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ARTICLE

'Journeying is Hard': Difficulty, Race and Poetics in Sarah Howe's *Loop of Jade*

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Amidst a growing consensus among critics that a discussion on race and white privilege in British poetry is long overdue, few have theorized on race and racism in relation to contemporary British BAME poets and their concomitant poetics. In being attentive to how BAME poets continue to be routinely othered by various critics, I will reflect on my positionality as a BAME poet-critic who considers literary criticism to be a crucial means to respond to exemplary work being produced by contemporary British BAME poets, with the aim of disseminating contemporary BAME poetry in forums which are less welcoming to non-white or non-Eurocentric voices and perspectives. This article will examine whether parody can be construed as a form of resistance, which can be deployed to counter racialized/racist notions of difficulty, readability and authenticity. As the case study of my exploration of contemporary British-Chinese poetry, Sarah Howe's *Loop of Jade* will be closely read to illuminate the inextricable 'connection between texts and the existential actualities of human life, politics, societies and events'.¹ Through offering a textual analysis of Howe's collection with due attention to her politics and poetics, I aim to reveal how *Loop of Jade* has broadened the definition of linguistic innovation in contemporary British poetry and practice through its scintillating use of parody and hybrid poetics.

Keywords: difficulty; race; poetics; avant-garde; lyric; Sarah Howe

In this article,² I wish to consider the complex critical reception of *Loop of Jade*, a debut collection by the British-Chinese poet Sarah Howe. Published in 2015, Howe's *Loop of Jade* (Chatto & Windus) has largely been celebrated by the British literary establishment, winning both the 2015 T.S. Eliot Prize and the 2015 *Sunday Times*/Peters Fraser and Dunlop Young Writer of The Year Award. More recently, Howe was elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature through its '40 Under

40' initiative, which seeks to 'welcome a new generation of writers into the RSL, and to celebrate the talent and diversity of Britain's younger writers'.³ However, these accolades have played an inadvertent role in fostering controversy among several (white, male) critics in the UK, which led in turn to a media backlash from female poets who – in response to a disparaging Twitter comment by the journalist Oliver Thring – coined the hashtag #derangedpoetess to express the fury they felt in the wake of Howe's perceived mistreatment by the press.⁴

I raise these literary controversies not to detract from Howe's poetry and poetics, but rather to begin the work of reflecting critically on how BAME poets in the UK are rarely afforded the privilege of having their work critiqued in a manner which does not, in the words of Dorothy Wang, 'explicitly oppose political and social "content" (including racial identity) against formal literary concerns'.⁵ In spite of the uneasy relationship between transnational readings and nation-focused critical arenas, markets and canons, Wang's contention that poets of colour remain read either for their 'race' or for their 'poetics' certainly pertains to the ongoing discussions on race and review culture in the UK. During a panel on the role of the poetry critic at the 2018 Ledbury Poetry Festival, Ledbury Poetry Critic Sarala Estruch astutely observed that 'when faced with reviewing the work of a BAME poet, the critic today too often falls into the trap of focusing on the cultural origin of the poet rather than the work itself'.⁶ Indeed, Howe's work has been odiously applauded for its 'oriental poise',⁷ while simultaneously attracting derision from a handful of critics who (mis-)read Howe's skilful use of intertextuality and linguistically innovative forms throughout her collection as being symptomatic of an 'intellectually abstruse' poetics.⁸

Such notions of (un-)readability and difficulty are often deeply racialized, particularly when one considers, in the words of Kayo Chingonyi, how a 'structurally racist literary culture might influence a myopic reading of work by BAME poets'.⁹ In response to those critics who insist that Howe ought to '[work] harder to write with the difficult clarity and complex simplicity of which she is capable',¹⁰ I wish to note that some poets do not consider 'clarity' or 'simplicity' to be necessary traits of their work, particularly those who draw inspiration from an avant-garde poetic

tradition. Simultaneously embedded in this clarion call to 'simplicity' is a veiled demand that a BAME poet's work come across as 'authentic', which is reflected in Ben Wilkinson's analysis of Howe's work, as he observes how 'the Hong Kong of Howe's early years is a fecund territory for a poet seeking to reconcile a quintessentially English life with a starkly contrasting Eastern heritage'.¹¹ While aptly acknowledging Howe's multiple heritages, such commentary brings to mind what Prina Werbner describes as, 'one key criticism often levelled against the notion of cultural hybridity, [which] is that it assumes the prior existence of whole cultures, a vision of culture much discredited in contemporary anthropology'.¹² There is also the problem of Howe being orientalised as the 'native informant' who is presumed to have unfettered access to an 'authentic' Eastern heritage by virtue of having been born in Hong Kong. Yet it perhaps escapes the inattentive critic that Howe comes to her Chineseness in *Loop of Jade* not through accessing primary Chinese texts (be it classical or contemporary), but rather via Ezra Pound's *Cathay* and *the Cantos*; that is, through Anglophone (Poundian) imitations of classical Chinese poetry, since English is in fact Howe's sole mother tongue. In an interview with Lily Blacksell for the *Boston Review*, Howe recalls that during her year abroad at Harvard University after graduating from the University of Cambridge (where she read English): 'I spent hours translating Virgil, but hadn't yet thought to study Chinese'.¹³ Having moved from Hong Kong, China, to Watford, England, at the age of seven, Howe has been vocal about her fraught relationship to language:

'Voice' isn't a straightforward thing for me: neither my physical voice, nor the unique and unified poetic voice we're all supposed to be trying to find within ourselves. A couple of years after we moved from Hong Kong to England [...] my mum came with me to parents' evening. She listened as the teacher told her to take me to [...] places where I could hear English, because it was important for non-native speakers to get extra exposure [...] I could tell my mum was quietly furious: English was my first and only language.¹⁴

Such microaggressions are often sublimated into subtler manifestations within the field of English literature and poetry studies. Thring observes disparagingly in his review for the *Sunday Times* that “‘Lacunae’ is a very Howean word. To interview this Cambridge English academic, whose PhD, Thring observes, was on “visual imagination and visual vividness in language”, is to undergo a tutorial sprinkled with wordy phrases: “hyperreality”, “double input”, “multi-layeredness”, “interleavings”¹⁵ It is curious as to why Howe’s usage of standard vocabulary within literary criticism has been identified by Thring as problematic, considering that certain discourses are demanded by academia, and Howe is indeed an accomplished Renaissance scholar. Accusations of racism and sexism aside, might this have something to do with the (white) critic’s fundamental inability to reconcile the BAME poet’s erudition with her racial background? Aside from persistent structural inequalities within British higher education,¹⁶ Thring’s issue with Howe’s work might also stem from the fact that BAME poets are often praised by critics for portraying a narrow and stereotypical version of ‘authenticity’. And this authenticity apparently requires them to perform what Wilkinson calls in relation to Chingonyi’s *Kumukanda* an ‘angry and defiant writing’.¹⁷ As Wilkinson continues, Chingonyi produces, ‘an authentic and convincing book [...] in its many nuanced portrayals and unflinching reflections’.¹⁸ When confronted with a BAME poet whose racial identity defies conventional expectations because it does not (and need not) map directly onto an autobiographical lyric ‘I’ conforming to racial stereotypes, critics have tended to react in frustration at being unable to, in the words of Howe, ‘read [...] poems by women, and especially ones from racial minorities, as artlessly autobiographical – as unmediated expressions of lived experience’.¹⁹ This seeming incongruence between one’s poetics and race is in turn grossly (mis-)interpreted by critics as a kind of ‘difficulty’ that requires fixing. Here, I shall now pivot towards a critical discussion of what I consider to be a more valid and important kind of ‘difficulty’ in Howe’s work.

