blend into one another.

Time in *Boudica*, as in other slow films bears, “an affinity to the natural sense of time, a rhythm of life.”⁹⁶ From my experiences in Norfolk it is as much the small, irregular or spasmodic movements of nature which show the passage of time: the turning of wind turbines, the movement of reeds, the lap of water, as much as it is the grand rhythms of the tides, the train times the movement of light to darkness. The stillness draws the reader into the image to look for signs of the present as in the shots of buildings, ruins or windows reflecting the drift of

⁹⁵ ‘An Interview with Ben Rivers and Ben Russell’ in *A Spell to Ward Off the Darkness* Dir. Rivers and Russel (London: Soda Pictures, 2013).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

clouds or the contrail of an all but invisible jet. In doing so “a slow, perhaps mythical past is invoked.” As a teenager, much of my free time was spent crossing housing estates and heathland in search of beer or weed or solitude, often at odd hours like dawn after a party at a friend’s house or in the evening after work or school. I see this as comparable to the activities of the flâneur, to the cosmopolitan strolls of Walter Benjamin which “exemplified openness and availability, allowing oneself to be traversed by time and inhabited by the traces of a past that is not one’s own.”⁹⁷ *Boudica* the film appears to depict a mythical present which may or may not belong to Boudica or the viewer, this allows me to conflate the present with the past and the presences which habit landscape. The filmmaker Wim Wenders writes that “when people think they’ve seen enough of something and then there’s more and no change of shot, then they react in a curiously livid way.”⁹⁸ Casual viewers of cinema are too used to the pace of horizontal action and are provoked when this is interrupted. However, those who are willing to accept the silence and slow-time of *Boudica* will, I hope, react in a meditative way as mentioned earlier (see Deren). This was anecdotally supported by early screenings of the film (Paul Farley remarked that watching the film and hearing the poem focused his attention as he encountered links between the visual and the spoken). “Slow movies provoke new thoughts or encourage contemplation”⁹⁹ and this enhanced mental state creates a fertile imaginative space for the poem to be encountered, the silences between poems, the held shots, developing this pensive or contemplative mood. Watching the film back now I find two equally pleasing readings of these extended moments: The first as a thawing of those frozen moments of painting which were the preoccupation of traditional writers of ekphrasis. & the second, as in *A Spell to Ward off the Darkness*, the extended moments can be read as Wordsworthian spots of time which perhaps exist in a single moment or over the course of a few nights or over the span of millennia.

⁹⁷ Jaffe, Ira *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2014) p. 10.

⁹⁸ Wenders, Wim in *The Cinematic* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2007) (p. 54).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 11.

Chapter Four: On Formal and Thematic Synergy

When my parents moved with my brothers and me to Norfolk in the summer of 1999, I hated East Anglia and its featureless landscape of fields running on to the sky, ditches full of stagnant water and parochialism, hatching mosquitoes. Norfolk feels remote, though not enough to possess the romanticisms of the far-north archipelagos of Orkney and Shetland or the Lizard peninsula in Cornwall. Nonetheless, Norfolk is the end of the line, a Land's End. "England ignores East Anglia, on the way to nowhere"¹⁰⁰ writes filmmaker and novelist Chris Petit in his foreword to *Est: Collected Reports from East Anglia*. The landscape is "cinematic as opposed to picturesque."¹⁰¹ Indeed, once you're here there's a sense that you've nowhere else to go and not much to do but stare at the horizon, ironed out under the immense cloudscapes and sharp light which so fascinated the Victorian schools of painters. As such, the Norfolk condition is one of introversion, isolation, melancholy, subject to pathetic fallacy dictated by the changeable sky. On the cusp of adolescence, I entered into this condition tramping around the county in my muddy Doc Martens, smoking in the graveyards of ruined churches, kicking up fossils and lumps of petrified wood on vast and empty beaches. I had nowhere and nothing but also everywhere and everything, which can be just as bad. *Boudica* is, on a thematic level, attempting to convey this state of mind and there are several key verse and film influences which have helped me in this endeavour which are explored below.

