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catch—with these riches come questionable content, free of any depth? If these are the themes righteous artists feel compelled to trumpet nowadays, maybe conceptual poetry and flarf are the best mediums to capture this preoccupation. And that is basically all Timmons does, piecing together a parodistic jungle of pseudo-intellectualisms and sound bites illustrating the shifting definitions of what constitutes the New in this post-'net society. Transition is the key thread tying his flarf together. Nothing is ever settled, and all that is hep and happenin' is already morphing into the next new, or The New Next. Everything is passé, including (or especially) what's hip. We are experiencing "the past of modernity."

That's not to say Timmons flirts incessantly with Bob Dylan territory of "Look out, Kid" Subterranean Homesick Poetry. If so, he would start to read like tired slogans. And although admittedly he does come close to that at times (such as "The New Concept"'s in-your-face anti-industrial spin and the most blatantly flarf "The New Night"), generally Timmons achieves something truly remarkable: subtlety from the Internet. The wonderfully perverse "The New Kitten" rips apart our endless delight in such animal-themed crazes as LOLcats, revealing what's really at the bottom of such kitschy fads: modern pet-owners displacing their maternal and paternal affections onto creatures pretty much incapable of returning human affection. We are growing increasingly incapable of coping with personal relations, finding in the wide, blank eyes of a numb, newborn critter a comforting substitute. The poem is a mash-up of random instructions gleaned from online cat experts, providing disturbingly cozy tips on how to warm the kitten up to its new environment, and vice-versa.

Remember that people (especially men) who are used to having dogs (not cats) may tend to play a little aggressively with The New Kitten. The best thing to do is to ignore the ruckus, and leave them to work it out on their own. It will take a while, and meanwhile, the worst thing you can do is force the situation.

Though Timmons's quotes are taken directly from websites centering around feline care, the text here eerily recalls information found on websites for step-parents learning to cope with children from a spouse's previous marriage. "Pets as replacement progeny" is not a terribly novel concept, but the theory that The New Kitten is also The New Sensitive Stepchild aptly captures The New Family Dynamic.

**Perhaps most surprising of all is, quite simply, how beautifully the poetry often reads.**

The poems tie together in surprisingly knowing—creative—ways. Many of his headings are left empty (all listed alphabetically, like a proper encyclopedia of expanding knowledge), perhaps to capture just how quickly one New skips to the next. However, it might be no coincidence that he writes nothing beneath "The New Label"'s title, but the empty poem quickly transitions to "The New Language." In "The New New York School," Timmons assigns Kehinde Wiley the role of "talking about that other contact sport, Flarf...." Wiley is no flarfer, but could be called a *visual* conceptual artist, painting Harlem youths in poses famous in Renaissance art—ultimately, inserting The New into an already established form. Even Timmons's call-outs serve as tenuous branches in the Conceptual Family Tree. He is creating The New Connect-the-Dots.

Perhaps most surprising of all is, quite simply, how beautifully the poetry often reads. Timmons breaks with the conceptual notion that the words in flarf don't matter, that emotional responses are irrelevant. He weaves his carefully chosen words together in such well-measured fashion that they result in unexpectedly heartfelt prose. Such pieces as "The New Ideal Reading Experience" and "The New Old" employ deliberately wistful ellipses coupled with brief spurts of emotion, evocations of nostalgia and classic art. And how are we to reconcile the idea that conceptual poetry only touches the mind, never the heart, when we read "The New Physicality?" "The New Physicality will come in the form of Dance, The New Physicality that no

choreographer has explored, as dance, just as Isadora Duncan's earth-bound movement foretold The New Physicality of Martha Graham." I was entranced by this section. Partly because Timmons steps back from dry cynicism (which he does do well), in all probability discovering a blog or two earnestly in love with dance, Isadora, and Martha, and he captured the original writer's isolated passion. Plus, like all great literature, this is written in such a way that's it's just a joy to read for the sheer sake of letting the words sink in, without immediately appreciating any overarching meaning. As Mrs. Ramsay reflects in *To the Lighthouse* (1927),

And she opened the book and began reading here and there at random, and as she did so she felt that she was climbing backwards, upwards, shoving her way up under petals that curved over her, so that she only knew this is white, or this is red. She did not know at first what the words meant at all.

Is this purely aesthetic reaction one of the goals behind conceptual writing, fascinating the reader with a work's style (and creation of that style) without exploring beneath the surface? Or is that the opposite intention, and conceptual poets expect their audience to look at the lines only for their technical virtues, of where the words came from and the mechanics of the process, without necessarily experiencing the incidental beauty of the work's prose? If the former, Timmons captures the very best of conceptual poetry: he allows the reader's intellectual gratification, not only with the seamless submersion of memes and 'net lingo, but also with the very sound and feel those words create when meshed together. If the latter, Timmons redefines conceptual poetry by courageously involving both the intellectual and the aesthetic (emotional) reader. He very well might usher in The New Poetic Evolution.

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## Poetics of Guilt

Anna Moschovakis

### TRAGODÍA 1: STATEMENT OF FACTS

Vanessa Place

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The distinction between an ethical and a moral approach to guilt, suggests poet and appellate attorney Vanessa Place in *The Guilt Project: Rape, Morality, and Law* (2010), is this: while the ethical "wonders what the collective us is doing" when we do what we do (to "innocent" citizens and convicted criminals alike), the moral "is hot and murky, circling the question of what makes us human." *The Guilt Project* presents a nuanced argument about criminal law, specifically the counter-intuitive laws concerning rape; it is aimed at the concerned and curious lay reader, whom it leaves bursting with ethical

wonder. By contrast, Place's *Tragodia 1: Statement of Facts* plunges its reader hard into the murk. There is no evident polemic, no well-deliberated thesis, in *Statement of Facts*, and this is precisely the point: it earns its moral weight in spite of, and because of, its status as conceptual poetry.

Like *The Weather*, Kenneth Goldsmith's 2005 book of New York City weather reports transcribed from the radio, *Statement of Facts* can be seen as an example of what Goldsmith terms "uncreative writing," an anti-Romantic methodology that emphasizes the importance of the idea or concept above other literary considerations, producing texts in which "all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair." It is certainly (again like *The Weather*) an example of appropriation, a technique in which language is lifted by the writer directly from another (often non-literary) context with another (often more utilitarian) use. Unavoidably reminiscent of Marcel Duchamp's readymades—in which an object becomes art by virtue of its placement in an

—Moschovakis continued on next page

VANESSA PLACE

## Tragodia

1: Statement of Facts