

Brainchild of poet Margaret Christakos, “Influency: A Toronto Poetry Salon” began in fall 2006 as a ten-week course offered by the University of Toronto’s School of Continuing Studies. Each salon consists of eight poets “from a diversity of traditions and schools of writing”: one poet speaks about another poet on the roster, who then reads; an hour of discussion follows, facilitated by Christakos. The aim? “It might benefit all of us to read more frequently across our more usual paths of influence, to in fact attempt to cross whatever artificial divides there might be among us” (Influency Salon website). In April 2010, a companion website was launched, hosting a range of poetry and commentary, with Coach House Books as a “launching pad” and the collaboration of the TransCanada Institute (University of Guelph). So far, its online magazine has published three issues. By presenting poets from many of the micro-communities in the city’s literary scene and beyond, “Influency” creates the opportunity for social and intellectual interaction, and builds a sophisticated audience for contemporary poetry in general and Toronto’s “multi-traditional literary culture” in particular. On 25 May 2011, this series, this “flow chart,” this “intertextual parade” featured Erín Moure speaking on Rachel Zolf’s *Neighbour Procedure* and Zolf speaking on Moure’s *Pillage Laud*. These two talks, revised for print publication, appear below.

“Like plugging into an electric circuit”

Fingering Out Erín Moure’s Lesbo-Digit-O! Smut Poems

Rachel Zolf

It is truly an honour for me to be invited to engage with the poetry of Erín Moure and associates, avatars, heteronyms.¹ There is no other sensory-poetic aggregate in Canada whom I admire more, whose bodies of work I have followed for over twenty years with intense awe and pleasure. Indeed, it is a daunting task to even consider writing on distributed multiplicities held in such high esteem for so long, but that task is made slightly less harrowing with the knowledge that I now have the privilege of counting the E(i)r(i)ns among my disturbingly lively friend network. This also means that they, the E(i)r(i)ns, may feel entitled to smack me upside the head later when I get everything wrong. Which would be fine, and even, perhaps, pleasurable.

Erín Moure has had much success writing lesbian sex poems, even when literary critics have chosen to ignore that Moure is writing “hi-toned obscurantist lesbo smut,” as she once called her work (*Wager* 145). Given that the main, shall we say, *thrusts* of Erín’s work relate to inter/intrasubjectivity and the bloom and rush of encounter and *jouissance* across languages, cultures, and bodies—specifically women’s bodies—the contortions that critics must have gone

through to bypass these aspects must have been strenuous. The lines that follow strive to tussle with Erin's swerving subjectivities as they manifest in her "lost cult item from the last century;"² *Pillage Laud: Cauterizations, Vocabularies, Cantigas, Topiary, Prose*.

One intriguing aspect of *Pillage Laud*, a book of poems supposedly "written by a computer" (back cover), is that "Erín Moure," the so-called "biological product in the usual state of flux" (109), not to mention in big scare quotes, is not alone in her little writer's garret dreaming up these sexy mechanized *cantigas* for her lesbian lover. She has cohorts in the production, co-authors, you might say, one being the sentence-generator program MacProse, and the other being MacProse's monster-father-programmer, Charles O. Hartman. We also can't forget *Pillage Laud's* originally accented "Erín Moure" from 1999, and probably the other E(i)r(i)ns too, with or without scary quotes and accents, and, who knows, maybe even Elisa Sampedrín in utero.³ Truly a distributed cybernetic network is this pillaged laud to plugs, bottoms, whips, wanks, vaginas, and harnesses, a "powerful infidel heteroglossia," as Donna Haraway, one of Erin's continuous muses, would say in her infamous "A Cyborg Manifesto" (181). Or "I was a front" and "We are my veils," as *Pillage Laud* would say (32, 14). Or, as perhaps only my friend Erin would get the engine to say, "My identity had grinned" (*Pillage* 88).

No queer reading of a book of Erin's should be overly invested in blood relations or lineage, but I don't think we can properly engage with *Pillage Laud* without mucking around at least a bit with the sperm trace of the donor that contributed to "Erín Moure"'s functional existence and poetic effluvia. In this spirit, I contacted Charles O. Hartman, aka "Daddy" in S/M parlance (this ex-girlfriend of mine would go apoplectic with laughter when I used the

term "S&M" to denote sado-masochistic sexual encounters, supposedly that's just not cool, it's "S/M"). I told Hartman that *Pillage Laud* was being reissued and asked what he had thought of the book on reading the copy Erin sent him when it was first published in 1999. He said he couldn't find his copy and didn't "remember much detail" but "remember[ed] liking the book, as well as finding it interesting" (Hartman "Correspondence"). I did manage to extract one useful piece of information from him, however. Contrary to what the back cover of *Pillage Laud* attests, MacProse has not been completely relegated to the dustbins of cybernetic redundancy. Hartman directed me to an updated version of the MacProse program called PyProse, which contains the original dictionary "Erin" worked with. Eureka, I thought, I can check how she cheated, because no matter how dead "Erín Moure" the author is or was, or how pure her machinic composition processes, I knew that her living avatars would add their own impure traces to the computer-generated stream. That's just what the E(i)r(i)ns do. So I downloaded PyProse from Hartman's website and started sniffing.⁴ PyProse, and MacProse before it, generates sentences that, according to Hartman, are:

random in two ways: the syntactical structure of each sentence is constructed from phrase elements recursively chosen at random from an editable grammar; and the word-slots in the resulting sentence template are filled at random from an editable dictionary arranged by word-types. ("Programs and Programming" n. pag.)

According to the PyProse instruction manual, the program also "massages dictionary items, conjugating verbs and pluralizing nouns" and "can manufacture words, for example by conjugating 'to be' or 'to have' in accord with any constraints the sentence has already established" (Hartman).⁵ All that constraining ontological massage sounds pretty sexy already, but here's how

the manual defines PyProse's flow:

Pressing the spacebar produces a sentence, which appears in the left-hand, "output" panel. In the right-hand "tree" panel you'll see the nested structure of randomly-chosen rules that built the sentence.

You can also generate a long stream of sentences by selecting "Until mouse-click" from the Sentence menu. A click anywhere in the output window will stop it.

You can save the whole output you've produced as a plain text file, by selecting "Save output" from the File menu. (Hartman, "Manual" n. pag.)

So, starting at the end, as the back end is often the most fun, one can see that the last poem in *Pillage Laud*, "to exist is reading," is an example of the "Until mouse-click" and "Save output" functions, with "Erin Moure" stopping the joyful stream at about three pages and printing it out (*Pillage* 107). Here is one small halt in the flow:

Sacrifices expect to rest, and to move happens. Fates knew her trial. So vicious a visit fell. You want to vent us. The impression is every sketch, and so seasonal a harmony is your view without excess. Because you may climb, matter cannot spell the border, and a current can pause. To form rolls. When to exist is reading. can listener stop? He who followed them discussed it. Schemes: the frequencies' sets. Musicians—whom have they checked? What are you releasing? Whom were we blaming? We stopped, and to spread was vacuum. (*Pillage* 106)

One could argue that the poem here consists of the sole intervention into the pleasurable spill, the underlined selection that furnishes the poem's title, "to exist is reading." I am reminded of "*du liest*" in Paul Celan's final poem, which translates as both "you read" and "you gather" or "glean" (Felstiner 285). It seems that "Erin Moure" made the *Pillage Laud* poems by selecting whole sentences from the program output and placing them in proximities and contiguities that made

sense to her own internal biological mechanisms. "To underline her tress in me . . . upended" (15). "What had so meaningless a book sheltered? / Film will remove the chemical region between the valve / and the message" (60).

In a vain attempt to decipher an indecipherable text, I spent an inordinate amount of time looking up words from *Pillage Laud* in the PyProse dictionary; I wanted to figure out if they were engendered by Daddy or "Erin" or "Erin" or someone or something else altogether. I started with the "Vocabulary Grid" on page seven of *Pillage Laud*. "Fist," "feeling," "vagina" and "flow" seem to bear particular significance—I wonder what that would be—since they dare to show up twice in the vocabulary list, and also appear in the PyProse dictionary. "Thwack," "tissue," "whoosh," and "harness" show up in the vocabulary list but not in the PyProse dictionary, so we are in impure territory already. "Vocabulary is the phantom. / Any fist—a session—" (*Pillage* 32). "Do the dawns of coinage warn the lovely vessels? / Like duh" (64). Who is speaking thus? Forgive me, Barthes' author always seems to pop up from the grave unbidden. "A dictionary especially rules. / . . . when am I entering?" (26).

Before I discovered Daddy and PyProse, I was at a loss for how the sentence-generating machine behind *Pillage Laud* functioned. My first thought was that the vocabularies running across the bottom of the page were search terms that "Erin" would input into an engine (maybe I was too clouded by my own writing processes, not to mention the title of Erin's earlier book, *Search Procedures*, which also has a bust of the Virgin Mary on the cover, but with the head and hand slightly shifted, sort of like the accent on Erin Moure). Mildly desperate to penetrate *Pillage Laud*, I asked Erin if the words were search terms, and she said no, they're choruses; she added that "each chapter or suburb has its chorus

. . . the relation of the chorus to the poem is choral . . . like a small girl making alphabetic letters on a page, while nearby her mother makes soup” (“Correspondence”). Then she directed me to Theodor Adorno for what she means by the choral:

The concept has definable *flaws*. That leads to corrections through other concepts. The hope of naming lies in the *constellation* of concepts that each gather around itself for the purpose of that correction. (Moure “Correspondence”)⁶

