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Contemporary British Poetry and the Long 1980s

Interview with Fiona Sampson

Fiona Sampson, with Bastien Goursaud et Claire Hélie

In this interview, Fiona Sampson examines the impact of Thatcherite deregulation and consumer culture on British poetry from the 1980s onward. She argues that poetry often became polished and defensive, avoiding abstraction and political engagement, while institutional forces—such as key editors and the "New Generation" promotion—both shaped and homogenized the field. Situating these developments within post-war austerity and Britain's cultural openness to the United States, Sampson also reflects on issues of diversity, noting the marginalization of experimental, African, and Caribbean voices. She concludes that poetic "deregulation" mirrored Thatcherite economics, producing both opportunities and constraints.

KEYWORDS: deregulation, Thatcherism, British poetry, 1980s, institutions and editors

Bastien Goursaud: *In your keynote, you started by underlining the sort of momentous socio-political shifts of the late 70s, early 80s, and their impact on the poetry scene. Could you start by telling us about those shifts?*

Fiona Sampson: Yes, thank you Bastien. Well, obviously the conference title addressed "the long 1980s", so I mean, you start by defining your terms, don't you? But also, I always think of text as not independent, not context-independent. And I think there is a tendency, on the other hand, in the British lyric tradition, let's call it that, to think in a context-independent way about itself. And I think that that's problematic. It's peculiarly problematic in relation to the 1980s, partly because – and I'll unpack both these points – there was a particular poetics that was very much to the fore, which was closely allied to a sort of commodification: which also claims to be context-independent, but isn't, obviously. And partly because the poetry in Britain in the 1980s was particularly, well, I suppose part of that same poetics was resolutely non-porous. So that although one might say that some of the trends in 21st century British poetry have been quite distorted by identity politics, and although that might be a distortion, it's still a gesture towards what's beyond the margin of the text.

I mean, obviously, we could unpack lots of things about, you know, "authorial identity", and let's put that in square brackets because we, as it were, know all that. But nevertheless, in terms of diction, subject matter, I think that this was peculiarly going on in the 1980s in poetry. And that, in technical terms, the poetics of the 1980s were also very much about, as Don Paterson said, "the poem is a small machine for remembering itself": this idea of a kind of small machine, a small entity, innocent of context. That's why I was thinking so much about those changes.

And then, of course, those changes were significant everywhere in Europe because it's the coming of age of the baby boomers. But it happened differently in Britain to continental Europe, because our war was different. I mean, too much of British national identity, British right wing and particularly alt-right discourses keep valorising the Second World War and the fact that we weren't invaded and so on. And I don't mean to embrace any of that, but just empirically, economically, in a whole number of ways, the experience of the British population was not one of occupation. And so the British trauma was a different one.

I always imagine that people in France look at Britain in the Second World War the way we look at North America and think, well, you didn't have a war, really, did you? Of course, that's not true. But actual horror was something which was experienced by the troops, by the armed forces, but not here at home – except in terms of the Blitz. So the legacy of the experience of war was a kind of trust in national planning. With "dig for victory", everyone dug up their gardens and grew their own vegetables. A whole generation of school kids were evacuated from the capital and the populous south-east of the country to relative safety in the north or west. And then we had a very long-term austerity, longer than in continental Europe, because we didn't get any rebuilding grants because we hadn't been knocked about.

We had been knocked about: but not nearly so much. So Britain carried on having rationing and being very, very kind of subdued and grey and pragmatic and kind of under the economic, rather than the emotional, cosh of the Second World War. And at the same time, it didn't have a sense of urgency about peace in Europe in the same way that you have: hence Brexit, I would argue.

And so the sort of return, as it were, of a kind of pleasure, really, when it came in the 70s, it was very much embraced by the baby boomer generation as their Oedipal struggle with their parents' generation. But it also led to a vulgar efflorescence of consumerism, as it were.

Claire Hélie: *Would you tie this efflorescence of consumerism in with the UK-US special relationship in the 1980s?*

Fiona Sampson: We've always had this problem of looking across the Atlantic and thinking we have a special relationship with North America, which, of course, we don't really. We just share a language. But we are obviously very, very open to cultural colonization because we share that language. Films and streaming and popular music. You know, even our literary prizes are open to anybody writing English (which basically means that North Americans and the Irish win them).

