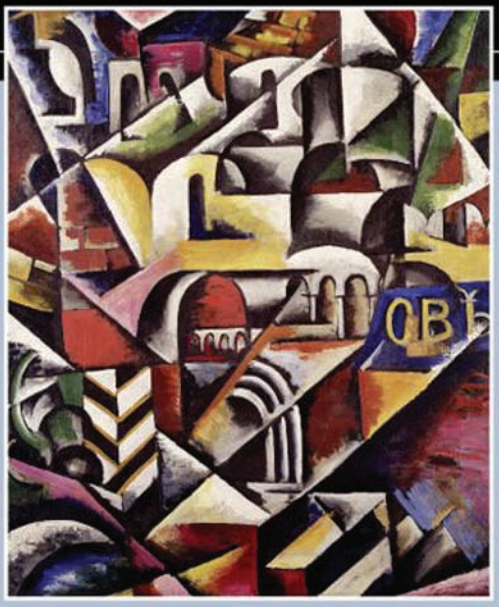
Reading Modernist Poetry



Michael H. Whitworth

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Reading Modernist Poetry

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For Roxanne and George

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Preface and Acknowledgements

Reading Modernist Poetry begins from two convictions: one, that even at its most forbiddingly difficult, and even at in its most pessimistic moments, modernist poetry can be a pleasure to read and to interpret; the other, that modernist poetry's resistance to interpretation is one of its distinctive features. The book aims to introduce readers to interpretative processes relevant to modernist poetry, and to larger questions concerning the nature of poetry in the modern age. It includes close readings of canonical modernist poems, but it does not intend to deliver ready-made interpretations. Of course interpretations are offered along the way, but it is hoped that the reader will return to the textual evidence and feel free to offer contradictory readings.

In its choice of texts, the present book is conservative in its choice of modernist poets: the most frequently quoted are Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, T. E. Hulme, H.D., and William Carlos Williams. Many of the poems may be found in anthologies of modernist work, and where the texts are available in Lawrence Rainey's anthology *Modernism* (2005), the book provides a page reference. However, the book's emphasis on interpretative processes means that the reader should be able to make independent interpretations of less well-known material.

Some means of circumnavigating the challenges of modernist poetry ultimately avoid what is interesting and enjoyable about it. Literary interpreters often use received wisdom about the author's beliefs or stylistic preferences to guide their interpretations; interpretations which contradict the prevailing view are rejected as invalid or improbable; or difficulties are resolved by reference to something outside the text. While the present study occasionally makes reference to a poet's wider oeuvre, its primary focus is on the texts. Another means of circumnavigating difficulties is to reduce poems to their subject matter: to make the poem the vehicle of a "message," or to make it "about" a contemporary issue. Modernist poets

had opinions, it is true, and they were fascinated and sometimes appalled by the modern world. But they were also aware that to reduce poetry to the bearer of moral content was ultimately to make poetry redundant. To encounter a poem with a preconceived idea of what it is "about" is to be equipped with a filter which will remove its complexities, its contradictions, and its music. Accordingly, although chapters 2–4 concern subject matter, the book is not organized by it. The reader must decide for him- or herself what any given poem is about, and must be alive to the poem's resistance to such reduction.

For similar reasons, the book only tentatively places modernist poetry in its social and historical context. It does, however, indicate points where a certain approach to reading will almost inevitably lead to contextualization. To understand a poem is to understand its language. Language changes through time, and words in different speech communities develop their own specialized meanings. An understanding of a poem's language necessarily leads outwards to social and political questions.

The Introduction outlines the significance of modernity to modernist poets, and how it shaped their poetry. The three chapters of Part I approach three kinds of modernist subject matter, and aim to foreground the ways in which these themes were developments of existing literary themes. In expressing ideas about poetry or about the city, a poet was doing so in a language which had been established by earlier authors. Although such poems successfully express or depict, they also open a window on language.

Part II considers smaller details such as rhythm, diction, and allusion, while all but the last chapter of Part III consider larger questions of literary form. While the book encourages the reader to begin with the words on the page, any reader's interpretation of words is shaped by his or her expectations about the larger shape of the poem. It would be possible to read chapters 12–17 before chapters 5–11, and certainly there would be value in returning to Part II in the light of the later chapters. The final chapter concerns the question of value: though academic readers of poetry are not routinely encouraged to express opinions about value, evaluative criteria silently inform everything we do; the chapter suggests ways in which those criteria might be articulated explicitly.

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Note on the References

In-text references to "Rainey" are to *Modernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Rainey (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); references to "Bakhtin" are to Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

1

Introduction

Agency, Modernity, and Modernism

A recurrent image in T. S. Eliot's early poetry can be used as an emblem of the place of poetry in modernity. The titular character of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is stricken by indecision, doubts whether he dare "Disturb the universe," and is concerned what others might say. In contrast to this constrained world, he imagines a different identity and a different sort of space:

> I should have been a pair of ragged claws
> Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
> (Rainey 115)

The sea floor is not compartmentalized by the walls, rooms, streets, and stairs that characterize the poem, and, silent, is apparently unpopulated by those who might constrain the protagonist. But "claws" is revealing, and takes us back to the everyday world of the poem: Prufrock does not say that he should have been a crab, a lobster, or any other crustacean. He imagines himself as a disembodied pair of hands. The image is consistent with his erotic fascination with the women's arms ("downed with light brown hair!"). Looking more widely across Eliot's early poetry, we see that the image echoes others of hands and arms disconnected from their owners: in "Preludes," "the hands / That are raising dingy shades / In a thousand furnished rooms"; in "Rhapsody on a Windy Night," "the hand of a child, automatic" that "slipped out and pocketed a toy"; and in *The Waste Land*, the hand of the typist, she who "smoothes her hair with automatic hand." These hands achieve something, but they seem to do so independently of their owners. In "La Figlia che piange," Eliot rewrites

Laforgue's line "Simple et sans foi comme un bonjour" ("Simple and as faithlessly as a 'good day' ") to read "Simple and faithless as a smile and a shake of the hand." Nor are hands in Eliot always strong: in "Gerontion," the personified figure of History "Gives too soon / Into weak hands," while in "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar," Princess Volupine extends a hand that is "meagre," "blue-nailed," and "phthisic."

Why might the hand, channel for the writer's expression, have become so detached from the mind and the body? Of course the profusion of autonomous hands in Eliot's poetry is partly a consequence of his employing techniques of metonymy, of substituting a part for the whole; but as the hand is the writer's instrument, I would like to suggest that these hands emblematize two important aspects of modern poetry. One is the impersonality of modernist writing: the writer remains detached from his or her creation. As James Joyce's Stephen Dedalus puts it, using another memorable image of hands, "The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."[1] Joyce's artist keeps control of his hands, but we might take Eliot's independent hands as signs of a creative faculty that is detached from the rest of the human subject.

The other aspect is to do with agency: while in some cases the subject appears to have delegated its work to disembodied hands, in others the hands have escaped altogether. The "automatic" and the weak hands are particularly interesting in this regard, and emblematize the idea that the writer, in common with all individuals in the modern world, has suffered a loss of agency. Individuals either fail to achieve anything at all, because they are too weak, or they achieve something unintended, because something comes between the mind and the hand. Eliot's lines in "The Hollow Men" put it more abstractly and more starkly: "Between the conception / And the creation / Between the emotion / And the response / Falls the Shadow." It is curious to note Eliot's initial experience of writing book reviews using a typewriter: "I find that I am sloughing off all my long sentences which I used to dote upon. Short, staccato, like modern French prose. The typewriter makes for lucidity, but I am not sure that it encourages subtlety."[2] Eliot's hands not only have a mind of their own, but in conjunction with the typewriter they have evolved a prose style of their own.

Precisely why the individual should experience a loss of agency in the modern world is difficult to determine, and there are many conflicting

interpretations and differences of emphasis. It is not the purpose of the present chapter to adjudicate between them. In some accounts, the discovery of the unconscious forced the realization that the rational, conscious will is not in full control of the human subject. In others, the shadow that falls between conception and creation is language: the writer's consciousness that language never succeeds in fully expressing his or her inner vision leads to state of inhibition and, ultimately, silence. Language is an impersonal entity which writers inherit, created through generations of human activity. It is a rich inheritance, and yet words have always already been in other people's mouths. In some Marxist-influenced accounts, the inherited corporate life of language is merely one aspect of a world characterized by vast, impersonal social structures which the individual cannot control.[3] In the humanist tradition "man" was the centre of the universe, and individuals believed that they could exercise a degree of control over their worlds; moreover, the significance of the non-human world was always determined in relation to man. In the era of imperialism and corporate capitalism, decisions are made by unidentifiable committees in charge of monopolies; or, in a more extreme case, circumstances change because of apparently non-human processes, such as changes in monetary exchange rates or the collapse of banking systems. In fiction, Joseph Conrad's novels provide some of the earliest portrayals of the dramatic irony that arises from globalized networks of power. Poetry, however, registered the displacement of agency less directly: it could indicate, for example, in the fracturing of syntax and diction, a human subject that was no longer coherent; by producing poems that resisted simple interpretations, it could force the reader to acknowledge that the world was no longer straightforwardly knowable.

The loss of importance of poetry in the modern world, and the consequent loss of agency for the poet, was also widely remarked. When in 1932 F. R. Leavis began *New Bearings in English Poetry* by saying "Poetry matters little to the modern world," the admission was somewhat shocking for a book of literary criticism, but it was not an altogether novel observation. Like the loss of human agency, the marginalization of poetry has attracted many different explanations. In some explanations, the growth of literacy in the late nineteenth century is the cause. Although mass literacy produced many more readers, they had little or no formal education in literature and literary tradition. They were drawn more strongly to forms of writing which could be appreciated in isolation than to those which required a literary background: to non-fictional writing, especially journalism, and to fiction.

An alternative explanation is that poetry became marginalized not because of the growth of printed matter as such, but because of the growth of a culture industry which is centrally controlled. Poetry would be much more acceptable if it could provide an uncomplicated, readily consumable product, but unfortunately for it and for the culture industry, it too often requires its readers to participate in the making of meaning, if only because it requires them to read it out loud, and very often because it requires them to think. It is worth remembering that the typist in *The Waste Land*, having endured loveless love-making, and having smoothed her hair with her "automatic" hand, puts a record on the gramophone. The culture industry is dependent upon the mechanical reproduction of works of art: what would once have been a unique performance of a piece of music becomes, thanks to the music industry, endlessly repeatable. Poetry had long depended upon the mechanical reproduction of the printing press for its dissemination, but the printed page delivers only the words and not their meanings.

A final strand of explanation concerns instrumental rationality. Modernity, according to this argument, values activities only to the extent that they are means to practical, material ends; it has little time for pure speculation, blue skies research, or the subtleties of poetry. Quantitative knowledge is valued more highly than qualitative, because it deals with the practically orientated, measurable aspects of the physical world. Science is valued in so far as it promises technological or medical breakthroughs, but distrusted when it is simply a realm of abstract speculation. Culture, as a realm of unregulated play, is treated unsympathetically by instrumental reason, but the culture industry, as the manufacturer of culture products, has a definite material aim in mind, and is welcomed. From this point of view, the newly literate audiences marginalized poetry because to them language was a means to an end: utterances were valued according to their content, their "message," not their beauty or their ugliness. From the point of view of instrumental rationality, cultural interpretation is welcome in so far as it can reduce a work of art to a definite message, because such a reduction produces something that might serve a practical purpose; the aspects of art that resist such reduction are distrusted.

There are many ways of defining modernism, and in consequence many ways of establishing what is and what is not modernist poetry. Critics in recent years have emphasized the plurality of modernism, and have grouped modernist writers according to family resemblances rather than a rigid checklist of criteria. The plurality of modernism is constrained by

reference to the experimental quality of the writing and to the experimentalism having a significant relation to modernity. It is not enough simply to experiment with grammar, structure, vocabulary, point of view, or any other element of poetry: the experimentation must serve some purpose in enabling the poet to engage with or cope with modernity. It is relatively easy to mimic the superficial appearance of modernist poetry, and many poets have been labelled as modernists on this basis. Conversely, it is possible to engage with modernity, or at least to depict and discuss it, using only traditional poetic techniques: Thomas Hardy's "The Convergence of the Twain" (1912) is an interesting example. In poems of this sort, the reader hears about modernity, but does not experience it in the texture of the verse. Of course the questions of whether a given technique counts as experimental, and of whether it serves a serious purpose are always open to critical debate, so the formulation given above does not provide a mechanical method for deciding who belongs to the canon of modernist poets.

Ideas of Poetry

Modernist poetry sometimes challenges and sometimes flatly rejects received ideas about the aims of poetry and about the means by which it achieves those aims. Sometimes it continues traditional poetic tasks, but does so using such innovative techniques that the continuity is not immediately obvious.