We could get into the intricacies of this hitoned queer reference to Adorno, the choral and mom’s soup, but I’m more interested in sexy concepts such as, “To come is conception between the pistol and the vampire” (*Pillage* 106). Seriously, in an essay published after *Pillage Laud* appeared, Erin herself acknowledges Adorno’s concept of the concept, but with her own inimitable spiral twist: “My writing process is a constellative progression outward and sideways (at times in vain), not dialectical for dialectics disallows too many other types of determination” (*Wager* 152). Speaking of the choral, it’s interesting that Charles O. Hartman aka Daddy’s first digital project happens to have been a program to harmonize chorales (Hartman, *Virtual* 9). “What was I influencing? To form / is the music between your restriction and my industry” (*Pillage* 30).

Elsewhere, Erin speaks of coalescences, in my associative mind another form of constellation held together via sticky affects⁷ and the constant linguistic motions of attraction, repulsion, and errancy. She writes:

I call the reader’s attention in my work to missing words, repetitions, misspelling, and jarring representations—or not representations but designations: machine struggles, coalescences, constructing selves that collide, molecularize, pine, adopt, enjoy, and confront a wide range of emotions and desires. (*Wager* 95)

Or in other pillaged words that laud:

After we are certain plants—coalescent—the wheel’s umpire shakes.
To read was the ribbon of girls; (*Pillage* 22)

Where we are these emotions, we are those errors, and we contribute.
(*Pillage* 14)

Perhaps not desiring to be too errant within the machine, Erin also gestures in the e-mail to the almost novelistic site-specificity of each “Pillage Laud” section, calling the poems chapters and the chapters suburbs, each with its own chorus. I had naïvely wondered if the “chapter” titles pointed to short-short stories of lesbians having sex everywhere, even in the suburbs, but I suspect some of these places, other than the holey gendered moon (Google is a good place to identify the different suburbs) were simply sites she happened to be in when her book machine spit out the sex poems. Landscapes for perverted topiary, cyborgian sculpture/composition by field/feeled/fealty. Like Gertrude Stein imprinted with all those patterned lines her eyes devoured from the window on her first flight over “America”—lines and grids that are also rhythm and stress and fidelity to sense and sensation. Thus, Oakland may have a more industrial smell and taste for “Erin” than the cows uttering in High Prairie, and she may have selected her sentences to enact situated sensations like these, however dispersed. In the same essay wherein she invokes constellations, Erin again channels Haraway’s “network ideological image” (“Cyborg” 170) and writes:

In this age, we as bodies, as coding devices, also extend over virtual spaces. Which is to say that, with computers and digital processing, any locality, including a body, is extensible over and through what we know as the old boundaries of physical space. (*Wager* 153-54)

Erin also draws on Wittgenstein’s famous maxim, “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (*Wager* 152),

torquing it into “the limits of my phrase regime are the limits of my world” (Wager 154). Indeed, in the world of *Pillage Laud*, “Erin Moure” is not only limited by what she can and can’t do with words and phrases and sentences, but also by the MacProse dictionary, to return to my favourite bug-bear, vocabulary, and those missing words, repetitions and jarring representations she called on the reader to notice. It’s interesting to me that “vulva” and “vagina” are in the PyProse dictionary, but not “penis” and “testicle.” “Baseball” and “football,” but no other balls. Is the dictionary sexist? Fascinating question, even if “sexist” doesn’t appear there, while “sex” and “sexual” do. I also happen to know, via a nonchalant conversation with the author, that “Erin” changed all the spat-out generic “he’s” to “she’s,” interrupting the engine’s patriarchal inclinations via a few short keystrokes. Neither “lesbian” nor “dyke,” nor even “queer,” is in the dictionary, but good to know that “utopia” points to a possible Brossardian spiral flourishing, along with “whip,” “zombie,” “stroke,” “citizen,” and “intention.” However, “Erin Moure,” I mean the 1999 “Erin Moure,” chooses to add “wank” and “harness” and “metro-nome” and “riposte” and “contusion” and even “bandoneon,” “fecund,” “anomalic,” “ligature,” “alignment,” “envy.” For what end beyond spilling her poetic DNA trace as impure flow in the network? I’m not sure. Just as I’m not sure why “Erin’s” 1999 limited edition “Her insertion” page, meant to nestle suggestively between the suburbs of Burnaby and Rachel-Julien, has also been relegated to the cutting-room dustbin in 2011. Are we meant to know? “The intention melted. / Strokes can allow her” (*Pillage* 79).