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¹⁰⁰ Chris Petit in *Est: Collected Reports from East Anglia*, ed. by M W Bewick and Ella Johnston, (Wivenhoe: Dunlin Press, 2015) (p 2).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* (p 3).

In *The Ekphrastic Encounter in Contemporary British Poetry and Elsewhere*, David Kennedy focuses his attention on the previously mentioned Philip Gross and Simon Denison joint, *I Spy Pinhole Eye*. He points out that Gross does not write directly about Denison's subject (the concrete feet of electricity pylons) but, as Gross acknowledges in his notes on the text, that the approach to writing involved "thinking not just of them but around [them]".¹⁰² Kennedy conjectures that this thinking involved writing about new worlds or other worlds and observes several allusions to Cortez, Robinson Crusoe, colonialism in 'First Footing', as well as the breaking through from one plane of existence to another in 'Saccadia' for example or the submarine world of 'Bathysphere'. Kennedy writes that the small, unexpected discoveries of the pinhole camera negatives are reimagined in verse on a global scale in verse¹⁰³. It strikes me that something similar is at work in *Boudica*. While there are poems specifically allusive to cinema – 'After Terrence Malik's *Badlands*' is an ekphrastic engagement with the piano-burning scene from that film and '*Abbsbbb*' and its engagement with the schematics and variations of cinema have already been discussed – I often do not write about cinema directly. My thinking around and about cinema has led to a preoccupation with the suburban or 'edgelands' territory: The scablands of grazed knees, horses in muddy paddocks, plastic bags in trees, damp caravans by railway lines, intercity trains. Instead of new worlds in the colonial sense, it is a seemingly dystopian future or dystopian present which manifests in my verse: The railway lines have grown over; East Anglia is flooded, the neon lights of capitalism appear to be flickering out. This dystopian vision translates into the film too. I have long been curious about what might remain of our culture in centuries or millennia to come. This fascination manifests in my decision to pair 'Tithe Barn Cinema' with images of the old defensive walls surrounding the city of Norwich. The title suggests – and the poem unpacks – an ancient building re-purposed as a sort of picture house style arts cinema much like the one I used to hang out in while I was bunking off school. The film then asks the

¹⁰² Denison, Simon and Gross, Philip *I Spy Pinhole Eye* (London: Cinnamon Press, 2006) (p. 69).

¹⁰³ Kennedy, David *The Ekphrastic Encounter in Contemporary British Poetry and Elsewhere*, (London: Ashgate, 2012) (p. 245).

viewer to imagine this, perhaps, after the collapse of western society. The building is re-ruined or ready to be repurposed again.

Perhaps the closest film antecedent to *Boudica* would be Patrick Keiller's Robinson trilogy, *London*, *Robinson in Space* and *Robinson in Ruins*. These films straddle documentary, the British psychogeographical tradition, fiction and essay forms. Like *Boudica*, these are films of stasis, and they enter that tradition which takes in the works of Michael Snow, Andy Warhol, Chris Marker's *La Jetée* and goes right the way back to early cinema. In *Motion[less] Pictures the Cinema of Stasis* Justin Remes reminds his readers that "films were initially presented as [...] projections of still photographs. After a few moments of stasis, the projector would be put in motion and the "photograph" would become animated."¹⁰⁴ However, this tradition does not just loop into the *Boudica* project's deep-seated obsession with motion into stasis and early motion pictures; static cinema is an aesthetic choice. In the Robinson films, as in *Boudica*, the camera is static (fixed) but the images are not. Writing about *Robinson in Ruins*, Doreen Massey points out that the stillness of the film is arresting "especially in the long takes of flowers, bees and butterflies. But they are not 'stills' and they are not about stasis. Things are happening; the flowers and the bees are working."¹⁰⁵ Things are working in *Boudica* too: I think of the long take of the spider which eventually begins to spasm as if in protest or the portrait of Boudica's parent's(?), so desperate to be a parody of Grant Wood's *American Gothic*, and would be just that were it not for the languorous uncoiling of smoke from the smoker. Massey recalls Henri Bergson's philosophy of duration; these quiet moments of localised sublimity allow space for the poetry to establish a relationship with the film content because "they challenge the notion that space is a static slice through time." Massey goes on to explain that "Space, is in fact imbued with the temporal; if it is a slice through time then it cuts through a myriad of on-going stories.

