Domesticity in Liam Wilkinson's Poetry

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Abstract

Liam Wilkinson is a contemporary British poet who was born in 1981. The majority of his poetry is written in free verse, but he has a craving for Japanese short forms particularly tanka, haiku, and haiga. Wilkinson's poetry has appeared in many internet and print publications such as Modern English Tanka and Ribbons. He himself has been the editor of many internet journals such as Prune Juice Journal of Senryu & Kyoka and 3LIGHTS Gallery & Journal. He even has his own web page where one can browse through his poetry archives, as well as have access to his publications, biography, and other links.

The present paper aims to trace domesticity in Wilkinson's poetry, focusing mostly on his poems written in free verse with quick reference to a few of his tanka. It has come to one's attention that household chores, activities, and furniture have become a poetic obsession for Wilkinson that dictates his topics and is part and parcel of his imagery and setting. Even when he treats topics other than domesticity such as music and poetry, his poems are completely soaked in a household milieu. Thus, the first part of the paper discusses Wilkinson's domesticity on the level of topic, that is, in poems that deal with domestic subject matter. For example, in "A Sunday Triptych," "Wednesday," "Domain Domine," and "The Execution," Wilkinson addresses domestic habits and duties such as reading newspapers while sipping coffee in the morning, taking the garbage out, waking up early, and cleaning up the house. The second and third parts of the paper delve into Wilkinson's domestic imagery and setting in poems that deal with the subjects of poetry and music. For instance, the action of both "Back Bedroom Baroque" and "The Arrival of the Queen Sheba" takes place in his bedroom and maybe living room, while "Welcome Here" likens

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poems to late-night intruders who feast on the poet's appreciation and then pee on a sheet of paper provided by him. This domestic trend raises many questions with regard to the future of contemporary poetry, e.g., is poetry withdrawing from the world and taking shelter at home in contrast to, say, Romantic poetry that goes out to nature?!

الحياة المنزلية فى شعر ليام ويلكينسون

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ملخص

ليام ويلكينسون شاعر بريطانى معاصر ولد فى عام 1981. وهو يكتب أغلب شعره على طريقة نظم الشعر الحر غير أنه مولع بأشكال الشعر اليابانى مثل التانكا والهياكو والهيجا. وقد نشر ويلكينسون شعره على صفحات الإنترنت وفى شكل مطبوع مثل مجلة مودرن إنجليش تانكا (التانكا الإنجليزية الحديثة) والربنس (الشرائط) حيث أنه عمل رئيساً لتحرير عدد من مجلات الإنترنت مثل بروون چوس چيرنال أوف سنريو & كايوكا (مجلة عصير الخوخ للسنريو & كايوكا) وثرى لايت جاليرى & چيرنال (معرض & مجلة ال3 أضواء). كما أن ويلكينسون نفسه له موقع على الإنترنت ينشر فيه أشعاره وأعماله وبه روابط متعددة.

يهدف البحث الحالى إلى تقصى الحياة المنزلية فى شعر ويلكينسون مركزاً فى الأساس على شعره الحر مع الإشارة للقليل من قصائده فى شكل التانكا. فمن الجلى لقارىء أشعار ويلكينسون أن الواجبات والأنشطة المنزلية وحتى الأثاث المنزلى أصبحت تشكل هوساً شعرياً لدى ويلكينسون يحدد موضوعاته ويصوغ الصور والخلفية الشعرية لقصائده. وحتى عندما يتناول موضوعات أخرى بخلاف الحياة المنزلية مثل الموسيقى والشعر فإن قصائده تفيض بصور أو خلفيات شعرية مستوحاة من الحياة المنزلية أو كلاهما. وهكذا فإن الجزء الأول من البحث يسلط الضوء على قصائد ويلكينسون التى تتناول موضوعات منزلية فقط مثل "لوحة يوم الأحد الثلاثية الأجزاء"، و"يوم الأربعاء"، و"مملكتى"، و"الإعدام". ففى هذه القصائد يتناول ويلكينسون الأنشطة والعادات المنزلية مثل قراءة الجرائد أثناء شرب الشاى فى الصباح، وأخذ القمامة خارج المنزل، والإستيقاظ مبكراً، وتنظيف المنزل. أما الجزئين الثانى والثالث من البحث فيرصدان الصور والخلفية الشعرية المستلهمة من الحياة المنزلية ولكن فى قصائد تتناول موضوعى الموسيقى والشعر. فعلى سبيل المثال أحداث قصيدتى "موسيقى الباروك فى غرفة النوم الخلفية" و"وصول ملكة سبأ" تقع على خلفية حجرة النوم وربما حجرة المعيشة بينما قصيدة "مرحباهنا" تصور القصائد الشعرية على أنها ضيوف آخر الليل المتطفلين على مائدة تذوق الشاعر النقدية والذين يقومون بإلقاء فضلات بولهم على أوراق الشاعر. وهكذا فإن الشعر المنزلى لويلكينسون يثير علامات تعجب وإستفهام بخصوص اتجاهات الشعر المعاصر مثل: هل يرتد الشعر إلى حدود المنزل بعدما كان مرآة للعالم من حولنا كما كان، على سبيل الذكر لا الحصر، الشعر الرومانسى تعبيراً عن الطبيعة والكون؟!

