Meeting a Giant: Allegory in Maurice Scully's *Things That Happen*

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In his esoteric study of the Baroque *Trauerspiel*, *On the Origin of German Tragic Drama,* Walter Benjamin contends that within the hieratic and emblematic forms of figuration called "allegory" lies a revolutionary potential absent from the more elegant and seemingly organic forms elevated by Romantic philosophy and criticism as "symbol." The rigid morbidity of allegory emphasises the absolute divergence of signs from their meanings, liberating us from delusions of signification: "Ultimately in the death-signs of the baroque the direction of the allegorical reflection is reversed; on the second part of its wide arc it returns, to redeem."[i] Benjamin's "rehabilitation" of allegory has proved immensely influential – both directly and indirectly – on modernist poetic practice. Always bearing in mind the resistance of Benjamin's ideas to application by literary critics – as Charles Rosen writes, "His interpretations do not give meaning to, but strip meaning from, the work, allowing the inessential to drop off and the work to appear in its own light"[ii] – I wish to propose, in this chapter, an exploration of the place of a broadly post-Benjaminian understanding of allegory in reading Maurice Scully's five-book project *Things That Happen*.[iii]

Given that Scully's work has still not received the critical attention it deserves, a description of the structure and technique of *Things That Happen* may be useful. The title, a late addition – for many years, Scully's working title was *Livelihood: the set* – alludes distantly to Paul Celan's Bremen Prize acceptance speech. Celan spoke of the effects of the Holocaust upon language: "It passed through and gave back no words for that which happened; yet it passed through all this happening."[iv] The imprecision of the allusion is calculated to avoid appropriation of Celan's suffering and that of European Jews, while it quietly draws attention to everyday enormity. Celan's phrase is "that which happened", unnameable and unique. Without claiming equivalence with "that which happened", Scully's title maintains that "things" do "happen" and the poetry "carries a lot of grief in its back pocket."[v]

The first volume of *Things That Happen*, *5 Freedoms of Movement*, was published in 1987 by Galloping Dog Press. It was reissued, with some revisions and in a different format, by etruscan books in 2002. The Galloping Dog edition is A4 format and uses a typewriter font, while the etruscan is shorter and broader than a standard trade paperback, almost square. In both editions Scully uses photographs to introduce each of the five sections, and the cover, frontispiece and end-pages feature his own drawings of moving bodies, based on Libyan cave

paintings. *5 Freedoms* also makes extensive use of found material. A number of poems are based on creditors' notices, phrasebooks and Linguaphone courses, Enid Blyton's children's novels, works of natural history, medical textbooks and operating instructions. Scully revised the poems between the two editions, publishing some of the results in European poetry magazines and in *etruscan reader IV* (1999), alongside the work of Bob Cobbing and Carlyle Reedy. He deletes a number of poems, and makes a few additions, though the order and structure of the work remains fundamentally unchanged. The poems excised from the etruscan edition tend to be either lyrics apparently addressed to a lover, such as "I close my eyes"[vi] or satirical work which identifies the speaker quite precisely as an impecunious writer living in Dublin during a bleak period of economic depression, examples of which include "Tart balm this: withdrawal from the salt details" (*5 Freedoms* [1987], p.11) and "That winter I could hardly think" (*5 Freedoms* [1987], p.39). Scully's purpose in reworking *5 Freedoms* seems to be to minimise the contribution of a lyrical poet-persona whose feelings and circumstances make a claim on importance simply because they are rendered in verse. The working poet is still a presence in the revised work, but inclinations towards self-pity and self-aggrandisement are muted, in line with Scully's ambition "[n]ot to write an autobiography, not to sketch a hero and edit amazing events, but to interact with the world… Not to meditate on the world, but to be *in* it" (*Metre* p.143). The account of *5 Freedoms* below takes the etruscan edition, the most recent and most easily available text, as definitive.

The first section, "Unauthorised Credits", begins with a reproduction of Yves Klein's "Leap into the Void" (1960), a photomontage of the painter diving from a ledge, apparently part of a wall surrounding a suburban park. The title of this first section is taken from a creditor's letter, which appears as a found piece later in the section:

> It is disappointing to note that you have not
> responded to a previous communication in connection
> with your account and that you are continuing to avail
> yourself of unauthorised credit.[vii]

The pun on "unauthorised" alerts us to Scully's disinclination to adopt the stance of a god-like author, or as Harry Gilonis puts it, the role of an "all-encompassing Master of Ceremonies"[viii]

"Instances", the second section of *5 Freedoms*, is prefaced by a photograph of a tiny figure leaping across the gap between two huge rock formations. His position in mid-air makes it difficult to judge whether he will make it to the other side, but if he does, he will certainly have to make the jump again, because the formation to which he is jumping is isolated from

the main spar of rock, like a huge pillar for a modern Stylites. Befitting this implication of a desire for asceticism and isolation, the poems in "Instances" have a meditative tone, detailing precise effects in nature and art.

"A Record of Emotion", the third and longest section of *5 Freedoms*, subdivided into "Side A" and "Side B", uses a photograph of a stage magician holding a luminous hoop and apparently making his female assistant levitate. The heads of his audience are visible in the foreground. Again, this photograph seems to refer to Scully's distrust of the manipulative author, as the ironic title does to his scepticism concerning transparent communication between the poetic self and the world of objects. Elsewhere, Scully links sub-Wordsworthian sentiments about poetry's origin in recollected emotion to commodified and half-forgotten versions of "history".[ix]

The fourth section of *5 Freedoms*, "Two Caterpillars", starts with a photograph of a toddler standing beside a brick wall. The child holds a photograph in front of his or her face. The image in this photograph is of the same child and brick wall. In this section, a pastiche of a children's story about "Fat Caterpillar" and "Fatter Caterpillar" frames a series of vignettes about sexuality, consumption and the artist at work: a childlike idiom brackets poems which confront the subtleties of adult life. The caterpillars' life of consumption is naturalised by the distinctly mediatory tone of a children's story, while the poet, observant and detached, details economic and interpersonal nuance that belong most definitely to culture rather than nature.

5 Freedoms closes with "One Wallflower". The photograph associated with its lyrics of minute movement is a Muybridge stop-motion study of a man performing a long jump. Some familiar motifs re-appear here – a Italian nursery-rhyme quoted in "A Record of Emotion" is remade to describe intellectual motion, though the logic of the thought quickly breaks down: "for argument you need words/ in blocks fit to ideas with/ sticky ends to fit block/ for block together" (*5 Freedoms*, p.88). This final section leaves us with the impression of a mind at work, Scully's characteristic pose of watching, thinking and recording. It's also an optimistic finale for a book that has been preoccupied with straitened circumstances:

> that quite particular colour
> dark but clear & the cool smell of rain on
> a changed breeze
> […]
> a tight schedule
> allows relief elsewhere
> more air in lungs & cooler
> a white line in a blue sky
> moving & the mind laughing at itself (p.91)

Livelihood (2004) is a work in five books and three "interstices", which Scully refers to as "the Ludes" – "Prelude", "Interlude" and "Postlude". Most of the work in *Livelihood* has been previously published, whether as extracts in magazines, chapbooks or book-length publications. Some of *Livelihood*'s texts also appear on a CD, *Mouthpuller* (2000), read by Scully. The frontispiece and end-piece of *Livelihood* is a sketch by Scully of a Sumerian clay container, the shape of which gave rise to the logograph for "legal", "decision", "trial" and "peace". The front matter of the book also features a childhood drawing of birds by the poet's daughter Leda, which first appeared on the cover of the pamphlet *Over and Through* (1992).