The 1980s was a kind of enormous upsurge in consumerism, and '79 sees Thatcher come in, and Thatcher means Reaganite economics. So— as in North America, but on a tinier canvas. Our nation is a tinier canvas, and our land mass is a tiny canvas compared to North America, obviously, so the effects were extreme. We underwent this selling off of nearly all national assets, from water to the railways. It was a kind of an immense commodification of life. And this tremendous divergence from this kind of communal "we're all in it together. We've all got the same ration books." The result was a chasm opened up between the haves and the have-nots. We're still working that out today. And the result of that is that everything is kind of brightly coloured, cool, packaged. Whatever's kind of rough or organic is dismissed, perhaps as hippie: it's certainly not seen as winning. Competition becomes the buzzword and the way of doing everything.

And with competition comes a kind of defensiveness. Hence these immaculately turned 1980s British poems, which are often not very large on the page. I often think they look like postcards – postage stamps, even. Neat lines of the same length. They might not have a strong metrical engine, but they are probably quite homogenous in terms of assonance. Also, they tend to want to exclude abstraction, ergo thought, and engagement, ergo politics. These kind of artefact poems became de rigueur.

Claire Hélie: *Could you please expand on the articulation you have just made between assonance, the artefact-poem and politics?*

Fiona Sampson: Well, it strikes me that the preoccupation with the assonantal has its roots in traditional Welsh verse. It has its origin in Welsh cynghanedd, which is a strict form that matches the vowels of half-lines across the caesura. This

happens, though less tightly, in Anglo Saxon poetry too. So it's actually a very old piece of formal apparatus. Don Paterson wrote somewhere that you take poem submissions out of their envelopes, and, you know, some of them look like a kind of alphabet confetti, because the letters are dissimilar from each other, there aren't enough matches. Of course, it's really an aural, not a visual dispersal. He's also a kind of folk and jazz musician. I should just add that I published some of his critical work when I was at *Poetry Review* and I'm not aware of extensive discussions by him of cynghanedd and in traditional Scottish and Anglo-Saxon forms.

Bastien Goursaud: *When you talk about assonantal or assonance or those artefact poems, as you call them, do you have specifically the Patersonian poem in mind, or is it broader?*

Fiona Sampson: My feeling is that poet editors can be the very best of editors—just as literary translators can be the very best of close readers. They plunge in among the workings of the text and there they observe the nuances of the language and of the sense. But they have to resist a temptation to prune everything. And both at Picador under Don Paterson and at Cape under Robin Robertson—this is really going into the 90s— poems were sometimes so heavily edited that they were, in some ways, almost co-created with their editors.

As poets themselves, both Don Paterson and Robin Robertson seem to me extraordinary. And had they not also been poet editors, I think their influence would have been entirely for the good and extraordinary, because they're both doing something that's very important. I mean, in Paterson there is a tremendous control of diction and awareness and a kind of steeliness, which is the steel edge of an exceptional intelligence. For example, I think his versions of the Rilke sonnets are terrific. I don't mean they're the best translations of Rilke. But as a book, I think *Orpheus* is stunning, and that, for me, applies to a lot of his books. And I think that Robin Robertson is an extraordinary poet of myth, and chromatic language, though with tremendous discipline. Both are extraordinary poets.

But sometimes, if you edit someone in your own image, you can become all technique: you don't leave the poem to be more than the sum of its parts. Actually, of course, as Paterson and Robinson are terrific poets, their own work is always more than the sum of its parts. There is a kind of lift off, let's say – not to get untechnical or mystify unnecessarily – the charisma of excellence. Acting is a good analogy. It's not only the interpretation itself, but the quality of conviction brought to that interpretation. It's not only your poetics, but how you inhabit those poetics.

Claire Hélie: *Can you tell us a little bit about the groups that emerged in the 1980s?*

Fiona Sampson: Well, there was a London writing group convened by Matthew Sweeney – who was just a little bit older, maybe ten years older than Paterson, an Irish poet living in London at that time – to which a large number of those poets went when they were pre-debutant, including Jo Shapcott and Lavinia Greenlaw. They became a generation, a cohort who knew each other and had strong

interpersonal relationships and therefore promoted and influenced each other. It's one of those things, isn't it? When you read even Hughes—Hughes's early letters, even when he's a student, he's saying it too, to his gang, many of whose names have not lasted: "We are the only good poets in England today." I suppose there is something hubristic about trying to become a writer anyway, isn't there? You're always wanting to vault the barrier that perhaps separates – one hopes it hyphenates, but perhaps it separates – reader and writer. And I do think there was a particular cultural bubble mentality in London in the early 90s—to say nothing of the 1997 election and "Cool Britannia", and Blair's government whose slogan that was. It was great for the country, after what had happened under Thatcher and Major. But it sort of says, "We're the cool gang." And everybody else, to some extent, doesn't count.