The idea of poetry as *expression* is the most deeply engrained, because of the dominance of the lyric form; "expression" in this case usually means the expression of personal emotion, though in some cases emotion is mingled with the expression of ideas. It is an idea of poetry economically summarized by William Wordsworth's early nineteenth-century definition of poetry as a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." The idea of poetry as *depiction* places the emphasis elsewhere: on "he," "she," or "it" rather than on "I." In practice, lyrical poetry in English has very often moved between depiction and expression. In what has become known as the "empirical lyric," the poet begins with personal observations of the external world before modulating into a more expressive voice; the expressive voice sometimes also modulates from personal observation and expression into first-person plural observations that supposedly include all of humanity.[4] Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" (1850) is a widely

anthologized Victorian example, while Philip Larkin's "Church Going" (written 1954) and "The Whitsun Weddings" (written 1958) continued the form into the mid twentieth century. Though it has become the critical practice to write of the "speaker" in expressive and descriptive lyrics, the assumption in the early twentieth century was that the speaker could be identified with the poet. Such poems are vulnerable to the criticism that they are valuable not because of the poem in itself, but because of something external to and prior to it: the emotion which the poem expresses, the message it conveys, or the scene it depicts. In opposition to this tradition many modernist poets – most influentially T. S. Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) – insisted that poetry should be impersonal. Poetry, wrote Eliot, refuting Wordsworth's definitions, "is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (Rainey 156).

The idea of poetry as the *evocation of mood* was at its peak in the late nineteenth century, and exerted a significant influence over modernist poetry.[5] It shares some qualities with the ideas of poetry as expression and depiction, but a mood is subtly different from an emotion: we feel emotions, but we sense a mood; moods have an existence independent of the self. Moods are also more readily understood as something shared; though the idea of collective emotion is not illegitimate, emotion is more readily understood as an individual possession, mood as a collective one. Moreover, a mood can be a quality of a place, and a sensitive individual can feel the mood of a place in ways that break down the boundaries between the perceiving subject and the perceived object. To this extent, the poetry of mood shares something with the poetry of depiction, but the difficulty of capturing mood in exact verbal formulae makes "evocation" the more appropriate term. The poetry of mood had its roots in Victorian romanticism, and in the poetry of the French symbolists and their English-language followers: Tennyson's lyrics such as "Mariana" (1830) provide early examples; W. B. Yeats's early poems are the fully developed *fin de siècle* version. It often includes narrative elements, but the narrative stops short of defined narrative closure; in this respect it resembles the modernist short story. To a reader who expects a narrative form that brings the story to an end, or a narrative voice that will explain the significance of the events, the poetry of mood can appear unsatisfactory and incomplete.

One of the attractions of the poetry of mood was the respect in which the vagueness and unreliability of evocation removed poetry from the demands of instrumental reason. Writing in 1895 Yeats was quite explicit about this:

> Literature differs from explanatory and scientific writing in being wrought about a mood, or a community of moods, as the body is wrought about an invisible soul; and if it uses argument, theory, erudition, observation, and seems to grow hot in assertion or denial, it does so merely to make us partakers at the banquet of the moods.

While poetry might adopt the discourse of instrumental reason, it subverted its instrumentality, making it answer to an ideal of evocation which would have been quite useless to science, technology, or business. For the modernist poet, the dangers of the late nineteenth-century poetry of mood were that it had evolved its own clichéd poetic diction, and that it too readily lapsed into imprecision for its own sake.

To define poetry in linguistic terms, as a distinctive way of using language, or as a distinctive poetic vocabulary, raises issues which were significant for modernist poets. Such definitions are important, because if poems are supposed to have an existence independent of their makers, we cannot define the distinctiveness of poetry by reference to the personal or intellectual qualities of the poet, such as his sensitivity or reflectiveness. It might seem straightforward to define poetry by its differences from "normal" language, whether by normal language we mean the language of everyday speech, the language of descriptive prose, or the literary language of fiction. Poetry might be defined as making more frequent use of figurative language (simile and metaphor), as using words with a fuller awareness of their etymologies, or as using combinations of words deemed unidiomatic in every speech. However, such an approach is problematic. No matter what definition is adopted, if one begins by defining another kind of language use as normal, one implicitly defines poetry as a deviation from it. While the deviation might be valued for being more exulted, more penetrating, or more durable, it nevertheless is marked as abnormal, as "deviant" in the pejorative sense of the word. Such a situation raises the question of why, if poetry is so much more powerful than normal language, poetry has not become the norm. Poetry's very willingness to deviate from the norm marks it as suspect. As we shall see in chapter 9, a similar logic attends to the relation of figurative language to literal language. Figurative language might seem to be more expressive, more ingenious, or more subtle than literal language, but because it seems to be a deviation from the norm, it also appears to be merely decorative and therefore superfluous. In a world governed by practical considerations, the whole of culture can sometimes appear to be superfluous; it is tolerated as an ornament, but not seen as fundamentally necessary to human life.

In the light of such concerns, it is also important to entertain the idea that poetry is a form of knowledge. To make such a claim is to challenge the perception that poetry is merely a pastime or a form of entertainment, and to assert instead that it deserves to be taken as seriously as science, philosophy, or economics. To make this suggestion is not to claim that poetry can ever know the same things as other disciplines, or that it can know things in the same way as them; indeed, an important part of the claim is that poetry complements other forms of knowledge by knowing different things and knowing them in different ways. Moreover, to say that a poem knows something is different from saying that its author knew something. The knowledge possessed by a person is transformed by existing in the context of a poem. Dramatic irony, such as we find in a dramatic monologue, provides an analogous instance: what the speaking character knows is less than what the poem knows, because the poem more fully comprehends the situation. Moreover, the poem, being a poem, recognizes the linguistic nature of the utterance. In a similar manner, a lyric poem might know more than its author, because, once the author's feelings or ideas have found their way into the poem, they are placed in relation to a vast constellation of other poems. It might be objected that the personification of the poem as the possessor of knowledge is fanciful and illegitimate: poems no more "know" things than they pay taxes. The personification, however, provides a convenient shorthand for a kind of knowledge which exists potentially within the poem, and which is brought to realization by the act of interpretation.

Modernist Poetry

As T. S. Eliot's idea of impersonality suggests, modernist poets were sometimes critical of the dominant ideas of poetry. It is convenient to gauge modernist attitudes by reference to the imagist movement in poetry. Although the most important poems of the modernist canon postdate imagism, some of them incorporated assumptions derived from it. Moreover, the concision of Pound's critical writings on the subject, and of key imagist works such as Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" (1913), mean that they provide convenient reference points for discussions.

The idea of poetry as expression – and particularly the idea of poetry as a "spontaneous overflow" of feeling – is challenged in several respects in Pound's "Imagisme" (1912) and "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1912).

First, Pound's focus on the learning of the poet's craft crushes the idea that anyone might be able to write a poem with reference only to his or her feelings. The poet must know the basic techniques of poetry, and should be aware of the finest models. Like the scientist, he or she should know what has been done before. The imagist practice of rewriting a poet's verse, "using about ten words to his fifty," indicated that the raw material of poetry was not feeling, but language. Second, the explicit definition of the "image" avoids the language of expression: an image "presents an intellectual and emotional complex." It does not express it, and it does not present a "feeling" or an emotion, but the more elusive "complex." Whatever a complex is, by the time it presents itself as raw material it is not inside the poet. T. S. Eliot's later analogy, in which the raw materials of the poet are like chemicals in a test-tube, also embodies this sense of detachment (Rainey 154). It should also be noted that by defining the materials of poetry as an "intellectual and emotional complex," Pound was distancing the movement from the late nineteenth-century idea of poetry as evocation: a mood is not usually understood as containing an intellectual element.

While the willingness of Pound to compare the poet to the scientist suggests a reduced hostility between poetry and science, it should not be taken to imply that Pound equated poetic knowledge with scientific. It is clear that he felt poetry offered something distinctive from other art forms and, by implication, other forms of knowledge. His warning that the poet should not "retell" in verse what had already been said in prose suggests he wishes to distinguish the capabilities of each form. Similarly in his warnings to the poet not to be "viewy" – i.e., opinionated – and not to engage in landscape painting, he seeks to define poetry's special strengths. For Pound, these strengths lay in its rhythmic qualities and, more generally speaking, its musicality, though the pursuit of mere musicality without rational sense risked confusing poetry with music.

As Eliot's reference to Wordsworth in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919) suggests, the outlook of the romantic poets was significant for their modernist successors. Although I will also refer to Victorian poetry, particularly when discussing the dramatic monologue in chapter 15, for the majority of modernists Victorian poetry did not exist as a distinct category, being seen instead as a continuation of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century work of the Romantics. While the majority of modernist references to Romanticism are critical in tone, their criticisms are informed by an awareness that the Romantics had similarly ambitious

expectations for the public functions of poetry. The modernists' criticisms were several. First, as indicated earlier, many modernists were sceptical about the idea of poetry as the expression of personal feeling, and they associated this view most strongly with the romantics. Second – a point we shall consider in more depth in the chapter on lyric – many modernists questioned the centrality of nature to the Romantics' worldview. For the Romantics, nature was the source of all value, in contrast to a civilization believed to be corrupt and corrupting. By the later nineteenth century, especially among minor poets, this outlook had led to the expectation that rural scenes were the proper subject matter of poetry, and that the city should be represented only as a means of highlighting the value of nature. Romantic representations were infused with a subtle anthropocentricity: nature, whether terrifying, elevating, consoling, or invigorating, existed only in relation to human feelings, values, and expectations. Many modernist poets rediscovered the city as valid subject matter, and those who made reference to nature were aware of the shortcomings of the romantic outlook. (That is not to say that they succeeded in freeing nature from anthropocentricity: in many respects, human needs and desires are built deeply into human language.) Third, many modernists, particularly the politically conservative modernists, felt that the Romantic worldview was too optimistic about human nature. The position was expressed most trenchantly by T. E. Hulme in "Romanticism and Classicism," a lecture dating from around 1912, which became more influential with the posthumous publication of Hulme's works in 1924. Hulme blamed the eighteenth-century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau for promoting the view that man "was by nature good" and that "it was only bad laws and customs that had suppressed him. Remove all these and the infinite possibilities of man would have a chance."[6] This view manifested itself in Romantic poetry in the idea of the infinite, and in images of flight. Hulme argued instead that man "is an extraordinarily fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant. It is only by tradition and organisation that anything decent can be got out of him." What Hulme called "classical" poetry was marked by "a holding back, a reservation," the classical poet was always aware of man's limitations. For the modernists who adopted Hulme's position, the reservation often manifested itself as irony; any glimpse of the miraculous or the infinite is severely circumscribed by the earthly and the everyday. Expressions of feeling are marked by the awareness that someone else might take a different view; the worship of nature is prevented by the awareness that nature is indifferent to man.

Though they criticized the Romantics, modernist poets shared many assumptions with them about poetry and its place in society. Above all, they shared a belief in the importance of poetry. Though modernists criticized Percy Bysshe Shelley more than any other Romantic poet, his claim in "A Defence of Poetry" (1821) that poets "are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" sets the scale of ambition for modernist poetry. While the Romantics have often been seen as primarily private poets, the work of the major Romantics was informed by political awareness, and the modernists shared their sense of the importance of poetry in the public sphere. Yeats, Eliot, and Pound all engage with national and with European concerns, and although their poetic modes share little with the rhetoric or discourse of political prose, they are nevertheless political in a broad sense of the word. Many modernist poets also shared with the Romantics the belief that the poetic imagination was capable of creating new insights and new forms of knowledge. Although many modernists were careful to avoid using the key romantic term, "imagination," they nevertheless believed that the poet possessed a faculty of mind which allowed him or her to make connections unavailable to other people. In "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), for example, Eliot claims that the poet's mind is "constantly amalgamating disparate experience," while the ordinary man has experiences which are "chaotic, irregular, fragmentary." The poet's mind can unite experiences as diverse as falling in love, reading philosophy, and the noise of a typewriter, while for the ordinary man such experiences remain unconnected. Although many modernists subscribed to the idea that man was limited in his nature, the same limitations did not apply to poetry.

Reading and Language

Towards the conclusion of "The Metaphysical Poets," Eliot turns to contemporary poetry and insists that "poets in our civilization [...] must be *difficult*."[7] His justification for such difficulty is that civilization has become complex, and produces "various and complex results" in the sensibility of the poet. Ordinary language is not adequate to express such "results," and so the poet "must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning." If we accept that modernist poetry is sometimes difficult, the consequence is that a fully engaged reading should not

pretend that the difficulty does not exist; and if any given difficulty is surmounted, the reader must try to remain aware of what the difficulty felt like, and must remain alert to the possibility that there may be other equally plausible "solutions" to the problem. To solve (or dissolve) a difficulty is to destroy it, and to destroy it may be to destroy the distinctive qualities of the poem. This is something that the minor poet Archibald MacLeish was aware of when he proclaimed that "A poem should not mean / But be,"[8] and it is implicit in the New Critical idea of "The Heresy of Paraphrase."[9]

Some of the difficulties we encounter when reading modernist poetry are common to all poetry. Many of our habits of reading and interpreting are based on our use of language in everyday practical situations, and on our familiarity with realist forms of narrative. In both situations, paraphrase is valuable. On completing a novel, we expect to be able to say what happened, and perhaps to be able to describe the main characters. The poems that are most readily adapted to this model are narrative poems and poems that can be treated as the containers of a "message." Needless to say, such a reading is reductive. Ideally for this sort of reading, the poet summarizes the message at some point (usually the closing lines), and does our interpretation for us. Such expectations risk confusing poetry with morally improving sermons and with public rhetoric. Though they were rhetorically skilled, modernist poets were clear that rhetoric is not enough.

