

Texts from the CD-ROM *mouthplace*

(Gilson-Ellis & Povall [Hanover, NH: Frog Peak Music. 1997])
all texts by Jools Gilson-Ellis

note: There are eight sections in *mouthplace*, navigable from sewing stitch icons on the opening page. Sections are not titled or numbered within the CD-ROM. This written version of the texts, uses titles and numbers for each section as follows; 1. Saliva; 2. Needle; 3. Speech; 4. Sex; 5. Mother; 6. Mad; 7. Food; 8. Singing.

1. SALIVA

This is the place

This is the place on your face that I sail from. This is the place I tumble from, dive and sing from. This is the place. This mouthplace. I throw-up cackles, like armfuls of crows, and then the slap and calm of mouth flesh. Spittle runs inside my gobbish sentence. I trail damp words. And this is the place on my face that I sail from.

Are you reading me?

Are you reading me?

Is it my mouth that you think of?

Do you read me?

Semi-colons;

Afterwards,

I lean forward

and cough up

ink,

and spit,

and semi-colons;

Spit poem

Who spat at me?

There will be no spitting.

Remember this.

He spat at me.

She spits.

Spitshot

Nasty stuff gob. Don't put it on your contact lenses. I know you do. Disgusting. If you've got phlegm, you can only cough it up in private, otherwise you've got to swallow it. It's salty and tastes like snot, because it is. I know you know this. You must never never spit at anyone. It is unspeakable. If you spit in someone's face it is even more unspeakable. The liquid you make in your mouth must properly stay there. Don't get gobbish on me. Otherwise there may be dribbling. Dribbling on the keyboard is dangerous for the electronics. It is important not to spit at the keyboard. Spitting is also dangerous for the electronics. It is also unspeakable. If you spit on someone else's keyboard, it is even more unspeakable.

Did you spit?

I turned to look at you, and you turned away, spat in the gutter, glanced once again at me, and smiled. Once you'd left I scooped up the saliva and found trails of sentences mingled together. I laid them out end to end, and they said: "I didn't know how to say this, but I am full of singing. I like walking in the city. Clubs and films. I have nothing to say to you, but my moods are articulate."

Hand

I take my saliva in my hand and touch you. I have done this for years and I am well-practised at keeping the liquid in my hands, before finding you. I like the wetness. I take my hand to my mouth again. My breath is steady and deep, and I guide you here. Words trickle between my fingers, and leave ink stains.

Expert

You trail saliva towards me, in glistening lines. I long for this, you fool. Clear directions; something that points. Seen here, your precise lines draw me like Gretel after sugar. Quieten down now, you mouthed me after you, and I'm coming, despite the wet. Let me haul you in to this great mouth of yours. O I like it here. Your wet mouth strings lined with bubbles, spun like spiders. Expert.

gob. *v. Slang.* To spit. To fling saliva forcefully from the mouth. To spit. (Middle English *gobbe*, lump, mass, from Old French *gobe*, mouthful, lump from *gober*, to swallow, gulp).

gob. *n. Slang.* The mouth. (Scottish and Irish Gaelic *gob*, beak, mouth).

spit *n.* **1.** Saliva, especially when expectorated; spittle. **2.** The act of spitting. **3.** A brief scattered fall of rain or snow. *v.* **spat** or **spit, spitting, spits.** **1.** To eject from the mouth. **2.**

To utter in a violent manner. **3.** To express contempt or animosity by or as if by spitting. **4.** To make a hissing or a spluttering noise. **5.** To rain or snow in light scattered drops or flakes.

spit *n.* **1.** a slender, pointed rod on which meat is impaled for broiling. **2.** A narrow point of land extending into a body of water. *v.* **spitted, spitting, spits.** To impale on or as if on a spit.

spit infinitive. *grammar.* An infinitive verb form with saliva interposed between *to* and the verb form. *usage.* The spit infinitive is not a grammatical error, and it has ample precedent in literature. But it is still avoided where possible by many writers and editors.

2.NEEDLE

Needling.

Needling. I lick the thread, and guide it through. I am steady, calm, vicious. Here it goes. I should diffuse bombs, brave detailed interrogation. This needle, deep-sung silver, red and dreadful thread, licked into shape. I kiss this point backwards into line.