In his seminal article ‘On Difficulty’, George Steiner contends that any mention of ‘difficulty’ arising from a literary text can be classified ‘into contingent, modal, tactical and ontological difficulties [...] [with] manifold combinations between them’.²⁰ According to Steiner’s classification, ‘contingent’ difficulties concern words or phrases

that are not immediately intelligible to the reader, and therefore require the act of 'look[ing] up' a particular reference²¹; 'modal' difficulties arise when the reader encounters 'something palpably unsettling, even repellent, about the movement and lunge of the whole poem'²²; 'tactical' difficulties concern instances when the poet may choose to be obscure in order to achieve certain specific stylistic effects, or when one is 'compelled towards obliquity and closure by political circumstances'²³; 'ontological' difficulties entail mystery over comprehension, in rejection of a Homeric tradition of 'linear, narrative, realistic, [and] publicly-focused [writing]'.²⁴ *Loop of Jade* contains various instances and combinations of such literary 'difficulties', all of which ought to be approached with at least some understanding as to their intents and purposes.

From a historical perspective, I find resonances between Howe's predicament and the reception of the Chinese-American poet John Yau, who initially found himself on the fringes of various poetry circles during the late 1970s and 1980s in the United States, only to be resurrected by John Ashbery, a former mentor, who chose '[Yau's] *Corpse and Mirror* (1983) as a National Poetry Series selection'.²⁵ I mention Yau, not to draw hasty equivalences between two poets who happen to both identify as Chinese; rather, Howe and Yau can be spoken about in the same breath because they employ similar poetic strategies in their work, specifically 'by use of repetition, circularity, narrative fragmentation, parataxis [...] [as well as] parody'.²⁶ Furthermore, both Yau and Howe cite Pound as a formative influence on their poetic imagination and textual strategies, with Yau acknowledging in an interview with Edward Foster that 'Pound's Chinese poets were very, very meaningful to me [...] they were about being Chinese, about some kind of identity'.²⁷ Similarly, Howe writes in her interview with the Forward Prize that, 'An interest in image [...] first took me to Pound, though he [has] since found other routes into *Loop of Jade*, through both *Cathay* and *the Cantos*'.²⁸ At this juncture, I wish to concur with Steven Yao, who contends in his seminal text *Foreign Accents: Chinese American Verse from Exclusion to Postethnicity* (2010) that an acknowledgement of '[Pound's] complicity with and even active participation in the long and troubling history of dominant Anglo-American Orientalism'²⁹ ought not negate the fact that 'the Orientalist efforts of [...] many Anglo-American modernists set the prevailing formal terms for virtually the entire subsequent development

of [...] verse by writers of Asian descent [within an Anglo-American context]'.³⁰ I shall return to this issue during my subsequent close readings of Howe's poems.

In her influential book *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (2014), Wang observes that 'for decades, Yau never quite fit any poetry category – Language, avant-garde, cultural nationalist, ethnic, postmodernist, conceptual, among others – and, to some extent, still does not'.³¹ Similarly, I would suggest that Howe's work also refuses easy categorization, with Sandeep Parmar concurring in the *LA Review of Books* that 'Howe's [*Loop of Jade*] moves between lyric and experimental modes, and dodges the uneasy limits of poetic subjectivity'.³² It is clear from current academic and literary debates concerning avant-garde poetics in the UK that 'while the relationship between "experimental" or "difficult" poetry and capitalism has been the subject of much compelling critical writing in the UK, little attention has been given to poetry's relationship to race, racism, and the legacies of colonialism',³³ a situation which the international research group RAPAPUK (Race and Poetry and Poetics in the UK) has sought to rectify. In her conclusion to *Lyric Shame: The 'Lyric' Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (2014), Gillian White writes about recent debates surrounding the lyric I's uses and problematics. She acknowledges that,

questions about authorial identity, identification and the legibility of non-white 'lyric' subjects would add [a] significant dimension to my account of lyric shame [...] as the beginnings of the lyric shame situation I seek to historicize are in fact located in forms of entitlement bound up with histories of minority oppression and white privilege. Among such forms of entitlement are Mill's and Eliot's assumption of the poet's warrant to speak and expectation to be broadly relevant to and understood by 'all'.³⁴

Responding to White's analysis, Parmar argues in her *Threads* essay on 'Lyric Violence, the Nomadic Subject and the Fourth Space' that 'it is impossible to consider the lyric without fully interrogating its inherent premise of universality, its coded whiteness'.³⁵ At the same time, Parmar aptly recognizes that 'anti-lyric poetics that emerge from post-structuralism undermine the coherence of a lyric subject [...] but

to not need to recognize oneself, to render oneself without a voice, is only appealing or possible for those who have not been screened out, marginalised, silenced by the powers inherent in language itself.³⁶

In light of these debates, I shall turn to a brief discussion about race and innovative women's poetry in the UK since the 1970s, in order to explore some of the limitations within current discussions on avant-garde poetics; this discussion will, in turn, inform my close reading of Howe's Borges sequence. Rather than place any firm poetic label on Howe's work, my aim for the rest of this article is to ascertain how *Loop of Jade* is currently being (mis-)read by certain critics in relation to notions of difficulty, race and contemporary poetics within a British context. I contend that *Loop of Jade* is a richly complex collection which claims multiple allegiances and influences, including that of Jorge Louis Borges, William Shakespeare, Philip Sidney, Horace, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, John Ashbery, Robert Hass, Jorie Graham, Li Po and Du Fu. As is evident from this wide-ranging list, Howe draws inspiration from American, European and East Asian literary traditions across various schools of poetic thought and time periods, even as her work is indelibly shaped by her experiences of being racially interpellated in the UK as a mixed-race female poet.