Bastien Goursaud: *What were the institutions that helped promote this generation of like-minded poets?*

Fiona Sampson: I would say that it was mainly *Poetry Review*, the magazine which I grew up with and later edited myself. *Poetry Review* was very metropolitan. It was and remains the UK's magazine of record. The whole "New Generation" promotion which dominated the 1990s was tied up with *Poetry Review*. In the long 1980s it was rare for the *Review* to publish a poem by someone new – either to the magazine itself or to publishing in general. So rare that, if they did so, they would run a whole feature on this person. There was a certain sense of nepotism around some of that: literary nepotism, in the sense that an editor might introduce a poet they'd spotted to the magazine, and this one individual who had come to their attention would receive as much attention as half a dozen equally gifted contemporaries put together.

The "New Gen" were the Baby Boomer poets. There were twenty of them, and those of their contemporaries who missed out on this promotion, perhaps because of who they were published by, never caught up on terms of readership or critical standing. It was a de facto hegemonic project. Therefore, this cohort had a huge influence on the rest of us. They also continued to influence each other in a kind of "troubadour" existence. This is before the rise of university creative courses in this country, and so these poets are going from gig to gig freelancing, giving workshops and readings. There was clearly momentum and excitement to this informal, highly sociable life.

But it's not time spent at the desk. Taken as a whole, the New Gen didn't write lots of books. Think of the body of work of Michael Donaghy: exquisite, but small. We all wish for so much more. Later, Don Paterson would work in a university and become the Picador poetry editor. So he had a big workload, too… I don't mean this cohort were lazy, I just mean there was too much teaching and gigging and not enough reading and writing. That was the only way you could earn a living. It was a good thing for British poetry when creative writing university courses did arrive since it allowed a lot of poets to make a stable living. And you do notice that bodies

of work have increased since. Because the thing about having a secure job is, you're not always looking for the next gig. You've got the salary.

Bastien Goursaud: *Actually, I do want to talk about the Next Generation Poets, which you had also mentioned in your keynote and which seems to me to be a product of the marketization of the poem which perhaps has something to do with the artefact-poems that you describe. Indeed you talked of the New Gen quite rightly I think, as largely a marketing project, not only that, but a marketing project that had, shall we say, homogenizing consequences, which I think is basically what you were already alluding to. So looking back, do you think that British poetry would have been better off without that promotional initiative? Would it have prevented the sort of influence of the Paterson-Robertson duo, the sometimes overbearing influence of that duo, and also maybe if you could share your impression of it as a young poet who started publishing a little bit after their first group, first list was created.*

Fiona Sampson: Let me answer the easy bit first: which is that for me as a young poet, it was a really big problem. It created a really big barrier to participation because it was so successful. It was very easy for festival organizers, publishers, international opportunities, to say, "These are the young poets." But for those of us who were younger than that cohort, and trying to emerge at that time, it meant a dearth of opportunity… When I was, say, 22 and just beginning to get a few poems into magazines, I thought I was young. I thought my generation were young poets. But no. It turned out that the boomers in their 30s, 40s and even 50s were the "young poets". Of course, we youngsters couldn't compete, because they already had books out, and because they'd had so much amplification. It made it very difficult for us. It delayed everything. I mean, there are very few people in my own cohort in British poetry: Matthew Hollis, and Julia Copus, and that's about it. We emerged at just the wrong time. We were suffocated, in a way.

It's worked out fine now, but at the time, it did make a difference. So then the more complicated answer is that yes, I do think such promotions make a difference, which can be very positive. And had the "Next Gen" come along a little bit sooner, maybe five years later, rather than ten, or whenever it was, I think that would have been healthier, because that would have kept a creative churn, and would have stopped this ossification of the poetry scene. Because the New Gen had a homogenizing tendency, and was reasonably homogenous in its initial selection too, it became monolithic. But it started as a sort of celebratory moment, and that would have been fine if what it had celebrated had been a moment.

Of course, the model was prose. It was *Granta*, with their Best Young British novelists. *Granta* was also a powerful periodical. I subscribed for years, and I read it as a Bible of what was going on in contemporary writing: just as I read *Poetry Review*, actually. But there was a great deal more churn in *Granta* than there was in *Poetry Review*.

