

Since its inception, poetry has grappled with constraints of form. Ancient Sanskrit texts were organized around rigidly structured patterns of *padas* (cognate to the English “foot”); classical Arabic poetry has sixteen unique metrical patterns; likewise, Greek poems were organized around a number of intricate and well-defined rules. More familiar to English readers is a form like the sonnet, with its strictly controlled rhyme scheme and iambic pentameter rhythm.

This issue, *Wag's Revue* presents poetry in the Oulipo tradition. A French poetic movement (short for *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, or “workshop of potential literature”), Oulipo asks, why not create new patterns, new structures, new constraints under which to write? George Perec’s novel *La Disparition* (*A Void*), a three-hundred-page text which never uses the letter “e,” is a famous example of an Oulipian constraint known as the lipogram, in which certain letters are not employed in a given text.

We have published poetry with unusual constraints in the past—Christian Bök’s translations of Rimbaud in Issue 3, for instance, use a number of Oulipian techniques. But this issue we devote entirely to the unusual constraint. We begin with selections from a new work by Ian Monk, one of some twenty living members of the Oulipo and the rare native English speaker in the movement. The work, entitled “Leaves of the Yucca,” is an expansion of the ancient Japanese haiku form.

**from LEAVES
OF THE YUCCA**

Ian Monk

The moon is asleep
tell me tell me so
when the it came down to it
a dumb stupid tale
what I thought I was feeling
just pathetic affection
words words words she wept
like love forcing a statement
the sun comes up watch
here the moon rises oddly
I shall never pray
I give the poor my money
like a hypocrite
I loved them and loved them all
fucking family
Jesusing mother-in-law
go and shaft yourself
she laid on me once fuck me
not my daughter no
I didn't Jesus saved me
from a heinous act
I went on to another
act two act three go
on explain she said sweetly
the foreplay's the thing
I don't know really I don't
I speak and that's all
love trembles trembles wriggles

I try to say shite
then the smile shites from my lips
the world gobbles it
and goes on anyhow fuck (...)

(...) hello and hello
beneath the silvery moon
I wake up and say
when you bathe you dream you just
carve love from the cliff
it came coded as root beer
the blacks were just blacks
when she was as young as me
we loved I think loved
one morning early and pissed
she got up and raved
come on now come on
hey you know about women
they never listen
sent shuffling homewards later (...)

(...) the drift of ourselves
well all came to pass during
one blank day of sleep
she picked me up on the train
I love fucking yes
she was well put it this way
plain faced about it
oh yes sweetness oh yes you
this is where we fuck
the golden business of art
come in here shut up
this is and isn't about

love and ambition
hone in and focus on knees
running and falling
childhood memories sharpen
leaves of the yucca
caress the skin of the drum
green nails across flesh
as they wrinkle and tumble
across the carpet
hoovered scattered making fuss
your mess run amok
told tales come on spill the beans
lick the sauce yum yum
and savour its sickly taste
of gone spice and verve
there's little left to relate
the world breakfasts on
like hotel guests awkward
in their choice of slush (...)

(...) wrap yourself around me now
tell me tell me so
when the it came down to it
the moon is asleep
tell me about it come on
is this socialist
when the world whirls it wobbles
the fucking yucca
tickles the drum skin (then what?)
green nails and green skin
someone says something sweet
past time past reason

the drunk on the street bawls and
my one night stand yells
what the fuck is up with you
I'm sleeping that's all
shut up now we're shooting
tonight in Antibes
nothing happens again zilch
this shit runs its course
like it does fuck anywhere
life bleeds underground
to feed itself again here
there now on the street
dribble comes then puke erupts
it is bile time wow
while here on the street life purrs
speel purls from each door
and says its speech to the void
it blabs on and on
saying out unthought reasons
they rhyme one on one
with the world and his fucking
wife who hen-pecks him
employer who screws him up
for good asks for more
reason to detest the world
in her Sunday best
when she speaks her so-called mind
she's out of control
the universe shuts itself up
when the world rumbles
she shrinks to herself then says
I am in love I
shall mould a cesspit into
sweetness look I am

me look just at my ankles
thighs why not go on (...)

(...) the door stammers shut
so can you picture it here
while you're gone tonight
the world spins and it trembles
so fuck that yucca
look it's there invisible
against the curtain
you can't see shit anymore
as bollocksed photons
divorce and get pissed as cunts (...)

(...) put laughter aside
so what does love really mean
it means a black hole
but here your life is bleeding
between your red hands
you clasp your cold destiny
you know love's like puss
it never drains but it pours
when calm comes it seeps
I dribble on and splutter
calm down my lovely
remember that your life's worth
all this pile of shit
a nice way of putting it
on the straight way out
of thought of teeth and wank mags
hell beckons so what
mouthing a fuck all really
just your head your head

which works on and on
which doesn't and dies who knows?
silence of course does (...)

(...) to be is to fuck
someone normally alive knows
to go is to walk
walking works simply between
the automobiles
makes your self-importance
quite silly really
watch the people in cars how
dumbly they look straight
at the windscreen then hit it
ants pain jams hurry
on towards nothing good night
your weirdness beckons (...)

(...) learning or brooding
or reading you know about
this kind of bullshit
like anything else in fact
implies a black hole
in the fabric of curtains
drawn to block the light
the charcoal scratches away
your sweet fingernails (...)

(...) the dumb endless cry
time's up now please come on and
empty out the bed

it's not made for pure chat
here's where we fuck
the world and his wife just look
they're buying things things
and things again things clothes look
life's here in the drawer
she said and showed me it was
a real eye-dribbler
reams of amazing lace yes
you'd barely guess at
the inner life of someone
into such underwear
it's so white tame and cotton
you can't come can't think
so you close the door go out
open the next door
behind it lies what or who
let's says you rather
would in fact like not to see
the face of your dead
when the it came down to it
tell me tell me so
the moon is asleep