Livelihood opens with "Prelude", first published as a chapbook in 1997 by Wild Honey Press. Like all the "Lude" chapbooks, "Prelude" has a reproduction of a yarn painting by a Huichol artist on the cover. The Huichol are an indigenous Mexican people, descended from the Aztecs, who preserve shamanic traditions in their art and belief system. This artwork is not used in *Livelihood*. The poems in "Prelude", mostly arranged in irregular tercets, describe the world around the speaker in sometimes disturbingly galvanic terms: "a penpoint purred", "take us/ home pleaded the dice/ inside tight on/ the floor/ & whingeing". (*Livelihood*, p. 9-10) The tone of puzzled grief that pervades much of the book is already evident in "Stone", in which the speaker finds himself before a grave:

> I who
> could never
>
> read you of a sudden
> reading yr
> stone
>
> reading yr
> stone. (*Livelihood*, p.11)

The first book of *Livelihood*, "The Basic Colours", was published by Pig Press in 1994. The Pig Press edition uses a different version of the Sumerian logograph sketch, and also reproduces Leda Scully's drawing. In addition to these there is an unidentified title-page drawing of shapes representing a fish, a cup, and perhaps a leaf, and an abstract pen and ink drawing between the poems "sonnet/ flying past this impossibly repeating lattice" and "A maker of cages. whispers too quite acute". Three poems in the Pig Press edition, "There is this specific machine", "parquet" and "THE START" do not appear in *Livelihood*.[x] Otherwise alterations are minor, mainly involving changes in lineation. The revisions are like those to

Freedoms, however, in rejecting the personal lyric and in particular, the elegiac lyric. In its Pig Press version, "**sonnet/**Open, wondering" confronts a recent death: "I'd like to thank you for the loan of the house./ crisp vertical layers. it's late. &…you're dead" (p.31). This has been emended to "it's late. you're gone" in *Livelihood* (p.40), and a later iteration of ellipses followed by the phrase "you're dead" is omitted altogether.[xi] According to Scully's note, "The Basic Colours" takes its title from an English/Greek phrasebook, *English/Greek Dialogues*, "which contains no dialogues" (*Livelihood,* p.331). Pedagogical concerns – Scully has worked as a teacher of English to language learners for much of his career – animate this book of *Livelihood*. In "**sonnet/** (we went out to look at the tree", one of Scully's personae, a "literate / old Yahoo", mock-pedantically anatomises the rhetorical questions of "Among School Children':

> this is the Bole, these the Branches, that the Canopy –
> stand back. underneath you know
> is where the Roots go
> to live & hold the Ground together.
> & look at the Top
> how compliant it is to the weather. (*Livelihood*, p.28)

The pedagogue's symbolic mode deranges cause and effect: because the individual integrity of the parts he describes are unimportant to him even as he names and distinguishes them, roots can "hold the ground together", the top of a tree be "compliant […] to the weather". The last line, in particular, parodies a Yeatsian vocabulary of complaisance and gracefulness. The conclusion of "**sonnet/**…" introduces an uneasy human relation – that between a teacher and his students – to the inherent instability of Yeats's rhetorical questions:

> *I see* nodded each student in the dance
> intent, pretending, chipping at the fact
> to teach me something, something quite different
> *I see* I think) (*Livelihood,* p.28)

Like Yeats's poem, this engages with urgent issues of discrimination. What is the difference between intentness and pretence or between seeing and thinking? What is the different thing the students wish to teach their teacher? How can the grammatical structure "I see" contain these possibilities?

The subtitle of "The Basic Colours", "a watchman's log", and the section headings "On Site: A" and "On Site: B", refer to the watchman's job that Scully held to supplement his

income in the 1980s. Many of the poems can be read as the observations, thoughts and dreams (the persona wakes with a start in the penultimate poem) of a man doing a very boring job.

The watchman persona is sustained in "Zulu Dynamite", the second book of *Livelihood*, which opens with an account of his routine:

> It was one of my duties as a night watchman on the site
> to check the site every hour on the hour & to enter in
> the site logbook, every hour on the hour, Sit normal.
> Nothing to report then to phone HQ to report that there
> was, in truth, nothing to report. (p.75)

Shortly after this, it seems, the watchman loses his job for excessive interest in the plans left in the site office, an interest Scully shared: "I used to pore over the plans in the engineer's office. Years and years of detailed work. Quite like art really." (*Metre*, p.143) "Zulu Dynamite" is arranged in five subsections, named after the notebooks in which they were composed. One of these, "The Yellow Logbook", seems to have been liberated from the building site. The contents of "The Red Notebook" are read by Scully on the CD *Mouthpuller*. "The Dun Copy" was published in 1997 as a folded card by Longhouse Books. The Longhouse Books version includes some italicised lines later omitted. These, like most of the material Scully excises in revision, are of a personal and confessional nature: "*the pain of waking up/ can be the pang of love/ yr hand*".[xii]

The third book of *Livelihood*, "Priority", is in two parts, "Prior" and "Over and Through", with a single-poem "Coda". Some of the poems in "Over and Through" were published in 1992 by Poetical Histories as a pamphlet which also includes some work not collected in *Livelihood*. "Work Day", the "Coda" to "Priority", appears in a slightly different form in the Poetical Histories pamphlet. In 1995 Scully published *Priority* as a book with Writers Forum. The Writers Forum book had an extremely small print run and is vanishingly rare. It does not include "Interlude" – "I wrote the 'Ludes last", Scully notes.[xiii] Parts of the Writers Forum book, omitted from *Livelihood*, appear in *Tig*. The closing pages of section II of "Bread", for example, are derived from the 1995 version of *Priority* (*Tig*, pp.73-74).

"Interlude", the second of *Livelihood*'s interstices, is placed between "Prior" and "Over and Through". It contains some of Scully's most explicit engagements with authority and its symbolic forms, particularly in "The Sirens – a ballad", where we encounter Cuchulain, "the giant/ spinning in his/ skin", as a personification of Order (*Livelihood*, p.140). The slender tercets of "The Sirens" also recall "Prelude", reminding the reader of formal links across the five books of *Livelihood*.

"Over and Through" differs substantially from the Poetical Histories pamphlet. Scully has added twelve poems, retitled two, and expanded two. The poem that appears as "Rain [A folder falls open]" in *Livelihood* has been both expanded and retitled. In a number of other poems he has changed lineation and syntax. The additions and revisions develop our sense of Scully as a political and social satirist. The precursor of "Rain", "Sound", ends on a note of multisensory observation: "Tensed rosettes of brilliance/ patterns, chance, the seam glistens…/ the hammer taps".[xiv] "Rain" replaces this with "Legislation is the rules of the fight, a rondo in/ plot-pages, not a comfort, honey, or didn't you know?/ Opulently produced by. Irk and then manipulate. Beware." (*Livelihood* p.156) The new poems in "Over and Through" also touch on literary politics: in "Fire", "a Language Poet grins &/ flickers in the ghost of svarabhakti in the west of Ireland/ risk misting the screen" (*Livelihood*, p.164). "Svarabhakti", a Sanskrit word meaning "loyal vowel", is used by some grammarians to denote the "helping vowel" sound interposed between consonants to aid pronunciation. Synonymous with the Greek "epenthesis", the effect is common in Irish, occurring for example in *gorm* ("blue") and *ainm* ("name"). It may also refer to the interruptive equals sign (=) sometimes placed between each letter of "Language" when referring to that poetic movement. Svarabhakti is disruptive of morphology but phonologically helpful; Scully, undogmatically but distinctly concerned with sound, relishes the idea of simultaneous interruption and facilitation. The juxtaposition of a Sanskrit word with "the west of Ireland" reminds the reader of connections between Irish and Indian nationalism, and the interest taken by Yeats and his circle in both Indian philosophy and the folklore of the Irish west. Svarabhakti might stand as a metaphor for Yeats's enabling and inhibitory effects upon his successors. Scully notes both Yeats's flexibility and his forbidding grandeur: "What I like about Yeats is his will to change. Right up to the end. The rhetoric can be just too hard to swallow, for someone of my generation anyway, sometimes." (*Metre,* p.139) "Language" poets typically oppose nationalistic literary culture of the type that Yeats seemed to promote, but their late modernist anti-identitarianism could not exist without the example of high modernist masks and personae. Scully's ghostly, flickering Language poet is an implicit acknowledgement of the spuriousness of a poetics which opposes the "creative" to the "communal".