Whither the Diasporic Avant-garde?: Race and Innovative Women's Poetry in the UK since the 1970s

In exploring the British poetic avant-garde since the British Poetry Revival of the 1970s, an increasing number of articles and publications have focused on the issue of 'innovative women's poetry in the United Kingdom',³⁷ to quote the title of an article by Stephen Mooney published in *Women: A Cultural Review* (2015). An earlier article by Linda A. Kinnahan (1996) discusses 'experimental poetics and the lyric in British women's poetry',³⁸ with a specific focus on the works of Geraldine Monk, Wendy Mulford and Denise Riley. Going back to the 1970s, Ken Edwards and Robert Hampson map out 'an exercise in collective remembering'³⁹ which examines the London avant-garde poetry community during the 1970s and 'how some of the debates and actions of the 1970s played out [in the 1980s]'. In his chapter in *Clasp: Late Modernist Poetry in London in the 1970s*, Hampson notes how 'the fact that "British Poetry" [was] represented almost exclusively by white men at both the 1974 and

1977 [avant-garde] conferences reflects the dominance of this group in experimental poetry in this period'.⁴⁰ By the 1980s, Lauri Ramey cites Kewsi Owusu in observing the emergence of a 'new Black British avant-garde'⁴¹ which included Linton Kwesi Johnson, Jean "Binta" Breeze, Benjamin Zephaniah, and Lemn Sissay as some of the movement's key members. It is noteworthy that 'Owusu cites performance poetry as a central formal manifestation of the experimentation employed by this avant-garde movement'⁴²; at the same time, Ramey rightly contends that 'orality and performance can only be read as "experimental" and "new" in relation to the British literary canon – not in the context of African diasporic traditions'.⁴³

It is indeed worth questioning which poetic practices are avant-garde in relation to which literary canons, as well as why one ought to privilege Western and European textual forms as the main point of comparative interest against which all other literary traditions are measured. Perhaps the root of this issue lies with colonial attitudes which entirely privileged Western literatures over non-Western ones, as epitomized by Vahni Capildeo's essay in the *White Review*, which was commissioned by the 'Citizens of Everywhere' project at the University of Liverpool in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum. In her powerful essay, Capildeo urges her readers to resist the lure of colonial nostalgia, and suggests 'reciprocity' as a way forward:

For millions worldwide, the alien English graft became natural. We are also you. But you, alas, are not us. That would require reciprocity. You would want to learn the Shakespeares and Wordsworths of the civilizations whose descendants are arriving as survivors. You would need to look at Cornwall and see Phoenicia; to look at the Scottish Borders and see Septimius Severus, Rome and Libya; to look at Bristol and see Caribbean sugar [...] to know your streets and palaces as built with borrowings and plunder; read your history, and count up as British values the adulteries, rapes, and love affairs in your never-isolate blood.⁴⁴

By the 1980s and 1990s, certain individuals and publications had begun challenging the overwhelmingly Eurocentric nature of the British poetic avant-garde. Writing in the collection of essays *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible* (1993), Fred D'Aguiar sought to contextualize the history of Black British writing since the 1970s,

while close reading the work of poets including Linton Kwesi Johnson, James Berry, Jackie Kay, Grace Nichols and John Agard. He concludes with the argument that

dub poetry, poetry influenced by calypso, reggae, jazz and blues rhythm, creole language and Standard English articulating for the first time the black experience in Britain have changed what it means to be British; deepened it in fact, making it more sophisticated, giving it a new lease of life.⁴⁵

The poetry anthology *The New British Poetry: 1968–88* had a similar effect on broadening the boundaries of British (innovative) verse. Published in 1988 by Grafton Books as part of its Paladin series, jointly edited by Gillian Allnutt, Fred D'Aguiar, Ken Edwards and Eric Mottram, it offered a diverse group of differentially affiliated poets and editors who each brought their own concerns regarding feminism, black British poetry and linguistically innovative verse to bear on the anthology. Had it not been for the book's general editor, John Muckle's, commissioning of the anthology with the precise aim to unite these different editors, it is likely that these four poets (Allnutt, D'Aguiar, Edwards and Mottram) may never have collaborated on a joint project to reflect their largely divergent aims and ambitions on the development of British poetry and poetics.

In the late 1990s, the ground-breaking anthology titled *Out of Everywhere: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America & the UK* (1996) was published by Reality Street. By the 2000s, a major event on innovative women's writing took place at the Contemporary Experimental Women's Poetry Festival in Cambridge in 2006, organized by Emily Critchley, who also co-organized the Women's Innovative Poetry and Cross-Genre Festival in Greenwich alongside Carol Watts in 2010. Two more anthologies followed: *Infinite Difference: Other Poetries by UK Women Poets* (2010), edited by Carrie Etter, and the second instalment of the *Out of Everywhere* anthology, titled *Out of Everywhere 2: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America & the UK* (2015). This latter was also edited by Critchley and featured a new generation of female experimental writers from both sides of the Atlantic, including those such as Amy De'Ath, Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Andrea Brady, Lee Ann Brown and Elizabeth-Jane Burnett (with Berssenbrugge and Burnett duly recognized as pioneers within the

BAME avant-garde). However, there remains a glaring lacuna in these laudable efforts to render the field of British avant-garde poetry more inclusive, with theorizations on the intersections between British BAME poetry and the avant-garde being produced largely by American critics, such as Lauri Ramey (2009) who writes compellingly on Patience Agbabi and Anthony Joseph in an article titled, 'Diaspora and the Avant-Garde in Contemporary Black British Poetry'. Bearing in mind that, as Kinnahan writes,

while the American and British situations cannot be fully collapsed, [...] the greater openness of American universities and critical establishments to [...] formal and linguistic experimentation, and to the ideological and gendered shapings of poetic conventions have a bearing upon experimental writing in England both in actual practice and in shared theoretical contexts⁴⁶

I shall proceed in my close readings of Howe's *Loop of Jade*.

***Loop of Jade's* Borges Sequence: Race and Steiner's 'Difficulties'**

I wish to consider Howe's *Loop of Jade*, above all, as a powerful and necessary critique of the very idea of race as a stable category and biological reality, starting with an examination of the book's epigraph by Jorge Louis Borges, who wrote a fictive Chinese encyclopaedia titled *The Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. In it, Borges writes:

These ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies recall those attributed by Dr Franz Kuhn to a certain Chinese encyclopaedia...On those remote pages it is written that animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) others, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies.⁴⁷

These arbitrary categories consisting of nouns, verbs and adjectives structure and permeate *Loop of Jade*, with each category constituting a stand-alone poem. I wish to

begin by offering a close reading of this epigraph, since it is through Howe's citation of Borges that the reader is first alerted to the multiple elements at play. First, the epigraph is a translated version from Spanish (Borges) into French (Foucault) into English, thus bringing multilingualism to the fore. Howe states in the 'Notes' section of her collection that the translated version of this epigraph appears in Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, a book which reveals the ways in which knowledge, conceptions of truth and socio-scientific categories are heavily contingent upon historical circumstances, and thus tend to evolve over time.⁴⁸ By alluding to the unstable nature of such categorizes, Howe encourages the reader to anticipate similar moves within her poems.