Claire Hélie: *Does it have anything to do with the lack of funding for literature?*

Fiona Sampson: It's certainly true that in England is the opposite of Wales (I can't talk about Scotland, because I don't know the situation there). In Wales, relatively generous public funding for the arts goes to literature, and within that, a fair sum to poetry because the national identity resides in the language, *yr iaith*, in the Welsh language. Whereas in England – which of course now has practically no arts funding at all – even back in the 80s and 90s and 2000s when there were funds, literature had the smallest budget, and within that poetry's was vanishingly small. As you know, in Britain poetry remains a genre about which really established literary figures, including literary editors on national papers, or novelists, feel quite comfortable to joke, "Well it could be worse. It could be a poem." There is very little cultural space for poetry. I'm not sure it's so different in France, but it's definitely problematic in Britain generally, and certainly in England. And so a promotion does grab the attention of all those kind of lazy arts journals and festival administrations to say, "Over here, come on, look at this. You think you know about poetry?" The laughable thing was that the New Gen promotion did repeat that poetry was "the new rock and roll"…

Bastien Goursaud: *Was it also problematic for the older generation?*

Fiona Sampson: One of the things I did when I was editing *Poetry Review* from 2005 to 2012 was to try consciously to publish across generations. I published lots more debutants, more than any other poetry periodical – except the tiniest magazines— in Britain, certainly more than *Chicago Review*, *Poésie*, or any internationally equivalent magazine, and many more than the *Poetry Review* had done since the 1940s. I published people who were not yet at first book stage, sometimes with the first poem they'd ever published in a magazine. But I also tried to rehabilitate – because it's the magazine of record – the generation who at that point were in their 70s and 80s, and who had been pushed aside by New Gen. They had a different poetics, a different experience. Although they were nearly all white, in terms of other kinds of backgrounds, they were in some ways more diverse, and certainly their poetics were more diverse. So I tried to bring them back in.

And you know, there's another upheaval going on in British poetry at the moment. In the 1990s, if you weren't published by the Golden Triangle of Picador, Cape or Faber, you practically couldn't get reviewed. Now, if you're published by Picador, Cape, Faber, or Chatto, there's the sense that you're not cutting edge. It happens cyclically, that awful pushing aside. The generation in their 50s and 60s always have to wait until they become national treasures. In the 70s and 80s, they kind of come back again. A good example, is Mimi Khalvati, who's just won this year's King's Gold Medal for poetry: and so she should, because she's an absolutely terrific poet who's been slightly underestimated all her life – she hasn't been sufficiently rewarded. She's an exquisite formalist and such a musical poet, such an intelligent poet. But although her background is Iranian (in fact, one might say

Persian, because the country she left at the age of four for boarding school in England was Persia in the time of the Shah), she didn't really write about these issues. So it's been easier for other women of global majority heritage to be rewarded instead.

Bastien Goursaud: *Since you mention diversity and those issues around the development of poetry which you have developed elsewhere. Poets of African and Caribbean descent had success in the 1980s but at the same time, they were suffering from a relative isolation on the British poetry scene. And I wonder if you could tell us a bit more about that, and why that was according to you.*

Fiona Sampson: Well, I mean, it's fairly obvious why we would have developed a terrific African Caribbean heritage tradition in Britain, in British poetry. And it's fairly obvious why that would have sort of really emerged in the 70s, partly because at the time the Windrush arrived, and partly because the 70s, in any case, was a civil rights decade, isn't it? You know, Britain's always in step just behind America.

One could say that quite a lot of the early performance type poetry, both dub poetry and just the whole tradition of free verse poetry, was associated with consciousness raising, although it wasn't necessarily done with a political agenda, or at least the political agenda was secondary. It was done with high literary ambition, and was proper literary work: I don't want in any way to imply it wasn't. But it was embraced with enthusiasm, particularly by educators, because it had all the virtues of oral poetry and few of the drawbacks, in terms of accessibility, of the written tradition. There's energy in the language. There's rhetoric. There are tropes of call and response. It's often fun. And thinking right back to people like John Agard and Grace Nichols and James Berry, they're using dialect. They're using *patois* that often breaks into song lyric. As an oral tradition, this work is attractive and it quite quickly became part of the national curriculum, so that, by the 80s and 90s, it was being taught quite widely in school. Now it's on the National Curriculum. Quite a lot of workshopping went on with young people and communities, too, with public resources, but it was like this alternative canon alongside the Cool Britannia of the New Gen. They sat side by side each other.