The present book aims to provide not readings of modernist poetry, but an account of the *processes* involved in reading it. In doing so, it implicitly draws on the work of Stanley Fish on the theory and practice of reader-response criticism. Unlike reader-response critics of narrative, who typically took major units of action as their units of analysis, Fish's account of the reader's expectations and their interaction with the text works at the level of the line and the word. Though Fish's most persuasive accounts of reader-response analysis take seventeenth-century poetry and prose as their subject matter, their terms are readily transferable to modernist poetry. His approach to line endings, which I adopt in chapter 6, is to assume that we prematurely interpret when we reach a line ending, even though we often find, on turning the corner, that a fuller or even contradictory meaning becomes available. Fish argues that the final meaning should not prevail as the only meaning: the experience of reading a text consists of the sum total of all its temporarily available "meanings," and the experience of modification and accumulation is what matters. Thus when

a poem summarizes itself epigrammatically in the closing lines, we should be careful not to privilege the perspective offered by the summary, but to remember our impressions before that moment of crystallization. The same principles apply to problems that we encounter while reading the poem. In "Interpreting the *Variorum*," Fish identifies various moments in Milton's poetry which have generated irresolvable conflicts of interpretation. Fish's procedure is to argue that such problems "are not *meant* to be solved but to be experienced (they signify), and that consequently any procedure that attempts to determine which of a number of readings is correct will necessarily fail."[10] For Fish, a poem should not mean, but should be experienced; only then can "meaning" be pursued.

Elsewhere, this study assumes upon a broadly structuralist account of language, supplemented with more explicit reference to the works of Mikhail Bakhtin. Its structuralism is very straightforward: the elements of language signify differentially. This principle is most commonly illustrated with nouns: within the semantic field of cutlery, the sign "knife" denotes something which is not "fork" or "spoon." Of course the same sign can exist simultaneously within several fields: within the field of murder weapons, "knife" signifies something other than "gun" or "phial of poison." The same principle also applies to verbs: though "etherized" and "anaesthetized" are near synonyms, they have different histories and "etherized" might, in certain circumstances, carry different connotations. To think this way is necessarily to think historically: in 1848, one could speak of being "anaesthetized," but the option of speaking of being "etherized" became available only in the 1860s. In reading a poem, we need to think about the linguistic choices that were historically available but were – consciously or unconsciously – rejected. One way of bringing such choices into focus is to mentally rewrite the poem and to ask what difference another word would have made.

As well as considering lexical choices (e.g. nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs), we can also apply this approach to higher level elements of poetic language. For example, we can think of different poetic forms and metres as signifying, even before the particular words have been supplied. The significance of such choices varies historically. A metrically regular rhyming poem written in the era of unrhymed free verse signifies differently from one written before "free verse" became an option. A poem about country hedgerows signifies differently once the ideological underpinnings of such poetry have been criticized, or, more crudely, when such poetry has been labelled old-fashioned.

What further complicates the picture is that, for a poet and a readership blissfully unaware of free verse, a regular rhyming poem does not signify differently. Although structuralist linguistics often speaks of the linguistic system (termed *langue* by Ferdinand de Saussure), the linguistic system is never single or unified: different social groups speak subtly different versions of it; a single person belongs to several social groups simultaneously, and thereby has access to several different "dialects." Although for much of this book, the focus is restricted to modernist poets and their readers, it is helpful to be reminded both of the internal variation within the apparently homogenous group, and of its contrasts with a larger literary field. In this respect, Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism are relevant throughout, and are the particular focus of chapter 8. Bakhtin moreover recognizes that utterances do not exist in isolation, but in response to other utterances and to concrete situations. Though poems are often treated as rising above such dialogue and as embodying timeless truths, it is illuminating to think of them as responses to other utterances.

Though modernist poets were uncertain of the power of poetry in the modern world, they were confident of their abilities to remake and renew poetry, and they remade poetry with a view to restoring its cultural prestige. They were aware, however, that although the poem must be able to survive as a creation independent of its maker's hand, it could not survive without a readership who were willing to be active readers and active interpreters.

Notes

1 James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 181.
2 T. S. Eliot, letter to Conrad Aiken dated August 21, 1916, *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, rev. edn., ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber, 2009), vol. 1, 158.
3 See Gaylord LeRoy and Ursula Beitz, "The Marxist Approach to Modernism," *Journal of Modern Literature* 3 (1973), 1159.
4 For "empirical lyric," see Andrew Crozier, "Thrills and Frills: Poetry as Figures of Empirical Lyricism," *Society and Literature 1945–1970*, ed. Alan Sinfield (London: Methuen, 1983), 199–233.
5 Robert McNamara, "'Prufrock' and the Problem of Literary Narcissism," *Contemporary Literature* 27 (1986), 359; for Yeats on the same topic, see "The Moods," *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 195.

6 T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," *Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 61–2.
7 T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), 64–5.
8 Archibald MacLeish, "Ars Poetica" (1926).
9 For "Heresy of Paraphrase," see Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), 176–96.
10 Stanley Fish, "Interpreting the *Variorum*," *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (Harlow: Longman, 1988), 312.

Part I
Subject Matter

2

Reflexivity

One way that modernist poetry shows itself equal to the challenge posed by modernity is to tackle subjects that are characteristically modern: the spectacle of the modern city and its attendant technologies; the ironies characteristic of the accelerated pace of urban life; the forms of consciousness engendered by modernity. Set alongside these topics, the selection of poetry itself as subject matter might at first appear to be an admission of impotence. Surely, if poetry is to matter, it should be concerned with something more than itself? Even if many other modernist poems are concerned with external subject matter, the reflexive turn might look like a sign of decadence.

Those concerns cannot be ignored, and I shall return to them at the end of this chapter, but, from a practical point of view, such poems are of great interest. If nothing else, they provide an economical means of gauging the poet's ideas about poetry and about their intentions in writing it. While it would be a mistake to accept any statements of intention uncritically – even when they're written as poetry – they nevertheless provide a distinctive kind of evidence. The present chapter will begin by considering W. B. Yeats's "Adam's Curse," before going on to consider Marianne Moore's "To a Steam Roller," Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly," Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning," Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," and H.D.'s "Garden."

Some poems address issues of aesthetics and of poetry in oblique ways, but "Adam's Curse" (first published 1902) is very direct:

> We sat together at one summer's end,
> That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
> And you and I, and talked of poetry.
> I said, "A line will take us hours maybe;

> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
> Better go down upon your marrow-bones
> And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
> Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
> For to articulate sweet sounds together
> Is to work harder than all these, and yet
> Be thought an idler by the noisy set
> Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
> The martyrs call the world."
>
> And thereupon
> That beautiful mild woman for whose sake
> There's many a one shall find out all heartache
> On finding that her voice is sweet and low
> Replied, "To be born woman is to know –
> Although they do not talk of it at school –
> That we must labour to be beautiful."[1]

The modern world, as sketched by this poem, is dominated by the opinions of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen. Together they represent the middle-classes. By association with the first two, even the clergymen seem worldly. One complication to the first paragraph is the indirect way by which these three types enter the poem: they are "the set" that "the martyrs" call "the world." If we take "the martyrs" to be representative of an unworldly disposition, a type of person willing to lose his life for the sake of an ideal, then the category of "the world" proves to be more complex than at first appeared: the worldly and the unworldly are mutually defining, and, though they are mutually opposed, they are also mutually dependent. Yeats is not aligning himself with "the martyrs": they too have misrecognized "the world," defining it too narrowly, and defining it in a way that excludes the craft of poetry from serious consideration. The woman's recognition of the similarities between woman and poet is a further measure of the marginalization of poetry at that time. The demand that poetry appear to be casual, "a moment's thought," means that the more it succeeds as poetry, the less it will satisfy "the world."

Yeats's belief that poetry involves labour means that past literature is of little value:

> I said, "It's certain there is no fine thing
> Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
> There have been lovers who thought love should be

> So much compounded of high courtesy
> That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
> Precedents out of beautiful old books;
> Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

Although Yeats expresses nostalgia for the time when to "quote with learned looks" was a valid way of conducting oneself as a lover, and nostalgia for a time when literature was not simply a "trade," the combination of sighing and quoting also suggests that to rely on the words of others leads to inauthenticity. Yeats implies what Pound was later more noisily to proclaim: that the poet must make it new.

We could leave it there: the phrases most often quoted from "Adam's Curse" declare the importance of poetry as work, and the paradox of its self-effacement. But the emotional force of the poem derives from its final lines, in which the poet and the woman "sat grown quiet at the name of love." It might be argued that the discussion of the nature of poetic work is merely a pretext for the introduction of the word "love," and that to treat it as a statement about poetry is to miss the point. Certainly the poem is often quoted selectively, but it is possible to reconcile the two aspects of the poem. The turning of the conversation to the subject of love is a mild Freudian slip, and leads to embarrassment for both parties. The poet concludes:

> I had a thought for no one's but your ears:
> That you were beautiful, and that I strove
> To love you in the old high way of love;
> That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
> As weary-hearted as that hollow moon.

The first part of the poem set the poet in the public arena, but the concluding lines concern thoughts intended for a purely private audience. The contrast between the two raises the question of whether some thoughts can be adequately articulated. The phrase about "the old high way of love" also refers back to "the lovers who thought love should be / [...] compounded of high courtesy." The connection clarifies the personal reasons for the speaker's nostalgia about the old style of love, but its failure, and the collapse of their relationship into weary-heartedness, also underscore its outdatedness. The poem's concern with poetry and its concern with love meet in the Freudian slip: whereas the speaker within the poem explicitly argues for craft and for control, the dramatic situation depicts an

unwilled and uncontrolled blurting out of a word that the speaker would have preferred to repress. So, while the speaker would argue for the poet having complete control over his words, the situation depicted by the poem suggests that the world is more complex; certainly that the rules that apply in personal relationships might not be the same as those that apply to writing.

Because it presents a dialogue, the poem knows more than its primary speaker. A small number of readily identifiable phrases tell us that this is a reflexive poem, but to treat the poem as if it consisted only of those phrases is to misread it.

Marianne Moore's "To a Steam Roller" (1915) is concerned with a philosophical question with implications for the aesthetics of poetry. By 1915 "steam roller" had acquired its metaphorical senses, both as a noun and a verb, particularly with reference to political and military power. Moore extends the metaphor into the question of what constitutes a legitimate argument. The core of her case is presented in the first stanza:

> The illustration
> is nothing to you without the application.
> You lack half wit. You crush all the particles down
> into close conformity, and then walk back and forth on them.
> (Rainey 647)[2]

The opening lines identify the steamroller as an exemplar of instrumental rationality. "Illustration" here may be taken to mean, in the *OED*'s words, "The action or fact of making clear or evident to the mind; setting forth clearly or pictorially; elucidation; explanation; exemplification," but there is nothing in the words to suggest that the pictorial implications are relevant; "application" may be taken to mean "The bringing of a law or theory, or of a general or figurative statement, to bear upon a particular case, or upon matters of practice generally; the practical lesson or 'moral' of a fable." The steamroller insists that all speculation be subordinated to practical ends, to the "application." While this does not make the poem in itself a poem about poetry, the steamroller is clearly inimical to the aesthetic sensibility, in which the "illustration" might be enjoyed for its own sake, for its own particularity, not because it conforms to some more general law. The idea becomes more complicated in the phrase "You lack half wit": while this might be paraphrased as a vague insult, implying that the steamroller is a "half wit," it may be more specific: the steamroller possesses the half of intelligence that

relates the particular instance to the general idea, and that relates the illustration to the practical application; but it lacks the intelligence that would allow the particular to stand on its own; it cannot see the details that differentiate the individual example from the general law. Like Yeats's "Adam's Curse," it concerns the divided halves of a complete consciousness.

To develop this reading, it is necessary to anticipate themes that I will cover in later chapters: the use of quotation and the effects of the verse form. The syllabic verse form of "To a Steam Roller" allows it to accommodate its prose quotation relatively unobtrusively. Moore establishes a scheme in which the first line of each stanza has 5 syllables, the second and third have 12, and the fourth has 15. The effect of syllabic verse, particularly to an ear accustomed to verse based on the relentless beat of iambic feet, is of something tentative, closer to spoken English and closer to prose than conventional verse. The prose quotation would be difficult to accommodate within verse based on the principle of conventional feet, and the reader would be forced to emphasize syllables in unnatural ways, but in Moore's poem, it is relatively unobtrusive. This suggests that one referent of the steamroller might be conventional English verse, a system of feet derived from classical prosody which crushes speech down to the level of "the parent block." Classical prosody is, from this point of view, the authoritarian parent. If we accept the possibility that "To a Steam Roller" might in part be concerned with verse, then the seemingly innocuous phrase "and then walk back and forth on them" becomes more significant: the steamroller is doing what the eye of the reader does as it moves across the lines of the poem. The turn that is implied by the word "verse" is something to which the steamroller is accustomed.

From its opening lines, Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920) is explicitly reflexive: "For three years, out of key with his time, / He strove to resuscitate the dead art / Of poetry." Like Yeats's "Adam's Curse," it reflects on the uncongenial environment for poetry, such as the "half savage country" in which the semi-fictitious "E.P." was born. Pound, however, is more compressed in his formulations, and has more to say about the aesthetics of poetry itself. The key poem is the second in the sequence:

> The age demanded an image
> Of its accelerated grimace,
> Something for the modern stage,
> Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;
> (Rainey 49)

Given that the first poem in the sequence had quoted in Greek from Homer, it is clear that there is no irony attached to the preference for "Attic" grace. Although "accelerated grimace" is clearly an expression of distaste for the modern age, Pound does not immediately make clear why poetry should not reflect contemporary society. Is it only because that society presents an unattractive spectacle – an "accelerated grimace" – or would it be so even if the spectacle of modernity were aesthetically pleasing?