I wound, dig and pull.

Squeeze my spittle.

And sew on.

Their threads trail like precise spittle.

Witch

They look for the witches with needles. They come with their wrath and their certainty, and prick us, all over our bodies. We jump at first, and give them shots of our blue eyes. But then we tire, and they find some small place on our backs where we don't feel their tentative, slow-plunging stabs. And we are done for. Needles have proved us witches, and when they slap us smartly across the face in announcement, we vomit needles at their feet, glance up at their fear and spit the last ones into their best eyes.

What happened here?

What happened here?

Who sewed this?

Did you stitch me up?

These are games of needlework. Unlikely, and calculated.

In war, the women would embroider the faces of their captors slowly closed. Though they selected colours that befit the time of year, and spent time on their designs, their silk would clot into a sewn frieze of black red. These bodies were sent back across the border, strapped to floating biers.

If you look inside the mouth of a man, whose face has been embroidered, you will find his tears collected in clear lozenges, hidden beneath his tongue.

Embroider: To embellish with fictitious details and exaggerations.

I did this,
in this place,
I did this.

Feminine Words

I need oil	knead	
I need	need	These are feminine words.
I needle	needle	

Shin

I warned you of this, she said, and we peered at the tiny bulb of blood at one end of the bump. And she will tell you later, and over the years, that she had to hold you down because they were short-staffed, whilst they sliced open your shin, and removed the broken-off needle. They took that needle away and used another to sew-up my child-flesh, and then brought another, to plunge into my skinny arse. Pick up needles if you drop them, or they multiply.

Looking Down

When I look down, I can see the women working. I know it is them, because their heads are bowed, but they are not crying. I can see small movements. They all sew by hand, without speaking. Some are seated on kitchen chairs, others half-curved in sofas. Fingers fold hems, and hold pins in their mouths. Others catch runs in tights. Delicate works. There are women working with heavy fabric, they stroke the needles through their hair to lubricate them. Others sew through sandpaper, and then hold burning matches to the tips of their needles. And then it goes dark, and when I look down, I taste burnt fibres, and the slim danger of needles in my mouth.

Deft

Can you do this for me ? I take the red cotton and the needle. I lick the thread to pertness, and guide it through the eye, catch the damp fibres on the other side, pull it through, and give

it back to her. She smiles, and touches my fingers as she takes the needle. Needles should have mouths, not eyes, she says.

Needles have mouths not eyes. Remember this.

needle *v.* **needled, needling, needles.** 1. To prick, pierce or stitch with or as if with a needle. 2. *Informal.* To goad, provoke or tease. 3. *Slang.* To increase the alcoholic content of. 4. To crystallise into fine pointed spicules.

sew. *v.* To thread saliva through metal. **sewed, sewn, sewing, sews.** 1. To make repair, or fasten with a needle and thread. 2. To furnish with stitches for the purpose of closing, fastening or attaching.

sew up. *v. Informal.* To control.

sewer. *n.* One that sews.

3. SPEECH

Knickers

This is my language.

I've got literature down my knickers,
and alot of noise in my mouth.

Answer

I have meaning under control. I can lap it up and spit it out at you. No resonance, nothing left over. No wastage. No rippling. Chewing verbal clauses, I decide: Choo. Choo. Sound and meaning clash and have it out, and come up with the answer every time. I'm an expert.

Rhubarb Poppy

She gives me Rhubarb Poppy, Brilliant Coral and Super Poppy

And then she leaves.

But she leaves me with marks on my lips -
splashes of shock-bright cream
that make me smile
sooner.

Fury

Fury present

I burst.

Tears falling I shout after them,
stumbling words that
can't fit between how much I hurt
and the place where my tongue is.

Fury past

I burst.

Tears falling I shouted after them,
stumbling words that
couldn't fit between how much I hurt
and the place where my tongue was.

This is half-time.

Remember this

Speaking again.

I spit into my fingers,
touch your tongue,
and you speak again.

Split.

Speaking is a splitting I can't speak of.