Steps, first published as a self-contained book by Reality Street in 1998 and scarcely revised for the 2004 publication, has a simpler structure than *Priority*, which looks forward to the less intricate third and fourth volumes of *Things that Happen*. It is divided into three numbered sections and a coda. A number of the poem-titles used in *Priority* recur here. As Scully remarks, "[t]itles of 'poems' are a bit slippery in *Livelihood*. They can be 'serious',

tongue-in-cheek, oblique, picking up a motif from elsewhere or pointedly omitting it and…sometimes a few of those things at the same time" (*Metre* p.139). As an example, Scully compares the first piece entitled "Responsibility" in *Steps* ("the fid, stirps") and a later one with the same title ("Washing her clothes"). The first poem combines a carpenter's specialist vocabulary ("fid", "kerfed", "rabbets") and classification ("stirps") with an ironic attack on the centrality of religious institutions to Irish public life in the twentieth century. The Yeatsian metaphors of bole and blossom, used to satirical effect in "**sonnet/** (we went out to look at the tree", are revisited in the poem's coda (*Livelihood*, p.204). The second poem is also concerned with specialism and knowledge, featuring "The Oxford English Dictionary of Spraints, The Pretoria Encyclopaedia of Mortgages, The Concise Cambridge Political" (*Livelihood* p.215) but this informationism is set against the optimistic figure of a young woman insouciantly washing her clothes in a rusty wheelbarrow: "her bright brown eyes/ and mouth connect in a smile whose radiance and playfulness the fine/ skin black" (p.215).

"Adherence", the fifth book of *Livelihood*, has a similar tripartite structure, with a coda. The parts are entitled "ABC", "Cohering" and "DEF". "Adherence" celebrates a stoical, though still minutely observant mode of life that looks back to "In Praise of Painting Doors" in "Priority" and forward to the elegy "A Song (& A Dance)" in *Sonata*. This book also contains poems with an explicitly scientific theme – "The Geometry of Soap Bubbles", for example – and some sorties in metacritical footnotes (*Livelihood*, pp.290-291).

Of the final interstice, *Postlude*, Scully notes "guest appearances include: Paul Celan, George Herbert, Emily Dickinson, Miyazawa Kenji, Anatol Stern, the Great Vowel Shift, Lao Tsu and Mary E. Carroll […] all a very welcome set of hectics at the party" (*Livelihood*, p.331). Scully's allusions and quotations usually go unacknowledged in the texts themselves; many are not even mentioned in the concluding note. "Guest appearances" complicate Scully's attitude of "humility in the face of the material" (*Metre*, p.139). He imagines *Livelihood* as a kind of carnival, but unacknowledged quotation is nonetheless requisition of a kind. He misquotes, as in the title *Things That Happen*, in order to evade appropriation of other writers' substance, but that strategy itself acknowledges the risk of such appropriation.

Sonata, the third volume of *Things That Happen*, has a much simpler structure than its predecessor. Longer than any individual book in *Livelihood*, it is arranged rather like "Steps" and "Adherence", in three numbered sections followed by a coda. This arrangement establishes Scully's partiality to tripartite structuring, and echoes the construction of *Things That Happen* as a whole. Of *Sonata*, the poet notes, "[t]he binding motif is the circle, so there are lots of repetitions, doublings, turnings, arcs, zeros, returns" (*Metre*, p.143). Unlike his

precursors Thomas Kinsella and Eugene Watters, however, Scully seems consciously to resist cosmic understandings of circularity. Where *5 Freedoms* and the first books of *Livelihood* were edited to exclude personal content, *Sonata* follows "Steps" and "Adherence" in admitting elegiac and more explicitly autobiographical poetry. "A Song (& A Dance)", written in memory of the poet and publisher Richard Caddel, stands out among Scully's elegies. The poem's variable rhythms evoke Caddel's own work, "a poetry rich enough to mirror the actual world, compositionally complex enough not to need an external music".[xv] Caddel, an asthmatic, was particularly interested in the relation of breath and speech. He was also a distinguished elegist: his book *For the Fallen* (1997) commemorates his son Tom with a hundred versions from the old Welsh *Gododdin*.

Tig, the coda to *Things That Happen*, appeared in print before *Sonata* in 2006, published as a trade paperback by Shearsman. Like *Sonata*, its frontispiece and endpaper feature a simple circle motif. "Tig" is an Irish word for "house"; Scully notes "English sense also intended" – presumably that of the playground game also known as "tag" or "it". The title is also reminiscent of Irish "tuig", "to understand", which gave rise to the informal English usage "to twig". *Tig* has two parts, "Stepping" and "Bread", each of which are subdivided into five sections: three numbered, followed by a coda and a "coda coda". These sub-codas, wryly acknowledging that the project's shape was not entirely planned in advance, "it just 'grewed' " (*Metre,* p.138), gesture towards the unfinishable nature of a poetic sequence.

Things That Happen is large in many senses: formal, chronological, geographical. The history of its composition demonstrates Scully's interest in mutability over ordered, preordained structuring. The "trilogy" is a psychological anatomy, in which different locations symbolise aspects of the speaker-poet, though he also tries to resist this kind of alignment of the outside world with the self. It is a *psychomachia*, in which the poet confronts psychic obstacles, grief and injustice. Because of its size and chronological spread, it is inevitably ambivalent and self-contradictory. It tries to evade coercive aggression towards its raw materials, but the speaker is often forced to acknowledge his ordering impulse in moments of irony. The growth of the project demonstrates an aptitude for infinite extension: although Scully has now finished *Things That Happen*, he acknowledges its actual, physical presence in his new work. For example, "The Pillar and the Vine" (*Livelihood*, pp.5-11) and certain parts of *Tig*, "I feel I should feel better now"[xvi] and "fat stem/ tiny branches/ enormous yellow flowers" (*Tig*, p.29) were originally part of a "diary-book" entitled *The Pillar & the Vine* which Scully "disassembled" before 1990, but continued to use in composition: "That 'fat stem etc' even occurs in [the] present book I've been working on for some years now. This book is not

part of *Things That Happen*."[xvii] Scully's account of the diary-book's disassembly powerfully suggests the apparent autonomy of the work, its independence from the poet's control and its almost non-human quality. In response to a question about when he decided to unpack *The Pillar & the Vine*, he notes,

> re: "decide to disassemble": much more organic than that: the mass of contiguous writing developed such a force that it burst apart anything in its way not strong enough to resist. P[illar]/V[ine] was in the way & had an unfinished feel to it. This would have happened perhaps (not sure exactly) late 80s, perhaps 1990.[xviii]

These qualities – largeness of scope, attention to the symbolic relation between the self and its surroundings, unfinishedness, mutability and autonomy – prompt a consideration of *Things That Happen* as an allegory. It is a self-reflexive one in that it takes seriously the ethics of allegory's fictive transfer of properties, as something that might have implications for real human bodies in the real world. If allegory is, as Joel Fineman puts it, inescapably the "hierarchizing mode,"[xix] then in *Things That Happen* we have an allegory by a poet concerned to resist hierarchy, yet drawn to a mode which offers the opportunity of making on a large spatial and temporal scale.

Dream vision and parable emerge as prominent modes in *Things That Happen*. "Two Caterpillars", from the first book, *5 Freedoms of Movement*, is styled as a parody dream vision. Its framing story adopts the deliberate tone of a story for young children: "*There once were two young caterpillars, Fat/ Caterpillar and Fatter Caterpillar, that lived/ on a windowsill under a tree*."[xx] (5 Freedoms, p.63). *5 Freedoms* contains a number of found poems based on children's books: Enid Blyton is a particularly useful source. Scully juxtaposes the limited vocabulary and simple syntax of such texts with the pedantic idiom of material for language students:

> "I say, look," said Peter in amazement,
> "a castle on a cloud. Who lives there?"
> "I don't know," said Chinky, "I do hope
> it's someone nice. I don't want to meet
> a Giant this morning."
>
> *
>
> Yes. No. Please. Thank you. I like it.
> I don't like it. That is too expensive.