Indeed, as *Pillage Laud* affirms, “a computer is plaster,” raw material from which to frame and shape a not necessarily containable linguistic, philosophical and affective topiary (*Pillage* 17). The translation always leaves something behind, to use a trope that

appears in *Pillage Laud* and recurs in Erin’s work. Translation becomes part of the composition and meaning-making processes of gift, receipt, loss; guest, host, *hostis*. Here among the constraining bits and bytes, “*obrigada*” (*Pillage* 27) doesn’t appear in the PyProse dictionary, but “thanks” does; “demeure” (*Pillage* 13) is nowhere to be found, but “residence” and “remain” exist, and even thus the handshake fragments of “what” “remains” of thinking and thanking. Via homolinguistic slippage, PyProse’s “agriculture” transforms into *Pillage Laud*’s “cultures,” and “hipboots” curve into “hips”; one of “open,” “penny” or “pencil” becomes the “pen I last wrote you with”; and the separately marching “band” and “wagon” jump on “Erin’s” noisy, sticky “bandwagon.” M. NourbeSe Philip’s *Zong!* comes to mind, in which the author proliferates words within words to impurely, momentarily, shuck off the shackles of constraint-based composition, not to mention unspeakable social limits and disavowals, via sometimes irrecoverable vocabularies. These our infidel mothers, this our heteroglossalia: Vocabulary starts the flow. Vocabulary is where I enter. Vocabulary clings to alterity.

Vocabulary is what gets altered, and even Daddy gets in on the action. Not content with occupying the stance of proverbial ghost in the machine, Charles O. Hartman also enters into poesis, writing poems using the PC version of the generator, “Prose,” and titled “Seventy-six assertions and sixty-three questions” (*Virtual* 129). In contrast to Erin’s approach to the machine, he openly and happily “alter[s] [Prose’s] impromptu output to suit [his] own poetic sense” (*Virtual* 83). Citing the influence of Coleridge’s “poetry is the best words in the best order,” Hartman not only added a lot of superlative “so’s” to the Prose grammar structure, but his ordering and ordered trace as author, or what he’d call “editor,” is much more obvious than “Erin’s”—and much less memorable (*Virtual* 81). Where

Hartman cuts into and recombines the sentence elements in a perhaps vain quest for the even more purely best words, “Erin” employs the MacProse sentences as intact units of composition (and emotion) in all their rough, awkward beauty. Even as she seems to give up control of her weedy, repetitive phrases, it is apparent that no one but Erin could have selected—written—these gleaned cantigas. Erin’s multivalent voice (I’ll resist the scare quotes) trickles through the registers—the trace or hand of the poet (like the hands that reappear on Erin’s book covers) is never completely erased, even as, according to Hartman, “the computer’s intervention can make the poet and the reader aware of the peculiar objectivity of language” (*Virtual* 107). Indeed, “every word we speak was once spoken for the first time by somebody, and it didn’t exist until then . . . even the dictionary has an author” (*Virtual* 107). Perhaps Hartman could be deemed the author of the Mac/Prose dictionary, which when he first started programming, contained the 5000 most common words in American English usage (in printed form, mostly via newspapers) and produced a poetry-generating program “whose terminal boredom,” he claims, “was partly due directly to vocabulary” (*Virtual* 80). While writing *Human Resources*, I dealt with a similar boredom using the WordCount database of the most common words in the British version of the English language and was glad to discover the “vagina america bitch cat” vocabulary strings that QueryCount generated. Hartman wasn’t so lucky as to have access to such flowery verbiage blooming from the dirty minds of online users, and bemoaned that among his original 5000 words, “not much was likely to crop up that would testify to the poetry inherent in the American soul” (*Virtual* 80). To remedy this pressing issue, and perhaps, in the footsteps of William Carlos Williams, in order to approximate the infamous “speech of Polish

mothers” or other burbling sounds from an essential American vernacular, Daddy Hartman cut words from the Prose dictionary that, according to him,

felt like irredeemable bureaucratise: *accordance, recommendation, facilities, nonspecific, marketing*. In general, any words that pushed a sentence too hard toward abstractness were better omitted: *personality, negative, growth, velocity, location, intervention*, and dozens of others ending with *-tion*. But also, inappropriately concrete words had to go, such as most names. “Dave” and “Orleans” are among the first five thousand, but they don’t help the reader’s sense of *focus* in random prose. They’re just disorienting. (*Virtual* 80)

Other so-called “good” words had to go—for example, he claimed that “urge requires a complicated object” (*Virtual* 81). (The *Pillage Laud* lovers can attest to that). “Dumping” words eventually brought the vocabulary list down to 1000, to which he promptly added new words that he:

hoped would have positive effects on a reader’s sense of coherence or purpose in the sentences. I began with concrete nouns: *elephant, Bebop, calico, muffin, pewter, clarinet, oak*. Earlier I had gathered for other purposes a special lexicon of words derived from poems I was working on. Many of these words—*checkmate, Babbage, metabolism, Turing, computation*—would serve. (*Virtual* 81)

Hartman also decided to add words that present special challenges to an automatic speech recognizer, and “the whole group of about two hundred covers the field of English phonemes very thoroughly . . . *asterisk, gung-ho, weed, typhoid, sleuth*” (*Virtual* 81). While Hartman may have been gung-ho in his urgent bureaucratic desire to intervene and use vocabulary to sleuth out a kind of nonspecific clean coherence in computer-generated poetry, Moure’s irredeemably disorienting Bebop abstractions elude the dictionary’s grasp while

recommending always provocative readings: “What may accuracy plant? . . . Would you please be done with ‘that’ before my adolescence” (*Pillage* 19, 12).