The problem with the modern age is illuminated to a small extent by the second stanza, which makes clear its impatience with the "inward gaze" and other introspective tendencies. The third stanza expands and develops the first:

> The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,
> Made with no loss of time,
> A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
> Or the "sculpture" of rhyme.

This clarifies the first stanza: the problem with the modern age in relation to poetry is not simply that the age is unattractive to look at, a "grimace," but that it does not allow time for the composition of what Pound considers to be real poetry. The acceleration, or the pace of modern life, is the problem, not the grimace. Not only is plaster a less durable form of sculpture, but, once the mould is created, sculptures can be mechanically reproduced.

I have treated it as obvious that the poems examined above are reflexive. However, in order to deal with more subtle cases, it is necessary to state more formally what makes them so. A reader-response critic might argue that they are "reflexive" only because we choose to interpret them that way. What makes them reflexive? Above all else, in the Yeats and Pound poems, it is the presence of the words "poem" and "poetry." "To a Steam Roller" is a little more veiled, but the use of "wit" and of the quotation that speaks of "impersonal judgment in aesthetic / matters" clearly gesture towards poetry: although the quotation refers to aesthetics in general, "wit" is a quality more closely associated with literature than with other arts. To generalize: the crucial detail about reflexive poems is that they include the vocabulary of aesthetics. That vocabulary does not need to be a particularly technical vocabulary associated with philosophical aesthetics: for the present purposes, even the word "poem" counts as relevant.

Languages change through time, and the present-day language in which we discuss poetry is not identical to that used by modernist writers.

Moreover, poetry by its very nature tends to outstrip the available descriptive vocabulary; thus commentators are forced to use impressionistic and metaphorical vocabularies which have relatively brief currency. What counted as the language of poetry criticism in 1922 may not be recognizable as such in the following century.

The songbird, a symbol of the poet and of poetry since at least the Romantics, was used by several modernist poets as means of exploring their ideas about poetry, and as a means of entering into dialogue with their forebears. For the writers in the Romantic era, poetry was capable of transcending the material world and taking the reader to a more spiritual realm. Hence, in two of the best known examples of the bird-poem, Keats's "To a Nightingale" and Shelley's "To a Skylark," the bird escapes the earthly weariness, fever, and fret. It is a critical commonplace that the songbird in Thomas Hardy's "The Darkling Thrush" (1900), written at the turn of the century, is a development of this tradition, and is an altogether more vulnerable and material being. Hardy's bird is "An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small / In blast-beruffled plume."[3]

It is in the context of earlier bird-poems that the birds of Wallace Stevens's "Sunday Morning" (1915) and W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" (1927) acquire their full meaning. In Stevens's poem we are introduced early to a cockatoo, part of the comfortable and complacent life of the unnamed woman. However, a cockatoo is not a songbird, and the birds in the fourth stanza are more immediately relevant to the tradition of the bird-poem:

> She says, "I am content when wakened birds,
> Before they fly, test the reality
> Of misty fields, by their sweet questionings;
> But when the birds are gone, and their warm fields
> Return no more, where, then, is paradise?"
>
> (Rainey 605)

If the "sweet questionings" of the birds are the dawn chorus, and the birds in some way represent poetry, then the first three lines might seem to suggest that it is a function of poetry to "question" or to "test" reality. Stevens does not specify what the alternatives might be, but the idea of poetry as interrogative could be taken in contrast to idea of a poetry as a mimetic art. Mimetic art uses its resources to reproduce the texture of reality as perceived. The interrogative ideal asks more of poetry than the mimetic, in that it wants nothing to be taken for granted: we cannot assume that,

while we were asleep, the world continued to exist; we cannot assume that, beneath the mists, the solid fields persist. The interrogative ideal also asks less of poetry, in that the poet no longer has to pretend to give an exhaustive catalogue.

The fourth and fifth lines are more difficult to interpret. One underlying theme of the poem is the nature of paradise and the means by which we might attain it, and a full explanation of these lines would have to take many others into account. A brief paraphrase would be that the fields will not "return" if the birds are not there to test their reality; or, to put it another way, that reality cannot exist without a subject to perceive it. Moreover, the perceiving subject must not passively absorb the world, but must actively test it. A slight variant on this reading would think about the fields "returning" not in the sense of reappearing once the mist has gone, but in the more literary sense of returning an echo; "return" is being used in the transitive sense but with the object understood. In either case, the larger point seems to be that reality does not exist without the poetic imagination to take soundings from it.

There are other birds in "Sunday Morning," and more could be said about them, but the cockatoo is particularly unusual. It is not a songbird, but as there are songbirds in the poem, it might become significant by contrast: as a mimic of human speech, the cockatoo might stand for another approach to poetry, one that draws only on other texts, like Yeats's lovers. It is a tempting reading, but as Stevens does not refer to the cockatoo making a noise of any sort, it might be pushing the idea too far. Rather, its defining characteristic is the brightness of its wings, mentioned in both the first and second stanzas. Note that the poem ends with the image of pigeons descending "on extended wings." Even if the cockatoo's wings are extended, it is unable to fly. The caged or captive bird is a well-established figure of the repression of the voice: in this tradition it is not the singing of the bird that signifies expression, but rather its flight.

T. E. Hulme wrote in "Romanticism and Classicism" (1912) that the characteristic feature of Romanticism was its obsession with the infinite, which crystallized in verse in metaphors of flight.[4] Hulme was an influential figure in theorizations of modernism, particularly after the posthumous publication of his essays as *Speculations* (1924), and it is certainly the case that many modernist poets were critical of much of the ideological inheritance of Romanticism. That does not mean, however, that we should ignore all references to a Romantic tradition of imagery in modernist poems. Certain poets – notably Stevens and Yeats – were closer to the

Romantic tradition than others. Moreover, one way of criticizing a body of ideas is to adopt its vocabulary and to turn it to other purposes.

Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" also becomes more significant once we recognize the reflexivity of its bird imagery. The birds of the first stanza seem at first to be naturalistic, or, if symbolic, to signify the fertility of Ireland. However, fish, flesh, and fowl, in commending the mortal world, are said to produce a "sensual music," and the phrase raises the question of whether the music of Yeats's poetry is "sensual" or a more sculptural "[m]onument." The second stanza's discussion of the need for an "aged man" to sing in defiance of his mortality is also clearly reflexive. It is however, the final stanza that concerns us here (Rainey 310). The narrator vows that once he is "out of nature" he will never take his "bodily form from any natural thing." Instead he will take the form of a mechanical bird fashioned by Grecian goldsmiths. The mechanical bird introduces a new species into the literary order of songbirds: neither the transcendent and unreachable bird of the romantics, nor Thomas Hardy's aged and windberuffled bird. As a reflexive image, the golden bird is somewhat cryptic: it does not tell us exactly what its equivalent poetry would look like, but nevertheless it suggests something hard, impersonal, and therefore – supposedly – durable.

The vocabulary of birds and song was well established by the early twentieth century as a means of talking, obliquely, about poetry. The vocabulary of sculpture was an innovation of modernist poets and critics. As we have seen, Pound explicitly contrasted the statue made from plaster in a mould with the more durable sculpture of alabaster, explicitly associating the latter with "the 'sculpture' of rhyme" (Rainey 50). It is part of a cluster of metaphors, found mostly in critical prose, in which good poetry is viewed as being "hard," "solid," and "firm in outline," while bad poetry is viewed as "soft," "flabby," or "hazy." Such remarks in contemporaneous critical prose provide some sanction for us to consider other images of sculpture as reflexive images. The first part of H.D.'s "Garden" (1915) is intense but cryptic (Rainey 443). The opening line, "You are clear," sets down a challenge concerning clarity: the rose is clear, but is the speaker clear, and will the reader ever be? The poem then sets a puzzle which it never resolves: what sort of rose is this? Is it a literal rose, metaphorically as clear in outline as if it had been cut in rock, or is it a rock literally cut in stone, perhaps as part of a gravestone or other funeral monument? That it should be hard, not as a hailstone, but "as the descent of hail," further complicates the image: the relatively static rose is compared to something

dynamic; moreover, the image implies that the rose is actively aggressive to the speaker, assaulting her. In the remainder of the first part of the poem, the speaker responds, contemplating how she might scrape or break the rose.

It does not solve all the mysteries of this poem to take the "rose," uncontroversially, as shorthand for beauty, and to take its hard, sculptural quality as a reference to modernist ideas of beauty. Read this way, the poem expresses deep ambivalence about the sculptural ideals of modernist poetry. The rose is intense in its beauty and its selfhood, and this intensity gives it great clarity, which might seem to be admirable; but these qualities are presented as being aggressive and harmful. The speaker's speculation about removing the colour from the petals reinforces the idea that the rose's form is more durable than its secondary qualities of colour and scent, but the verb "to scrape" suggests that the speaker harbours an aggressive or resentful feeling towards it. This is further amplified in the speculation about the possibility of breaking the rose. If we take the poem to be a poem about sculptural poetry, then H.D. voices dissatisfaction with the sheer objectivity of the imagist poem – even as she continues to write in that mode – and frustration with its seeming unwillingness to enter into dialogue with the reader. This is far from being the only possible reading, but it is one that relates "cut" and "hard" to the vocabulary of contemporary writing about poetry.

It is clear from the birdsong poems that reflexivity did not begin with the modernist poets. Poems that proclaim the durability of poetry date back to classical writers, and poems that worry about the limitations of the poet's resources stretch back at least to the Romantic period. Arthur Henry Hallam, reviewing Tennyson's *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1831) wrote of "that return of the mind upon itself" which was characteristic of his era.[5] True, Hallam was referring to a generalized introspection, rather than one specifically concerned with poetry, but an age which reflects on itself is likely to produce poetry that is concerned with the nature of poetry. Even if there were nothing distinctive about the modernist form of reflexivity, considering reflexivity would still be a valuable approach to it. In fact, modernist reflexivity differs from that of earlier eras in several regards. When it employs an established vocabulary, such as that of the songbird, it revises it to describe a distinctively modernist approach. Elsewhere, it employs a vocabulary that was more peculiar to the modernist period, and which we must relearn if we are to read the poems properly. It is more alert to the social

conditions within which poetry must survive, and specifically to a sense that poetry is no longer a respected form of knowledge. While modernist self-reference is still concerned with the aesthetics of poetry, that is, with a debate about what counts as a good poem, it is also often concerned with the viability of poetry as an art form.

In schools, poetry is often approached with the assumption that it is valuable only insofar as it is has some external referent; that is, only insofar as it is a poem *about* something. That something may be a physical object, as in poems about animals or the weather – Ted Hughes's *Poetry in the Making* (1967) begins in this way – or it may be an abstraction such as love or mourning. The centrality of descriptive war poems to school teaching particularly reinforces this view. Reflexive poems, and poems read reflexively, are certainly "about" something, but compared to poems that depict battlefields or other external objects, they may seem limited in interest. They may appear to be written for an audience consisting only of other poets; that very limitation of audience may seem to confirm the belief that poetry is unimportant in the modern world. Even in a university context, where reflexiveness is rife, to read a poem reflexively might seem evasive when other texts are read as if they were concerned with such weighty issues as gender, sexuality, or colonialism.

There are two lines of response. The first is to say that there is nothing wrong with reading poetry reflexively; and that those who treat such poetry as lighter or less significant than poetry with an external object are betraying their own lack of confidence in poetry as such. A complete version of this defence would have to draw on a larger justification for poetry. This is something that I will return to in the final chapter. To sketch it briefly, one might follow Victor Shklovsky in arguing that a poem is valuable because of its ability to defamiliarize reality, and that a good reflexive poem does exactly this to our ideas about poetry. It might do this by addressing poetry explicitly, and by introducing new ideas about poetry; or it might defamiliarize poetry by discussing it in metaphors which initially obscure it.

The other line of response is to argue that very few ideas are ever purely aesthetic. Even ideas about the technicalities of poetry, such as rhythm and metre, have often been entangled with ethical and political ideas. For many writers, for example, it seemed that "free" verse and "open" forms were intrinsically more politically radical than traditional forms of metre and rhyme, though this is a view that has been challenged in recent years;

many radical poets have used conservative forms.[6] In reading the poems reflexively, we are not necessarily turning them in upon themselves; rather, we may be finding another way in which they relate to the larger world. For example, the ideal of "sculptural" poetic form can be contextualized with reference to ideas of degeneration and decadence. Such ideas were most often applied to the human body and to the human race, or to distinct human races, but they were also applied to language and linguistic systems. T. S. Eliot's explicitly reflexive statement in "East Coker" is one late example: writing poetry is

> a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
> Undisciplined squads of emotion.[7]

In the face of this, a call for poetic language to be hard and sculptural seemed like a call to order. There is often a conservative politics inherent in this position, in that those who subscribe to it often treat all change as decay, but it also values precision in thought and expression in a way that is not politically aligned. In other words, an ethics emerges from the aesthetics. Similarly, it is clear that "hard" and "soft" were often used in a gendered way, so that the ideal of the "hard" and "sculptural" poem was an ideal of a supposedly "masculine" form of poetry. One does not need to subscribe to this ideology in order to see how the aesthetic opens out into political territory. More straightforwardly, Wallace Stevens's idea that the birds are testing the reality of the fields not only proposes an idea for poetry, but might also lead to a whole epistemology and an ethics: it implies that no reality should be accepted in advance; that reality is constructed through a form of dialogue between the singing subject and the responding object; moreover, the object might also include other subjects. This is only the sketch of a reading, and it places a great deal of weight on a very small foundation, but it serves as an illustration of the general principle: ideas about the function of poetry very easily become ideas about society, perception, and ethics. By introducing the language of criticism, by becoming reflexive, poems are able to address the larger issues surrounding poetry in general; they can shape the conditions by which they are to be understood, and they are able to make a case for the value of poetry in the modern world.