Please let me have. How do I get to…?
What is the time please? I need. I
would like. I don't speak. I don't under-
stand you. These

are important expressions. (*5 Freedoms* p.33)

Children and language learners are in similar positions of powerlessness, which is apparently emphasised here by the intrusion of racist vocabulary. (In the Blyton novel from which this is an extract, *The Adventures of the Wishing Chair* (1937), the character so named is a pixie, and no explicitly racist connotation pertains.) They are patronised by teachers and adults, who are their authors as well as their authorities. The children's novelist writes ingenuous dialogue for her protagonists, the language teacher offers basics of communication, "important expressions" as pre-packaged units independent of grammatical understanding. Fictional child characters and language students, in that they are given words to say, have meaning imposed upon them, just as personification involves the imposition of meaning upon a human form. Meeting a Giant – that staple of allegory as well as fairy-tale – resonates, in this context, for both.

The Caterpillars of "Two Caterpillars" are Scully's own invention, influenced perhaps by Eric Carle's ubiquitous children's story *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969). They present a more complex dynamic than the juxtaposition of Blyton with "important expressions". The Caterpillars are defined by their natural impulses to eat and sleep, which they do persistently and paratactically, "*they ate and ate and slept and slept/ quite happily on the white windowsill/ under the tree*" (*5 Freedoms*, p.63). The windowsill, apparently not connected to a window let alone a dwelling, alerts us to the odd interplay between nature and the man-made in the following poems.

In the next stanza "a bankman" sits under the tree "balancing a book". At the end of "Two Caterpillars" we discover that "bankman" as well as his book-balancing is a pun, as he is swept away by a river in flood, but for the moment he serves to introduce the dream-vision motif:

in his dream he saw a bankman falling asleep
under a tree with his money and a book and
beginning to dream of a man dreaming he was
making money out of a book (in which he featured
quite prominently) under a tree beside a window-
sill upon which were two young caterpillars
[…]
that dreamed they lived
on a windowsill under a tree. (*5 Freedoms* p.63)

It is not uncommon for the protagonist of a dream-vision to fall asleep within his dream, nor for him to enter a further allegorical vision upon doing so. Such a manoeuvre occurs in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, for example. Riverbank settings are also an established feature, the 14th-century *Perle* being exemplary. Scully's parody of such dreams-within-dreams also evokes the sort of philosophical puzzlers – how do we know we are not simply figments of someone else's dream? – popular with children a just a little older, perhaps, than those who enjoy reading about Hungry and Fat Caterpillars. The bankman is also related to the financiers who have pursued the poet throughout *5 Freedoms*, demanding the repayment of "unauthorised credits".

The bankman's presence in the narrative allegorises it: because he and his only action of book-balancing are puns, the reader is alerted to the metaphorical implications of the caterpillars' consumption. As we might expect in a book about money and movement, "Fat Caterpillar" and "Fatter Caterpillar" are also capitalists or fat cats. In this newly allegorised world, nothing happens naturally. The coercive allegorist is always present: "*one day an Autumn Leaf fell on the Fatter / Caterpillar to the sinister snip of scissors*" (*5 Freedoms* 64). This action by an invisible human turns the caterpillar itself into a visionary, who begins to dream a human life, articulated in a series of ten brief poems.

Casting a caterpillar as the dreamer inverts allegorical hierarchy, whereby active human agents dream the world around them into significance. The poems which make up the caterpillar's dream vision in turn resist the imposition of allegorical meaning upon the world. The difficulty of such resistance is suggested by the structure of the poems, which often begin in a patient, observant mode and inch almost imperceptibly towards allegory or allegoresis, before stopping short in a moment of irony. The first poem of this dream vision sequence performs the manoeuvre twice before breaking off. It begins: "between the paper & the trees where the sun / gets through between the branches to the grass / under a leaf on a curving stem", but before the landscape can be moralised, it is dismissed as a "pseudo-fairytale" which abets a possessive "lyric" view of the world (*5 Freedoms*, p. 65). The poet presents another scene, at first as if for someone's approval, from which he again draws away:

> how's this? a girl goes by from elsewhere
> to set street music its cryptic rhythm against another
> how can you live to a different beat an old radio
> in a hut on a deserted building site paid little to
> live & as to writing/well! but between stations
> to pick up the possible & go with that from there (*5 Freedoms*, p.65)

The poet resists an impulse to find meaning in the girl or the temptingly "cryptic" street-sounds or 'music' and retreats to his night-watchman's hut (about which the reader discovers a great deal more in *Livelihood*), reflecting on his poverty. His ambition seems to be to exist in the white noise between definite and clear transmission of meaning: "between stations". In "pick up […] & go with that from there", however, there is wry acknowledgement that these "stations" might also be stages in a secular Passion: a shared mythology continues as a ghostly, ironic possibility.

The second poem in the series extends the theme of "street music": its first stanza imagines a troubled, restless woman suffering from "love-grief". Her actions are self-conscious and distrait: she "pretends to try to read" and hears "the / wind in the street playacting along with music". In interview, Scully explains his attitude to what the interviewer terms "ambient noise":

> Ambient noise…oh, something wrong there, for me. […] it's neither ambient nor noise, but the penetrating signature of…everywhere I've lived. All the many houses I've lived in, rooms worked in, they've all had their own highly distinctive song, sound. Composed certainly of quite mundane things […] but in combination, extraordinarily distinctive. Not to privilege human language and stuff it with ego but listen, the poet a contributor not an imperious editor. (*Metre*, p.142)

For all its humility, this remark bears traces of an "editorial" attitude: unconnected noise is still gathered and processed into "the penetrating signature of…everywhere I've lived". Similarly, the woman performing her "love-grief" to herself attributes similar "playacting" to the wind outside. Allegorical manoeuvres – the pathetic fallacy being one such – are surprisingly difficult to avoid, as the second stanza of this poem notes. The speaker imagines a chilly, empty outdoor scene in contrast to the "clammy, tropical" enclosure of the previous stanza, and the main agent seems now to be a man, moving through a deserted urban space of "gantries" and "alleyways", turning his collar against the cold, sensing "wads growing with each / breath in yr breast pocket". Money, which often behaves in a peculiar, galvanised fashion in Scully's poetry, seems to impede breath, stopper or "wad" normal human function. Such representations of polis and oikos, conditioned by economic concerns and conventional gender roles, the speaker concludes rather glumly, are "very popular very human" (*5 Freedoms*, p.66). The third poem in the series, like the last, records a moment of communication and the speaker's attempts to avoid analysing it. The exchange is a sexualised one, "tight cloth in

motion / over the pelvic rhythm", followed by an "eye kiss", "returned", with grave mock-formality, 'with thanks & best wishes' (*5 Freedoms*, p.67).

Scully then returns, with the fourth poem, to the question of sound and "music". The verse is more open here than in previous poems – Scully leaves large spaces between words to represent "pauses developing in places", and conversely, suggests rapid "bustle" by using an oblique slash instead of a space between words (*5 Freedoms*, p.68). The music begins to intersect with the poet's artistic practice, as he "wonder[s] how it works" and the music "leans / forward into its own *danger*" (p.68). The dangers that the poet faces, in inadvertently endorsing egotistical, "editorial" ways of thinking about his surroundings, encourage him to develop a listening, contributory mode of being:

> the tenacious details of daily getting by
> fog interspersing as no some mist emphasis
> counter simultaneous emphases/bustle in the enclave underground
> & a ghost from another station (*5 Freedoms* p.68)

Sibilance indicates the space "between stations", while the broken syntax suggests the poet's reluctance to invest the world around him with allegorical meaning.