Liam Wilkinson is a contemporary British poet, songwriter, and musician. He was born in Doncaster, Yorkshire, England in 1981 and received his college education at the University of Hull, Scarborough where he studied English and Art History. He got his degree in 2003. As a poet, Wilkinson employs various kinds of verse forms. The majority of his poetry is written in free verse, but he has a craving for Japanese short forms particularly tanka, haiku, and haiga. He developed this deep interest in Japanese poetry while he was studying in college, as he points out in an internet interview:

> I began writing haiku whilst studying at university in Scarborough on the North-east coast of England. At that time my free verse was being published here and there and I thought of haiku as a necessary relief to all that longer poetry. As time has moved on it's become apparent to me that haiku does the job better than longer poetry. I'm both fascinated and terrified by the rapidity of time and how quickly the present becomes the past. Haiku has helped me to seal the jar around particular moments in a way that no other art form could ever do. ("Liam Wilkinson")

Wilkinson is also so much enthralled by tanka that he devoted two whole books to this verse form both published online: the first is called Selected Tanka, the second The Darkening Tide. In the above-mentioned interview, he expresses his fascination with tanka, commenting: "I'm a tanka obsessive. I keep a tanka journal and take it with me wherever I go. In early 2008, I left a tanka at the World Trade Centre memorial in New York. It's become second nature to me to write tanka" ("Liam Wilkinson"). Wilkinson's poetry has appeared in many internet and print publications such as Modern English Tanka, Ribbons, Simply Hiaku, Aesthetica, Lynx, Latchkey, and Presence. Wilkinson himself is the editor of Prune Juice Journal of Senryu & Kyoka, as well as the former editor and founder of 3LIGHTS Gallery & Journal. He has also served as the co-editor of Modern Haiga and as the poetry editor and art commentator of The Rose & Thorn Journal. He even has his own web page where one can browse through his

recent poems and skim over his old ones, which are kept in chronological archives. One can also have access to his publications, biography, and other links via this site. The site can be found at http://liamwilkinson.blogspot.com/. As a musician, Wilkinson has been frequently seen on the Yorkshire Folk scene, playing both as solo musician and as a member of few local bands (Wilkinson, "Biography;" "Liam Wilkinson Biography;" "Contributor's Notes").

Going through Wilkinson's poetry, one cannot help taking notice of a recurrent aspect that pervades all his works, namely domesticity. Household chores, activities, and furniture have become a poetic obsession for him that dictates his topics and is part and parcel of his imagery and setting. Even when he treats topics other than domesticity, his poetry is totally soaked in a household milieu. A close reading of Wilkinson reveals that the two other obsessions or, rather, topics that preoccupy him second to domesticity are music and poetry. In poems such as those dealing with the subject of music and poetry, domestic imagery and setting or either is ubiquitous. Therefore, the goal of this paper is threefold: first, to trace Wilkinson's domesticity solely on the level of topic, that is, in poems that deal with domestic topics, and then to dig into his domestic imagery and setting in poems that deal with the other two concomitant topics, namely music and poetry. The research will focus mostly on Wilkinson's poetry written in free verse with quick reference to a few poems written in Japanese forms, especially tanka.

The first domestic poem that attracts one's attention is called "A Sunday Triptych." The triptych of the title is not an actual tripartite picture but, rather, stands for three main scenes of Wilkinson's Sunday domestic activities. As a holyday from work, Sunday has its own idle flavor the poet dearly relishes. Thus, he seems to savor every minute of his weekend as well as every bit of activity affiliated with it as if he is celebrating a special occasion:

I.

Sunday is made of crisp paper

and coffee
so I'm happy to be here
out in the world
carrying the news
home
and savouring
the Americano on my tongue.

II.

The shop assistant
had no idea
how much I loved her today.
Or how much
I loved the gorgeous line
of fresh orange juice
in the fridge
and the low low price
of economy cat litter.

III.

The stillness of the seventh day
is only beautiful in things
as it happens
sad
to think Monday
will soon be here
in the tears
of tomorrow's frozen vegetables. (1-25)

The first scene depicts the poet browsing the Sunday newspaper and sipping his coffee. The word "crisp" underlines the poet's delight in perusing the paper so much so that he enjoys even the touch of its pages. "Crisp" might also be an allusion to up-to-the-minute news. Weekend papers are usually larger than the daily ones, abounding in wide-ranging reports. Reading Sunday papers offers the poet an

opportunity to break away from his working day routine, which seemingly keeps him from catching up with what is going on in the world around him. That is why he is "happy to be here / out in the world" where he can carry "the news home" (3-5). Likewise, "on my tongue" highlights the pleasure the poet has in "savouring / the Americano" (7-8). The fact that he specifies the kind of coffee he is drinking testifies to this pleasure. The use of the verb "made of" indicates that reading newspapers and drinking coffee are the poet's two most crucial domestic activities on Sunday. In the second scene, the poet expresses his infatuation with shopping at a grocery store on this day. This infatuation is reflected in the way he defines his relationship with the shop assistant, who "had no idea / how much I loved her today" (10-11). It is also apparent in his deep passion for his groceries, particularly the "fresh orange juice" and the "economy cat litter" (14, 17). That the poet pays attention to the shopping details such as "the fridge" and "the low low price" bears witness to his enjoyment of the shopping (15, 16). The third scene conveys the poet's secret of craving Sundays, namely the "stillness of the seventh day" (18). By stillness here, the poet means mental rather than physical stillness. In other words, he enjoys the peace of mind derived from being free from daily job duties and embodied in such diversions as browsing papers, savoring coffee, and doing one's shopping. Understanding "stillness" in this sense demystifies the paradox in "stillness . . . as it happens" and explains why it "is only beautiful" (18, 19, 20). It is not, therefore, unexpected that the poet should feel sad about the approach of Monday. His sadness is portrayed in the image of weeping frozen vegetables, which is a metaphor for Monday's stored food, as opposed to Sunday's fresh one.

In "Wednesday," Wilkinson addresses another household activity which he usually carries out on Wednesday, i.e., a working day, and which, unlike weekend amusements, he does not enjoy. This activity is taking out the garbage. It is mid-morning when the poet carries his trash outside. There he stumbles upon his neighbor doing the same thing:

Mid-morning.

I go out to the dustbin
with my black bags
where I find my neighbour
also filling her dustbin
with black bags.

I wonder what conversation
we can salvage
from this act of disposal.

I pick out a half-eaten discussion
on the subject of our postman
who seems to be getting lazier.
She, the hollow shell of a joke
we once passed between ourselves
concerning the mail company.