Back to our own fumbly-fingered sleuthing, after a *bissel* of elementary deduction, it becomes apparent that the 2011 *Pillage Laud* contains poems that have been revised from the party-on 1999 edition. For example, the poem on page 92 has a number of cuts and some reordering, perhaps because it wouldn’t fit on the smaller page layout in the new edition. One remarkable change, however, is in the second-last poem of the reissued book, where the final pronoun in the poem shifts from I to we: “Though to vanish openly escapes you, / We didn’t end” (*Pillage* 102). Could it be that the “you” of the pushy audience “expect[ing] affections” (*Pillage* 102) and the formerly loner “I” now distributed “we” of the writing machine, and the S/M dykey lovers, and Charles O. Hartman aka Daddy, and the tightassed MacProse grammar and dictionary are all connected via lungs and proliferating I/ eyes, ears and other leaky-clangy prosthetic netherparts? It’s undecided—just like the former “Erin Mouré,” of the first *Pillage Laud*, not only whose name but whose author bio transformed somewhere in the basement of the BookThug Department of reissue. Like one of the ghosts in *Pillage Laud*’s machine, though “To intend forms me” (*Pillage* 69), “Erin Mouré has not separated out ‘intent’ yet.” The latter sentence was the bio line on the back cover of *Pillage Laud* in 1999, which mysteriously disappears twelve years hence. Perhaps in the interim the author found a place for her intent outside the book machine and its procedures: “The violet of force compels my intention. / To stay reflects. They listen” (*Pillage* 31).

Intentional or not, another interesting slippage in the 2011 *Pillage Laud* is the disappearance of the epigraph from Jacques Derrida’s book *Demeure* (that word again, the vocabulary fragment that wasn’t in the

PyProse dictionary, while “what” “remains” of translatability endured). Here is the excised epigraph:

Allow me, since there’s not much time, to blurt it out: without the *possibility* of this fiction, without the spectral virtuality of this simulacrum and, as a result, of this lie or this fragmentation of the truth, no accurate testimony, as such, would be possible. (*Pillage* 1999, iii)

I assume “Erin” simply had to cut an epigraph because of the shorter page layout, but it is interesting that she chose this particular epigraph to cut, rather than the one from Deleuze, Beckett, or the *Oxford Concise Dictionary*. Perhaps a random choice, like in a computer program that generates sentences via algorithm. Perhaps “Erin” was stuck on the dictionary (as we both seem to be) and cut the next largest epigraph. Perhaps she no longer believes in the “spectral virtuality of this simulacrum” that is also *Pillage Laud*, this book’s uncanny ability to cleave testimony into polyvocal coalescence and constellation and embody the person as “a sensory aggregate” (*Wager* 104). But I doubt this was an epistemic crisis; it was probably just the page length. In *Demeure*, the lines that precede the cited epigraph refer to the “fiction of testimony,” so this is likely the fiction referred to in the excised epigraph, the full and fully haunted multiplicity of testimony (and poetry), never reducible to the univocal (Derrida 72). As Giorgio Agamben reminds us in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, not only is the living witness to the disaster never singular or complete, but the etymological roots of “author” are vendor, one who persuades, and *witness* (148). The *Demeure* lines that follow the excised epigraph are: “Consequently, the possibility of literary fiction [and fiction here encompasses poetry] haunts so-called responsible, serious, real testimony. This haunting is perhaps the passion itself, the passionate place of literary writing, as the project to say everything” (72).