This breakthrough is followed by another poem using the authoritative tone of a language primer. Simple sentences in French are undercut by reflections from a more involved and difficult life:

> *Marie est debout*
> *près de la fenêtre.*
> my wife the sun the rent
> *Je suis assis dans un fauteuil.*
> is due my headache is due
> to your headache
> *Pierre est a genoux sure le plancher*
> *il joue avec son train.*
> Pierre is screwing
> that tart from Kimmage.
> *Bonjour mon ami.*
> *Ecoutez s'il vous plait*. (*5 Freedoms,* p.69)

Funny as this is, it represents a regression from the insights of the previous poem, in both its easily playful line-breaks: "the rent […] / is due my headache is due / to your headache" and its facetious rejection of the bland simplicities of elementary language learning. The request "[*e*]*coutez s'il vous plait*", is, however, typical, and marks a mid-point in the dream vision. The following poems explore allegorical structures in more forensic detail.

The dense sonnet-shaped poem beginning "diverge the gaps" describes some of the structures that we employ in order to make the world meaningful: "our what really is matter to be expressed our / our bright tininess our understandings reticulated" (*5 Freedoms*, p.70). "What really is" becomes "matter to be expressed"; the allegorical protagonist understands himself to be "reticulated", tied into a network of meaning which pulls in and encloses everything it encounters. This speaker sees himself and other agents as microcosmic – "our bright tininess" – but nonetheless in competition with others for control and mastery of their surroundings: "we meet they-you-I & retreat / parry & plunge" (p.70). The poem ends with figures of mutability and flux, but it is far from certain that the speaker has been able to escape or resist allegorical hierarchy. Scully's choice of a sonnet shape for this poem is interesting, particularly in view of the many poems in *Livelihood* entitled "Sonnet", none of which take a fourteen-line pentameter form. (Not all the lines in the "Two Caterpillars" poem can be scanned as pentameters either, though a number can.) The sonnet shape conveys an enclosed economy which resonates with the poem's interests in reticulation and microcosmic ordering. That the last word of the poem is a participle form of the first emphasises this closure, while it allows for limited change and mutation. In *Livelihood*, Scully's understanding of networks which tie and bind, like the form of his "sonnets", becomes more flexible.

The seventh poem in the series takes further the brief evocations of allegorical violence in the sixth, and reminds readers of both the fiscal framework of this dream-vision and the monetary preoccupations of *5 Freedoms* as a whole. "doing business", in terms reminiscent of Kinsella's *A Technical Supplement*, sees the capitalist economy as a slaughterhouse:

> Getting the knife in deep & clean
> preferably into as many as possible
> to line up simultaneously in a good
> straight voluntary & vulnerable file
> (memory) then suppressing the adrenal twitch
> to simplify the mind
> & steady the hand (memory) (*5 Freedoms*, p.71)

The allegorical personality becomes almost psychopathic in its disregard for the bodies which it turns into meaningful objects: an analogy might be drawn between allegorical production of significance and capitalistic production of profit. "Memory" brackets an act of coolly considered violence – this is affective, coercive, instrumental memory, the kind which tears past events from their context in order that they may make an impact on the future. Of instrumental memory, Mary Carruthers writes, "the accuracy or authenticity of these memories

– their simulation of an actual past – is of far less importance […] than their use to motivate the present and to affect the future".[xxi] It "simplifies the mind" and makes violent action easier.

Scully then moves from the metaphor of the abbatoir to a characterisation of a more profound allegorical violence:

> confidence in ignorance to be eaten
> hatch in the victim's alimentary canal
> laid in the places frequented by any suitable
> victim species hatch into minute active larvae
> the later stages Collide There are things we meet
> They have nothing to do with/Flash/Don't let it end (*5 Freedoms*, p.71)

Scully is fascinated by parasitoids (that is, parasitical organisms which kill their hosts), and descriptions of their life-cycles recur throughout *Things That Happen*. Allegorical meaning can be understood a literary parasitoid, inhabiting bodies and objects to obliterate and replace their integrity. Gordon Teskey, in *Allegory and Violence*, locates allegory's eradicatory impulse in a philosophical poser little more sophisticated than the childish solipsism implied by the dreams-within-dreams of the caterpillar story. We perceive that our consciousness is a product of nature, and yet we also perceive nature as something other than ourselves. This dilemma of consciousness is resolved by casting others as coterminous with ourselves: we assert that because the self is in the world, the world must be in the self. The microcosm-macrocosm analogy produced by the identification of self and world is one of allegory's most cherished features, cherished, argues Teskey, because it expresses the desire in which allegory originates. This is "the desire of the organism to master its environment by placing that environment inside itself,"[xxii] a desire which is expressed in the allegorical vision of the universe as a giant. Northrop Frye identifies this vision as characteristic of his "anagogic" phase of symbolism:

> when we pass into anagogy, nature becomes not the container but the thing contained and the archetypal universal symbols […] are no longer the desirable forms that man constructs inside nature, but are themselves the forms of nature. Nature is now inside the mind of an infinite man […] This is not reality but the conceivable or imaginative limit of desire, which is infinite, eternal and hence apocalyptic.[xxiii]

Immediately, however, we perceive that any subject who desires to contain nature in this way is in competition with all other bodies, which all have the same desire. These other bodies

must be eliminated in the most complete way possible: by devouring them. The structure underlying allegory is one of mutual devouring – Teskey calls it "allelophagy" (Teskey, p.8).

Scully figures the later development of the parasitoid as a collision between it and its host: "Collide There are things we meet", which echoes, in a much more sinister fashion, the sexual exchange of the third poem in the series, and looks forward to the baffled chance meeting of the last poem. The last line appears to be a disingenuous denial of the violence underlying systems of representation, a reading that can be confirmed by reference to the 1987 version of *5 Freedoms*, published by Galloping Dog, in which it reads "They have nothing to do with life" (p.70). The parasitoids of this poem remind us that the series is the dream-vision of a larval creature, and while they contrast starkly with the anthropomorphised Fat and Fatter Caterpillars, they are also linked by their shared relevance to money and capital.

Emphasising this financial theme, the eighth poem in the series begins "Credit all this lumber!" It lists the contents of the poet's study – a "shaky", "riddled", "overcrowded" environment in which there is little of purely economic value. The poet's poverty means that he cannot even consume: "gas fire – turned off, economy in the cold". He reflects that he has some superficial resemblance to the insects (which, we recall, are dreaming him and his study) but their "madness of aggregation" has a "logic", which his collection of "lumber" lacks. The poem concludes with an ironic demand for the poet to be written into a system of meaning, made the subject of "a new entomology" (*5 Freedoms*, p.72). It inverts accepted allegorical procedure, whereby humans both give meaning to the non-human and encompass it through macrocosmic figuration, but it also endorses the aggregative potential in allegory.

The penultimate poem in the dream-vision series proposes a saner, less grasping attitude to the world. The poet returns to his observant, reserved persona, concluding:

> sometimes sudden self-anger
> sometimes blank falling
> I forget the most simple things elsewhere
> wherever my mind elsewhere taking a walk as if
> among very many as if's very
> demanding labyrinthine but I think I
> think lost (*5 Freedoms*, p.74)

The reticulated allegorical view of the world is exposed as a kind of madness "mind […] lost". The final poem in the sequence, meanwhile, suggests an awareness of otherness which undermines allelophagic competitiveness. The solipsistic poet, meeting others in the street, finds them grown older and unreadable: "a new solid film over their features […] masked" (*5*

Freedoms, p.75). Instinctively hermeneutic, he reflects that "I read too much into it or / […] / they're half thinking the same thing / too *him*!" (p.75). Basic allegorical procedures – aggressive interpretation and violent conflict with other agents – are summarised here.

