

SWEET, GOOD EMPERORS

Read from page

I have the honour of making this address today and
I have been asked to begin by stating that I did not
choose these words, or compose this text.

Pause – prepare yourself by skimming ahead in the text.

Eye contact with the audience before beginning again.

Read from the page

A writer's genius, it says, is as much evident in what
they select as in what they originate.

Look up, learned text in a lighter tone

The author read somewhere of a scarcely imaginable
scheme, in which the word of a professor is
disseminated to their students by way of a rolled-up
theorem. This is then swallowed, and the ball of
digested information is driven by the student's own
pulse around their body, absorbing and expanding
until it encircles them entirely.

Pause,

EMMA WILSON



read again from the page

The sweets were made for this address. A sticky one could resist, taking shape too exactly and fixing to my teeth. A sharp one, on the other hand, might scratch, leaving a serious blemish on the side of my mouth. One can't ever be sure, with the unconscious bringing unwelcome and unvoiced associations to light. The basic parts of this author's 'sweet-word' are tempered to a state of hard crack.

Pick up your sweet, hold up your sweet. Learned text,
looking across the audience sternly

Something originally set will begin to comply, after a
bit of warm and gentle bodily coaxing.

Unwrap the sweet now. Put the sweet in your mouth.

Unwrap your sweet. Put your sweet in your mouth, rolling
it around, giving time for the audience to do the same. Don't
wait if they don't follow the instruction. Throughout the
address, continue to move your sweet around your mouth

It is invariable that my tongue – already twisting
expectantly – will begin to roll and test the ball
for imperfections.





Close to the microphone: test the ball with your tongue,
rolling it back and forth

In doing so, I take the shape of another's word,
which loses its textural fringes. It becomes smoother
edged and glossier than it was when it belonged to
someone else.

The word unfolds, round in sweetness, transforming
my mouth. A shift — signalled by a vocabulary that
doesn't belong, the formal sign of an alien sensation.

Tasting the sweet, move it into the centre of your mouth
then back to the side before speaking. Softly

This one is a triumph.

Pause, more forcefully

Once it has depressed my tongue, it is my triumph.
I taste the contours of success, and I give the impression
of strength and virtue.



Stand up straight

The quote-to-be spreads. It reaches my two cheeks, and collects in two balls of sweetness on either side. Two sweet cheeks: one of pride and one of purity, one expanding and the other contracting.

Move the sweet across your mouth

The symmetry of my mouth is imbalanced by these two balls; by the asymmetry of speech and the organs of speech.

Gesture to your left cheek. Move the sweet to the left side

On the left, the larger ball tempts the attention with its growing periphery. The outer edge reaches one ear. It blankets the way with a sticky, slippery, protective gloss, opening soft pipes with a flowery tale.

Gesture to your right cheek. Move the sweet to the right side

On the other side, the shrinking ball yields to the pull of its core. It gathers, advancing and collecting to a hardened marble point. With percussive certainty, this ill-coloured ball pierces the other ear, its small drum unfit to halt further exploration.

Long pause, place your hands on the podium

All of this happens before I speak, before the word-imbued saliva seeps from my cheeks, lubricates my jaw, and flips down my chin –

Gaining momentum

And I quote, uttered on an exhale which corrodes my lungs, and decays my teeth . . . carving out new canals of piety, and duty, and martial accomplishments. Wrapped in the purple of another's word, I stress my legitimacy to you.

Making regular eye contact with the audience

Every pore exudes strength and virtue, which move across the room with the audible activity of the word and its accompanying – O.



Roll the sweet back and forth in your mouth. Long pause, beginning again at a slow pace in a lower voice

The **duplication of an original could wear it out**, turning it from **local observation . . . to doxa . . . to tired ghost . . .** but revival is given in the **duplicitous** form of me, as **the new speaker**. A refreshment, a friend of the original . . . a victorious new face lifted from the same material. **This recutting should not be redolent of a decline in ability or form, but a sophisticated message of continuity and stability.**

The **proposition and demonstration are borne** by the **tinctured** sweet through the ear and down the throat. The information is **mounted to the brain** and the second brain. Momentarily, **the word acts on us**. **The outer events run in parallel with these inner ones, and there is no basis for internal versus external.**

Pause

What **struggle to escape**. One closes one's eyes and **implodes . . .** demonstrating just how **messy, how indiscernible**, and how **truly non-dualistic** this act may be.