Indeed, the *Demeure* epigraph haunts the re-issued *Pillage Laud*, as *Pillage Laud* haunts *A Frame of the Book* or *The Frame of a Book*, the book of Erin's that also appeared in 1999, a book not generated by a computer, so thus, in common parlance, closer to the so-called truth of the so-called author-vendor-persuader-witness; yet, it is a book just as haunted by incomplete testimony and unanswerable questions as is the *Pillage Laud* writing machine. According to Hartman, "The [Mac/Prose] grammar . . . stresses questions because I've found they have an especially evocative effect on the reader" (*Virtual* 80). He also refers to American Language poetry, and in particular Ron Silliman's seminal essay on the "New Sentence," the paratactical sentence as unit of composition in a good portion of the most interesting poetry being written in the United States since the 1970s (which is, in turn, influenced by Gertrude Stein's singular use of the sentence long before). Hartman is particularly interested in Silliman's thirty-page prose poem, "Sunset debris" in his book *Age of Huts*, a poem made entirely of sentences that end in questions. Hartman writes, "This massive consistency shifts our attention to the nature of questions themselves. Each sentence, rather than asking something (like questions in conversation) begins to *exemplify questioning*" (*Virtual* 23). One definitely gets a sense of the flow of questions enacting a space of thought in the section of *A Frame of the Book* entitled "The Her Sensorium" (71). I am reminded of Edmond Jabès's book of frames, thresholds and unanswerable questions at the limits of language and thought, while also becoming fixated on how many of *A Frame of the Book*'s questions may have been cribbed from MacProse. "Whose feature was an implicit groin?" (84). Nope. "Is a grammar also a 'bonyness'?" (92). Nope. "Is there a hybrid correlation for 'life'?" (92). Not in PyProse, but definitely in the various "E(i)r(i)n Mour(é)s" not

yet killed off like Pessoa's heteronym in the opening of *Pillage Laud*.⁸ Haraway's cyborg haunts—"a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction" ("Cyborg" 149). Perhaps Haraway's "leaky distinction between animal-human (organism) and machine" is like the leaky distinction between fiction and so-called truth or testimony in *Demeure* ("Cyborg" 152). Perhaps *Pillage Laud* is just as much made of and from Erin as *A Frame of the Book* is; perhaps the excised I haunts the we that entered that poem near the end of the 2011 *Pillage Laud*. This is the singular newness of *Pillage Laud*, particularly at the time its digital sex poems appeared in 1999; instead of simply ejaculating language from a Markov chain and a generator of ones and zeros, the book enacts and re-enacts "the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading [and I would say *gleaning*] the world" ("Cyborg" 152).

Through his own theorizing of digital poetry's meeting of machine and organism in *Virtual Muse*, Hartman also touches on some of the basic thinking behind a broad range of writing more focused on the materialities of language than on the narrative of the self. Hartman draws not just on Silliman but on John Ashbery's writing style:

Ashbery obscures his references to the nonlinguistic world we think we all know in common. Yet the sense of the language, its internal relations of syntax and semantic categories, remains largely intact. . . . So this kind of language is a little like music, which refers to nothing but which no one would call meaningless. (*Virtual* 20)

Hartman claims that "though some of [Prose's] products seem quite strange, they are all grammatically correct, with all the urging toward sense that that implies" (*Virtual* 79). This reminds me of one of

the most important things Erín taught me, or maybe it was Bob Majzels—sometimes I can't separate them (Bob also used MacProse to compose some sentences in his remarkable fiction, *Apikoros Sleuth*. And while we're in the social, Bob smartly opined that MacProse was incapable of generating a cliché because it has no culture and has never met anyone—a quip that Erín later happily stole from him⁹). Anyway, either Erín or Bob helped me notice how a line of poetry can be syntactically correct but semantically slip out of grasp, how that elision enhances the impact of sentences as units of composition in literary writing. For the machine behind *Pillage Laud's* mask, mesh, net, text, tissue (of quotations), "Nouns are its gears, and fabrics are your brushes" (*Pillage* 17). *Pillage Laud* succumbs to the caress—of cloth, ornament and encounter; lover/reader reaching across the gaps, even among all that rough leather. "My text is grieving, and these belts finish every arrangement" (36).

More than Silliman's or Ashbery's subject-verb-predicates, Stein's inimitably emotional sentences as units of constellative concept and composition seem more in tune with Moure's *Pillage Laud*. Here are just a few Steinian bon moments:

"A sentence thinks loudly." (Stein, "More" 375)

"A sentence is not natural." (366)

"A sentence is not not natural." (374)

"A sentence is primarily fastened yes as a direction, no as a direction." (Stein, "Sentences" 164)

"A sentence is made by coupling meanwhile around to be a couple there makes great dubeity named atlas coin in a loan." (115)¹⁰

Erín invokes Stein's continuous play with repetition and difference via her own disjunctive digital chorus: "Each of her can verge: tissue should form. / (the code) has stumbled" (*Pillage* 36). Recall that "tissue" (that close etymological relative of net, text,

mesh and mask) appeared in the *Pillage Laud* chorus but not in the PyProse dictionary.