¹⁰⁴ Justin Remes *Motion[less] Pictures: The Cinema of Stasis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Doreen Massey 'Landscape/space/politics: abstract of an essay' in *Robinson in Ruins* (London: BFI, 2006).

As it lingers in the landscape the camera is open to the surprises of these stories.”¹⁰⁶ For Keiller these stories are for the narrator to unpack. In *Robinson in Space* we are brought to the house in Reading once occupied by Rimbaud and Verlaine, now a seat of local council. In *Robinson in Ruins* it is the riots against wages and land reform at Thatcham and Otmoor. Mark Fisher, in his essay ‘English Pastoral’ writes that *Robinson in Ruins* “returns to landscapes where antagonism and martyrdom once took place.”¹⁰⁷ In *Boudica* it is the Celtic revolt against the Roman occupation which acts as a psychic bedrock for the poem. Once upon a time, the poem drew a parallel between that pagan revolt and the widespread rioting which took place in August of 2011. One poem survives – ‘The Water Thief’ – which alludes to that summer and paints Boudica as one of those rioters so desperate to be seen that they were ready to loot anything, even bottled water, and so thoroughly patronised by David Cameron’s socially elite government. My Boudica is, I realise, more provincial, though held in place by those same political constructs which the rioters seemed to be kicking against. The poem, and the film, point to this historical context and exist within it but are not an explicit part of it. Just as Robinson does not allow himself to be caught up in a single moment of history but exists instead in a space which “rather than being a static surface – is a simultaneity of stories-so-far.” Massey here is writing about *Robinson in Ruins* but she might as well be writing about *Boudica*: “The form of the film, then, can provoke us to see landscape as a multiplicity of trajectories [...] not buried in a layered past but bursting through to speak to us now.”¹⁰⁸

This way of seeing or fanciful way of thinking owes much, in poetic terms, to Geoffrey Hill’s *Mercian Hymns*, Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts’ book *Edgelands* and the deep topographical writing of Nick Papadimitriou. Indeed, if I were to pick a presiding influence for the way I have handled the subject matter of *Boudica* it could only be *Mercian Hymns*. This

¹⁰⁶ Doreen Massey ‘Landscape/space/politics: abstract of an essay’ in *Robinson in Ruins* dir. Patrick Keiller (London: BFI, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ Mark Fisher ‘English Pastoral’ in *Robinson in Ruins* dir. Patrick Keiller (London: BFI, 2006).

¹⁰⁸ Doreen Massey ‘Landscape/space/politics: abstract of an essay’ in *Robinson in Ruins* dir. Patrick Keiller (London: BFI, 2006).

sequence of thirty prose poems (first published in 1971), draws a diachronic link between the life of the eighth-century Mercian ruler King Offa with memories of Hill's own childhood in the 20th century Mercia of the west Midlands. Roy Fischer, perhaps Hill's closest contemporary, wrote this on the collection (its original source is unknown; this passage is taken from a feature on Hill by Robert Potts published in *The Guardian*):

[Hill's poetry] is thought of as tending to make an aesthetico-political sound far to the right of what I'm about. And there is this priestly and hieratic quality which some of the people who like what I like would think of as rather tight and bombastic. I was caught by it very much. The idea of there being a history of quite savage energy which is almost recoverable from the body of Middle England.¹⁰⁹

Hill doesn't simply combine memory and history but presents them as existing together: he conflates the history of early England with 20th century modernism: "King of the perennial holly-groves, the riven sand-stone: overlord of the M5:" "I was invested in mother-earth, the crypt of roots and endings [...] I abode there, bided my time:" "Gasholders, russet among fields. Milldams, marlpools that lay unstirring. Eel-swarms. Coagulations of frogs."¹¹⁰ Mixed registers, mixed ancient and modern cultures, mixed landscapes, not so much bombastic but the mutterings of a visionary edge-land wanderer who is by turns unintelligible and lucid. Offa is not just another despotic figure in the long, violent history of Britain, for Hill he is a *genius loci* whose "savage energy" exists within and outside of time. The mixed registers also appear in Gross and Denison's book. There is, as Kennedy points out, a language of "archaeology, history and mythology". As with Hill, there are references to the Roman occupation of the British Isles, the medieval and dark ages, even a cursory scan of the contents page reveals poems titled 'Hoard' and 'Yggdrasil'. What is interesting to me is the interplay between Gross' language and his subject – Denison's pylons. Kennedy highlights Denison's endnote plea that Gross' poems are different from the 1930's poetry which "celebrated pylons as symbols of progress" – "tall