Leave the script and your sweet wrapper and exit the space



La masse invisible
Amy Maga

A worldwide problem was publicly revealed by Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of New York, whose farewell speech brought politics and the art world together to face a scandal that would make anyone pale. In *False Impressions, The Hunt for Big-Time Art Fakes*¹ he stated that 40% of the works in his museum's basements and vaults were forgeries. The economic nervous system between public money and pieces from collections not identified as authentic condemns many of the works to remain in the reserves of various museums and national institutions. It can be identified as one of the most widespread forms of political behavior: whether it happens in Elne, New York, or Paris, public money used to buy badly appraised fakes constitutes tax fraud, and no one can say who is responsible. By keeping these works secret and often locked away in vaults, whether they come from the eighteenth or the twenty-first century, we avoid scandal in the press and the public as well as the responsibility to report to historians and curators. Certainly, in an opaque community of big banditry, it gives rise to a hypothesis that copying and its history should perhaps be treated as an intangible heritage.

This question remains unresolved, and unfortunately, we condemn our history of art to a state of dissociation from the history of copying and its techniques, whereas we could choose to investigate, expose, and write about it. As is the case with Emma Wilson's work, which can be compared to that of a 3.0 archivist at the Musée du Louvre. Trained and sharp-eyed, she creates poetic documents from hundreds of sources, out of which sculptures emerge that are made to talk in performances and animated video works. Scanner in hand and flashlight shining upon old manuals and pdf commentaries, she goes beyond textual re-appropriation to create new discourses by collecting fragments of



language from different sources and merging them in a new format.

"I'm not sure I ever described to you what I'm doing, so here's a quick explanation to make sure it's real. I start with intuitive note taking, just reading around generally, then when an idea develops more, I search for more specific examples to support it, or go back to texts I have previously read. Everything is copied or typed up into a digital document so I can review it, looking for things that might fit together in this new context, and editing it again and again."²

To fabricate a text with the texts of other authors, without naming sources, would be tantamount to saying that the work was that of a copyist and not a forger. What makes Wilson different from a classic copyist, or a simple forger, if the sources themselves are not quoted, and is it necessary to do so if the final message is to be quite different?

We could think of it as a closeness that Wilson is reaching through her collages of texts in a process comparable to the technique that Frederick Jameson used to re-map Taipei. By collecting and reordering articles, film footage, maps, and photography from Taipei gathered through archival research and subjective choice, Jameson assumes the role of an investigator. Using material that spans approximately twenty years, he visits and analyzes the architectural and political situation of a place by merging his experiences with multiple sources. These are treated as symptoms which, when read together, can give insight into the body's state. Indeed, the philosopher dedicated a long period of his career to thinking about how we could create our own maps without the use of contemporary technological tools in order to become politically free to engage in a world system.³ His approach is a timeless investigative tool that produces the opposite re-mapping result to the empty sketch of a drone, for example, that scans the surface of Taipei.

We could see Wilson's work as a form of language remapping, when she writes in

her work *Sweet* (2020): "The duplication of an original could wear it out, turning it from local observation [to . . .] a victorious new face lifted from the same material. This recutting should not be redolent of a decline in ability or form, but a sophisticated message of continuity and stability."