Second, it is noteworthy that the reader first encounters Chinese culture in this collection not through Howe's speakers, but through the mediated gaze of the white critic (i.e. Borges and Foucault). Once again, Howe foreshadows a crucial theme in her work – the ways in which her own relationship to race and poetic voice is not entirely straightforward. Third, this epigraph serves to hint at the central importance of intertextual tropes such as translation, allusion and parody to Howe's poetic project, thus effectively foreshadowing the multi-layered nature of *Loop of Jade* as a collection which insists on inhabiting its situatedness between *and* within cultures, both in light of Howe's mixed-race background, and given Hong Kong's former status as a Chinese city colonized by Britain in the aftermath of the Opium Wars. For Wilkinson to state that 'Howe's early years is a fecund territory for a poet seeking to reconcile a *quintessentially English life*⁴⁹ with a *starkly contrasting eastern heritage*⁵⁰ (my italics) is to offer too naïve an understanding of political history, for in the aftermath of Empire and colonialism, one can hardly refer to peoples, cultures and cities as being 'purely' one thing or another, a fact which Howe poignantly observes:

The Chinese term for people like me [is] 混血[儿] (*Hùnxuè'ér*) [...] meaning literally 'mixed blood', but with just a hint of 'muddled' or 'confused blood'. In early twentieth-century colonial Hong Kong, people like me were a taboo [...] and even fetishized subgroup: an unpleasant reminder of what ensued when the Empire's implicit racial hierarchies were transgressed.⁵¹

Howe explores the deeply contingent nature of racial identity throughout *Loop of Jade*, particularly through her pervasive use of intertextuality in conveying the 'rivenness of subjectivity wrought by immigration, diaspora [and] the violence of assimilation'.⁵² Even for those who are not mixed-race, the shadow of Empire and the enduring complexities of being a postcolonial invariably inform one's approach towards race, language and culture – none of which are static or ossified entities. Critical race theorists and scientists have long dispelled the notion that race is biological reality, with Ian F. Haney Lopez observing that 'race must be viewed as a social construction',⁵³ while proposing the term 'racial fabrication [in lieu of] racial formation'⁵⁴ to denote how 'humans rather than abstract social forces produce races'.⁵⁵ This is borne out in a recent poem by Anthony Anaxagorou, who intersperses his poem 'After the Formalities', first published in the *Poetry Review*, with factual statements on race: 'In 1481, the word "race" first appears in Jacques de Brézé's poem "The Hunt". De Brézé uses the word to distinguish between different groups of dogs'.⁵⁶ Later, Anaxagorou writes: 'In his 1684 essay "A New Division of the Earth", French physician François Bernier became the first popular classifier to put all humans into races using phenotypic characteristics'.⁵⁷ Towards the end of the poem, Anaxagorou adds: 'In 2001, philosopher Robert Bernasconi wrote "The construct of race was a way for white people to define those who they regarded as other"'.⁵⁸ In her poem '(l) Others', Howe writes:

I think about the meaning of *blood*, which is (simply) a metaphor
and *race*, which has been a terrible pun.

[...]

*

A personal Babel: a muddle. A Mendel?

Some words die out while others survive. *Crossbreed. Halfcaste. Quadroon.*

*

Spun thread of a sentence: ... *have been, and are being, evolved.*

The spiralling path from Γένεσις to genetics. Language revolves like a ream of stars.

*

A different generation: *They wouldn't escape by the Mischlinge Laws.*

I wonder if they'll have your blue eyes.⁵⁹

In these fragments, Howe meditates on the complexities surrounding ancestry, race and ethnicity to reveal their historically determined and socially constructed nature as categories which 'have been, and are being, evolved'. Language itself is placed under scrutiny: the first couplet questions the deep attachment we have as a society (across cultures) to the meaning of 'blood', which, the speaker reminds us, 'is (simply) a metaphor', rather than being a biological trait which differs across races and ethnicities. However, the use of brackets around the word 'simply' alerts the reader to the speaker's self-conscious deployment of this notion of simplicity, since 'blood' *qua* metaphor powerfully dictates the ways in which one is perceived and categorized in a world of nation-states, many of which continue to grant citizenship through the principle of *jus sanguinis* ('right of blood'), under which persons born to one or both parents of a particular country are granted automatic citizenship, as opposed to the principle of *jus soli* ('right of the soil'), which confers the rights of citizenship to anyone born within a (nation-)state's territory. Apart from the practicalities of citizenship, 'blood' continues to play a crucial role in determining our self-identity, with Derek Walcott's poem 'A Far Cry from Africa' evoking precisely this metaphor: 'I who am poisoned with the blood of both, | where shall I turn, divided to the vein?'⁶⁰

Howe understands the paradoxical and anguished nature of Walcott's lament, noting that '[the metaphor's] literal impossibility underlines the slipperiness of race: how [does one] separate out the "white" capillaries from the "black" ones?'⁶¹ In *Troublesome Science: The Misuse of Genetics and Genomics in Understanding Race* (2018), Rob DeSalle and Ian Tattersall contend that according to the strict rules

of taxonomy, and based on the application of modern genetic tools in examining human variety, there can only be one logical conclusion: that the notion of discrete 'races' is merely the product of ideology, myth and human imagination, for we are all biologically part of the same human race.⁶² That race is socially constructed does not, however, entail that it is irrelevant to the interpellation of individuals across and within cultures and societies. Rather, race is indeed 'a terrible pun', since the fact that people of different 'races' are locked in an unequal 'race' against one another is borne out daily across the world, particularly within capitalist democracies where racial hierarchies often remain systemic and deeply institutionalised.⁶³

The next couplet, which appears later in the same poem, reveals a 'contingent' difficulty, since words such as 'Babel', 'Mendel', or even '*Quadroon*' might require some effort from the reader in terms of research, but the internet is quick to yield such definitions. In offering a racialized perspective on looking up difficult words in a poem, I recall a time during secondary school in Hong Kong when almost every other phrase in a literary text required extensive research, since none of the cultural references came intuitively to me, and few of the metaphors used by the 'canonical' British poets were familiar territory for a Chinese reader. Chinese poetry, on the other hand, referenced myths and legends that I had grown up with, and there were social codes, historical allusions and cultural metaphors which I could instantly recognize from classical texts. As I read Howe's *Loop of Jade* almost a decade later, I find myself relishing rare moments of ease – instances when the Chinese myths referenced by Howe in the title poem 'Loop of Jade' make obvious sense; how descriptions of Hong Kong's Mid-Levels and Victoria Harbour are so vivid in 'Crossing from Guangdong', that I can almost trick my mind into thinking that I am standing at the harbour's edge, staring from Hong Kong Island across to Kowloon. All this to say: is there not a compelling case to be made for readers to try harder at comprehending what various and multiple sources of inspiration a British-Chinese poet might find herself drawing from? Is there not a strong case to be made for a British audience willing to meet Howe halfway in attempting to understand her version of Hong Kong and Mainland China through the specificity of her eyes, rather than expecting the BAME poet to offer a tamed and reductive version of 'the Far East' for one's easy and convenient consumption?

Loop of Jade asks much of its readers, but only because Howe's keen intellect is multicultural and multi-faceted. In calling herself 'a personal Babel', Howe's speaker evokes the confusion of multiple voices speaking through her, and asks if this is indeed 'a muddle' (recalling Howe's earlier reference to the notion of 'muddled blood'), or is this 'a Mendel'? Once again, brief research will alert the reader that a reference is being made to Gregor Mendel, the father of modern genetics, who developed the laws of Mendelian inheritance. Here, Howe allows sonic reverberations of meaning to occur through the use of imperfect rhyme ('muddle' and 'Mendel') – perhaps challenging us to ponder how 'muddled' we all are, since we are inevitably products of varying genetic combinations passed down from one generation to the next. The unpredictability of genetic inheritance is underscored with Howe's question later on in the poem, where she writes: 'I wonder if they'll have your blue eyes' – a line addressed to the speaker's Jewish lover and referencing her future children, who would have been deemed as people of 'mixed-blood' under Nazi Germany's racist 'Mischling Laws', which were used to determine whether a person was a 'Jew' or a 'Mischling' (someone of 'Aryan' and Jewish ancestry). The aural pun on 'I' and 'eyes' (a plural 'I') also gestures at Howe's ability to destabilize an ostensibly unified subjectivity as espoused by a stable lyric 'I': one who is often deemed as 'universal' (i.e. white).