The dream vision ends with this articulation of fundamental structures, and the story of the caterpillars and the bankman is resumed. The bankman, who, it appears, must have been sleeping on the bank of a river, is drowned when it floods, and Fat and Fatter Caterpillar undergo their metamorphosis into butterflies, pausing "*as a mark of respect*" on the flowers on the bankman's coffin. "*Before moving on*." The bankman's death is a deliberately absurd *deus ex machina*, evoking not so much stories for children as stories by them (dream vision narratives, are of course, a staple of both). In parabolic terms, the bankman seems to be too obvious a representative of capitalism and the pain it has inflicted on the impecunious poet to be allowed to live. (The fish in the river catch his money.) Instead, the "fat cat" caterpillars are transformed into kinetic signifiers and diffused into the world, rather as ideologies penetrate consciousness by presenting themselves as natural objects.

The dream vision is also appears in *Livelihood*, especially in the first half of the volume, in which the protagonist is a night-watchman, working on the building site from which he must report every hour "that there / was, in truth, nothing to report" (*Livelihood* 75). The night-watchman dozes occasionally, and wakes up with a start, a motif that is continued, with variations, throughout *Sonata* and *Tig*.[xxiv]

Another motif in *Things that Happen* takes parabolic form. Like the dream-vision discussed above, it begins as a found work drawn from children's literature. Gianni Rodari's poem "Ci vuole un fiore"[xxv] is translated by Scully as:

> To make a table
> you need wood
> to make the wood
> you need a tree
> to make the tree
> you need a seed
> to make the seed
> you need fruit
> to make the fruit
> you need a flower
> to make a table
> you need a flower (*5 Freedoms*, p.40)

Scully changes the poem's grammar: the passive voice of the Italian "ci vuole un fiore" – "it takes a flower" – becomes an active construction which can be read as a direct address to the

reader, a memorandum to the self, or an informal use of "you" to mean "people in general". This ambiguous use of the second person is very common in Scully's work, and relates to his impatience with the lyric self: "As a 'prentice poet in the '70s the 'I' was very big in Ireland. [*sic*] It still is? Me, my, I. I love you. You love me." (*Metre*, p.141).

Rodari's poem is a charming, if slightly saccharine, illustration of human dependence upon nature and the necessity of even that which we may regard as purely decorative. Scully's use of the motif in *Things That Happen* explores the allegorical structures which underlie even such an apparently innocent caprice. Rodari depends for most of his effect on a childish bit of illogic: the notion that "trees" and "flowers" belong to separate categories of being. It is not a very remarkable thing to state that to make a (wooden) table you need wood, which comes from trees, and from that point on the poem deals with different parts of a single organism: a tree, its fruit, seeds and flowers. So in essence, the poem states that to make a table you need a tree, which is not a delightful or charming thing to say at all. A further iteration – actually, simply a truncation – of the poem in *5 Freedoms* effectively makes this point:

> to make a table
> you need wood
> to make the wood
> you need a tree
> to make the tree (*Livelihood*, p.47)

"You need a tree / to make the tree" is true in a biological sense: it simply omits the intermediary stages which give Rodari's poem its piquancy. It emphasises the circularity of argument which makes this motif particularly useful to Scully in *Sonata*.

Scully's English distinguishes between definite and indefinite articles in a way that the Italian does not: "ci vuole il legno / per fare il legno ci vuole l'albero / per fare l'albero", but "to make the wood / you need a tree / to make the tree". "You need a tree / to make the tree" also expresses with remarkable concision a central dynamic of allegory: an ideal representation ("*the* tree") must find its substance in the world of individual trees. In becoming *the* tree, *a* tree suffers a loss of individuality which is smoothed over by Scully's idiomatic English translation. We might not mind it happening to trees, but the point is that allegory treats everything in this way, even human beings.

Scully demonstrates his concern with the violence involved in making objects and persons allegorically meaningful in his subsequent uses of the motif in *5 Freedoms* and *Sonata*. He criticises the weakness of Rodari's reasoning towards the end of "One Wallflower":

> for argument you need words

in blocks fit to ideas with
sticky ends to fit block for
block together (*5 Freedoms*, p.88)

Rodari's sentimental category mistake is implicitly compared to a child's toy – alphabet blocks, perhaps, or Sticklebricks – and his seemingly basic argument is actually constructed of 'blocks' of unexamined assumptions. The surprise of Rodari's poem depends on children *not* recognizing that tree, fruit and flower are part of the same organism, which resonates with Scully's allusive discussion of Yeats's "Among School Children" in *Livelihood* (p.28). In that poem, discussed above, the pedantic speaker shows a disregard for individual parts of a tree – bole, branches, canopy – which predisposes him towards a Yeatsian vocabulary of compliance with and acquiescence in authority. His mistake is the opposite of Rodari's, but it turns out to have similar results. Rodari places a tree and its own flower in artificially separate categories in order to make meaning, while the speaker of "**sonnet**/" implies a signifying unity which overrides the individual integrity of the tree's constituent parts.

Rodari's poem evokes natural cycles, and its flawed argument depends on logical non-progression, so it is appropriate that it is often quoted and parodied in *Sonata*, the governing figure of which is a circle. These parodies expose the violence that underlies allegorical signification: "to make a table / you need a gun / filled with rhetoric" (*Sonata* p.55) perhaps also has Yeatsian rhetorical questions as its target, while other examples interrogate the hierarchical abstraction of the allegorical mode: "to make a table you need power / pierced by childhood" (*Sonata,* p.57), "to make a table / you need theory-in-excelsis / pierced by groundswell" (*Sonata*, p.63). These examples also demonstrate the ambivalence of allegory, its propensity to incorporate (without necessarily modifying) even resistance to its own structures: power is shot through by powerless "childhood"; celestial theory punctured by reality on the ground. Can such ambivalence be liberating, or is allegory simply, voraciously encompassing everything which it encounters, even resistance to itself? In *Sonata*, the "to make a table" motif is always followed by an elliptical query or challenge to a writer or thinker:

So you're another – what?
storyteller twiddling dice
In a game called Risk? two parts

confection, one part grit. (*Sonata*, p.55)

[…]

So you're another lyricist?

My mother
remembers
yr brother. (*Sonata,* p.57)

[…]

So you're another
novelist?
tell me yr novelty. (*Sonata*, p.63)

These are queries about making. The first offers a recipe for narrative in which toothsome make-believe is moderated by "grit", though the result is "a game called Risk" not risk itself. That the board game so named advertises itself as "the game of world conquest" might return us to the anagogic man. The second seems to challenge the familiar and familial context of much lyric poetry, with which, as noted above, Scully is often exasperated, while the third skewers the opposite vice, a preoccupation with alleged novelty. All three remarks implicitly question how the work of making meaning helps us live in the world, a concern which is made clear in the final iteration of this motif:

to
make a table
you need a
leg to

stand on.
so you're
another
pragmatist? (*Sonata*, p.83)

It is in *Livelihood*, however, that Scully's critique of allegory and authority is at its most angry and overt. "Pattern", Harry Gilonis notes, "is, for Scully, a net, a snare" (Gilonis, p.30), and *Livelihood* draws close parallels between reticulation – the web of meaning – and consumption, as of a fly by a spider. Both of these allegorical processes are in turn connected to authority, order and power:

/the Police are perfect
God is perfect
God is the Police/

and in a cabin on a building site
watching. hatching near spring
to net the one pet fly

thrums the web to lull her
then motions as to bind her
(blue whale's residual pelvis)
and rarely gets away

/the Rule is No.
the Rule is Good.
take take take take take/
the pieces (*Livelihood*, p.63)

Gilonis quotes the second stanza and remarks:

> there is positivity […] in this passage. Even here in the natural world, our great cultural "other", not everything is red in tooth and claw. (The next stanza refers to mating and the birth of young.) Also, a spider – like a poet – is a pattern-making animal and activity in both cases is predicated on observation, on attentiveness. (Gilonis, p.30)