Notes

1 W. B. Yeats, "Adam's Curse," *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989), 132–3.
2 Though the text of Marianne Moore's "To a Steam Roller" is taken from Rainey (p. 647), I have corrected the lineation, following *The Poems of Marianne Moore*, ed. Grace Schulman (London: Faber, 2003), 92, so that the fourth line is not broken between "forth" and "on them."
3 Thomas Hardy, "The Darkling Thrush," *The Complete Poems*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976), 150.
4 T. E. Hulme, "Romanticism and Classicism," *Collected Writings of T. E. Hulme*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), 62–3.
5 Arthur Henry Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry" (1832), *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory*, ed. Thomas J. Collins and Vivienne J. Rundle (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 1999).
6 For the argument that poetic radicalism does not imply political radicalism, see particularly Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Politics and Form in Postmodern Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
7 Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 182.

3

Landscapes, Locations, and Texts

While to many modernist poets and later critics the significance of modernist poetry lay in its innovations of form and style, and while much of the present book attends to such innovations, one cannot ignore the fact that it represented aspects of the world, and that the referents of the poems might be worthy of discussion. However, it is not straightforward to write about subject matter without seeming to reduce the poem to its subject matter. This chapter focuses on a particular kind of subject matter – the physical setting of the poem – and proposes a comparative method of reading, in which the poems refer as much to other poems as to the real world. In proposing this, I do not wish to suggest, in the manner of some postmodernist criticism, that the text refers only to other texts. Rather, because everyday language usage so predominantly focuses on the referent, I propose that we need to redress the balance, and refocus on the textuality of the text. Although the chapter concentrates on landscapes and locations, the method could be developed in relation to more abstract poetic subjects, such as moods, emotions, or ideas. The advantage of dealing with concrete subjects is that the categories for them are more precise: we can speak clearly of the city versus the country, of the sacred space, and of the desert; emotions and moods are necessarily more elusive and blended. The chapter will begin with the city, relating T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* to poems by Charles Baudelaire and one of Eliot's now-forgotten contemporaries; it will then turn to the desert, in the form of W. B. Yeats's "Paudeen" and "The Second Coming," and then to rural nature, comparing William Carlos William's "Spring Strains" to a traditionalist English poem by W. H. Davies.

Though many early twentieth-century reviewers were struck by the ways that modernist poetry broke the stylistic norms of poetry in matters of rhythm and rhyme, a significant number also remarked upon the "realism" of modern verse. The term "realism" when applied to poetry is as slippery as it is when applied to the novel: the term does not imply that poetry

gains unmediated access to the real; in any case one reader's idea of the real might differ from another's. Critics applying the term to modernist poems were often registering the impression that the poems contrasted to those of the previous generation: for example, that they included observational details which would have been excluded from earlier poems, but which might have been considered legitimate in a novel. In the case of T. S. Eliot, his reference to men "in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows" ("Prufrock") was considered to be strikingly modern; so too were his references in *The Waste Land* to a "dull canal" and, even more so, a "gas-house." Both Pound and Eliot refer to teashops, a distinctively new kind of social space which had appeared in the late nineteenth century.[1] The surprise of finding such things in a poem is enough to disable the best critical judgements, at least temporarily, and to focus attention on the represented subject, not the medium of representation. For example, one reviewer of Eliot's *Prufrock and Other Observations* wrote that:

> He knows what he is after. Reality, stripped naked of all rhetoric, of all ornament, of all confusing and obscuring association, is what he is after. His reality may be a modern street or a modern drawing-room; [...] Mr Eliot is careful to present his street and his drawing-room as they are, and Prufrock's thoughts as they are [...].[2]

All of this makes the very fundamental error of believing that the drawing-room and Prufrock had a real existence prior to the poem.

Later critics, recognizing that urban existence had become a widespread subject of modern poetry, were more inclined to treat the represented city of any given poem as typical of modernist poetry, and to treat the city as symptomatic of modernity in some less immediate sense. This procedure, though more subtle, still essentially sees the poem as a window on reality, even if the reality is refracted complexly. One recurrent object of critical attention has been Charles Baudelaire's poem "A une passante" ("To a [female] passer-by"), which, although it predates the modernist era, and although its technique is formally conservative, appears to embody typically modern experience.[3] (The line-by-line prose translation is mine.)

> La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
> Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
> Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
> Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet;
>
> Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
> Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,

> Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
> La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.
> Un éclair ... puis la nuit! – Fugitive beauté
> Dont le regard m'a fait soudainement renaître,
> Ne te verrai-je plus que dans l'éternité?
>
> Ailleurs, bien loin d'ici! Trop tard! *jamais*, peut-être!
> Car j'ignore où tu fuis, tu ne sait où je vais,
> O toi que j'eusse aimée, ô toi qui le savais!

> (The deafening street roared around me. / Tall, slender, her sadness majestic, in full mourning, / A woman passed, with a sumptuous hand / raising and swinging the festoon and the hem; / Agile and noble, her leg statuesque. / I drank, crouched like a wild man, / From her eyes, livid sky where the hurricane grows, / The sweetness that enthralls and the pleasure that kills. / A lightning flash ... then night! Fleeting beauty, / Whose glance suddenly made me reborn, / Shall I never see you again until eternity? / Elsewhere, far from here! Too late! *Never*, perhaps! / For I know not where you fled, you know not where I go, / O you who I would have loved, O you who knew it!)

Even a critic as sophisticated and widely admired as Walter Benjamin takes the poem as symptomatic of what it represents, even if the relation between signifier and signified is altogether more complicated:

> What this sonnet communicates is simply this: far from experiencing the crowd as an opposed, antagonistic element, this very crowd brings to the city dweller the figure that fascinates. The delight of the urban poet is love – not at first sight, but at last sight. [...] [These verses] reveal the stigmata which life in a metropolis inflicts upon love.

The poem communicates and it reveals something beyond itself: what this account leaves out is how it relates to other poems by contemporaries and predecessors. T. S. Eliot's account of the influence of Baudelaire gives a sense of how a poem might refract experience rather than directly represent it. From Baudelaire he learned the "poetical possibilities":

> of the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis, of the possibility of fusion between the sordidly realistic and the phantasmagoric, the possibility of the juxtaposition of the matter-of-fact and the fantastic. From him, as from Laforgue, I learned that the sort of material that I had, the sort of experience that an adolescent had had, in an industrial city in America, could be the material for poetry; and that the source of new poetry might

> be found in what had been regarded hitherto as the impossible, the sterile, the intractably unpoetic.[4]

Not only does Eliot indicate that realism is only half of the new poetry of the city, but by indicating his debt to earlier poets, he suggests that we might read modernist poems in such a way that they point both to the experience and to other texts.

Intertextuality is more obvious in the works of poets who have not fully assimilated their influences. For example, consider "Meeting" by the now-forgotten poet Leigh Henry; the poem first appeared in the influential modernist magazine *The Egoist* in April 1918.

> On the din of the street, –
> – crashing, screaming, chaotic rush –
> – rasping, whirling, and rumble of wheels
> of motor, cycle, wagon, and bus,
> and clatter of feet, –
> a sudden hush
> swoops down – [...]
> (ll. 1–7)

The combination of "din" and "street" echoes Matthew Arnold's "The Buried Life" (1852), in which, "in the world's most crowded streets," "in the din of strife," there arises a desire "After the knowledge of our buried life." Arnold in turn was indebted to Wordsworth, who in "Tintern Abbey" (1798) remarks that "in lonely rooms, and mid the din / Of towns and cities" he has often recalled the banks of the Wye. With the invention of the pneumatic tyre one source of din had diminished, though the internal combustion engine introduced a new one: although the cause and quality of the noise had changed, the tendency to characterize the city in these terms had persisted. Wordsworth's and Arnold's city poems both contrast "din" with something more peaceful – a rural scene, or the "buried life" – and so the sudden descent of a hush is not altogether surprising, though it is also distinct from the Romantic and Victorian versions. In Henry's poem, the hush acts aggressively on the "noise of the town," causing it to fall "paralysed." Henry then presents a scene already familiar from Baudelaire:

> Malignant, immense,
> the stillness crouches ...

> ... and from it your pale face and insolent eyes
> undisguised,
> stare ravenous.
>
> (ll. 18–22)

Although this person is unnamed, and could almost be an allegorical figure (of terror, or of death), the lyric convention suggests that she is female; and though she is insolent and ravenous, the position she occupies in the poem is similar to that of Baudelaire's *passante*. In the following lines, the speaker's brain "reels," and he whispers her name; no sooner has he spoken it than "the silence shrinks away," and the woman disappears: "a torrent of shapes and noises / rends through my sense, and your face is lost ..." (lines 35–6).

There are several ways of dealing with these intertextualities. One could treat the poem as essentially a repetition of Baudelaire's, albeit one couched in a hyperbolic rhetoric. However, one could also see Baudelaire's poem as establishing one possible urban contrast and one possible urban narrative: the contrast between the city traffic and the special individual, and the narrative in which the individual emerges momentarily from the mass only to vanish once again into it. In a more generalized version of the pattern, the individual need not be a person, but any glimpse of a singular beauty, and the enveloping medium might not be the deafening traffic but the crowd. Henry's poem subtly reworks this contrast, making the special individual into something less visibly distinctive, and more insistently malevolent.

Once this general pattern is established, one can imagine other possible variants, and can imagine how they might strike a reader who was expecting the generic city poem. At one extreme, a poem that represented the city and its crowds not as suffocating, but as vitalizing, might stand out as unusual. Or, for a reader who expected a structure in which the oppressiveness of the city is relieved by a glimpse of something transcendent, a poem in which no special individual or moment of transcendence emerges from the crowd would be especially bleak. Once a pattern is established, absences signify as much as presences.

To a reader acquainted with Baudelaire's poem and with Henry's rewriting of it, parts of *The Waste Land* comes into sharper focus, and particularly the lines in "The Burial of the Dead" describing the "Unreal City," the crowd flowing over London Bridge, and the appearance of "Stetson" (lines 60–70) (Rainey 126–7). The crowd and the meeting are

familiar elements from the earlier poems, but Eliot rings several changes. What he was later to term the phantasmagoric element is implied by the allusion to Dante: these might appear to be modern-day commuters, but they are simultaneously in hell. Unlike Baudelaire's city and Henry's, Eliot's appears to be eerily quiet: although in a later section of the poem we hear the sound of horns and motors, the crowd flowing suggests a relatively quiet motion; so too does the audibility of short and infrequent sighs, and the fact that individuals in the crowd maintain their own private spaces, and are not talking. The single individual who emerges from the crowd, Stetson, also runs contrary to the analogous figures in other poems in that he does not immediately disappear, although given that he participated in the naval battle of Mylae (260 BC), he is in some way a ghost, and equally elusive.

Although the city is prominent in many accounts of modernism, it is not the only significant location. Indeed, if each sign acquires significance only through its contrast within other signs, then "the city" signifies only by contrast to its antonyms. Some of these, like the striking individual or the calm sanctuary, are geographically internal to the city itself – they are part of it, yet contrasting to it – while others lie beyond.

The desert contrasts with the city in several ways: for present purposes the term stands for any place which is depopulated and barren. Its barrenness of course offers a point of similarity with the city, so the contrast is by no means a stable one. Yeats's "Paudeen" (written 1913) was collected in *Responsibilities*, a volume that divides its attention between archaic Irish myth and contemporary Dublin and its cultural politics. On the one hand, "The Grey Rock" and "The Two Kings"; on the other, "To a Wealthy Man" and "September 1913." By the time we come to "Paudeen" in the collection, we have already been introduced to a world where the lower middle classes "fumble in a greasy till," but also a world of combats between a King and a stag, and a world of immortal lovers. "Paudeen" combines the two:

> Indignant at the fumbling wits, the obscure spite
> Of our old Paudeen in his shop, I stumbled blind
> Among the stones and thorn-trees, under morning light;
> Until a curlew cried and in the luminous wind
> A curlew answered; and suddenly thereupon I thought
> That on the lonely height where all are in God's eye,
> There cannot be, confusion of our sound forgot,
> A single soul that lacks a sweet crystalline cry.[5]

The stones and thorn-trees are plausible as an Irish landscape, but they might also be classical or Biblical. Stumbling "blind," Yeats presents himself as a prophetic figure in the wilderness. The "lonely height" implies that he has ascended a mountain, and his receipt of a revelation from the curlews further reinforces this idea. The contrast of ordinary humanity's confused "sound" and the "sweet crystalline cry" of the curlew bears some similarities to the contrast in city poems between the din and the redemptive element that emerges from it, but here the revelation required a journey into the desert. In some respects, the poem shares a basic assumption with Romantic poems: civilization contaminates, while nature has a virtue that is, as Wordsworth put it in different versions of *The Prelude*, "fructifying" or "renovating."[6] Here, however, nature is barren and scarcely fertile. The landscape of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" was benign, a landscape of "plots of cottage ground," "orchard tufts," "unripe fruits," and "woods and copses."[7] Many modernist writers distrusted the easy consolations of nature, certainly as presented by post-Romantic poets, and so the nature they present is more often inhospitable and barren. Note too that the song of the bird is crystalline, with the implication that the poet's song might be similar.