In an interview with Patricia McCarthy, Howe observes that

there's a scholarly, hyper-referential tone that I was conscious of letting some of the later poems inhabit, playfully licensed by their connection to the book's Borges epigraph [...] to leave out such a strain altogether [...] wouldn't offer a true portrait of how my mind works or the cultures that formed it.⁶⁴

This quotation is illuminating and enlightening for the poem's other conspicuous pun: 'The spiralling path from [Genesis] to genetics', which evokes how our understanding of the human race is based not on objective facts, but is rather derived from an amalgamation of political, religious, cultural, social and scientific narratives that are in turn rooted in language. In '(d) *Sucking pigs*', Howe injects a humorous tone to explore – in a lyric mode – related themes of cultural origins, as well as the arbitrariness of cultural symbols:

Between choosing canapes and favours I read
 how the groom's family by Chinese tradition
 should gift to her kinsmen a piglet, milk-fed,
 just a moon at the teat, crisped to perfection,

when quite satisfied the bride's still intact.

I imagine your mother cranking the spit.
 Crackling's coy, brittle russet then succulent fat —
 that atavistic aroma makes me salivate,

you physically sick. So as pet names go, *Shikse's*
 not a bad fit. (I did play your Circean temptress...)⁶⁵

This poem appears (once again) to present a series of literary 'difficulties' (see Steiner), but I shall persist with the act of close reading in order to illuminate the poem's complexity. Here, the roasted piglet (which symbolizes a bride's virginity within a Cantonese tradition in China) is viewed through a dual and deeply polarized lens: that of 'reverence' and 'disgust'. The speaker (who salivates at the thought of the roasted pig's fragrant aroma) imagines her Jewish husband's mother cooking the piglet (an impossible scenario), since Jewish people consider pigs to be 'unkosher', with some even refraining from saying the animal's name for fear of invoking God's wrath. The irony that a type of food can symbolize purity for a particular ethnic group (the Cantonese) and filth for another (the Jews) is epitomized in the line: 'that atavistic aroma makes me salivate,|you physically sick'. In light of this clash of cultural symbols (reminiscent of Samuel P. Huntington's controversial 1993 *Foreign Affairs* essay titled '*The Clash of Civilizations?*'), the speaker muses on her pet name 'Shikse', which is a Yiddish insult used by observant Jews to denote other women who are not Jewish, thus suggesting that those women are, in a deeply derogatory sense, not one of *ours*. The imperfect rhyme between 'sick' and 'Shikse' hints at the name's offensive tone, particularly in light of it being a 'pet name', which is usually meant to be a form of endearment rather than a source of alienation. The speaker then states in

an aside: 'I did play your Circean temptress', alluding to the figure of Circe in Greek mythology, who infamously used her powers to transform Odysseus' men into swine. Here, the juxtaposition of Circe's pigs and the prized Cantonese pig, that is in turn abhorred by the speaker's Jewish husband and mother-in-law, suggests how arbitrary cultural symbols are despite their ability to evoke deeply held beliefs and sentiment across time and space. Towards the end of the poem, Howe juxtaposes the Jewish mandate *not* to consume pork and a Cantonese take on the matter to great comic effect through the use of parataxis, quotation and collage:

Wikipedia says it comes down from Leviticus,
how your God labelled creatures unclean to ingest;

but then, disgust seems to blur into reverence*

*Cf. Xu Bing, *A Case Study of Transference*⁶⁵

At first glance, the end rhyme between 'reference' and 'transference' suggests a link between religiosity and psychoanalysis; yet the act of 'looking up' *A Case Study of Transference* yields deeply surprising results. Rather than presenting a psychoanalytic case study on transference between psychotherapist and client, Xu Bing (an artist) offers a controversial conceptual artwork titled 'A Case Study of Transference', which consists of a 1994 video performance piece in which two pigs (both imprinted with nonsensical words, one in Simplified Chinese and the other in English) copulate before a live audience, intended by the artist as 'a satirical take on the collision of East and West'.⁶⁶ If both cultures (East and West) are equally represented by the image of the pig in Xu's provocative performance art, there appears to be no reason to consider one culture to be more 'legitimate' than the other. Furthermore, if one examines the issue of pork's symbolic meaning(s) from a Jewish versus Cantonese perspective, it appears that both attitudes could be equally repugnant, or equally savoury, depending on one's personal allegiances and ideologies. Furthermore, Xu seems to imply that the mating of the two pigs (one imprinted with nonsensical English words and the other with senseless Chinese characters) will logically produce

piglets free from blemish (since those ink stains are not genetically inherent to the pigs and have only been added onto their skin artificially by the artist). Is Howe therefore suggesting that aspects we might often consider to be inherent to a culture (for example, a hatred of pork) are a result of 'nurture' rather than 'nature', and thus are less inevitable or ingrained than we might presume?

Ultimately, Howe leaves her reader to ponder a more 'open text' than the poem's lyric form might suggest, which, according to Lyn Hejinian, 'invites participation, rejects the authority of the writer over the reader and [...] speaks for writing that is generative rather than directive'.⁶⁷ While select critics have shown an appreciation of Howe's experimentation with form,⁶⁸ Howe observes in a conversation with the author of this thesis that her experiences of reading '(d) *Sucking pigs*' aloud to various audiences around the UK have not been met with the expected response: 'I've stopped reading those poems in the collection that are perhaps a bit "out there" [...] the poem "Sucking pigs" was supposed to be funny, but people never laugh'. With such 'difficult' poems, Howe faces a conundrum: whether to read these aloud to audiences who may be seemingly less receptive to work which seeks to complicate notions of race, culture and poetic voice. Here, I wish to consider the following observation made by Hampson in puncturing the illusion of a homogenous readership:

The reader of *fragmente* or *Talus* has quite different literary expectations from the person who reads poems in the *TLS* or the *London Review of Books*. There is, then, the paradox [...] that, if this tradition of the new is defined in terms of 'countering formal expectations', it produces poetry which, in practice, is sought out by readers who would expect 'challenging' texts, whereas those readers who would really be challenged by these texts are unlikely to engage with them.⁶⁹

While Hampson seeks to describe the problems of avant-garde poetics as pure formalist play, I wish to adapt his observation to note that the BAME poet who wishes to adopt an innovative poetics in her writing yet, 1) does not claim to be an avant-garde poet, 2) is not read as such by literary critics who would rather Howe write more

'lyric' poetry than resort to 'linguistic excess' and, 3) is a pioneer in terms of writing poetry in the UK from a positionality of Chineseness, faces the profound difficulty of knowing precisely which 'formal expectations' to counter in her work.