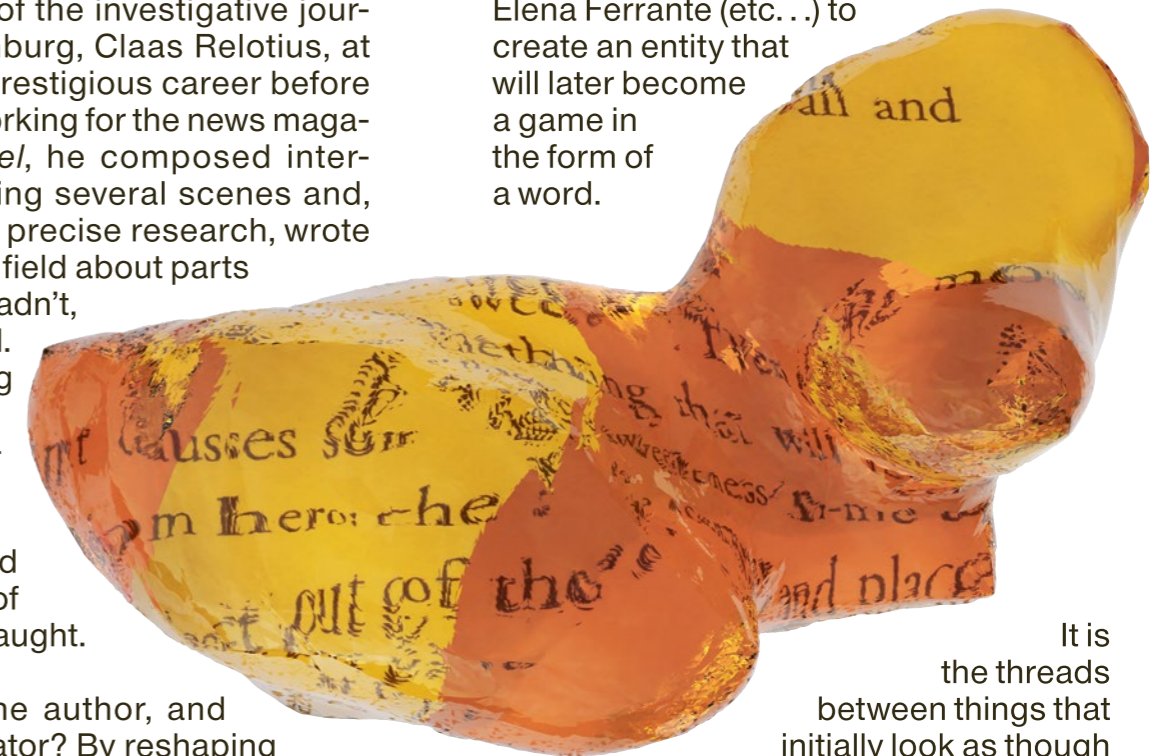
Here, we might also think of Liz Magic Lazer's process in *Stand Behind Me* (2014), in which she collaged gestures from speeches by US presidential candidates and reconfigured their performance: when editing the content, instead of changing the words, she made a collage of the gestures.

We could think of the investigative journalist from Hamburg, Claas Relotius, at the height of a prestigious career before he turned 30. Working for the news magazine *Der Spiegel*, he composed interviews by adjusting several scenes and, based on highly precise research, wrote reports from the field about parts of the world he hadn't, in fact, yet visited. It was by invoking his right to keep his sources confidential that Relotius's "creative writing" could continue—until, of course, he got caught.

Who, then, is the author, and who's the translator? By reshaping the essence, shall the artist wash him- or herself of the parentage of the creation? We could easily brand Wilson's work as re-appropriation—a de facto response to the question of authorship. A situation of "don't ask, don't tell," which can remain the status quo as long as no one complains. But the legal question mark persists and authorship is still unresolved.

Agent Cooper, the instinct behind David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* TV series of the '90s, taught us that fragments of information can be taken and arranged as in a dream to form tangible evidence. Throughout the show, the Log Lady presents clues the origins of which she attributes to the log she

carries with her, simply stating: "my log has something to tell you." Through the Log Lady, each episode opens with a speech that weaves together the previous episode's events and poetic foretellings. We can wonder if the Log Lady, who always makes sense at the end, should instead be the leading character of the entire TV show, facing the camera in a one-minute shot and asking the existential questions: but does the "real" mean the "original"? Does the paranoia that information might have been used differently mean that it has been copied? Is the result equivalent to the surrealist concept of the exquisite corpse? Scanning the head of Roland Barthes, the shoulders of Elena Ferrante (etc. . .) to create an entity that will later become a game in the form of a word.



It is the threads between things that initially look as though they had nothing to do with one another, but actually have everything in common: this is pattern recognition, used to discover something new in existing material. The solutions vary widely but the drive remains the same—the desire to find adequate allegories for our social existence. This is what Emma Wilson is doing in her work of text assemblage, language recognition, and translation.

FBI agent Dale Cooper has somehow adopted the creative vision of Frederick Jameson in order to solve his case, but the following question still remains regarding Emma Wilson's work: what do you call a source that quotes an unnamed source?

Images

Sweet, 2020/2022. Lecture performance (ca. 12 min) in “Arbeitsstipendium für bildende Kunst der freien und Hansestadt Hamburg 2020/2021,” Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg 2022. On entering, the audience receives a round, homemade sweet wrapped in cellophane with the instruction, “you will be told when to unwrap it and when to eat it.”

good emperors, 2022. Sugar sculpture, 18 × 20 × 11 cm, installation view in “Arbeitsstipendium für bildende Kunst der freien und Hansestadt Hamburg 2020/2021,” Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg 2022. Sugar cast of digital recarving of the Colossus of Constantine into Emma Wilson.

Sugar drips, 2023. Rendered images.

Footnotes

- 1 Touchstone Edition, New York, 1997.
- 2 Emma Wilson in conversation with Amy Maga (May 21, 2023), edited by Amy Maga.
- 3 Developed in particular within *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space*.

Colophon

Emma Wilson: Sweet, good emperors

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