Yeats's "The Second Coming" (written 1919) produces another desert setting, but its location is somewhere beyond the speaker. It is, first of all, a mental image of a desert, "a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi":

> a waste of desert sand;
> A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
> A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
> Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
> Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.
> (Rainey 308)

The scene recalls that of another Romantic poem, Shelley's "Ozymandias," and in both cases the desert is a location for thinking about political change over a long duration. In Shelley's poem, the King's imperative, "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!," has been rendered ironic by the hand of time; in Yeats's, the coming of the rough beast to Bethlehem suggests that twenty centuries of Christianity are about to be reversed. While Shelley's poem implies despair only for tyrants, and cause for optimism among radicals, in Yeats's poem the desert reveals a troubled future for the whole of Christian civilization.

If the desert is a place with the potential for revelations, it is also, more simply, a place marked by infertility and the potential for fertility, and in this connection the most extensive and complex treatment comes in *The Waste Land*. Although Eliot's desert and its place in his poem owes much to his reading of J. G. Frazer and Jessie Weston, even before he wrote it, the desert had already begun to signify for modernist poets: it signifies in contrast to the more benign forms of nature seen in the Romantics and their descendents, and it signifies as a place of revelation and of narratives of fertility and infertility.

As well as contrasting to the city, the desert also acquires significance by contrast with places more readily fertile, whether the garden or wild nature. For modernist poets, to choose the desert as a location was to repudiate the nature poems of the Romantics, Victorians, and the Georgians; to choose more verdant locations was to adopt a setting that was dense with potential clichés. James Reeves has summarized the post-war Georgian poetry as a nostalgic celebration of an essentially rural England:

> Poems about country cottages, old furniture, moss-covered barns, rose-scented lanes, apple and cherry orchards, village inns, and village cricket expressed the nostalgia of the soldier on active service and the threat to country life which educated readers feared from the growth of urbanism.[8]

The first of the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies had appeared in 1912, and the volumes that appeared before 1918 were more various than the received idea suggests. Nevertheless nature serves as the source of authentic emotion and identity in many of them. In Harold Monro's "Lake Leman," for example, the Alpine countryside, characterized in terms of harvest sheaves, cool roses, and honeysuckle, is something that will sustain the speaker in future days; the poem ends with an invocation to the scene to stay with him, "constant and delightful." W. H. Davies's "Days Too Short," which appeared in the same 1912 anthology, is slightly more complex:

> When primroses are out in Spring,
> And small, blue violets come between;
> When merry birds sing on boughs green,
> And rills, as soon as born, must sing;
>
> When butterflies will make side-leaps,
> As though escaped from Nature's hand
> Ere perfect quite; and bees will stand
> Upon their heads in fragrant deeps;

When small clouds are so silvery white
    Each seems a broken rimmèd moon –
    When such things are, this world too soon,
For me, doth wear the veil of Night.[9]

This is not an uncomplicated celebration of nature: in one respect, Davies is saying that April is the cruellest month, as it is inseparable from thoughts of mortality. If this were granted, then it might appear that the differences between Davies and the modernists are technical ones: Davies employs a regular rhyming stanza (Tennyson's *In Memoriam* stanza), grammatical inversion ("boughs green"), and archaisms ("rimmèd," "*doth* wear"); his adjectives are often bland and imprecise ("*merry* birds"). I would argue that the differences go deeper, and that the poem gives nature a significance and a role that would at the very least be qualified in modernist poetry. The complex feelings aroused by springtime are focused entirely on nature: the poem gives no hint of a human civilization that lies beyond it. Notice also the work done by "when," one of the more common ways of beginning a Georgian poem: the underlying structure is "when ... then"; when one set of conditions prevails, then this emotion will be felt. The "then" clause often signals the modulation from the observational to a more emotional or even abstract register. In Davies's poem, "when" refers to a typical state of affairs ("when such things are") and a recurrent one. Some of this might also be said to be true of *The Waste Land*'s account of April, but the difference is that Davies's nature consoles with its predictability; Davies experiences a pleasant regret at springtime, while the first voice of *The Waste Land* actively resists springtime, because he wishes to repress the knowledge of the dead beneath "forgetful snow."

William Carlos Williams's "Spring Strains" first appeared in Alfred Kreymbourg's *Others, An Anthology of the New Verse* (1916).[10] From the opening lines the difference from the English pastoral poem is obvious:

In a tissue-thin monotone of blue-grey buds
crowded erect with desire against
the sky –
        tense blue-grey twigs
slenderly anchoring them down, drawing
them in –
                (ll. 1–6)

The sexual implications of "erect" and "desire" give another dimension to the poem, although Williams's language more typically avoids such figurative dimensions. The poem is more insistently energetic than English Georgian poetry: there are birds chasing, tree limbs pulling downwards, and "sucking in the sky." Compare the lame verbs of Davies's poem: primroses "are out"; violets "come between"; butterflies "make" side-leaps. In Williams's poem the energy is initially implied by the verbs, but later Williams refers to it explicitly:

> creeping energy, concentrated
> counterforce – welds sky, buds, trees,
> rivets them in one puckering hold!
> Sticks through! Pulls the whole
> counter-pulling mass upward, to the right,
> locks even the opaque, not yet defined
> ground in a terrific drag that is
> loosening the very tap-roots!
>
> (ll. 19–26)

The language of energy and forces here, and the language of energies braced against each other to form a stable structure, derive from physics and engineering rather than from any Romantic tradition of nature writing. The "strains" of the title, which might have initially appeared to be a generic term for the poem, turn out to be strains in a physical sense. Compared to its Georgian counterparts, the poem is also marked by the absence of a first person presence. Although "erect" and "desire" connect the energies of nature with the human realm in general terms, nature is presented in its own right, not appropriated as the cause or symbol of an individual's feelings.

The reason for not focusing on subject matter in modernist poetry is obvious enough: to do so risks reducing the poet simply to the scene, feeling, or idea that is represented. But it is possible to approach subject matter in ways that remain focused on the textuality of poetry. It is possible to treat frequently recurrent subject matters as if they were signs in a signifying system: the city contrasts with the countryside, and the countryside contrasts with the desert. Moreover, by taking a group of poems concerned with a given type of location, it is possible to determine the range of typical narratives. In doing this, one could aim to read each poem reductively, noticing only what is typical about it, but a more balanced reading would

note both the adherence to the norm and the deviations from it. To approach poems in this way is not to view them merely as the recycling of literary clichés: they re-present the world, but they do so through a dialogue with the reader's expectations and a dialogue with earlier poems.

None of the locations considered in this chapter were absolutely new to modernist poetry. The countryside had acquired a particular significance with the coming of the Industrial Revolution, and from that point onwards, as Raymond Williams demonstrated, the country and the city signified in opposition to each other. Many of the themes associated with the city in modernist poems can be traced back to Romantic poetry and the Victorian novel. The desert has a cultural history stretching back to the Bible, with other more literary resonances – such as Shelley's "Ozymandias" – accreting along the way. Though none of them were new, modernist writers approached them in new ways. The new approach was not simply a matter of new verse techniques and a purging of archaisms, but also a revision of the values associated with nature and the non-urban world. Nature is interesting to modernist writers, but man has been displaced from the centre of the universe; the humanist attitude in which nature reflects human feelings is replaced by one in which nature threatens to disregard man; if nature is nothing more than matter in motion, man has no privileged position in relation to it. The city, although anonymous and alienating, or crowded and oppressive, might hold out more redemptive potential than nature.

The city is often seen as the most distinctively modernist location, but Raymond Williams long ago cautioned against focusing exclusively upon it.[11] Modernism saw its own processes as universals, and to achieve a critical perspective upon it, one needs to place it in a wider field of comparison. One needs to think outside an ideology of modernity in which "the new" is always necessarily the best; at the same time, one needs to avoid a nostalgic conservatism in which progress is always a process of decay. The city may have embodied all that was most technologically and socially progressive – though even these two assertions need to be separated and questioned – but it was not the only form of social life. Not only is there no single thing called "the city" – Paris, London, and Berlin might all signify differently and in contrast to each other – but to understand the city properly, one needs, as Raymond Williams urged, to "explore it with something of its own sense of strangeness and distance." By exploring modernist poems alongside their forebears and alongside their aesthetically conservative contemporaries we can begin to see them in a new perspective. To approach

the modernist city as if it were a sign rather than as the truth about a place allows us to understand better the process of representation. The modernist poem, like other literature, does not represent locations so much as remake them.

Notes

1 Scott McCracken, "Voyages by Teashop," *Geographies of Modernism*, ed. Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker (London: Routledge, 2005), 86.
2 The review of Eliot's *Prufrock* was by May Sinclair; see *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Grant (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 86–87.
3 The French text of Baudelaire's "A une passante," and Walter Benjamin's commentary on it, are taken from Benjamin's *Charles Baudelaire*, tr. Harry Zohn (London: NLB, 1973), 124–5.
4 T. S. Eliot, "What Dante Means to Me" (1950), *To Criticize the Critic* (London: Faber, 1965), 126.
5 W. B. Yeats, "Paudeen," *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), 211.
6 Wordsworth's epithets are applied to the "spots of time" in the two-part version of *The Prelude* (1799) (I.290) and the 1850 text (XII.210).
7 William Wordsworth, "Lines Written a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey," *Romanticism*, 2nd edn., ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 265.
8 James Reeves's description of post-war Georgian poetry is taken from his introduction to *Georgian Poetry* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), xv.
9 W. H. Davies, "Days Too Short," *Georgian Poetry, 1911–1912* (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1912), 60.
10 William Carlos Williams, "Spring Strains" *Collected Poems*, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan, 2 vols. (New York: New Directions, 1986), 1:97–8.
11 Raymond Williams, "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism," *The Politics of Modernism*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), 47.

4

Explorations of Consciousness

The imagist manifesto of 1912 called for "direct treatment of the 'thing' " (Rainey 94), and a misinterpretation of the name "imagist" led some poets to concentrate on images of external objects. But the full rule was "direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective." Although some modernist poems direct their attention primarily to external "objective" things, such as the city, in many cases the subject matter of the poem was the subjective state of consciousness, or a more complex and teasing blend of subjective and objective. Sometimes the speaker of the poem comments directly on his or her own psychology using a conventional vocabulary of affect, or a more technical vocabulary derived from psychology; but sometimes our knowledge of the speaker's psychology must be inferred from the poetic qualities of the text, from nuances of vocabulary, from changes of pace, from objects brought obsessively into focus and from those curiously omitted. To concentrate on subject matter in these cases is not to overlook the poetic qualities of the text.

This chapter will begin with H.D.'s "Mid-day" which, although it has some qualities of an "objective" imagist poem, focuses as much on the speaker's perceptions. It will then turn briefly to a non-modernist poem, Thomas Hardy's "Faintheart on a Railway Train" and will return to Baudelaire's "A une passante"; finally it will consider T. S. Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night." In conclusion it will consider how specifically modernist this sort of subject matter is, and what are the larger implications for our understanding of modernism.

"Mid-day" (1915) (Rainey 442–3) might at first appear to be another desert poem. The title of the poem does not direct attention towards the perceiving subject: unlike dramatic monologue, for example, it does not name a protagonist. Nor does it name a place or a type of place: if the poem were to be titled with, for example, the name of a specific

Mediterranean village or a generic landscape feature of a hot region, it would direct attention more closely to its setting. By selecting a time of day, it encourages us to focus on mood, and so on the person experiencing that mood.

As in "Garden," published in the same year, we find a first-person speaker seemingly assailed by external objects: in "Garden," the rose is "as hard as the descent of hail," while in "Mid-day" the light "beats upon me." It was a commonplace in psychological and literary writings of the time to speak of perceptions cascading, showering, or even bombarding the perceiving subject, the best-known example being Virginia Woolf's "shower of innumerable atoms" in her essay "Modern Fiction" (Rainey 898). Had H.D. written of the *sun* beating upon her, we would be in the realm of cliché, but the substitution of "light" refreshes the phrase, and redirects our attention to the verb. There is an apparent mismatch between "light," which is seemingly without substance, and "beating," which implies mass. The mismatch requires us to think further about the phrase, and this leads in several directions: first, the psychological idea that all perceptions "beat" at the organs of perception; second, the underlying cliché of the sun beating down; and third, the idea that the first person of the poem is hypersensitive.

H.D. goes on to spell out the speaker's state of mind more explicitly. For a critic who believes that good literature should trust its readers to make inferences and to reach conclusions for themselves – that it should show and not tell – the explicitness with which the speaker identifies her state of mind is the weakest aspect of this poem. We are told that the speaker is "startled," "anguished," "defeated," that she is torn by her thoughts and that she experiences "dread." It is interesting to rethink or to rewrite the poem without the explicit statements: for example, the opening lines might be: "The light beats upon me / I hear a split / leaf crackle on the paved floor." The bare fact that the speaker hears the leaf implies a location of solitude and silence, and a narrator with heightened senses. Small details are telling: the floor is *paved*, from which we may infer that the location is not the open country, but a place once inhabited, but now depopulated, temporarily or otherwise.

Although we might regret the explicit naming of emotional states, the statements are there, and we have to work with them. What, in the first three lines, is the relation between "I am startled" and "a split leaf crackles"? H.D.'s imagist method leaves the reader to decide. At its simplest, the imagist method consists of the presentation of stark and simple statements

in a sequence, with little logical explanation as to cause and effect or their relations to each other. These statements are predominantly visual images and other transcriptions of sense impressions (the crackle of the leaf, for example); they normally relate to a particular instance rather than general cases. Although the statements predominantly relate to sense impressions, introspective statements about states of mind, such as "I am startled," also appear. However, there is no narrative of cause and effect. The reader is left to determine whether relations of similarity or causation are being proposed.