But at the bottom of our matching lives,
empty as they are on this Wednesday morning,
we find only silence
and fill it with the rustle of black bags
before scurrying back into our houses
to sort refuse from use. (1-20)

The poet uses the domestic chore of throwing trash into the dumpster as an allegory of the emptiness of man's life, exemplified here by his life as well as his neighbor's. The resemblance between their lives is established through the poet's use of the adjective "matching" in line 15. It is not trash that they are wasting but, rather, their lives. Their lives themselves are trash. The black bags are symbols of the dark, absurd lives they are leading. Actually, the act of waste disposal is not absurd as much as the meaning of their lives for, while taking the garbage out serves a purpose, specifically cleaning up one's house, their lives serve none. This bleak absurdity is acted out, not only on the level of deed and color, but also on the level of language. Besides the fact that the poem draws on the rubbish vocabulary, e.g., "dustbin," "bags," "salvage," "disposal," "refuse," etc., it

fails as a means of communication (1, 2, 7, 8, 20). Trying to fill in the space in their empty lives, the poet holds a conversation with his neighbor in vain. His "discussion" is "half-eaten," while his neighbor's joke, being old, not original, is a "hollow shell" (9, 12). Even the object of their conversation, namely the postman and the mail company, are subjected to ridicule, which demonstrates the negative connotations of their conversation. The only sound that can break their silence and, hence, bridge the gaps in their lives is "the rustle of black bags," which again stresses the futility of language as well as of their lives. The poem comes full circle as the poet and his neighbor return to their houses to sort out their garbage. Since garbage stands for the meaninglessness of life, the poem ends, as it begins, on an absurd note.

As a domestic poet, Wilkinson considers his house as his own private kingdom or "domain." Thus, in his poem "Domain Domine," he imagines that he is a conqueror who needs to wake up early in order to subjugate his house before the advent of the day, which represents his enemy. Accordingly, he walks the carpets as if he is invading new countries, straightening "the parts that have risen overnight" as if they are lands infested with rebels (4). Then he resets the ambush of his house for the coming day so that it will meet its "slow death here" (7). By night, he breathes life into the house again by turning on the lights as well as other electric devices pressing many a switch, which is a demonstration of the free exercise of his royal rights. The buzz of the electric power is his imperial decree to "live a life on" (11). As a final manifestation of his majestic sway, the poet shows how he ventilates the house through the simple act of "opening a door." The ventilation process is depicted as giving the air in the house "a push," that is to say, dismissing it from the house like some sort of a lazy bureaucrat thrown out (12).

> To be the first awake in this house
> is to conquer it.
>
> I walk its carpets,
> push down the parts that have risen overnight,
> reset the trap of this house

so that day will come out of the dawn
and have its slow death here.

I turn it on again,
push its many buttons,
I arouse its hum –
a drone to live a life on.

And I give its air a push,
revive its circulation
with the minute power
of opening a door. (1-15)

If Wilkinson views his house as a conquered country, it is no wonder, then, that he conceives of house cleaning as an execution. In his funny poem "The Execution," he describes the various household objects being cleaned as if they are convicts sentenced to death, each by a distinct means. Consequently, carpets are battered in the courtyard, the washbasin is coerced into drinking the poison of bleach, the shirts "are hung," which is a pun on "hanged," earthenware submerges, and finally "curtains and towels" are fed to the washing machine, while "shoes and books" queue up for their turn (6, 9, 11).

Hearth rugs are
beaten in the yard.

Each sink is made
to swallow bleach.

Shirts
are hung.

Crockery
drowned.

Curtains and towels
stuffed into a machine.

Shoes and books
line up

and wait. (1-13)

Another funny poem that shows Wilkinson's fondness for or, rather, skill in domestic chores is "Acadomestic," whose title is a play on the adjectives "academic" and "domestic." In this poem, he compares household work to a test he has efficiently passed, getting high grades, as well as earning numerous school and university degrees in the various domestic fields. His merit is established since the test results are already posted and approved. In view of these results, he proves to be knowledgeable about dish washing, excellent in drying, and proficient in vacuum cleaning. He also has an eighth grade education in polishing and wiping, "a GCSE in cushion-plumping / with a distinction in scattering," and an A in handling the toaster (8-9). Similarly, he has got a BA in wiping his feet, an MA in hanging his coat, and a PhD in "standing up" (15). It makes perfect sense that he obtains the highest degree in standing up since this activity forms a constituent part of all the other aforementioned activities. After all, the poem gives the impression that Wilkinson is absolutely clean and tidy, which hints at the possibility that he either works at home or is a house husband:

The test results are in. It's official –
I'm a competent dish washer
and excel in drying.

Yes, I've passed
my vacuum cleaner proficiency test
and made it to grade eight
in wood polish and wipe.

I have a GCSE in cushion-plumping,
with a distinction in scattering. And
that A Level's for tapping the toaster

and brushing the crumbs off, into a bag.

For wiping my feet, a Bachelor's Degree,
then a Master's in hanging my coat.

And finally, that defining landmark –
my PHd in standing up. (1-15)

While Wilkinson enjoys doing domestic chores, he is so critical of women's domestic habit of looking into the mirror in preparation for going out. He regards this habit as an act of erasing one's real self by hiding it in a shell, as his poem "Shell" makes clear:

When it's time to go out, it's time
to remove every trace of yourself.
It's time to put that old self away.

You sit that self before the mirror
and watch it slowly dissolve
as you assemble another self around it.

Your age is the first to go. Its lines
are filled in or rubbed out, its loll is lifted.
Years are locked inside the shell.

Then the pure current of your hair
is calmed. The waves the years have made
are dragged out with the new tide.

That's the bit I hate the most,
standing behind you, tying my tie.
You think I'm with you in that mirror.