Smiles

I've got smiles on my lips.

articulate. *v.* 1. To make art with hinges. 2. Art that accommodates abrupt changes in direction. *n.* The shapes of sounds inside the mouth. *adj.* 1. Skill with language and meaning. 2. Lingual dexterity. 3. Precise tongue work.

chatter. *v.* To make quick sense.

gossip. *v.* To negotiate verbal allegiances.

meaning. *v.* To squash precision out of chaos.

So just be careful.
This is not to be taken
internally.

Keyboard

Kiss every key on your keyboard tonight. Take your time, and if your lips can't hack the precision, try a little lick. Linger on Enter, unlock those caps with a rich lick. Tinker with both your controls, so that they lose it. Drop a tab on your fab tab key.

Screen

Lick the screen
between these two bars
to move on.
Spit at the green box to go,
Spit three times
anywhere you like
to come.

Compact

What a compact little disc this is.
silver, circular slither,
spinning hopefully.
Bless it

Little Miss Muffet sat on her friend Susan.

Close Quiet Steady

Your close quiet steady breath turns me rollercoaster-aching.
I am flooded
and fall inwards and outwards at the same time.
You kiss me across a guarded border,
and I kiss you right-on back, and sink to your jeans,
where I dive, popper-busting for your polite folds of ocean.
You are wet and wide for me
and I yearn tonguingly for more of this delicious place
and go get it.
O you taste of aching answered.
I fold over you so you can catch me; thank girls for skirts.
Popperless you find me,

stretch aside my M & S best,
so your eager tongue will find me too.
O we are sailing here.
We rock this mouthplace.
Our mouths are full of certainty today.
This is definitely the place.
We fuck with conviction.
Our clitori bashed with mouthpleasure.
This is definitely the place.

Kissing You

I'm kissing you.
I give you kisses.
I'm kissing you.

laughter. *n.* Noisepleasure in the mouth.

clitorise. *v.* To fill with a desire to lean towards..

clitoris. *n.* A small erectile organ at the upper end of the vulva, expanding into a great web deep into the female hips. From Greek *kleitoris*, "small hill," from *kleinen*, to lean, incline.

5. MOTHER

Boy

And what boy is it that you bring into the light?

She hovers on the brink of birth
like someone stranded.
She strides across fields, talks with her mouth full and giggles like her girls.
We embrace and he lies curled between us,
upside down and stubborn.

Threshold

Runs

She runs
I call after her
But she still runs

If she runs and I call again
She will stop and turn
Giggle and then run again.
Her name in my mouth catches her

Taylor

I hold her crying in one arm, and with the other melt frozen breast-milk under hot water. She roots for me; her not-mother. Distracted I let her nuzzle my nipple. She calms momentarily and tries to get a get a hold of a teat she needs. Her small head moves excitedly from side to side looking for the right connection, and doesn't find it. Only when she cries again, do I look down and see my breast, exposed, and wet with baby saliva.

Laughing

Hey, Elsie,
I wanted to come,
dressed in summer colours,
bright and flashing,
my arms full of perfect globe chrysanthemums,
and my heart smiling.
I wanted to celebrate your life with you today,
as well as grieve.

I wore black, but I've got really flowery knickers on,
and I can hear you laughing.

mothering. *v.* To give sustenance from the body to the mouth of offspring.

mother. *n.* 1. One who feeds. 2. One who mops mouths with saliva. 3. One who cleans teeth. 4. She who fills, maintains and cleans children's mouths.

mom. *n.* 1. She who is there for you. 2. She who is gone from you. 3. She.

mum. *n.* The female origin of all our bodies.

keening. *v.* To grieve with the mouth.

6. MAD

Hummingbirds.

I jumped in with my lips clenched, gasped at the cold, and a swarm of hummingbirds flew out of my mouth.

Bruises

I'm bruised
I've got bruises
They're deep and slow
Like drugged hornets

I'm body-stuck
And hurt in slow motion

Nothing

Writing has nothing to do with my mouth.
Get it out of here.
Get it out of me.

Mad

If I open my mouth, baby stereotypes jump in and behave badly.