When we come to lines 5–7, the relations are more explicit: the shaking of the seed pods is reported in line 5, and the speaker then uses it as the basis for a simile concerning her thoughts, "spent / as the black seeds." But in lines 1–3, less is explained. The expected sequence might be to describe the sensation, the sound of the crackling leaf, and then to describe the reaction, being startled. The reversal of this sequence allows us to accept the leaf as an image of the reaction – the sequence implies that being startled feels like being split open – but it is difficult to erase the interpretation that takes the leaf as the cause.

There is not space fully to explore the connection between the seeds and the narrator's state of mind: gardens and fruit are common in H.D.'s early poetry, and hint at the fertility theme common in modernist poetry around this time. As seeds have some properties in common with words, ideas, and metaphors of imaginative creativity, the poem might be read reflexively. There is some connection between the speaker's anguish and her seeding of ideas.

At line 19 a turn is explicitly signalled by the phrase "yet far beyond": even without the "yet," the gesture towards another space and a different scale would establish it. The turn towards the poplar confirms what many readers must already have felt: that the speaker's concentration on tiny detail such as the seeds, blades of grass, and the grapes, signals a state of mind that is overwrought and hypersensitive. The introduction of poplars makes the small scale of the earlier observations all the more explicit. The poplars also introduce a religious theme into the poem, in the invocation of them as "great"; the religious theme is also implicit in their position on the hill, apparently above the speaker; and implicit in the connotations of their being "deep-rooted," therefore durable. The religious theme draws on a specifically Christian vocabulary and imagery: nothing indicates that the poplars are suffering, but trees on a hill might suggest the crucifixion; the possibility that the seeds of the first part of the poem might be related

to the Biblical parable of the seeds (Mark 4:1–20) tends to be supported by the final lines about the narrator being a seed or seedling in the crevices of the rocks; falling, in other words, on stony ground. Note also that H.D. speaks of perishing rather than dying: the slightly elevated diction recalls the Gospel of St John, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Read this way, "Mid-day" is not concerned with seeds, heat, or poplars, but with the subject who perceives them. It employs slight nuances of language to suggest wider connotations. Two states of mind emerge from the poem: one, a nervous and despairing state, tied by reflex reactions to immediate sense perceptions, and the other more optimistic state, in which the speaker appears willing to submit before a greater, quasi-divine power.

Thomas Hardy's "Faintheart on a Railway Train" (published 1920), a poem that cannot be described as modernist in its techniques, nevertheless provides a concise summary of a characteristically modern state of mind, one which modernist writers would embody into the form and style of later poems.

> At nine in the morning there passed a church,
> At ten there passed me by the sea,
> At twelve a town of smoke and smirch,
> At two a forest of oak and birch,
> And then, on a platform, she:
>
> A radiant stranger, who saw not me.
> I said, "Get out to her do I dare?"
> But I kept my seat in my search for a plea,
> And the wheels moved on. O could it but be
> That I had alighted there![1]

The setting is "modern" in the sense of being a relatively new technology, one that placed the individual in a position of powerlessness compared to other modes of private and public transport. It embodies Hardy's well-established theme of the inexorability of Fate, but on this occasion he seems less concerned with the classical idea of the Fates than with the workings of modernity. The regular announcement of the hours in the first stanza suggests modernity in terms of the quantification of time. We might summarize the state of mind as hesitancy, but rather than diagnosing it as a personal character weakness, we can see it as subject position characteristic of

modern consciousness, brought about by the belatedness of perception in the modern world. Hardy's poem is an English version of the Baudelaire sonnet discussed in the last chapter, "A une passante." In Baudelaire's poem the mechanism by which the stranger is delivered to the speaker is the crowd, not the railway, but the two poems share the idea that our emotions cannot keep pace with modern life. As Walter Benjamin says of the Baudelaire poem, "love itself is recognized as being stigmatized in the big city."[2] Hardy's poem makes clear that modernity reaches into the countryside, in the forms both of the railway and of clock time.

Although formally Hardy's poem is not modernist, the randomness of the sequence of perceptions in the first four lines shares something with the disordered perceptions of modernist texts. There is neither logic nor narrative connecting the church, the sea, the town, and the forest; the man-made is juxtaposed with nature, the urban with the rural; the seeming order of the sequence of times is imposed externally, as is the order of rhyme. Both Hardy and Baudelaire gesture at something conveyed more convincingly by later modernist writers in both poetry and prose: the idea that, in the modern world, the perceiving subject is bombarded with sensations. Virginia Woolf's account in "Modern Fiction" is well known:

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel. From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, as they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday, the accent falls differently from of old. (Rainey 898)

The world seen from the railway carriage, or experienced in the busy city street, is a confused one: patterns emerge only retrospectively. This brings us to an idea adduced by several psychologists in the early twentieth century: that modernity creates a gap between perception and cognition; in the modern world, the mind is so overwhelmed with sensations that it can no longer process them. One possible result is the blasé mind, described influentially by Georg Simmel in "The Metropolis and Mental Life," a mind which has experienced so many sensations it can no longer absorb any more. Other minds are able to process their experience, but by the time they have done so, it is too late to act. There is, then, a kind of irony built into the very nature of modern experience; it is ironic because we expect sensations to connect us to the world, but when they become too numerous, they actually obscure it.

This sense of belatedness surfaces in a relatively small number of modernist poems; it is important, however, because the characteristic methods of modernist poems mean that the reader is placed in the position of the observer. Although we can choose the pace, we are overwhelmed with disconnected information which the speaker rarely interprets for us. If we slow the reading process down in order to cope, then we lose the natural pace of the poem. In this regard, modernist poems respond to modernity by reproducing it; but, as we can possess the poem for ever, they also allow us to replay fragmented experiences in slow motion, and to attempt to comprehend them.

While this study does not aim to contextualize modernist poetry, a survey of ideas about the mind may help to bring into focus some of what is going on in modernist poetry. Histories of modernism usually give great prominence to Freud's ideas about the mind. Freud is significant because he argued that the mind contains a residue of animal drives; that, although we believe ourselves to be rational and civilized beings, our rational behaviour is at the very least vulnerable to being hijacked by our animal drives, and might even be described as powered by them; our most civilized behaviour represents a sublimation of the animal side. The mind then, is divided. However, Freud was far from being the only psychologist to say that the mind is divided; one needs to resist assimilating the other theories to the Freudian one. Many other psychologists theorized about instincts and about the interface between the learned and the instinctual: among the most influential were William James and Henri Bergson.

T. S. Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (written 1911, published 1915), has in common with "Mid-day" a mood of tension, but the mood is placed within a more complex philosophical framework, and "Rhapsody" draws on a philosophical vocabulary not found in H.D.'s poem. The effect of the vocabulary is to allow connections between its presentation of the processes of mind and the philosophy of Henri Bergson. There is ample evidence to suggest that, not long after writing "Rhapsody," Eliot began to feel dissatisfied with Bergson's philosophy, but there is also evidence that he was interested in the philosopher during his period of residence in Paris.

> Twelve o'clock
> Along the reaches of the street
> Held in a lunar synthesis,
> Whispering lunar incantations

> Dissolve the floors of memory
> And all its clear relations,
> Its divisions and precisions.
> Every street lamp that I pass
> Beats like a fatalistic drum,
> And through the spaces of the dark
> Midnight shakes the memory
> As a madman shakes a dead geranium.[3]

"Rhapsody" rewards a slowing down of the reading process, stopping line by line or even word by word to see what we know and what remains unclear. In the title, "on" is ambiguous: does it mean simply that the poem is set on a windy night, or might it mean that the poem is a rhapsody *on the subject of* a windy night? There is a similar ambiguity in the word "rhapsody." Is it an announcement of the poem's form, by analogy with "Ode to a Nightingale" or "Elegy in an English Country Churchyard"? While the "rhapsody" is not a recognized poetic form, it recalls titles from the *fin de siècle*, such as Oscar Wilde's poem "Symphony in Yellow." Or is "rhapsody" an announcement that this will be a sort of dramatic monologue in which the speaker's state of mind will be rhapsodic? The latter allows for some irony, some distance between the speaker's apprehension of the world and our apprehension of the speaker.

Clock time is announced as important from the opening line: Eliot might have begun with "Midnight," but "Twelve o'clock" implies horological precision. The adverbial phrase "Along the reaches of the street" defers the grammatical subject and the verb. It also transfigures the literal setting: the intended meaning of "reaches" may be mean "a continuous stretch, course, or extent" (*OED*), but the term is used most often of rivers and other waterways, meaning the portion between two bends; the word transforms dry land into water. Even the dry land meanings of "reach" imply that the speaker is concerned to know what is going on around him, which at midnight implies that he is concerned with his safety; but if dry land is transfigured into water, then the street becomes altogether more dangerous. Moreover, "reach" cannot entirely rid itself of the implications of reaching: the street has become animated; while the speaker attempts to comprehend the street, it attempts to reach out and grasp him. To comprehend is to grasp. We do not even have a noun or pronoun at this point, but the poem is already suggesting a consciousness that is overwrought and nervous, perhaps even paranoid.

There is no comma at the end of the second line, so it remains unclear what is being "Held in a lunar synthesis": it might mean that the "reaches" are held, or it might refer forwards to the subject still-to-come. This is relevant because line 3 establishes a pattern which at first seems to continue in the following line, "Whispering lunar incantations": because of the pattern, it is possible to take "whispering" as a hanging participle, and to hope that the grammatical subject will appear in the next line. By the time that we have reached the full stop, it becomes clear that, if we are to parse this as a grammatical sentence, the subject must be "incantations." In a street on a windy night, we might have been expecting something more solid.

I have slowed down the opening lines because their slippery grammar enacts something that the sentence also describes: the dissolution of clear boundaries and clear relations. As readers we are able to rediscover those relations, but the experience of reading the opening lines reminds us how fragile they are.

The idea that clear relations and boundaries might dissolve is the clearest hint yet that the poem is drawing on Henri Bergson. Given the poem's emphasis on clock time, and the marking of time by the "fatalistic drum," the most relevant route into Bergson's philosophy is his discussion of time. Bergson's fascination with the question of time began with Zeno's paradox concerning Achilles and the Tortoise. Achilles challenges a tortoise to compete in the hundred metres sprint. To be fair to the tortoise he gives it a head start: it starts from a point 10 metres ahead of him. Common sense tells us that Achilles will soon overtake the tortoise and win the race; to put that more scientifically, we know their maximum possible speeds in races of this sort. But look at it this way: by the time that Achilles has reached the tortoise's starting point, the tortoise has moved on to a new point. By the time that Achilles has reached that point, the tortoise has moved on even further. And so on, ad infinitum. It seems that Achilles will never overtake the tortoise. A modern way of thinking about this is as a series of snapshots: Bergson was working as a philosopher in the early days of photography. Eadweard Muybridge's photographs of running horses date from the 1870s; the French original of Bergson's *Time and Free Will* dates from the 1880s.

The paradox is easily resolved: we know that each of the instants at which the tortoise has got out of Achilles' reach is closer in time to the other; our photographer would have to take photos ever more rapidly to produce the images that we are referring to. But the fact that it looked

plausible, if only momentarily, suggests that there is something wrong in the way we conceptualize time. Bergson argued that we mistakenly "spatialize" time: we think of it as a series of instants or segments, each entirely separate from the other. The spatialization of time is most obvious in a strip of cinema film, where each instant in time is spatially adjacent to the next. In spatializing time we obscure the dynamism of time and therefore of movement; we obscure the interpenetration of one moment into the next. We need then to distinguish between *temps* and *durée*, between clock time and the underlying "duration."

Bergson extended his critique, arguing that spatialization was a more widespread tendency of the rationalizing mind. Reality is continuous, with every part interconnected to the other; the rational mind segments reality into manageable chunks. Ferdinand de Saussure's model of language is similar: the continuum that is the world of sound is subdivided into manageable chunks which we call phonemes; reality is subdivided into elements of vocabulary, and into the temporal distinctions encoded in verbal tenses. There is a simple Darwinistic argument to explain why the division and categorization of reality is necessary: if, as organisms, we could not manipulate reality, we could not survive. In spite of this argument, many followers of Bergson felt that the undivided flux represented a more true reality. Bergson's ideas were implicitly a critique of instrumental rationality.

In "Rhapsody," the words "o'clock," "dissolve," "divisions," and "precisions," and other related terms acquire additional depth in the context of Bergsonian thought: to an educated reader in 1915 they could have carried Bergsonian resonances. These ideas might help to interpret some other details in the poem. There is a passage in Bergson's *Evolution Créatrice* (1907) in which incidents that seem disconnected, but which exist against a continuous backdrop, are compared to drumbeats emerging in a symphony.[4] We do not need to know the passage to connect the "fatalistic drum" in "Rhapsody" to Bergson, but it makes the connection all the more secure. The sequence of lamps resembles a sequence of clock chimes, and the announcements of time give the poem some sort of shape. Each lamp addresses the speaker in the imperative, ordering him to regard, remark, and finally to "mount" the stairs, "[p]ut your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life." The imperatives suggest that the outer form of his life at least is controlled by clock time; the inner associations represent a limited kind of freedom.