Steven Yao's *Foreign Accents: Chinese American Verse from Exclusion to Postethnicity* (2010) is illuminating on some of the specific cultural politics of verse which impact upon works written by Chinese poets in an Anglophone literary context. In one of his chapters, Yao considers Pound's relationship to a 'poetics of Chineseness'⁷⁰ in the United States, and argues how, in the wake of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and concomitant discourses on the 'Yellow Peril', Pound's '*Cathay* gives a comparatively sympathetic portrayal to a series of individual speaking Chinese subjects, each of whom displays an intense, if stylistically understated, emotionalism'.⁷¹ This marked the first time East Asians in the United States were introduced as speaking subjects within English literary verse, which opposed the prevailing xenophobic and racist attitudes towards the Chinese at the time. Despite its Orientalist tropes (i.e. conflating Chinese and Japanese as if they were indistinct languages, presenting Chinese culture as reified and timeless, and depicting a 'generic Oriental tonality in English'⁷² that would contribute to stereotypes regarding what a Chinese poem ought to sound like on the page), Yao argues that '*Cathay* present[ed] a rare instance of "high culture" functioning to articulate a "counter-poetics" of difference'⁷³ in depicting the Chinese as a racialized subject in America. One ought to bear this in mind when appreciating Howe's use of parody in this next poem, titled '(k) *Drawn with a very fine camelhair brush*', which evokes Pound's *Cathay* even as it offers a clear critique of its Chinoiserie. I find Howe's reflections on her relationship to Pound useful in thinking through the poem's subtleties:

I found *Cathay's* intuitively brilliant but sometimes linguistically ill-founded moves as a 'translation' from the Chinese oddly enabling, not least as a way of navigating what sort of cultural space I might inhabit as a half-Chinese person who grew up not speaking Chinese: is it possible to recuperate a Chinoiserie-like 'inauthenticity' – that being the way I sometimes think of myself and my Western reference points – at the same time as critiquing it?

hours later, cheek wet with morning,
to discover his badly knotted skiff
had disappeared downstream⁷⁴

While those wary of 'Re-Orientalism'⁷⁵ – defined by Lisa Lau as 'Orientalism by Orientals'⁷⁶ – might be loath to encounter yet another a stereotypical Chinese landscape, I argue that we must once again be attentive to the poem's productive 'difficulties'. In this poem, the speaker is an omniscient narrator who includes the reader in his tale with the use of the pronoun 'we', akin to Pound's speaker in one of his most famous *Cathay* poems, 'Song of the Bowman of Shu', whose speaker observes: 'Here we are, picking the first fern-shoots|And saying: When shall we get back to our country?'⁷⁷ Howe's careful positioning of her scholar vis-à-vis the narrator is necessary for her critique of language's perceived ability to deduce (and reduce) the world to a state of transparency, as she writes: 'A hand, a brush, its inclination –|so involved in an anchoring of sign to thing|so artful that we, like the Jesuits, might forget|words' tenuous moorings'. Howe is eager for us to question this call to a simplistic, knowable, and 'authentic' identity. As such, she invites us to interrogate this presumed link between 'sign' and 'thing' through allowing misfortune to befall her self-satisfied scholar, who eventually 'falls asleep|reflecting how he must write a poem|about the dragonflies' (in a subtle nod to Robert Hass' 'Dragonflies Mating'⁷⁸), and subsequently awakens 'to discover his badly knotted skiff|had disappeared downstream'. Here, the scholar's lost 'skiff' is a playful metaphor and pun on the aforementioned 'tenuous [mooring]' between 'sign' and 'thing', easily untethered, quickly lost to the relentless flow of water, which – in *Loop of Jade* – stands for that which simultaneously divides and connects cultures, peoples and places. Also, while the poem begins with what might appear to be a stereotypical Chinese scholar from ancient China, I wish to note that the scholar's contemplation of (Hass') dragonflies could hint at the possibility of a mixed-raced scholar, somewhat akin to Howe.

To return to Steiner's various modes of literary 'difficulty', the poem '(g) *Stray dogs*' presents another instance of 'contingent difficulty', since not many readers are

necessarily familiar with or well-versed in Pound's *Cantos*. Pound's autobiographical background presents itself as a kind of 'modal difficulty' which the reader must also contend with; how, for example, is one to approach a poem which, in some ways, elicits sympathy for a distinguished poet-cum-Fascist sympathiser? Once again, Howe relies on the reader to ensure 'that one's homework is done',⁷⁹ dropping us *in medias res*: 'To think again of Pound, bared to the sky at Pisa. | The traitor's cage they built for him specially. 6 × 6 ft | of airstrip mesh & dust'.⁸⁰ Historically, Pound suffered from a mental breakdown whilst housed in a 6 × 6 foot outdoor steel cage, in which he was kept for weeks by the US military on charges of treason. The form of Howe's poem resembles this cage – a block of dense, rectangular prose poetry in which language itself becomes highly compressed in a situation mimetic of Pound's predicament: words such as 'regulations' become 'reg'lations', while the conjunction 'and' is replaced throughout by ampersands. Both historically and within the realm of the poem, Pound's only salvation is

his dog-eared
 Confucius: he'd slipped it in his slacks' side pocket
 that day at the house, a rifle butt pounding the door.
 As he flicks through the *Analects*, his hand starts to
 tremble.⁸¹

This poem is particularly complex because it takes poetic and political risks by 'ventriloquizing Pound, who was ventriloquizing Li Po'.⁸² Writing in the *New Yorker*, Louis Menand notes the dangers of having a parody lost on its intended audience: 'Not everyone gets the joke: if you don't already know about the peach, you won't laugh at the prune'.⁸³ In this poem, Howe's speaker parodies Pound's relationship to Confucius: Pound's recollection of 'Kung' (Confucius) standing at the city gate and being mocked by strangers is akin to the speaker conjuring Pound up in her mind's eye and wondering at his predicament, seemingly out of nowhere: 'To think again of Pound, bared to the sky at Pisa'. The action is multi-layered, such that the reader stands firmly outside the text, looking in on the speaker who is in turn looking into her mind's eye at an imagined Pound who is conjuring up Confucius in his mind's eye. This tunnelling effect has the potential to alienate a less patient reader; however,

this 'ontological difficulty' presented by a non-linear narrative which spans multiple cultures and centuries reflects yet again Howe's claim to a complex poetic lineage. Toward the end of the poem, the image of a pitiful Pound reading Confucius whilst '[squatting] at his crate-cum-desk' given to him by a black man and writing the words: '*Pull down thy vanity*' (Canto LXXXI) is disconcerting to the reader, who is invited to view Pound as an anti-Semitic yet tragi-comic figure.⁸⁴ Once again, Howe is careful to situate Pound within a specific historical context, suggesting perhaps that the *Cantos* (for all its faults and limitations) ought to be read in a contextualized manner when one assesses its impact and legacy on Anglo-American verse.