This place

This is further than I remembered. Wasn't this the place we stopped before? Isn't this the border? Weren't you unsure in this place before? Weren't you coming to this edge when I arrived? I came here once before, and it was further than I remembered this time. It's quiet here. I like the peace. But you can only say that in hindsight. Did you reach this place another time? Were you asked to come here? Threshold. I am full of uncertainty today. Did you arrive before me? Were you here before the others? I can't see the edge. I can't remember what we decided about this place. I know we once thought that there were many borders. But this is the border we always reach. This is the only place like this. Come with me again. Is this the place we decided on? Is this a fine place? Did you like it here? Were we together? Were you frightened? And did we go close together, or one at a time? Who was first? Do you remember this? Is this a place you remember? We approached calmly. Did you see me walking? Were we close? And cold? This is difficult today. You slept and we came here. To this place. I longed for this. This was the place. We were sure. I was sure. We were sure together. But borders have frightened me before, and it is happening again. Is the place?

Circus Mouth

I write this down for you. You should be careful of this. There are flights inside my mouth. There are dashes for cover, falls, skids, and arching, swinging bodies turning in the mouthair. If I open my lips, there will be chaos once again. There have been easy yawns, which have ended in catastrophe. And I have reached today by keeping the carnival in my mouth, sealed-up and swirling. There is terror and pleasure in this wet place of mine; this cave gated by molars. If I were to floss I would loose a small city of circus workers. Sometimes I feel them shrieking and giggling at each other. They are tyrannical at pleasure. They strive for perfection for no audience.

I'm falling silent

I'm falling silent.

She doesn't speak today.

Words are failing me.

Pretty Mouth

This is not a pretty mouth

This is not a pretty mouth, or a place I know.

Slipping.

When I speak,
pieces of air slip
out of place.

Secrets

You keep secrets
in your mouth.

I see them
folded,
tiny pieces of
white paper
covered in plastic
tied
to your back
teeth.

Bad Mouth

I've got a bad mouth
crammed with badness
and I bad-mouth with it

it sends them through
flung doors
tear-charged and flushed with heat
and I grin
and do it again

Bite

Try not to bite the servants Jenny.

girlness. *adj.* she is hysterical full of girlness she strains and gabbles and we slap her.

globus hystericus. *n.* my womb is reaching into my mouth I am choked up with it it stays there like a clenched fist and makes my eyes smart.

hystericise. *v.* To try and make sense. **hysterical** *adj.* 1. To make no sense, or to make too much sense. 2. Frightening. **hysteria.** *n.* Female madness.

sensible. *adj.* not to be hysterical not to be hysterical as in the word hysterikos the greek for womb suffering not to suffer in their wombs not to care not to bother the men because they want to think of other things and do not want to take the women seriously. (quote from Susan Griffin *I like to Think of Harriet Tubman*).

7. FOOD

sugar honey

sugar, honey, sweetie, treacle,
sugar-candy, pumpkin pie,
sweetheart, sweetie, popcorn-Jeanie,
you're the cookie in my eye,
Wanna eatcha, wanna eatcha,
let me munch your nougat sky,
tutti-frutti, syrup-Sue,
Wind me in, I'm comin thru.

Polite

Close your mouth when you are eating.
And don't speak with your mouth full.

Always be clear about your directions.

If necessary bring a compass to the dinner table and face north.
Speaking travels from inside the body, to the outside. (Northerly)
And food travels from outside the body, to the inside. (Southerly)

If you become confused about directions during dinner,
then make use of your compass, and check your notes.

Some dinner guests are like dentists.
They will ask you questions when your mouth is full.
Try scowling.

In extreme situations, it is possible to reply immediately and heartily to such questions,
making sure that small pieces of food are thrown into the face of the appropriate guest.
If this does not work, a more skilled insult, will emit the projectile food at the moment that the
guest opens her mouth, such that the missiles land in her mouth.

If many guests insist on asking you questions whilst your mouth is full, try using plosive
phonemes such as 'b' 'p' 'k' and 'g' to explode larger pieces of chewed food over a range of
offending guests, as you reply.

This is a place of danger

This is a place of danger. And I bring you here to set you out in safety. You must sit with
others, and together tear things with your teeth. Each of you will sit armed with knives.
Violence is kept at bay by vigilance, and rule-abiding. If your elbows rest on the table, it will
be thought you are readying yourself for attack, and you risk death. You must speak to the
others, but not whilst you use your teeth for grinding. It will frighten them to see such things.
Do not leave before they are all over with their mouth business. This is a game of lasting
cunning, and if you leave, the lot of them will be out of balance, and close to danger.