But I'm not. I'm lying in tomorrow,
watching your naked body sleep,
your new self left undone on the floor. (1-18)

The poem sheds light on the fact that people in general and women in particular suffer from schizophrenia when it comes to their public

conduct in that they have two personalities: the real or unadorned one, which they assume indoors, and the false or adorned one, which they assume in public. Ironically, the one that goes out is locked up in a shell of glamour, while the one confined to the house is free from such false pretensions. The poet portrays the new personality as a machine or some mechanical apparatus that is dismantled and is to be assembled on the framework of the old personality, thus dissolving it. The first marks of the real personality to be wiped out are the marks of age in the face, the wrinkles, being "filled in or rubbed out, its loll is lifted" seemingly through the use of cosmetics (8). Next to go are the natural curls of hair being smoothed down, possibly by a hairdryer or a hair cream. The image used to describe the hair straightening is that of a clear stream flooded by "the new tide," which underpins the supremacy of the false personality and its glamorous world, and the helplessness and fragility of the true personality and its domestic world (12). Wearing his tie while his wife wears her makeup before the mirror is what the poet hates most, probably because he cannot make room for himself having, therefore, to stand behind her. As an item of men's wear when dressing up, the tie carries out the symbolic function of standing before a mirror literally in that it constrains the poet's unadorned self not only morally but also physically. The poet tells his wife that when he looks at the mirror to tie up his necktie, he is not really watching himself at all but, rather, fantasizing about seeing her nude body lying down the following day. "Nude" here can mean either without clothes or without makeup or both. So going to bed is the time when his wife can be her real self, having taken off her fancy clothes and removed her cosmetics. Then her adorned personality comes to an end, or comes "undone on the floor," along with her clothes and cosmetics. That the poet disowns his image in the mirror signifies that he does not have a false self, but only a real one: "You think I'm with you in that mirror. / But I'm not" (15-16). Wilkinson's attempt at identifying his wife's image in the mirror with her adorned personality brings to the mind Jacques Lacan's "Mirror Stage" theory. At the age of eighteen months, Lacan argues, the infant begins to realize his image in the mirror, considering it an ideal representation of himself/herself. Lacan understands this stage "as an identification" calling the mirror image as "the Ideal I" (179).

Wilkinson follows in Lacan's footsteps except that the term ideal for him is only a synonym of artificial.

In "Remnants," Wilkinson ponders over the act of moving into a new house. He is overwhelmed by the sentiment of the occasion, addressing the occasion in emotional terms. Thus, furniture and clothing for him are not inanimate objects but, more exactly, individual hours of cherished memories. He is packing and wrapping not pieces of furniture and items of clothing, but "every hour of this home" (2).

> Now we have folded, collapsed
> and boxed every hour of this home
> we shall lay our remnants in the dining room,
> ready for the van.
>
> An exploded bomb
> shrouds the crystal wineglasses,
> a scattering of showers
> submerges the antique clock.
>
> Clothing,
> bagged in its seasons,
> will one day reveal the wrinkled receipts
> of this tumbling chapter, but
> for now, waits agape
> like a risk
> for the quiet, unseen spider. (1-15)

In the second stanza, Wilkinson becomes realistic as he describes the messy piles of remnants in the dining room. It seems as if a bomb has blown up in the room where the debris covers "the crystal wineglasses" and the dust showers "the antique clock" (6, 8). The explosion image underscores the poet's nostalgia for the past and his present sense of loss. In the third stanza, the poet gets emotional again when he personifies clothing as a man that ages with the passage of time. The "wrinkled receipts" is a metaphor for old age as well as a

pun on human wrinkles. Someday this clothing will tell the tale of this bygone chapter of the poet's life. Right now they just wait open-mouthed for the approach of stealthy spiders, which indicates that the wreckage in the place may be partly due to the erosion of the old house.

Wilkinson is interested not only in domestic chores and activities but also in domestic relationships, as his poem "The Enormous Timer" illustrates. The poem explains how the everyday, domestic routine of a married couple's life can be boring, stultifying, and even fatal to their marriage. When warm relationships turn into cold monotonous habits, life is emptied of its meaning and, hence, of happiness. Life in their house goes on as if the house were put on an enormous timer. The man and his wife act like robots devoid of human feelings. He is "a mechanical man" who is programmed to "go out for wine and come back again / before making love to a clockwork woman" every night from eight to half past ten (4, 5-6). The poet's reference to his mechanical self and that of his wife as complete strangers through the use of the indefinite article "a" distances these mechanical selves from the real identities of the poet and his wife and adds a schizophrenic touch to their characters. Through the use of parallel structure, the word "undressed" acquires double meaning as both the synonym and the antonym of "dressed." Semantically, the word means "naked," but stylistically, it functions as "dressed" in that the woman, by undressing herself, is, in fact, dressed as a mechanical wife. Consequently, the woman grumbles about her bad need to free herself from her domestic responsibilities and get her life back, i.e., "to be a real woman / who gets to see daylight" (10-11). However, when it is time to be away on a Christmas vacation with her husband, she is reluctant to give up her domestic role, which reveals how her mechanical self takes control of her real self to the extent that her domestic life has become her only reality. Her husband sarcastically tells her that she does not have to worry since the house will be put on an enormous timer. The poem is, in truth, in keeping with modern feminist theory. For example, it epitomizes Gayle Rubin's feminist stance expressed in her essay "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." Rubin comes to the conclusion that a

"sex/gender system" within a certain society is the product of "the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity," i.e., the various systematic social apparatuses take up biological females as raw material and shape them into socially accepted beings, that is, domesticated women (534). Rubin defines the process in terms of language exhaustion where words lose their originality and become void of their meanings just as Wilkinson's mechanical persons. "In contrast to words, which have wholly become signs," she believes like Wilkinson, "woman has remained a sign and a value" (550).

> We’re leaving for Christmas
> and putting the house on an enormous timer.
>
> Between eight and half ten each night
> a mechanical man dressed as myself
> will go out for wine and come back again
> before making love to a clockwork woman
> undressed as my wife
> who, at precisely afterwards, will tell the man
> how much she hated it
> and how much she wants to be a real woman
> who gets to see daylight
> and who can go away for Christmas
> without worrying about the house. (1-13)

Such a cold and dull domestic life would never be void of troubles and quarrels. In one of his tankas, which, like all of his other tanka, is untitled, Wilkinson zooms in on one of his household fights with his wife where the action of disputing with his wife takes on the actual fighting on a battlefield:

> you and I
> fought all night
> and left an eerie
> hole, gaping
> in the middle of the room (1-5)