The metaphor of Pound as a 'beaten dog' resurfaces towards the end of the poem, a slur which Kung Fu-tzu (Confucius) receives (in the speaker's version of Pound's mind) with serenity: 'Look at this man here, he has a face like a lost dog!' While Pound's imagined Confucius does not object to such racist speech, the reader is left to wonder whether Confucius' virtuosity inspired Pound to reflect upon his fascist ways ('No longer blithely ranting on Rothschilds as in his radio days')? Here, the speaker offers no additional social commentary; she merely stands outside the historical drama and allows Confucius to have the last word (yes, that's quite correct'). In contrast to the conventional lyric which tends towards epiphany, Howe's prose poem effectively draws the polyphonic voices of Pound and Confucius together across time and space through her use of allusion, juxtaposition and collage, which in turn allows for what Capildeo terms 'a poetics of reverberation and minor noise'.⁸⁸

'Those tender quills wrote of their mystery'

Howe's skilful uses of various modes of intertextuality throughout *Loop of Jade* allow her speakers to effectively interrogate complex subjects such as language, culture and identity in a manner which does not settle for the false compromises of 'authenticity' or 'readability'. Instead, Howe's speakers resist being typecast as the effeminate or suffering Other by embodying a decidedly complex subjectivity at every turn. In the hands of a lesser poet, many of the poetic and political risks which Howe's poems attempt might have come across as forced or clichéd; in *Loop of Jade*, the reader is offered a 'difficult' yet necessary depiction of what it means to be British-Chinese in the aftermath of Empire.

Through close reading a few key poems from Howe's central Borges sequence, I have demonstrated Howe's ability to juxtapose unlikely subjects and images in order to complicate existing cultural representations of non-Western identities and cultures within contemporary British poetry. Howe's lyricism needs no defence (the poems 'Loop of Jade', 'Crossing from Guangdong' and 'Islands' have all received much deserved critical praise); as such, I have sought instead to use this article to highlight Howe's more linguistically innovative approaches through her use of allusion, collage, understatement, parataxis and parody. Criticisms of 'the lyric' made by avant-garde poets remain largely inattentive to the complications faced by marginalised poets (in terms of race, gender, sexuality, class and disability), many of whom face the harsh reality of not being seen as part of the 'all' of citizenry which White gestures at, let alone being 'understood by "all"' within the field of English literature, which has historically been rife with unspoken exclusions. What is equally undesirable, however, is the current phenomenon of literary critics privileging 'a mainstream lyric mode that normalizes difference by fetishizing and orientalisating BAME poets for a "universal reader"'⁸⁶ who is often presumed to be white. This latter problem is precisely what I sought to highlight at the beginning of this article: how literary review culture in the UK continues to perpetuate problematic expectations that the BAME poet either portray herself as 'authentically' traumatized as the suffering Other, or else come across as the perfectly assimilated migrant who is defiant yet empowered.

It is clear that Howe's work does not fall entirely into the avant-garde, nor does it read strictly as a collection of lyric poems. Rather, *Loop of Jade* bears testament to the fact that to construct a complex subjectivity as a BAME poet can and should be construed as a radical and innovative act, particularly if we consider how Howe remains the first British-Chinese poet to attain a level of literary success unprecedented across both mainstream and avant-garde poetic camps in the UK. In terms of Howe's renderings of identity, culture and place throughout *Loop of Jade*, I concur with Capildeo, who states in an interview with Parmar that 'I admire Sarah Howe [...] for being able to mention things that of course are there, mixed into home. [She] reclaim[s] "exotica" as the quotidian'.⁸⁷ Ultimately, I contend that the complex reception surrounding Howe's work after *Loop of Jade* won the 2015 T.S. Eliot Prize reflects the (white, male) critic's persistence in '[reading such] work through a hermeneutic

of authenticity [...] [thereby performing] a *de facto* reification of the categories [of] "ethnicity", "identity" and "experience", which ought to be resisted by poets and critics alike. Rather than providing the reader with 'ready legibility [...] and the presumption to linguistic transparency',⁸⁸ *Loop of Jade* charts new territory within British contemporary poetry by enacting a rejection of what Carrie Noland and Barrett Watten call 'a single cultural logic'⁸⁹ within the poetic avant-garde. As Noland and Watten argue: 'in an emerging global culture, it is obvious that a radical innovative poetics must significantly reflect on its cultural location and address rather than rely solely on what Charles Olson termed "radical formal means"'.⁹⁰ I also concur with Lisa Lowe, who rightly contends that 'how ethnicity is imagined, practiced, [and] continued is worked out as much between ourselves and our communities as it is transmitted from one generation to another'.⁹¹ In *Loop of Jade*, Howe's skilful deployment of various Steinerian forms of literary 'difficulty' allow her to successfully convey the historically contingent, imaginative and fluid nature of her cultural identities and concomitant poetics.

Notes

- ¹ Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 5.
- ² The phrase in the article's title – 'Journeying is Hard' – is taken from Sarah Howe, *Loop of Jade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p. 59.
- ³ Royal Society of Literature, '40 Under 40', *RSL Fellows* (August 2017) <<https://rsliterature.org/fellows/40-under-40/>> [accessed 24 August 2018].
- ⁴ Katy Evans-Bush, 'TS Eliot Prize Row: Is Winner Too Young, Beautiful – and Chinese?', *Guardian* (January 2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/23/deranged-poetess-sarah-howe-ts-eliot-prize-media/>> [accessed 12 February 2018].
- ⁵ Dorothy Wang, *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 31.
- ⁶ Sarala Estruch, 'Training Our Noticing', *Poetry News*, Spring (2019), 1–16 (pp. 9).
- ⁷ Kate Kellaway, 'The Best Poetry Books of 2015', *Guardian* (December 2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/08/best-poetry-books-2015-clive-james-claudia-rankine/>> [accessed 15 February 2018] Writing in the *Boston Review* on the 2015 T.S. Eliot Prize shortlist, poet and critic Dai George observes that "'New writer's voyage into Chinese family history" has proved too alluring a spin for some critics, inviting the sort of pat generalization that Howe's exquisite, accurate poetry explodes'.
- ⁸ Ben Wilkinson, '*Loop of Jade* by Sarah Howe Review – the Winner of the TS Eliot Prize', *Guardian* (January 2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/12/loop-of-jade-sarah-howe-poetry-winner-ts-eliot-prize/>> [accessed 20 February 2018].
- ⁹ Kayo Chingonyi, 'Worrying the [Blood]line of British Poetry: Notes on Inheritance and Alterity', *Swimmers*, 1 (2016), 1–11 (pp. 5).
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.