Half of a quarter

I have a bread roll each day. Sometimes I can manage all of it, but more often it is a half, or a
quarter. Other days it is a half of a quarter.

I'm alot bigger than I look. I'm alot smaller than I look. For looking makes me. I am at sea in
here, and navigation has been a problem for years.

After Orbach

When I deny my hunger, my feelings of helplessness are dulled because I feel in charge. A distressed eater, I am trying to enter and disappear from a culture which derogates and deifies me. I want to speak with my mouth what it is I need to say, rather than relying on what does or doesn't go into my mouth to do it for me. I starve amidst plenty. I strive for invisibility, and wish to be seen. I have been prepared for a life in which I continue to service the needs of others, and teased by the possibility of leading a life of my own. I live with a tension about my place in the world. My body is an object of alienation, fascination and desire to myself, to women and to men. I have been unable to develop an authentic sense of my needs, or a feeling of entitlement for my desires. I have come to depend on the approval of those to whom I give. I have come to know that the food I prepare for others as an act of love and an expression of my caring, is somehow dangerous to me. My psychological symptoms express the ideas this culture has about itself. Eat it up luv.

[adapted from the introduction to Orbach, Susie. *Hunger Strike: The Anorectic's Struggle as a Metaphor of Our Age*. (London: Penguin. 1986)] adapted and used with permission.

Suffragette

"On the third day the two doctors sounded my heart and felt my pulse. The senior told me he had no alternative but to feed me by force. . . Presently I heard footsteps approaching, collecting outside my cell . . . The door opened - not the doctors but a crowd of wardresses filled the doorway. I could not use my missiles on them; poor tools! Yet nervously the hand that lay on the basket clutched a shoe and it fell amongst them as they closed with me. I struggled but was overcome. There were six of them all much bigger and stronger than I. they flung me on my back on the bed, and held me down firmly by shoulders and wrists, hips knees and ankles. then the doctors came stealing in. Someone seized me by the head and thrust a sheet under my chin. My eyes were shut. I set my teeth and tightened my lips over them with all my strength. A man's hands were trying to force open my mouth; my breath was coming so fast that I felt as though I should suffocate. His fingers were striving to pull my lips apart - getting inside. I felt them and a steel instrument pressing around my gums, feeling for gaps in my teeth. I was trying to jerk my head away, trying to wrench it free. Two of them were holding it, two of them dragging at my mouth. I was panting and heaving, my breath quicker and quicker, coming now with a low scream which was growing louder. "Here is a gap," one of them said. "No here is a better one. This long gap here!" A stab of sharp intolerable agony. I wrenched my head free. Again they grasped me. Again the struggle. Again the steel cutting its way in, though I strained my force against it. Then something gradually forced my jaws apart as a screw was turned; the pain was like having the teeth drawn. they were trying to get the tube down my throat, I was struggling madly to stiffen my muscles and close my throat. . They got it down, I suppose, though I was unconscious of anything then save a mad revolt of struggling, for they said at last: "That's all!" and I vomited as the tube came up."

(Sylvia Pankhurst describing force feeding in Holloway prison, 1913.
She was imprisoned for breaking the window of an undertakers.)

Pankhurst, Sylvia. *The Suffragette Movement*. (London: Virago. 1984) used with permission.

Devouring

Give it to me give it to me give it to me give it to me. My full mouth is like gates falling,
boundaries crashing, cattle stampeding. I'm fucking hungry and fucking angry. I rage down
corridors of heaving fridges, slamming doors. Feed me. No communion here sweetheart. On
screen. At your beck. I eat fridges for forgiveness. No satiety here, Susie. Only devouring.
Only devouring. Give it to me give it to me give it to me.

Be very very scared.

You should be very very scared.

I could eat you up.

If you aren't scared,
you're easier to catch.

eating. *v* To have pleasure in the mouth.

anorexia nervosa. *n.* A woman's confusion about how much space she may take up in the world.

bulimia *n.* A woman's difficulty with giving to herself.

dessert. *n.* Female relationship to deserving.

8. SINGING

Singing. *v.* To have joy in the mouth. Is

©Jools Gilson-Ellis 1997