The couple apparently resort to the use of artillery and bombers since their battle leaves a horrifying hole in the middle of the battlefield, namely their room. The hole, of course, represents the breach in their relationship. The personification in the hole being a person gazing in wonder at the couple tells of the severity of their battle. Even so, the poet is not totally pessimistic about their marriage for sometimes his wife can make things right with just a simple smile, as another tanka demonstrates. In this tanka, the poet depicts their argument as a movie by Hitchcock. That their fight is a movie attests to its frequent recurrence, and that it is one by Hitchcock proves its atrocity:

in a scene
from our argument
I wait
for the cameo
of your Hitchcock smile (1-5)

A spider is a household object that is also of much interest to Wilkinson. In his poem "Suspended," Wilkinson delineates a moment in man's life when man is stunned by the puzzling sight of a crawling spider not knowing whether to squash it or explore its mysterious world. One feels helpless being torn between one's animal instinct to kill and one's human thirst for knowledge. At this moment the world of reality and the world of dreams clash as the beholder goes into a trance. Thus hypnotized, the poet and his wife speculate the alternatives of either crushing the spider with his "strangled tea towel" or her "clouded tumbler" or quietly scrutinizing its "small, black twitches" (11, 12, 15). Eventually, the couple wake up to the reality that the spider has rapidly scuttled away under their very noses. The beauty of this poem lies in the fact that the language adopted by the poet in relation to the couple is taken from the spider's world. For example, the title "Suspended," which means "stunned" with reference to the couple, can also mean "dangling" with reference to the spider. In light of this, one can read "teetering," "Holding," "strangled," "pounce," "jolt," and "headfirst" (8, 10, 11, 22, 23). This reading of the poem's language places the couple in the spider's shoes, thereupon turning the poem's meaning upside down. Now it is the spider that has

the upper hand with the couple, not the other way round, for they are the ones who are entangled in the web of their daydreams, while the spider lives in reality, which is why it ends up victorious:

In this moment
reality and nightmare
are colliding.

We do not know
whether to kill or spare
the Spider.
We stand helpless,
teetering
on some unknowable edge.

Holding our options –
my strangled tea towel,
your clouded tumbler –

we count the seconds
silently
between small, black twitches,

at times let loose
our uncontainable thirst
for a close examination

of the thing
that keeps us
suspended here.

And then we pounce,
jolt, headfirst
out of our dreamscape
into the reality
of the Spider's swift,
scuttling departure. (1-27)

So far the paper has been discussing Wilkinson's domestic poetry on the level of subject matter. Now it is time to investigate his domestic poetry on the levels of imagery and setting through his poems on the subject of music. The first poem worthy of consideration in this regard is his "Back Bedroom Baroque." In this poem, Wilkinson relates how in 1998 he lost a classical music recording of the German Cologne Chamber Orchestra, which was conducted at the time by Helmut Muller-Bruhl, in his back bedroom. The recording belongs to the Baroque music by the famous German composer Johann Sebastian Bach. Wilkinson pictures that the members of the orchestra have crowded into his room to play exclusively for him. They will perform "Bach's / Orchestra Suite No. 2 in B Minor" (7). The room is too small to accommodate all the members of the orchestra, who squeeze themselves in. Accordingly, there is not enough space for each musician to play his instrument without feeling ill at ease. The Flautist cannot move his elbow unless he bumps into the Harpsichordist's shoulders being all jammed in between numerous Violinists and an antique chest of drawers. As for the orchestra conductor Helmut Muller-Bruhl, he takes his place "on unpacked box of saucepans" running the risk of tumbling down "the clumsy cluster of musicians" (13, 15). Obviously, the fanciful story is an allegory of the poet's deep depression on account of losing the musical recording as well as his excitement on finding it ultimately, which justifies the "blend of fury and exhilaration" at the end of the poem (17). That is to say, the poet is as much thrilled to listen to the recording again as he is angry with himself for being the cause of depriving himself of such a joy:

> This is not a recording, circa 1998
> of the Cologne Chamber Orchestra
> conducted by Helmut Muller-Bruhl
> but the orchestra themselves,
> huddled in the back bedroom
> for a private performance of Bach’s
> Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B Minor.
>
> The Flautist can hardly raise his elbow
> above the Harpsichordist’s shoulders,
> crammed as they are between several

Violinists and an antique dresser.

And Heir Muller-Bruhl, perched
on the unpacked box of saucepans,
knows that the risk of falling
into the clumsy cluster of musicians
is what lends this piece it's unique
blend of fury and exhilaration. (1-17)

Wilkinson's fondness for Baroque music is also expressed in "The Arrival of the Queen Sheba," whose title is taken from the title of a work by the famous German-British Baroque composer George Frideric Handel. Haunted by "some dream-powered quest," Wilkinson gets up from his bed in the middle of the night and approaches his piano. He begins playing Handel's "The Arrival of the Queen Sheba" by ear, shattering the silence of night. Towards the end of his tune, it occurs to him that his neighbors may now be knocking at his door in astonishment that Handel has woken them out of their sleep. As his final note echoes in the place, a sleepy sound of an oboe softly penetrates his wall like a spider. It seems that one of Wilkinson's neighbors is so appreciative of his performance that s/he himself/herself embarks on playing his/her own oboe as if to return the favor:

The quiet of night is suddenly pierced
as I approach the piano, up out of bed
in some dream-powered quest, and play
The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba by ear.

As I round the corner onto the final mind-stave,
I meet the thought that the neighbours
may by now be hammering at the door,
wondering how Handel got into their sleep.

The final note resounds and out of the wall,
soft, like a small, appreciative house spider,
comes the sound of a drowsy oboe,

striving to find another bar. (1-12)

Wilkinson is not only fond of classical music but he also has a liking for jazz music. His poem "Djangology" reflects his enthrallment with the legendary Belgian Gypsy jazz guitarist Jean Django Reinhardt (1910-1953). In 1934, Reinhardt, together with the Parisian violinist Stéphane Grappelli, founded the Quintette du Hot Club de France, one of the most renowned bands in the history of jazz music ("Django Reinhardt"). "Djangology," whose title, as is the case in the previous poem, is taken from the title of one of Reinhardt's works, shows how Wilkinson, when home alone, amuses himself by doing an impression of Reinhardt. He uses a tennis racquet for a guitar, walls for an audience, and furniture for the members of the Quintette du Hot Club de France. Thus, the walls are amazed at his performance, while he, along with the shoe polishing stool, moves from room to room presenting every melody in Belgian. In the dining room, his band partner the table is surprised to discover that he is playing the guitar with only two fingers. He engages the remaining members of the band such as the chair and the desk in the big finale just before his wife returns home. Commenting on this poem, Wilkinson points out: "I seem to have an obsession with the private pleasures of a man in a house with nothing better to do. Maybe I should get out more" ("Djangology: Comments"). Wilkinson's comment illustrates how he is exceptionally domestic:

Finally alone, I pick up the tennis racquet
and dazzle the walls of our house
with my Django Reinhardt impression.