¹⁰⁹ Potts, Robert 'The Praise Singer' in *The Guardian* (10/08/2002): <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/10/featuresreviews.guardianreview15>

¹¹⁰ Hill, Geoffrey *Mercian Hymns* (London: Andre Deustche, 1971) p. 2 – 30).

with prophecy / dreaming of cities”¹¹¹ wrote Spender. Kennedy remarks that Gross seems to reject “the idea of modernity as a rupture.” Instead, he follows the Hillian impulse to fuse through imagery and diction the modern and the ancient. What is created is a sense of locatedness, a deep topography in which all time exists at once and the poems tap their vat of regional memory.

‘Permanent Exhibition’ recounts a chilling encounter with a diorama at a local museum, the character of Boudica observes an ancestral resemblance to the figure of a Celtic warrior in the process of executing a Roman civilian. ‘Meanwhile...’ uses the filmic trope of passing through a mirror or water to signal the passing through one internal system of logic to another. Time travel. The poem begins with Boudica at a chalybeate (iron salt) spring performing a kind of ritual: ancient coins “plump” and decorated with symbols familiar to me from tedious school trips to local museums or archaeological digs, woad makes its first appearance in the sequence as “blue wool” and the Celtic flavoured word “cloodie” earns a place here too. The first half ends by violently yanking the reader from the world of tribal Albion and right into the 20th century with “a line of druids proceeds from the visitor centre.” The poem opens a portal or time-slip which fuses the ancient or mythological and the modern. Boudica dives into the spring but finds herself surfacing in the 21st century to, presumably pass the “line of Druids” on her way out the car park where she – Keyser Söze style – makes her escape. Edgelands florae such as hogweed and cow parsley feature here too, the umbelliferon of roadside ditches and derelict estates. It is perhaps more realised later in the sequence in poems such as ‘Let’s Get into Character’ which opens with the image of rape flowers – a common crop in East Anglia which has managed to seed itself in the verges and ditches the county. So too in ‘The Urban Regeneration of Her Tribal Land’:

Along the old branch line, she wrinkles
her nose at wafts of anaerobic rot.

¹¹¹ Stephen Spender *New Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2015) p. 46.

Fly agarics thrust, syphilitic through
the mulch. Panties hang on hawthorn

like something flayed. The overgrowth
affords glimpses of potholed cul-

de-sacs, caved-in trampolines, the milk-
eyed stare of bathroom windows.

There's the iron ribbonry of council
commissioned sculpture to consider,

lit nightly by thin, even LED light;
the piss-head's hotspot: a ruined

signal box draped in a ghillie suit
of fern & ivy where she puts an ear

to heaped rubble. Through the insect
tombs, says Boudica, I can hear down

to the ocean floor, past the din of industry,
years shovelling steam, centuries

of creaking tumbrels, to where the last
living tribesman of the east reanimates,

heaves himself from the fen & goes
in search of skewered meat.

Time and again, *Boudica* reveals itself to be a collection interested in the interactive zones between natural and manmade environments. In the poem at hand, the focus is another edgelands staple: the former railway line recommissioned as some sort of linear park or cycle way, where the yummy-mummy's and DILFS of suburbia jog off their pinot paunches. This is tempered with the threat of violence and dereliction; a set of underwear turns up pierced by thorns like a shrike's kill, trampolines in back gardens are caved in and the windows of houses appear as blind eyes. Civic sculpture becomes totemic; nature has reclaimed the remaining railway infrastructure. This montage of images work together it seems to access the ancient, time concertinas and the language creates again a portal between the familiar and the tribal, between domesticity and savagery. The effect is, I hope, a heightened and holistic view of place. As with

‘Meanwhile...’ cinematic techniques are at work here – there seems to a moment of split screen editing when Boudica enacts putting her ear to the ground. Perhaps most nakedly filmic is the moment when the last-living tribesman manages to break through from his dimension into Boudica’s, an image which echoes the decaying hand thrust from the grave sod, recollecting George A Romero, Hammer films and countless B-movies.