I mean, you know, obviously, in terms of when poets themselves did events together, it was all hugely amicable. They were all part of one big social circle and the Poetry Society, which published the *Poetry Review*, was excellent at representing and publishing their work. But apart from that, generally, they had different platforms. They were more likely to be on TV and radio. They were much less likely to be reviewed in *The Times*. And that did several things. One was there was little thought about other kinds of global heritage. Someone like Mimi Khalvati, again a really good example, was effectively hidden in plain sight. She was almost counted as white because she wasn't Afro-Caribbean, and because she was writing formal verse, high formal verse in the lyric tradition.

There were also poets with an Afro-Caribbean heritage who did cross between traditions. Archie (E.A.) Markham set up one of the early creative writing programmes in universities at Sheffield Hallam University, and then worked with

Sean O'Brien, who is a wonderful poet and our major poet critic. O'Brien comes from a whole other tradition: the playful intellectual, who can be passionately ideas-led, and who descends from W.H. Auden by way of Peter Porter. Again, someone who wasn't part of the New Gen, because he emerged a little earlier.

In the long 1980s African English and Indian English were really coming to flourish in British literature. Fiction and literary prose offer any number of examples from Salman Rushdie to V.S. Naipaul. These writers didn't all emerge at the same moment as each other. But they were part of a tremendous celebration of world *Englishes* at the time, and which still wasn't happening in poetry. We had the global majority heritage literary community and population living and working in Britain, but cultural hegemonies are conservative, even if they mean to embrace diversity.

Claire Hélie: *Was it the same thing in terms of gender politics?*

Fiona Sampson: Well, yes, it also took a long time for it to stop being a markedly heterosexual space. I mean, even Carol Ann Duffy, you know, our first woman Poet Laureate, was first spotted as a precocious young poet when she was dating one of the (male) Liverpool poets. In a sense, identity was thought of as a tabula rasa, which, of course, is not true at all. So there was little investigation of the resources of hyphenated identity. Derek Walcott, for instance, was not a British poet. He was a St Lucian poet doing something British poetry was unable then to do, even though he would come over and win our prizes. He proudly and obviously and resolutely and for the very best of reasons didn't want to be part of British culture. Yet, his appropriation of Western culture is done brilliantly in poems like "Omeros" and "The Bounty."

Bastien Goursaud: *You've mentioned Poetry Review a lot already, but I had a question on the late 70s. What happens in the 70s is* Poetry Review *becomes a sort of place for experimental / avant-garde writing through a surprising sort of coup and that stopped at the end of the 70s, start of the 80s. I was wondering if you thought maybe that particular moment was the reason why experimental writing, avant-garde writing in Britain, never really found its place or remained marginalized throughout the 80s and 90s, and what sort of role the institutions played in that marginalization?*

Fiona Sampson: It's a really good question, because there was always that third stream as well. I think another way in which Britain differs from the continental tradition is in our profound anti-intellectualism. It's a *cliche*, but it's true. You know, when I go to France, the guy who sells me the chicken will expound his philosophical opinion, using language he learned at school. You belong to a country where you're taught philosophy in school. Whereas we are a nation of shopkeepers, we're proudly empirical and we profoundly anti-intellectual. (This "we" is not personal.) Don't underestimate how, in the culture wars at present, to be called "an intellectual" in Britain is a term of abuse. The reason Nigel Farage works so well with so many idiots is because the idea of a kind of blokey "we don't trust experts" man in a pub saying

what he reckons with a pint in his hand is the apotheosis of the English dream of itself. Which is one of the reasons our arts are always badly funded, and our universities too.

So you can see why in the 80s and later it was so attractive to art managers and to editors and poets to commodify poetry– you put it on the High Street, then you're appealing to the nation of shopkeepers. "Look, this is something nice. You want to buy it. It's nice. It's an artefact. It's a product, rather than a state of mind, a thought experiment or experience of something that stretches you or changes you. No, none of that. It's a thing." And of course, experimental poetry refuses that.

It often refuses its own boundedness. I mean, it's playing with all sorts of givens. It's not having much truck with a realist tradition either, or indeed with anything that it feels has gone before, although, of course, it has its own tropes and gestures. It's never been the bridgehead for going into schools and the community. It's never been the bridgehead for public access. It's never been something that arts and literary and intellectual journalists, who themselves are also part of another British tradition, have wanted to broach. Experimental prose has a difficult enough time in Britain. Its readership and profile have been transformed by Fitzcarraldo Press, in particular, and the Goldsmiths Prize. But most of the best stuff Fitzcarraldo publish is in translation, because the best stuff in those traditions is not yet widely written or read in Britain, although there are some amazing writers here and there. So experimental poetry has tended to be the preserve of universities, and of certain universities only.