I move between the rooms with my racquet
and the small stool we use for buffing our shoes,
introducing each tune in a Belgian accent.

In the dining room, the table is astonished
to find that I'm doing all this with just two fingers!
Even the improvised solo in 'Oh Lady Be Good'!

And before you arrive home, I launch

into the big finale, with the chair, the desk
and the rest of the Hot Club of France. (1-12)

Being a classical music and jazz fan, Wilkinson dedicates his poem "The Melody" to the famous American pianist and composer Keith Jarrett (1945-present), who plays both jazz and classical music. Jarrett won the Polar Music Prize in 2003, and in 2004 he was awarded the Léonie Sonning Music Prize. He was also inducted into the Down Beat Hall of Fame in 2008 ("Keith Jarrett"). Once more the title of poem is taken from one of Jarrett's works, specifically The Melody at Night, with You, which is a solo piano recording. One Sunday as Wilkinson stands by the window listening to this recording, he feels himself so moved by the beauty of the tune that he compares it to a cup, not of coffee, but of Jarrett himself that has been slopped into the piano. He opens all the doors in his house to ensure that every piece of furniture is soaked in the tune and that the hall is emptied of the tune since its notes have been polishing the stairs so much that the stairs become slippery, i.e., a hazard. The tune is so emotional that the poet cannot play it following the departure of a beloved one or when writing poetry for fear that it would tone up his feelings in such an intense way as never to be able to express them. He is touched by this recording to the extent that he and everything around him lose their corporeality, turning into images or reflections in the glass of a window:

As though a cup of you
had been spilled on the piano
is all I can liken it to
this uncertain Sunday, by the window.
I open every door to make sure
that not a single piece of furniture
is left untouched, that the stairs
are not considered a hazard
as the notes under your fingers
glaze them. Music that I cannot play
when loved ones leave, music
I can hardly write to, fearing
that I should squeeze the concertina

of my feelings too hard
and button it shut forever, music
that now puts the reflection of a window
into everything I own and am. (1-17)

Another poem that addresses both classical music and jazz is "The Last Sheet," which speaks of the French pianist and composer Jacques Loussier (1934-present), who is famous for his jazz interpretations of Bach such as the Goldberg Variations ("Jacques Loussier"). The poem consists of three parts. In the first part, Wilkinson imagines the sky by night as being made up of several sheets. Since it is already dawn, he believes that the sky has reached its end, drawing its last sheet. This last sheet can barely obstruct daylight. Besides, it is not stiff or firm but, rather, flabby and full of wrinkles. Wilkinson then compares this last sheet to a tune played by "the fingertips / of Jacques Loussier," to be exact, "a Goldberg Variation" most likely because the beauty of the sky fills him with the same emotions a Goldberg Variation does (4-5, 6). This comparison is an example of synaesthesia where the poet likens an object that can be realized only through the sense of sight, namely the sky, to an object that can be realized only through the sense of hearing, namely a Goldberg Variation. In Part II, Wilkinson uses apostrophe when he addresses the sky as if it were a human being, e.g., a companion or the like, greeting it and welcoming it into its home. He tells the sky that it is Friday and that his day has gone well with the exception of spilling some tea on the rug probably due to his drunkenness as Part III of the poem will point out. Then holding a huge volume of Bach's portraits, he inquires of Bach how his (Bach's) day is and whether it seems anything like his (Wilkinson's). He takes the pictures apart and reconstructs them not by sight but by ear, which is another example of synaesthesia. Wilkinson inaugurates the third part with the remark that it is getting late at night and that he is already drunk having been drinking red wine. Now he contemplates the sky and realizes that the "Goldberg Variation is dark blue" (20). The color of the sky calls to his mind the church close to his old house whose stones are bathed in moonlight as if coated with a primer. Wilkinson likens the light of the moon to purgatory that is leaking "from an all-night supermarket"

(25). The image is actually a double metaphor since purgatory is compared to a supermarket liquid item. Wilkinson complicates the image more by comparing the process of leaking to suicide, with moonlight/purgatory representing the person committing suicide and the supermarket representing a "suicide bridge" (27). He concludes the poem with apostrophe when he says "Good Night" to the sky, apparently leaving for bed, and asks it to change sheets in preparation for a new day (28).

I

The sky is coming to an end, now.
Pulled to its last sheet, it hangs
limp from the day. And beyond
those creases, the fingertips
of Jacques Loussier.

The sky is a Goldberg Variation.

II

Good Evening! Welcome home.
I spilt a little tea on the carpet, but
apart from that, it is Friday
and the goldfish is still alive.

How was your day? Did it look
like mine? (and with this, I open
the large tome of portraits
of Johann Sebastian Bach
being dismantled and reassembled
by an ear.)

III

Later, later still.
I have drunk and am drunk

by a bottle of red.

The Goldberg Variation is dark blue,
it reminds of me of the church
near our old home –
the moon priming its slates,
the purgatory seeping
from an all-night supermarket,
the suicides we never saw
on suicide bridge.