I’d like to reflect for a moment on John Rogers’ film *The London Perambulator* which follows writer and thinker Nick Papadimitriou on some of his exploratory walks around the London suburbs, areas which he fondly refers to as being like the “idle dream of a mushroom God.”¹¹² The areas of *rus in urbe*, or *urbe in rus* even, appear to have their own time systems or exists as “storage vats of regional memory or a momentary film” a sentiment which echoes the poetics of Szirtes’ *Reel*. Later, Papadimitriou talks of ley lines or, “an archetectonic based on old pagi boundaries embedded in the landscape.” And later, “a splash of sunlight smears across the red roofs of Kingsbury and a rush of wind rattles the briars down by the foot path ... once more the landscape unlocks.”¹¹³ The interactions between the natural and urban worlds give Papadimitriou a sense of timelessness. “When I first saw that,” he says towards the end of John Rogers’ film *The London Perambulator*, speaking of a small river valley passing between the back gardens of two rows of semi-detached houses, “I felt as if I was time travelling, I felt I was looking back to the pre-world war one era [...] a kind of portal or window through to other possibilities buried in the landscape.”

As I have already mentioned the poems themselves owe much to Hill’s Offa and his depiction of “the permanence of historical fact.”¹¹⁴ I also owe a debt to David Rudkin and Alan Clarke’s *Penda’s Fen* – also set in the west midlands – which depicts a young conservative boy’s spiritual encounter with Penda, the last Pagan king of England, and his personal epiphanies against the pillars of Britishness. This television play appeared three years after the publication of

¹¹² *The London Perambulator* dir. John Rogers (2014) <https://londonperambulator.wordpress.com/>

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Michael Schmidt, ‘A Defence’ in *Poetry* (June 1972) (Chicago: Poetry Foundation) p.170 – 175.

Mercian Hymns and although not a film-poem *Penda's Fen* shares the same topographical and psychogeographical locales as Offa and the language of the film owes something to the gothic-pastoralism of Hill's writing: Sukhdev Sandu speaks of a countryside scarred by the urban shrinkage of post-industrialism, an "historical battleground [...] in constant turmoil [...] wormholes and geysers, fault lines that fertilise, ruptures that release energy"¹¹⁵ a pastoralism which shrugs off smug Tolkienisms and instead becomes "attuned to its lurking darknesses."¹¹⁶ This same pastoralism permeates *Boudica*. The nature stands ready to reclaim suburbia: pianos turn up in sand dunes, brambles overgrow the railways, the sea-defenses are all but compromised. There is not quite the same bombast of the geysers and earthquakes in *Penda's Fen* but the dead – both ancient and recent – reanimate and in search of flesh which itself is able to regenerate in the cooking pot. There is violence but there is little of the cruelty of Offa, there are no flayed Ceolreds, no petulant snotty boy kings or war-bands. In reviewing *Mercian Hymns*, Michael Schmidt points out that there is a cruelty and lust for power about Offa, something he observes as being bound up with the psychosexual development of the English psyche. *Penda's Fen* and *Boudica*, with their preoccupations with paganism, also tap into a pre-oedipal Albion. The film form and the language of the poem create ley lines which intersect. Much like the lines of energy described by Alfred Watkins in *The Old Straight Track*, this intersection creates a point of energy, an augmented space in which the subject of *Boudica* is amplified and appropriately realised: a mystical and alternative spirit or punk ethic which still plays out in the edgelands, the between places where it feels as though you can slip through time as through gaps in chain-link fences.

¹¹⁵ Sukhdev Sandu in 'Penda's Fen' in *Penda's Fen* dir. Alan Clarke (London: BFI 2016).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

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