While this is indeed a passage about the confrontation of the self with the "other" as represented by nature, it is perhaps more ambivalent about the desirability of pattern-making than Gilonis suggests. The stanzas about feeding and mating spiders are framed by an authoritarian syllogism and a sharply reductive account of the dynamics of inequality: a "Rule" which equates prohibition with "Good" while rapaciously and indiscriminately taking. The "pieces" are perhaps the disintegrating body of the male spider, who dies after mating, or perhaps his sloughed-off cuticle, which implies maturing and ageing, if not decease. These "pieces" appear alongside evidence of new life – "eggpouches" – as "little luminous pieces of the love story" (*Livelihood*, p.63). In the end, the poet finds it difficult to refrain from being a "pattern-making animal", co-opting death and birth into a cyclical narrative, which may also enable and endorse authoritarianism. Gilonis is right to comment that Scully does not metaphorise spiders in the usual ways: they are neither loathsome "others" nor emblems of "industry and perseverance *qua* Robert the Bruce", but nor can they be, as Gilonis puts it, "simply […] item[s] in the inventory of the world." (Gilonis, p.32) Or, rather, they *can*, but being an item in the inventory of the world is not a simple matter. The idea of "an inventory of the world" immediately revives allegorical, hierachising modes of thought, and returns us to the realm of the figural. Scully's spiders, because they are both predators and pattern-makers, often signal reflections on the nature of figuralism itself.

"The Sirens" revisits these concerns about authority. The title suggests that the alarm and action implied by a klaxon in the street is a form of seduction by power. The sirens offer wisdom, but the consequence of giving in to their temptations is a passive, lingering death; the

only way to listen to them safely is in a state of enforced stillness. The poem's subtitle, "a ballad", indicates a narrative, though a vernacular one rather than formal epic, making it again "of the street". Other "ballads" in *Livelihood* show humans working within and aligned with nature: "marram builds directed builds / my children too [learn, learn, learn & do]" ("Ballad", *Livelihood*, p.216) or demand a withdrawal from interference in the world. The first word of "Ballad" from the book "Adherence" is "Stop." (*Livelihood*, p.249) Echoing the importance of the form for Romantic poets, Scully's ballads confront and complicate distinctions between nature and culture.

"The Sirens" begins with a flat statement of the disparity between precision and function: "Everything *correct*. And no / use." (*Livelihood*, p.137) The italicisation of "*correct*" suggests that the speaker doesn't share this opinion of the rectitude of his surroundings; but given Scully's distrust of instrumental meaning, it might also be an expression of approval – such ambivalence is characteristic of allegory, given its purposeful muddling of nature and consciousness. The scenes that the poet observes might be *paysages moralisés*: "Broken glass blood- / stains / spiked fences desklamps dream- / homes" or "Lithified beach / dense starscrap" (*Livelihood*, p.137), but the speaker refuses any hermeneutic activity: "I mean as far as I can see / that's as far as I / can see." (p.137) The rebuttal is immediately undercut by *Livelihood*'s characteristic figures for consumption and pattern-making: "A spider eating jagged/ shadows under a / leaf" (p.137).

The syntax and lineation of "The Sirens" enacts the reader's search for allegorical significance, the singular goal that draws us into the realm of reticulated meaning:

> In a shimmer of
> hollow surfaces
> at so many
>
> removes from
> so-called
> reality
>
> in the unworld
> where Unity
> is
>
> and True/False
> tremble
> in
>
> the ring – darkness/
> coyote

scat. (*Livelihood*, p.138)

The passage embodies allegorical distaste for "reality" and the search for unified meaning in an "unworld", but the search concludes with an animal howl, "coyote / scat". "Scat", by association with "scatological", suggests waste as well as the free-form vocalisations of jazz singers. "Scat" in both senses is free of semantic content: the allegorical pursuit of meaning is temporarily halted. The ballad continues with another reticulation, which this time involves human bodies:

Let the skeleton set off
then down
the

laneway through the gate and
be gone. Gorgeous Art!
Joints

click. Blank. (*Livelihood*, p.138)

The skeleton, itself an intricate system, is dispatched on a quest "out of silence / and back into it / and out again" (p.138). The figure of labyrinthine pursuit which follows is emphasised by choppy line-breaks and discontinuous syntax:

Of all the many links in the set
of all things
plural

that make up
the twisted
chain

in ngile an tráthnóna
in mainistir na
feola

sirens thread the streets
ferry the
dead – (*Livelihood,* p.139)

"Set" refers both to the totality of the poet's daily experience and the poetic work at hand. The title *Things That Happen* is a late addition: during the work's composition Scully called it *Livelihood: the set*. The "set" of books that eventually became *Livelihood* – "set" is a term

Scully prefers to "sequence", because it is "more radial"[xxvi] – is visualised here as a "plural […] twisted chain". It's a figure which fuses the hierarchical – the chain as *scala naturae* – with exploratory plurality. Similarly, "sirens thread the streets / ferry the / dead" suggests an eclectic myth, conflating the figures of Odysseus, Theseus and Charon with the mundane, though instrumental, urban sound of an ambulance on the street. As readers, we're tempted to install the mythic meaning above the everyday one, to consider it more important because it requires (only slightly) more recondite knowledge – this is one of the functions of allegorical hierarchy – but Scully insists on bodily reality:

> dying – injured – past where
> you live (repeat)
> (clack)
>
> to the table in
> the corridor
> or
>
> slab
> in the
> dark
>
> splash of
> vomit on
> the path (*Livelihood*, p.139)

In order to reject mythological significance, the poet must conjure pain: "dying – injured" and violent expectoration: "splash of / vomit". The violence of instrumental meaning intrudes even where it is consciously resisted.

Peace, "the sound of no-one there", disturbs the speaker no less (*Livelihood*, p.140). It admits possessiveness (here filtered through the poet's cat) and self-regard:

> cat vanishing from a
> sunlit ingle
>
> to brush your ankle
> as you pass: *mine:*
> *keep out.*
>
> See! Said the Mirror
> *we are civilized –*
> subtle urbane
>
> tolerant witty – (*Livelihood*, p.140)

This self-caressing mood is immediately productive of an allegorical figure:

> Whereupon there
> rose up a thing
> called
>
> Order – the giant
> spinning in his
> skin –
>
> AW. DAH. (*Livelihood*, pp.140-1)

"Order" both embodies allegorical hierarchy and is subject to it: he *is* the allegorical system (he is Frye's anagogic man), but in that he is a personification, is also contained by it, which impossible self-reflexivity produces the warp-spasm oscillation. Cúchulain's position within Irish culture is analogous: the ancient hero has meaning imposed upon him by modern nationalism, but as that nationalist icon he himself forces bodies into meaningfulness, impelling real violence and suffering. Allegory's uncanny interventions in our world have never been more precisely conjured than by Yeats in "The Statues": "When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side / What stalked through the Post Office?"[xxvii] Scully can manage nothing like this, in which magnificence resides in absurdity, but "The Sirens" nonetheless registers allegory's persistent interference in the real world. The appearance of Cúchulain as the personification of Order further suggests a satirical swipe at Kinsella, the best-known translator of the *Táin*, whose portentous preoccupation with psychic ordering is the reverse of Scully's non-interventionist aesthetic (which is not to say that preciousness is entirely foreign to such an aesthetic). Scully's description of Cúchulain's warp-spasm – "awe-inspiring and a bit ridiculous" (*Metre*, p.138) – might also apply to his older contemporary. "The Sirens" concludes that "the point is":

> just to breathe
> and live
>
> sing/passing a little
> fruitshop on a corner
> by the lights/
>
> the sirens
> Yr move. (*Livelihood*, p.142)

Aspiring to a non-hermeneutic contentment, the poet turns over responsibility and agency to the reader. It is a weak conclusion to an attack on authoritarian ordering of experience, but withdrawal may be Scully's only possible response to allegorical voracity.