- ¹² Pnina Werbner, 'The Limits of Cultural Hybridity: On Ritual Monsters, Poetic Licence and Contested Postcolonial Purifications', in *Postcolonial Studies: An Anthology*, ed. by Pramod K. Nayar (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 438–56 (p. 438).
- ¹³ Sarah Howe, 'The Sound of Her Voice: Sarah Howe Interviewed by Lily Blacksell', *Boston Review* (July 2016) <<http://bostonreview.net/poetry/sarah-howe-interviewed-lily-blacksell/>> [accessed 30 February 2018].
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Oliver Thring, 'Born in the Rubbish Tip, the Greatest Poetry of Today', *Sunday Times* (January 2016) <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/born-in-the-rubbish-tip-the-greatest-poetry-of-today-xx6mqg3rlvf/>> [accessed 25 February 2018].
- ¹⁶ Richard Adams, 'British universities employ no black academics in top roles, figures show', *Guardian* (January 2017) <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/jan/19/british-universities-employ-no-black-academics-in-top-roles-figures-show/>> [accessed 12 March 2018].
- ¹⁷ Ben Wilkinson, 'Kumukanda by Kayo Chingonyi Review – Unflinching Reflections', *Guardian* (January 2016) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/12/loop-of-jade-sarah-howe-poetry-winner-ts-eliot-prize/>> [accessed 20 February 2018].
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ George Steiner, 'On Difficulty', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36 (1978), 263–76 (pp. 276).
- ²¹ Ibid., pp. 264.
- ²² Ibid., pp. 269.
- ²³ Ibid., pp. 270.
- ²⁴ Ibid., pp. 274.
- ²⁵ Dorothy Wang, *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 167.
- ²⁶ Ibid., pp. 170.
- ²⁷ Ibid., pp. 177.
- ²⁸ Sarah Howe, 'Forward Arts Foundation in Conversation with Sarah Howe', *Forward Prizes for Poetry* (June 2015) <<http://www.forwardartsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Sarah-Howe-Forward-Prizes-Interview.pdf/>> [accessed 12 June 2018].
- ²⁹ Steven G. Yao, *Foreign Accents: Chinese American Verse from Exclusion to Postethnicity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 39.
- ³⁰ Ibid., pp. 40.
- ³¹ Wang, *Thinking Its Presence*, p. 166.
- ³² Parmar, 'Not a British Subject', *LA Review of Books*.
- ³³ Janani Ambikapathy and others, 'Race and Poetics and Poetry in the UK: Legacies of Colonialism', *RAPAPUK* (July 2018) <<http://www.rapapuk.com/october-2018.html/>> [accessed 15 July 2018].
- ³⁴ Gillian White, *Lyric Shame: The 'Lyric' Subject of Contemporary American Poetry* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 268.
- ³⁵ Sandeep Parmar, 'Lyric Violence, the Nomadic Subject and the Fourth Space', in *Threads*, ed. by Sandeep Parmar, Nisha Ramayya and Bhanu Kapil (London: Clinic Publishing, 2018), pp. 7–27 (p. 11).
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Stephen Mooney, 'Innovative Women's Poetry in the United Kingdom', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 26 (2015), 237–253 (pp. 237).
- ³⁸ Linda A. Kinnahan, 'Experimental Poetics and the Lyric in British Women's Poetry: Geraldine Monk, Wendy Mulford, and Denise Riley', *Contemporary Literature*, 37 (1996), 620–70 (pp. 620).

- ³⁹ Robert Hampson, 'Introduction', in *Clasp: Late Modernist Poetry in London in the 1970s*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2016), pp. 7–14 (p. 7).
- ⁴⁰ Robert Hampson, 'King's College and the PCL Poetry Conferences', in *Clasp: Late Modernist Poetry in London in the 1970s*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Ken Edwards (Bristol: Shearsman Books, 2016), pp. 70–74 (p. 73).
- ⁴¹ Lauri Ramey, 'Diaspora and the Avant-Garde in Contemporary Black British Poetry', in *Diasporic Avant-gardes: Experimental Poetics and Cultural Displacement*, ed. by Carrie Noland and Barrett Watten (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 189–206 (p. 191).
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 192.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁵ Fred D'Aguiar, 'Have You Been Here Long?: Black Poetry in Britain', in *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 51–71 (p. 70).
- ⁴⁶ Kinnahan, p. 629.
- ⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. xvi.
- ⁴⁸ Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970).
- ⁴⁹ I also wish to take issue here with Wilkinson's notion of a 'quintessentially English life', since this seems to suggest a very narrow sense of 'Englishness' (i.e. that of the white British person who drinks 'normal tea' and consumes marmite) to the exclusion of other ethnicities, religions and cultures which make up the multicultural fabric of contemporary British society.
- ⁵⁰ Wilkinson, 'Loop of Jade by Sarah Howe Review', *Guardian*.
- ⁵¹ Sarah Howe, 'Sarah Howe interviewed by Patricia McCarthy', *Agenda* (November 2016) <<http://www.agendapoetry.co.uk/documents/NGPissueNotesforBroadsheetPoets.pdf>> [accessed 28 September 2017].
- ⁵² Wang, p. 117–118.
- ⁵³ Ian F. Haney Lopez, 'The Social Construction of Race', in *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Second Edition), ed. by Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 964–74 (p. 968).
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 969.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ Anthony Anaxagorou, 'After the Formalities', *Poetry Review*, Spring (2018), 69–73 (pp. 69).
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 73.
- ⁵⁹ Sarah Howe, *Loop of Jade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p. 46.
- ⁶⁰ Derek Walcott, 'The Schooner Flight', *Poetry Foundation* <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/48316/the-schooner-flight>> [accessed 21 May 2018].
- ⁶¹ Howe, 'Sarah Howe interviewed by Patricia McCarthy', *Agenda*.
- ⁶² Rob DeSalle and Ian Tattersall, *Troublesome Science: The Misuse of Genetics and Genomics in Understanding Race (Race, Inequality, and Health)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).
- ⁶³ Francis Elliott and Matt Chorley, 'Embattled Theresa May delays "explosive" report on race', *The Times* (July 2017) <<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/embattled-theresa-may-delays-explosive-report-on-race-xptk60rl7/>> [accessed 28 September 2017].
- ⁶⁴ Howe, 'Sarah Howe interviewed by Patricia McCarthy', *Agenda*.
- ⁶⁵ Sarah Howe, *Loop of Jade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p. 22.
- ⁶⁶ Barbara Pollack, 'Controversial Xu Bing Work Enters the Guggenheim Museum's Collection', *New York Times* (March 2018) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/13/arts/design/xu-bing-guggenheim-museum-collection.html>> [accessed 10 July 2018].

- ⁶⁷ Lyn Hejinian, 'The Rejection of Closure', *Poetry Foundation* (October 2009) <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/69401/the-rejection-of-closure/>> [accessed 8 June 2018].
- ⁶⁸ The 2015 T.S. Eliot Prize Chair of Judges Pascale Petit notes in her comments that 'Sarah Howe's *Loop of Jade* shone with its startling exploration of gender and injustice through place and identity, its erudition, and powerful imagery as well as her daring experiment with form'.
- ⁶⁹ Robert Hampson, 'Producing the Unknown: Language and Ideology in Contemporary Poetry', in *New British Poetries: The Scope of the Possible*, ed. by Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993), pp. 134–55 (p. 135).
- ⁷⁰ Yao, p. 39.
- ⁷¹ Yao, p. 42.
- ⁷² Yao, p. 51.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 49.
- ⁷⁴ Sarah Howe, *Loop of Jade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p. 39–41.
- ⁷⁵ Lisa Lau, 'Re-Orientalism: The Perpetration and Development of Orientalism by Orientals', in *Post-colonial Studies: An Anthology*, ed. by Pramod K. Nayar (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), pp. 110–24 (p. 110).
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁷ Ezra Pound, *Cathay* (New York: New Directions, 2016), p. 18.
- ⁷⁸ Robert Hass is a favourite poet of Howe's whose presence can be subtly detected throughout *Loop of Jade*. See Arenike Adebajo, 'Sarah Howe: dream libraries, revolution and literary influences', *The Cambridge Student* (May 2016) <<https://www.tcs.cam.ac.uk/sarah-howe-dream-libraries-revolution-and-literary-influences/>> [accessed 20 January 2020].
- ⁷⁹ Steiner, p. 265.
- ⁸⁰ Howe, *Loop of Jade*, p. 29.
- ⁸¹ Sarah Howe, *Loop of Jade* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2015), p. 29.
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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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