Obviously, when it stormed the bastions of *Poetry Review*, that was a really significant moment, because *Poetry Review* sort of roughly equals the heart and soul of British poetry. If you want to capture the castle, that's the castle you must capture. But I don't think that, when it all went wrong again, when there was one of those periodic convulsions, this pushed experimental poetry in Britain into a kind of concealment. I think it was already concealed, by which, I don't mean to disparage it, but, its heartland is Cambridge and Prynne: and, in fact, someone like Elaine Feinstein, when she was a young academic in Cambridge. When she was befriending US poets like Charles Olson. And then, of course, if you've had few rewards, you do adopt a defensive posture. So there's been a kind of gracelessness on both sides of the experimental divide. The poetry world is so unrewarding anyway, certainly in Britain, and to be an experimental poet within that is to accept the cloak of invisibility, really. That's tough, because that isn't the life blood of poetry. You know, poetry is not written to be invisible or inaudible.

Claire Hélie: *How do you place yourself with regards to that tradition?*

Fiona Sampson: Well, if I think back to when I was emerging, I was actually on the cusp of the experimental, but I didn't think I was on the cusp of anything, I was just being me, exploring what I wanted to explore. In *Beyond the Lyric* I wrote about the "exploded lyric", and this expansion or opening apart of the lyric voice was what I was fascinated by. I was very influenced by European poets, spending a lot of time at European festivals, translating and being translated, scouting for European

writers, and so on. So I wasn't trying to ape anything, but both sides thought I was a kind of "loose cannon" who could not be relied upon to toe their poetic line.

I don't really understand, as an intellectual or experiential position, the notion that there could only be one poetics: because there have been different poetics across the world, in other languages, other eras, centuries. And it's obvious that poetics will shift, because they always do. So what on earth would make you believe that there was only one true poetic faith, and that everything else must be policed away?

Bastien Goursaud: *We are interested in the word deregulation. Obviously, that is an economic notion, but one that we, after Sean O'Brien, thought could be useful to map the British poetry scene. And obviously, as you already alluded to, that's a notion that comes directly from the United States. And that's a very broad question, but where do you see American influence on that deregulatory movement, or moment in British poetry of the long 1980s? What is the power of North America or the United States?*

Fiona Sampson: It's complicated. It's two-pronged again. You know one prong is, in terms of societal and financial deregulation, massive. And I think something that one shouldn't forget under that heading is, how many poets were able to have an apprenticeship in the 1980s because, like everybody young, they were on the dole, because under Thatcher unemployment was so high and you could live – not well, but you could live – on benefits. It was not a badge of shame to have to sign on when you finished university, art college, music or drama college. That bought a whole generation creative time, time to noodle, time to experiment, time to try things out. At the same time, there was this other discourse, which was "No time to waste. You've got to get on the ladder. You've got to get to the top." You know, competition again. "If a grocer's daughter from Grantham can do it, everybody can do it." Well, obviously the definition of competition is that not everybody can. It wouldn't be competition, would it? Competition means lots of people don't get it, whatever it is.

So I think there's that. And then the actual literary sort of prong of influence. Now, reading backwards, I think that there was, oddly in North America at that time, this space for poets like Donald Hall and Stanley Kunitz, a kind of non-urban space, and there was the sense of a much more decentred literary world. So there's New York or the New York School. There's also California. I mean, obviously we all thought about Thom Gunn over there, but because campus culture arrives so early for writers in North America compared to Britain, decades earlier, there's a tremendous dispersal of excellent writers right across the country, and that means a greater room for manoeuvre. Britain is very London-centric. It's very metropolitan, and particularly was so then, when just about everybody who wanted to could still afford to live in the capital. And that means very few people making all the cultural decisions, really, or at least knowing the other people who make the decisions. Poetry in the long 1980s in Britain was like one village, which wasn't then the case in North America. It's not to say there aren't various organizations and magazines in Britain that have king-making capacities. But I just think, you know, deregulation was a bit

more always already in in North America, and we responded by doing the opposite, by kind of going to this defensive crouch, you know, like the Roman military "tortoise" with their shields over their heads.

I think that our poetry embraced much more the economic model than the literary model of deregulation.

Bastien Goursaud: *Thank you very much for your time, Fiona.*