"In general," Erín writes,

my work constructs texts whose lines are "planes" or "planar components" linked proximally in scenes that act in turn as a kind of figure, which itself often repeats, backtracks, jumps, is partial, twists, impedes. (*Wager* 116)

Derrida similarly circles and re-circles around and though different meanings of the word "demeure" in his deconstruction of Maurice Blanchot's fiction—repetition and *différance* producing polyvocal testimony that opens and opens. Jonathan Culler suggests that "[Derrida's] *Demeure* carries a questioning of stability to the heart of memory, of what remains" (871). *Pillage Laud* suggests that "An archive comforted me // I was a front / My label between every chief and the sex exposed you" (32). Like Adorno's notion of non-identity, there are concepts that exceed the grasp of thought and sensibility; there are limits to this phrase regime and this world, limits where it's plenty fun to play in, against and around.

Speaking of exposure, excess and excision, in the reissued *Pillage Laud* there is an interesting erasure of "*secret de la rencontre*" as the title for the opening section of the book, which in 1999 included the epigraphs, the Vocabulary grid, and the Pessoa dialogue. With an encyclopedic memory or a little dexterous Googling, one can discover that this phrase is excerpted from Paul Celan's "Meridian" speech. Here is the relevant section in English (Erín must have read it in French translation from German):

The poem is lonely. It is lonely and *en route*. Its author stays with it.

Does this very fact not place the poem already here, at its inception, in the encounter, *in the mystery of the encounter*.

The poem intends another, needs this other, needs an opposite. It goes toward it, bespeaks it.

For the poem, everything and every-body is a figure of this other toward which it is heading. (Celan 49)

Even as the 2011 *Pillage Laud* erases this secret, it heads toward its own persuasive response:

When we were your dances, so permanent a way was every curling woman without its chapel, and we were persuading it. She who has run matters. (103)

Since to advance is so consistent a waste, we should wait for someone; and her speaker won't reply. Events: grasses. (94)

"What are the limits of individual consciousness?"—Erin asks in an essay on *A Frame of the Book* (Wager 104). (She doesn't mention *Pillage Laud* in this essay, but *Pillage Laud* haunts). I'm drawn back to that email exchange she and I had on Adorno, the choral, the mom, and the soup. According to Erin's email:

Pillage laud selects (well actually an individual consciousness, i for short, selects... first, decides when to start the sentence generation, decides when to press stop, then performs actions within the generated text ("selection" more or less)) from computer generated sentences...

She also wrote "the relation of the chorus to the poem is choral . . . like a small girl making alphabetic letters on a page, while nearby her mother makes soup." Interestingly, the next line is "the i.c. is both the s.g. and the m." The individual consciousness is both the small girl and the mom. Now the reader can know the limits of this world we go toward, bespeak, in grasses. Yet the E(i)r(i)ns' non-identity keeps grinning, as do their sparring with stinky presence and flirtation with the anti-aesthetic:

Their sentence—had each of them destroyed the rank of presence?
The stress is analysis.
So iron a father vaccinates beauty.
(*Pillage* 14)

The fiery, passionate and sometimes ugly digital lashings could lead to cauterization or another mutually wounding process, "Its suture presence (ventricle) was skin." As Erin asks in her essay on *A Frame of the Book*,

Does the skin still demarcate the borders of identity when we work with a computer, when we no longer see our interlocutors? What is the effect of distance on the human body, on a woman's body, on relations between women? Is distance also an inevitable effect, thus a fact of the text? In what ways does the text act like a skin, like a libidinal band (after Jean-François Lyotard)? (Wager 104).

Here I could root around beneath Lyotard's libidinal skin, but perhaps I'll leave that for intrepid investigators to Google in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. As Haraway affirms and "Erin" enacts, "the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity" ("Cyborg" 151). Derrida advocates the "possibility of an innocent or perverse literature that innocently plays at perverting the distinctions" among fiction, simulacra, dissimulation, lie, and perjury (29). Yet, the cyborg is, according to Haraway, "oppositional, utopian and completely without innocence" ("Cyborg" 151). And yet, Erin's cyborg is a complicated "we" that "were these (shelved) utopias" (*Pillage* 19)—multiply partial, ironic, and perverted, but also resolutely uncommitted to the cliché of the lesbian utopia:

I want to go beyond utopic portrayal or distopic or atopic portrayal (all of them meaning "not a place") to what I call, wonderingly, *to-pic*. . . . the problem is how to evoke a lesbian imaginary that *acts across boundaries* without falling into the utopic or the banal, an imaginary that, as well, resists commodification, and works without slipping into a solipsistic version of tenderness. (Wager 94)

Drawing on Adorno, there is a distinct sense throughout Erin's work of "cognition

[as] wounded healing,” evident here among this sculpted topiary of tender cauterizations, the brand mark of multiple S/M author-practitioners burning traces in the surrounding white space (53). The cautery destroys some tissue in an attempt to mitigate damage. The line of creation is the same as the line of destruction. “Harm didn’t verify us. / The vaccine of music was a gate” (*Pillage* 17). Thankfully there is “wit inside wounds” (15) . . . “so pleasant a prison” (30). “The vested interest balanced. A master had slipped / A riposte her contusion” (15). Even while the fevered archive of encounter in and on the marked body of the text evades the reader’s—and writer’s—reach: “The tragedy of flesh was / my summary between the vehicle and an archive. I can’t repair it” (91).