Good Night! Put on a new sky. (1-28)

Wilkinson also shows an interest in blues music, as his poem "After You've Gone" demonstrates. The poem explains how he uses the voice of the most popular American female blues singer in the 1920s and 1930s Bessie Smith (1894-1937), sometimes called "the Empress of the Blues," as a remedy for his deep feeling of loneliness owing to the departure of his beloved wife ("Bessie Smith"). He turns the volume up so that her voice would reach the farthest corners of his house, imagining that he chases after her around the house. Thus, he pursues her while she climbs up the stairs, making her way into the spare room. He then reflects on the thought that his wife would hate this chase, sipping his tea and putting the cup back on the plate. The reflection and drinking take place at the landing where he stands bending over beneath a broken light bulb and dressed in the thick coat of "St Louis Blues" (12). The clothing image is an example of synaesthesia:

After you've gone, I try
to fill as much of the house as possible
with Bessie Smith's voice.

And I walk around, following her
as she makes her way up the stairs
and seeps into the spare room.

You would hate this, I think
as I take another sip of tea
and place the cup back on the saucer,

standing there on the landing, leaning
under an empty lightbulb, clothed
in this thick layer of St Louis Blues. (1-12)

Wilkinson is so infatuated with music that he takes his piano black key as his role model. In his poem "Sharp," he states that he owns an antique piano that produces a half-step so powerfully, illustrating that every good deed in life should be carried out by the same token. Wilkinson then cites three examples of deeds that should be accomplished vigorously: two of them are domestic, while the third is poetic. The first deed is rising from bed, probably because it inaugurates one's day, so one ought to be refreshed. The second is the appreciation one shows for the coffee a friend makes one, very likely since coffee is among the most highly cherished refreshments. The third is the present poem, which, standing on its toes like a ballet dancer, i.e., aspiring to perfection, seeks after one of these semitones. The image of the poem dancing employs two figures of speech simultaneously, namely personification and metaphor, which enhances the meaning of the last two stanzas. Besides, the dancing image is in line with the poem's topic, that is, music:

I have this old piano
that plays a semi-tone too high,
as all good things should -

getting out of bed, for instance,
should involve some endeavour
for one more semi-tone.

Enthusiasm, perhaps
towards the way a friend
makes your coffee.

This poem, dancing as it is
on the balls of its feet,

aiming
for one of the black keys. (1-13)

With "Sharp," one comes to the end of the second section of the paper, which investigates Wilkinson's domestic poetry on music. The paper will now focus on his domestic poetry on poetry. Ending with a reference to poetry, "Sharp," therefore, makes a perfect transition between the second section and the final one. The first poem of interest in the final section is "Welcome Here." The poem describes the process of composing poetry, comparing poems to late-night visitors or intruders for whom the poet is full of hatred. These visitors devour the little dishes of the poet's appraisal. The poet then takes out a piece of paper so that his visitors or, rather, poems can urinate everywhere on the page. "Paper" here is a pun where the poet plays on "a sheet of paper" and toilet paper (4). Thereafter, the poet spends the whole night kneeling down to clean up the floor off the visitors' dirt, i.e., revising and appreciating what he has written down on the page by, for example, substituting an inappropriate word for a proper one, rephrasing an ambiguous statement, or crossing out a tasteless simile or metaphor. This cleanup makes the poet sick to his stomach, especially that the page is crammed with words from margin to margin. The poet asks the reader to take notice of his sheer disdain for those late-night intruders since they get hold of all things in his house, i.e., since they completely occupy his thinking. On their departure, those visitors leave behind the fingerprints of their reverberating meters and the smell of their amusing puns, which is as stinking as the smell of urine "in the bathroom of this page" (15). Both the fingerprints and smell images are examples of synaesthesia:

Hear of the hate I have for these poems
as they arrive, out of the night
wanting the small bowls of my appreciation
as I put out a sheet of paper
and let them piss all over the place.

Let me tell you about the nausea I feel
as I spend the rest of the evening on my knees,
scrubbing the floor of their filth,
finding pieces of their metaphors and similes
jammed between the margins.

Observe my utter contempt for these intruders
as they pick up everything in the house and leave
their resounding rhythms like fingerprints
and their humorous wordplay
like a bad smell in the bathroom of this page. (1-5)

In his poem "Rediscoveries," Wilkinson takes a little trip down memory lane on the discovery of a bunch of old poems that have been stitched somewhere for a long time. Some of these poems remind him of an earlier phase of his life, as well as of the worn-out rugs upstairs. The use of the verb "smell" in relation to his "younger self" is a form of synaesthesia where the poet means "reveal," not "smell." Meanwhile, its use in connection with the carpets implies either that these poems literally have the same musty smell as the carpets or that the poems refer to them one way or another (1, 2). Some other poems, if shaken, will defecate "dead silver fish / and chewed guitar picks," which underlines Wilkinson's association with both writing and music (6-7). Two other poems bring back the memory of some party or special occasion for they are pasted on each other after having absorbed slopped cocktails with which they are scented. Finally, one of the poems bears typical resemblance to the present poem "only colder only / happier" (14-15). The poem is "colder" because it has been lost long ago with no one touching it, and it is "happier" because the poet used to be happier at the time, which indicates that he lacks some of his past cheerfulness now. The poet follows a sifting strategy as he narrows down the number of the poems that fill him with nostalgia, perhaps on grounds of their personal relation or emotional attachment to him:

These old poems smell

of a younger self
and the thread-bare carpets of
second floors

some of them when shaken
excrete dead silver fish
and chewed guitar picks
two

are stuck together
with the distinct scent
of spilled cocktails

and one of them
looks just like you
only colder only
happier (1-15)

Wilkinson's suffering from a writer's block is the topic of his poem "Shut." He likens his inability to compose poetry to being shut up in a desk drawer, hence the poem's title. Thereupon, he imagines what it is like to be locked up in such a drawer. The first thing that catches his attention is the mixed smell of "hot wood and ink" that washes down his nose (2). Next, he feels the fluffy moth-eaten remnants of a pencil sharpening breaking up on his lips. As if these Alice in Wonderland circumstances were real, the poet wonders how on earth he gets himself ensnared in this tiny drawer. He thinks to himself that he is treading on an unfamiliar dark territory banned from all but his pens and poems. Now his fingertips can reach the inmost recesses of the drawer. Eventually, Wilkinson gets his message across by pointing out that this fanciful Alice in Wonderland situation is his allegory of coming to a dead end when writing. To feel lonely and writhe, struggling to squeeze oneself in the drawer, is pretty much similar to suffering due to striving to come up with an interesting idea or finish an incomplete line:

The fusion
of hot wood and ink
swills at each rim
of my nostrils.
The dead moth
of a pencil shaving
falls apart at my lips.
I have no idea how
I came to be trapped
in this drawer.
My fingertips explore
the terrain, hidden
in a darkness
that only my pens
and poems have known.
To be alone, contorted
to fit in this space,
is to know the loneliness
and pain of so many
half-hearted ideas, so
many unfinished lines. (1-21)

Among the poetic genres that Wilkinson practices is what he calls "micro poetry" or "a skinny poem." A skinny poem is a poem where each line consists of no more than a word or two. Wilkinson's skinny poems are usually untitled. In one of his recent skinny poems, he expresses how the scene of his kitchen and lounge always pervaded by light and the smell of cinnamon presents him with untapped reservoirs of inspiration for his poetry. That is to say, for Wilkinson, the kitchen, a very domestic place, is not only a room for cooking food but also functions as his muse as well as his study where he writes his poetry:

light
from
long-since
spilled

day
all over
kitchen
into
lounge
smell
of cinnamon
incense
page
of ideas
waiting
to be
poems (1-17)

The notion of the kitchen as Wilkinson's muse and study is restated in one of his tanka which he composes while sitting at the kitchen table. Inspired by the scene, he suddenly realizes that cooking pasta is not a bit different from writing poetry in that one can never tell when either of them is completed. The long dash at the end of the second line singles out the moment of realization or, rather, inspiration:

writing this
at the kitchen table-
pasta and poems
are the same: I never know
when they're done (1-5)

In "System of Discovery," Wilkinson compares the process of reciting a poem for the purpose of revision to drinking the water of a long river. He points out that one morning he allows a poem to glide through his larynx so as to slow it down, whereupon he can reflect on it. He sips the long river of the poem as if he were sipping a drink. His tongue gets wet in the process while he examines the air stream passing through the larynx by holding it when pronouncing a consonant and releasing it when pronouncing a vowel, which

establishes his familiarity with phonetics. At the end of the day, he finds that the crumbs of his food have dried up, making "their image" "on the day-white plate," and that the tea residue lies at the bottom of the cup (14, 15). "Plate" here is a pun on either a printing plate or a picture in a book. Nonetheless, he is still reciting his poem, which he depicts, this time, as a brook of air formed by a voice that is "getting used / to its surroundings," namely the organs of speech, as it seems (22-23).

> This morning I slide
> a poem through my larynx
> to slacken it.
> A long river of poem,
> taken like a drink.
>
> I wet my tongue
> with the poem
> and test the air
> with its consonants,
> before releasing it
> in its vowels.
>
> The crumbs
> on the day-white plate
> have made their image
> and the cool dregs of tea
> have come to rest
> in the cup.
>
> But the poem is still running
> through a rivulet
> of air
> that is shaped by a voice
> getting used
> to its surroundings. (1-23)

Delineating the practice of composing poetry in one of his tanka, Wilkinson uses antithesis where he shows how he shuts the

door of his room and opens the windows of his mind, having resorted to his typewriter. The act of opening the windows of his mind is, of course, an allusion to poetic creativity:

closing the door
behind me
I go to my typewriter
and open the windows
in my head (1-5)

This delightful tanka brings the final section of the paper and, as a result, the paper itself to their ends. In light of the above analysis of Wilkinson's major poems, one comes to the conclusion that Wilkinson's poetry is deeply immersed in domesticity to such an extent that domesticity has turned into a poetic obsession for him. Thus, household chores, activities, furniture, etc., have become determining factors in the selection of his topics and the forging of his imagery and setting. As it has been pointed out in the first part of the paper, most of Wilkinson's poetry deals with domestic subject matter. For example, in "A Sunday Triptych," "Wednesday," "Domain Domine," "The Execution," and "Acadomestic," Wilkinson addresses domestic habits and duties such as reading newspapers while sipping coffee in the morning, taking the garbage out, waking up early, cleaning up the house, making the bed, wiping one's feet, and hanging one's coat. In "Shell," he discusses the domestic habit of dressing up in front of a mirror in psychological terms. In "Remnants" and "The Enormous Timer," he explores domestic emotions and relationships such as the nostalgia packing up in preparation for moving into another house fills one with and the deadly effect of everyday domestic routine on the love of a married couple. In "Suspended," he traces the mesmerizing effect such domestic creatures as the spider have on the beholder. On the other hand, when Wilkinson treats other topics like music and poetry, as the second and the third parts of the paper illustrate, his imagery and setting are entirely permeated with domesticity. Therefore, the action of both "Back Bedroom Baroque" and "The Arrival of the Queen Sheba" takes place in his bedroom and maybe living room. In "Djangology," he moves from room to room,

doing an impression of Jean Django Reinhardt. In "The Melody," he makes use of domestic imagery where he compares a solo piano recording by Keith Jarrett to a cup of refreshment which is spilled all over the house furniture. Likewise, Wilkinson's poetry on the subject of poetry teems with domestic imagery. For instance, "Welcome Here" likens poems to late-night intruders who feast on the poet's appreciation and then pee on a sheet of paper provided by him. "Shut" portrays the poet's suffering from a writer's block as being locked up in a desk drawer, while one of his tanka associates writing poetry with cooking pasta. Consequently, the paper has proved the domestic aspect of Wilkinson's poetry beyond doubt, which, as indicated above, hints at the probability that Wilkinson stays at home a lot, maybe works at home, or is even a house husband. Wilkinson's domestic poetry raises an imperative question concerning the future of poetry: what is contemporary poetry coming to? After the spectacular poetry of nature of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Keats, the grand poetry on myth and religion at the hands of the Victorian poets such as Tennyson and Hopkins, and the complicated poetry about the common man by Modern poets such as Eliot and Frost, now in the age of globalization, while the world boundaries are vanishing and the world is becoming a small village through modern technology of communication such as the internet, poetry is retreating home to the household boundaries!

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