Allegory is powerful. Not only does it intervene forcibly to impose meaning upon things and persons, it takes up resistance to itself and rewrites it into its signifying system. *Things That Happen* opposes "AW. DAH.", but the pleasure that it offers is that of "tracing a clew", as Gilonis puts it, of spotting pattern and lighting on recurrence. Scully's strategies of evasion often result in poetic unsuccess, poems that equivocate their way to a muted whimper. "Backyard", one of two poems thus titled in *Tig*, attacks capitalistic avarice in terms which startlingly recall the notion of allegory's origin in "allelophagy". The poet, engaged on a quest through "chequerwork / barbed dazzle" of a rather Coleridgean "Difficulty-in-Life", spies first a "gap in the defences" (*Tig*, p.28) and then encounters an obstacle which is instantly personified: "boulder in yr / path: / Calculated Greed." (*Tig*, p.29) This obstruction prompts polemic:

> an accelerating bubble on a swollen
> tide – machines of war memory perception –
> whose meanings can't any more be pre-
> figured or absorbed cultures inverted
>
> to prey on not "cradle" "civilisations"
> lulling or eliminating peoples for the
> use of a few invisible manipulators of
> no country or allegiance – theft –
>
> parasitic on a scale never before thought
> possible to succeed – eating up humanity.
> eating it up. meanwhile old world lyrics
> get prizes in small quaint corners. &
>
> good luck to them.

This gets to the heart of what allegory does – "eating up humanity", both in that it is driven by devouring desire and it annihilates humane attitudes – but its devices are crudely imitative: the line break "pre- / figured" (worse, in the preceding stanza there is a "frag / mented"); the inverted commas cradling not just " 'civilisations' " but " 'cradle' " itself; the poetic sectary's attack on "lyric" as innately reactionary, immediately and ambivalently retracted.

On the other hand, some of Scully's most successful critiques of inequality in "our Overdeveloped Pig World" (*Metre*, p.139) are perilously near to "old world lyrics" both in

their form and their deployment of symbolic material. "Liking the Big Wheelbarrow" advocates a characteristically attentive stance in a kinetic world:

> Wait. The instruction was to wait. Be still.
>
> Dust particles collide and bounce away, collide
> again elsewhere and stick until a thicker
> filamentary delicate medium sinks to the central
> plane of the disc which breaks into rings (*Livelihood*, p.168)

Scully's resources here are aural and syntactic rather than spatial and typographic, and the result is far more achieved poem than "Backyard". "Liking the Big Wheelbarrow" concludes with that most "mainstream" of devices, an epiphanic anecdote which revises the foregoing lines:

> A four-year-old child who said to a pilot
> on their way to the plane on the air ferry tarmac
> "I like your big wheelbarrow." (*Livelihood*, p.168)

Allegory intrudes instantly, capturing the child's utterance, simultaneously making it significant of innocence and stripping it of innocence. Significance is inimical to such simplicity: to perceive it at all the reader must be self-conscious, not simple.

The success of "Liking the Big Wheelbarrow" and the achievement of *Things That Happen* as a whole suggest the difficulties inherent in moralising a poetic stance. Scully is painstakingly thoughtful about the implications of poetic form, and the ethics of organising experience into artefact. That he is perhaps at his best when he forgets his own strictures and dares to write a lyric which might win the approval of "small quaint corners" does not render invalid his reservations about instrumental meaning. And though some distrust of allegory's system, order and hierarchy is wholesome, we should not allow ourselves to become melodramatic or self-castigating about the violence done to raw material or experience in the creation of a poetic artefact. *Things That Happen* is large enough to admit some diffuseness, some allegorical ambivalence. Immediately after his attack on prize-winning lyric in *Tig*, the poet finds himself on the margins of the "Forgotten Gaelic Tradition", mediating the equivocal voice of the "Blackbird of Anywhere-At-All quite likely to be in two / minds on one branch." The irony is heavy enough – at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the various poetic blackbirds of "Gaelic Tradition" are probably the least "Forgotten" thing about it (not to mention the boost they have received from Wallace Stevens). The line break "two / minds", meanwhile, is as deliberately unsubtle as they come. But the sentiment is large-hearted, and it

alerts us to Scully's other deployments of Irish tradition in *Tig*: the allegorical-mnemonic kennings or *briatharogham*, which like *Things that Happen* itself, are "oblique, obscure and undependable. And extraordinary." (*Tig*, p.101)

Notes

This chapter is a shortened and revised version of an essay originally published as '"AW.DAH.": an allegorical reading of Maurice Scully's Things That Happen' in *POST, A Review of Poetry Studies #1*, (April 2009) pp.59-89.

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[i] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928) trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 1998) p.232.

[ii] Charles Rosen, 'The Ruins of Walter Benjamin', in Gary Smith (ed.) On *Walter Benjamin: Critical Essays and Reflections* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1988) pp.129-75, pp.171-2.

[iii] Scully's continuing interest in the potential of formality and artificiality to effect liberation can be seen in this manipulations of the pastoral elegy in Humming (2009). See Kit Fryatt, The Poetics of Elegy in Maurice Scully's *Humming*, *Irish University Review* 46:1 (Spring 2016), pp.89-104.

[iv] Paul Celan, 'The Meridian' trans. Jerry Glenn and Beatrice Cameron, *Chicago Review* 29: 3 (Winter 1978) pp.29-40.

[v] Maurice Scully, 'Interview', *Metre* 17 (Spring 2005) 134-143, 141.

[vi] Maurice Scully, *5 Freedoms of Movement* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Galloping Dog, 1987) p.10.

[vii] Maurice Scully, *5 Freedoms of Movement* (Buckfastleigh, Devon: etruscan, 2002) p.9.

[viii] Harry Gilonis, "The Spider, the Fly and Philosophy: Tracing a Clew through Maurice Scully's *Livelihood*", *The Gig Documents* #3 (2005), pp.29-43, p.32.

[ix] Maurice Scully, "(HISTORY)", *Livelihood*, (Bray, Co. Wicklow: Wild Honey, 2004) pp.59-61.

[x] Maurice Scully, *The Basic Colours* (Durham: Pig Press, 1994) pp.52-4.

[xi] cf. *The Basic Colours* p.31 and *Livelihood* pp.40-1.

[xii] Maurice Scully, "From Zulu Dynamite", (Guilford, Vermont: Longhouse Books, 1997) n.p.

[xiii] Maurice Scully, "Re: Priority", email to Kit Fryatt, 29th July 2006.

[xiv] Maurice Scully, *Over and Through* (Cambridge: Poetical Histories, 1992) n.p.

[xv] Harry Gilonis, "Richard Caddel: Obituary", *The Independent*, 11th April 2003, repr. in *Jacket* 22 <http://jacketmagazine.com/22/caddel.html> Accessed 9th August 2006.

[xvi] Maurice Scully, *Tig* (Exeter: Shearsman, 2006) p.69.

[xvii] Maurice Scully, "Re: anti-talent", email to Kit Fryatt, 9th August 2006.

[xviii] Maurice Scully, "Re: pillar/vine", email to Kit Fryatt, 9th August 2006.

[xix] Joel Fineman, "The Structure of Allegorical Desire", *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Stephen J. Greenblatt, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins, 1981) pp.1-38, p.32.

[xx] Maurice Scully, *5 Freedoms of Movement* (Buckfastleigh, Devon: etruscan, 2002) p.63

[xxi] Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p.69.

[xxii] Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1996) p.7.

[xxiii] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957, repr. 1971) p.119.

[xxiv] For examples, see Maurice Scully *Sonata,* (St Leonards on Sea: Reality Street: 2006) p.59, p.92 and *Tig* p.44, p.83, p.84.

[xxv] Gianni Rodari, *Ci vuole un fiore* (Rome: Gallucci, 2003). The poem was popularised as a song by Sergio Endrigo.

[xxvi] "Poems 14", *Pinko.org*, Andrew Duncan, [n.d.], <http://www.pinko.org/91.html>. Accessed 27th March 2018.

[xxvii] W.B. Yeats, "The Statues", *The Poems*, ed. Daniel Albright (London: J.M. Dent, 1990) p.384