Though we can’t, and don’t want to, repair the gaps in presence and meaning and certainty and identity and authorship and testimony and archive and confession in and among these happily perverted pillaged lauds, we can draw on the E(i)r(i)ns’s beloved Gilles Deleuze for a pithy final moment of close reading and exegesis: “There is nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging into an electric circuit” (*Wager* 15). Or perhaps we can get inspiration to go on, and on, from Hartman aka Daddy sperm, whose last line of *Virtual Muse*, is “We live most when we live in flux” (109). Alas, for me and my buddy MacProse, it seems all that remains of our fingered-out path through the thick, wet forest of Erin-cy is: “We were these comments. / You were swelling. The rest is radar” (*Pillage* 46).

NOTES

1 This paper is a slightly revised version of a talk I was invited to give on Erin Moure’s *Pillage Laud* (BookThug, 2011; Moveable Ink, 1999) for Margaret Christakos’s Influency salon at the University of Toronto, May 25, 2011. Influency is an important pedagogical experiment in long-form conversations

between Canadian poets. In tandem with this talk, Moure gave a talk on my book, *Neighbour Procedure*, that also appears in this issue of *Canadian Literature*. In this paper, I deliberately retain the talk’s open tone and structure, as this form—close unreading, fingering before figuring—is best suited to the thinking and knowledges that *Pillage Laud* generates.

- 2 According to the back cover of the 2011 BookThug edition of *Pillage Laud: Cauterizations, Vocabularies, Cantigas, Topiary, Prose* by “Erín Moure.” This edition is a slightly revised reprint of the 1999 Moveable Type books edition, written by “Erin Mouré.” Subsequent references to *Pillage Laud* refer to the BookThug edition, unless otherwise noted.
- 3 Erin Moure has published under several heteronyms, including Erin Mouré, Eirin Moure, Elisa Sampedrín, EM, “Erin Mouré” and “Erin Moure,” the latter two monikers corresponding respectively to the 1999 and 2011 editions of *Pillage Laud*. For the rest of the paper, I will use the singular Erín Moure to designate the writer (or “indicator of a social structure projected onto this organism,” *Pillage* 109) as she primarily appears in the present. Her other derivations appear when clarity is necessary.
- 4 To download *PyProse*, go to <http://oak.conncoll.edu/cohar/Programs.htm>.
- 5 “PyProse Manual” is downloadable at <http://oak.conncoll.edu/cohar/Programs.htm>.
- 6 This seems to be Erin’s own translation (and italics), but similar wording can be found on page 53 of Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*.
- 7 In thinking associatively of the desiring relations among writer, text, reader (and context), I here draw on Sara Ahmed’s book, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*: “Stickiness is what objects do to other objects—it involves a transference of affect—but it is a relation of ‘doing’ in which there is not a distinction between passive and active, even though the stickiness of one object might come before the stickiness of the other, such that the other seems to cling to it” (91).
- 8 There are a number of lines cribbed from MacProse in Erin’s subsequent, supposedly non-machine-made book, *O Ciudadán*.
- 9 Or maybe it was the other way around. Suffice it to say that Bob and Erin translate together and read each other’s work and influence each other. Indeed, Bob engaged in “the first quiet reading” of the *Pillage Laud* manuscript (1999, 99). They have also both been important mentors and colleagues to me.

- 10 I am drawing on Lyn Hejinian's important "Two Stein Talks" (in *The Language of Inquiry*) in composing this list of sentences.

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On Zolf's *Neighbour Procedure*

Erin Moure

Introduction

Jean-François Lyotard, in 1979, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, articulated what is, to me, a beautiful proposition: that in our times no final authority—ecclesiastical, secular, or cultural—lays down the overriding rules (or metanarratives) for discourses. Discourses, rather, emerge in action, in the process. They move in and through and touch each other. They "incomprehend" each other, to coin a word. There is often a temptation, in dealing with such "incomprehension," to insist on a single discourse, one that simply overrides that of the other. To Lyotard, and to me as well, political imposition of a *discours unique* is one thing that leads to fascism and to an "expulsion of the other" that can't help but be dangerous.

Expulsion always enacts a border. Just as voracity/anthropophagy¹ effaces one. *What does a border mean, provoke?* A border between countries or polities is always an imposed thing, not "natural" or "a priori." It is, in itself, perhaps, the *risk* of expulsion. The geographical location of the risk of hurt. That harm, or expulsion, could potentially occur is what situates us at a border.

The line at a border is not actually thin,