The cat which "devours a morsel of rancid butter" provokes a particularly interesting memory:

> So the hand of the child, automatic,
> Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay,
> I could see nothing beyond that child's eye.
> I have seen eyes in the street
> Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
> And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
> An old crab with barnacles on his back,
> Gripped the end of a stick which I held him.

Bergson was also interested in whether we possess free will, or are, so to speak, automata, and it is significant that the child's hand is "automatic"; that the speaker can see nothing behind its eye implies the absence of a soul. The incident opens up a series of questions: where had this toy come from, and how was the child so easily able to grab it? If its owner were present, surely what would be memorable would be the ensuing dispute over ownership? The scenario suggests that the toy itself is automatic, and had run on well in advance of its owner. It is a world of automatons. The next memory, the eyes in the street, is analogous to the speaker's own eyes looking at the child, and the shuttered windows analogous to his blankness. The difference is that, with the child, there appears to be no soul in residence, no one at home, while "lighted" implies that the house is occupied. The third memory, the crab, is analogous to the boy in its action of grabbing, and its being a creature with an exoskeleton confirms the idea that the narrator is locked out from the secret of life: there is something inside, but he cannot understand it. Eliot begins with philosophical ideas about the functioning of mind, but he also gives them an emotional edge. The memory of the crab seems like a memory of friendship, of a friendly gesture being acknowledged; but if that is the only friendship available in a world of automata, then the speaker is in a dire situation. In the light of this reading, the final lines of the previous paragraph become more significant. There, the speaker thinks of

> A broken spring in a factory yard,
> Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
> Hard and curled and ready to snap.

Although the image concerns an inanimate object, it is anthropomorphic: we speak of "fatigue" in metals, and this spring, suffering from it, has in a sense, died. It is analogous to a creature that has lost its vital power; "form"

remains in the sense of the external shape, but the spring no longer possesses the inner energy. It would be possible, of course, to read these lines as a reflexive comment on formalist poetry.

How distinctively modern are these poems, and how distinctively modernist? Both "Mid-day" and "Rhapsody" concern highly wrought, highly strung consciousnesses. Clearly their techniques are distinctively modernist, but were they simply reworking familiar content? Highly strung states of mind were not entirely new: consider Tennyson's "Mariana": the narrator picks out sounds such as the clinking latch, the creaking hinges, and the buzzing fly; he has an ear for detail that implies both relative silence and a hypersensitive consciousness. H.D.'s poem certainly builds on that kind of writing, and both draw on a kind of description common in Gothic fiction. However, there is a difference in proportion. In Tennyson's poem, the details are much more clearly placed within the general description, and subordinated to it; Tennyson provides a sense of perspective. H.D.'s poem focuses exclusively at first on the small sensations: it expects more of its readers, expecting them to reconstruct the landscape around the details by a process of inference. Moreover, while the aim of Tennyson's poem is the production of an emotional mood – call it langour or melancholy – the aim of H.D.'s is different: it is less concerned with emotion, and more with a state of mind. The two are not entirely distinct, but we need a different vocabulary to deal with it. It is also notable that, unlike dramatic monologues, H.D.'s poem does not name a protagonist. Whereas a dramatic monologue would imply a situation that explained the protagonist's mood, H.D. throws us into the state of anguish without explanation. "Angst" was far from the only state of mind portrayed by modernists, but by 1915 it had become sufficiently expected that it was possible for a poem to dwell on it without explanation or context.

Nor were the states of mind in Eliot's city poems entirely new: it is widely acknowledged that he drew on nineteenth century sources such as Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night*. Eliot's innovation lies not only the verse technique, but, as in H.D.'s poem, in a drastic reduction of context; the reduction places the emphasis more securely on the speaker's consciousness. Moreover, in the case of "Rhapsody," Eliot draws on psychological and philosophical knowledge about the mind, so that, while being placed inside the speaker's head, our attention is also directed towards tools that might assist in the analysis of it.

In concentrating on states of consciousness and mental processes, what were modernist poems overlooking? One answer is the body. True, they include the body as the residence of the five senses, but very few modernist poets consider the body as something creating its own sensations through sexual desire, the consumption of food and drink, and through the processes of aging. Eliot's Gerontion might be an old man, but he seems remarkably untroubled by physical pangs. The most thorough modernist account of the body comes not in a poem, but in Joyce's *Ulysses*. W. B. Yeats's poems of old age touch on the aging of the body, and its absurd combination with a young man's desire, but Yeats is vague or decorous about the specifics. The other interesting and neglected exception is Mina Loy's "Parturition": although the poem has a philosophical strand to it, about the emergence of the new from the old, it is also a poem about, literally, the sensation of giving birth.

Poems about states of consciousness are, predominantly, poems about individuals. It is true that the movement known as unanimism sought to describe states of consciousness that derive from being a member of a crowd, from the dissolution of divisions between individuals, but unanimist poems in English are relatively few; its greatest impact was on prose. The individuals of modernist poems are often isolated, even when there are other figures present. The philosophical position implied is one of solipsism, the "prison" of consciousness to which Eliot refers at the end of *The Waste Land*. As well as leaving out the body, modernist poems leave out social relations. They imply that the key to the modern world is to be found by looking ever deeper within the mind of the individual, rather than looking outside. A key word here is "alienation": for a Marxist, it describes a relation to the means of production, but modernist poetry suggests that it is a purely psychological phenomenon.

There are several different levels at which to approach modernist poems about states of consciousness. We need to look at the detail, at nuances of diction and structure, in order to understand the setting for the mind. But we also need to stand back, to think comparatively: we need to consider the range of possible states of mind that a modernist poet might describe; we need to think about how poets treated similar material before modernism. And we need to stand even further back, to see the choice of subject matter as a choice; we need to think about the other possibilities that were open to modernist writers, and about possibilities that seemed beyond the scope of poetry.

Notes

1 Thomas Hardy, "Faintheart on a Railway Train," *The Complete Poems*, ed. James Gibson (London: Macmillan, 1976), 566.
2 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* (London: Verso, 1997), 46.
3 Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 24–6.
4 The connection with Bergson's *Evolution Créatrice* is noted by B. C. Southam in *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (5th edn., London: Faber, 1990), 50.

Part II
Techniques

5

Interpreting Obscurities, Negotiating Negatives

The difficulty of modernist poetry is due, at least in part, to a feeling of disorientation: the kinds of information we expect a poem to give us are withheld, or are present only in highly unusual forms. How we can deal with such feelings, and how we can turn them to our advantage, is the theme of this chapter. One way of turning our disorientation to our advantage is to ask the question which informs Part II of this book: "Who is speaking?" There are productive and unproductive ways of asking the question. It is not helpful to try to identify a voice with a particular person; rather, we must ask "what kind of person is speaking?" Inseparable from this question are some others. Who does the speaker think he or she is speaking to? What assumptions does he or she make about the auditors? What knowledge does he or she expect the auditors to possess? What inferences does he or she expect the auditors to make for themselves? What knowledge do the auditors lack?

The present chapter will concentrate on titles and opening lines. Very often, if we can develop a critical insight at the start of the poem, the interpretation of the rest follows more easily. One way of suspending our own sense of disorientation is to think about the implied reader, one who possesses the knowledge needed to make sense of an utterance or of a complete text. One way of thinking about the implied reader is to ask what preliminary statement the poem would have to include to render the disorienting elements intelligible; and similarly, to ask what linking material is being suppressed. The chapter is primarily concerned with Hart Crane's "At Melville's Tomb" and "Black Tambourine," Ezra Pound's "The Return," William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow," and Pound's "Liu Ch'e"; other modernist poems will be invoked in the course of the discussion.

Sometimes, the difficulty of a modernist text is a matter of dense metaphor and uncertain pronouns. The opening stanza of "At Melville's Tomb" (1926) provides a particularly pronounced example:

> Often beneath the wave, wide from this ledge
> The dice of drowned men's bones he saw bequeath
> An embassy. Their numbers as he watched,
> Beat on the dusty shore and were obscured.
>
> (Rainey 816)

The title, conventional in itself, might lead us to expect a conventional elegy or reflections on death. While that hint is clearly relevant, the density of the language that follows defies our expectations of a conventional public poem: it does not have the transparency or the predictability that we would associate with the function of such a poem. "He" is presumably Melville, but in what sense can dead men's bones be dice? And in what ways can an inanimate object "bequeath" anything to anyone? The final preposterous, indigestible gesture is the idea that those dice might bequeath not something associated with gambling, but an embassy.

I will propose some answers to these questions, but the most important part of the interpretative process is to see the poem as forcing these questions on us. One response to this sort of difficult text is to assume that it is written for someone else, and that, for someone else, this reads like normal English. A more productive approach is to assume that our bafflement might be well founded, and to assume that it was part of the poet's intention to puzzle us. The immediate rewards from this kind of poem come from its music, and from the shapes of its phrases, not from any instantly paraphraseable message or content; there is then a different kind of reward or pleasure in thinking about the ways the phrases might make sense.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* reveals the richness of "bone." Some of the richness is due to metaphors of bone in relation to flesh, which commonly figure relationships of depth in relation to surface, of structure in relation to depth. Some of it is due to the uses to which we put bone: "bones" in the plural may be used to refer to dice. This need not imply that Crane means "the dice of drowned men's dice," which would be a tautology. Rather, he is encouraging us to imagine the bones rolling about on the bed of the ocean as rolling like dice. Or, if we prefer, we can set aside any attempt to visualize the scene, and we can think of "dice" as standing for unpredictability.

Dice can lead, if one is lucky, to great fortunes, and that is the most obvious connection between "dice" and "bequeath." Again, the dictionary is helpful. "Bequeath" is related to "quoth," and originally was broader in meaning: it meant "to say, to utter, to declare"; it gradually narrowed to the legal term we now know, and to metaphors derived from the idea of a literal bequest. Might Crane be using the word in an archaic sense? If we are familiar with other works by Crane, our judgement here might be guided by what Michel Foucault called the "author function," by an idea of what is plausible within his oeuvre. Crane was not shy of archaisms. Given that, it is worth investigating meanings of "embassy" which are no longer current. The word can refer to the group of people sent to represent a sovereign or nation; in a defunct sense it can refer to the message carried by the sovereign's representatives. So "bequeath / An embassy" might not refer to a real-estate transaction, but to the dice leaving a message. This is punningly confirmed by the sentences which follow. "Their numbers … / Beat on the shore and were obscured." "Numbers" could imply that Melville was conscious of the number of men who had drowned; it could refer to the numbers on the dice; but the plural noun can also refer to song or poetry (*OED*, 17b; see also 4b). So, to paraphrase, the dead men (via their bones) send a message to the shore.

Having paraphrased an obscure modernist phrase like this, we might wish to ask why the poet did not express his meaning more plainly; such complaints were made in many reviews of modernist poetry in the 1920s and 1930s. One answer is that there are many connotations carried in the wake of the literal meaning which our paraphrase would not achieve. To speak of the "dice" of drowned men's bones implies a rolling motion without having to spell it out; the chanciness of dice suggests that the "numbers" might not manage to communicate. But even if the original carried no more connotations than our paraphrase, the difficulty might be meaningful. First, it sends out a larger message about poetry, communication, and culture: we should not expect poetry to be consumable like other commodities; it is not an ingeniously packaged box containing an easily digestible chocolate. Second, the difficulty may signify something relevant to the particular poem. In this case it signifies the difficulty of communicating with the dead, or the difficulty of communicating with those lost at the bottom of the ocean. If Crane brings defunct meanings of "bequeath," "embassy," and "numbers" come into play, it is to remind us of the distance from the dead. We need to experience the disorientation for the poem to work its full effect. Our experience of disorientation, of finding the language opaque, is part of the meaning of the poem.

Two other forms of disorientation may be introduced by an examination of Crane's "Black Tambourine" (1921). The first of its three stanzas runs as follows:

> The interests of a black man in a cellar
> Mark tardy judgement on the world's closed door.
> Gnats toss in the shadow of a bottle,
> And a roach spans a crevice in the floor.
>
> (Rainey 813)

The structure of the poem derives from Eliot's quatrain poems such as "Whispers of Immortality" and "Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar." Though Crane's line is longer, the rhyming of second and fourth lines echoes Eliot's form, as does the sequence of blunt, syntactically simple statements. It also draws on Eliot in its juxtaposition of the present-day with the ancient world, in its movement from the cellar in the first stanza to Aesop in the second. This is one feature of the poem that might disorientate: we have hardly caught up with the "black man," and have hardly answered our questions about his cellar, when we are flung to an entirely different place and time. In the final stanza we are then returned to the black man and to the limited choices facing him. Our disorientation ought to lead to a question: what is the connection between a black man in Crane's America, and Aesop the Greek writer of fables? That might lead to further investigation of Aesop, and in this case, Lawrence Rainey's note reminds us that Aesop was traditionally believed to have been a slave who had been freed. Through juxtaposition, the poem is inviting us to compare and contrast the two men, one a freed slave, the other quite possibly an African-American descended from freed slaves.

"Black Tambourine" presents the "black man" as a type: there are no personalizing details, no narrative that explains how he came to be in the cellar, or what relation it bears to his everyday life. In so far as it treats him as a type rather than an individual, it is a racist poem; but in the context of other stereotypes of Negroes in circulation at the time, it is mild. It suggests that "the world" has closed the door to him, and this suggests some sympathy, even if "the world" sounds like an evasive description of those with the power to offer him wider opportunities.

The opening line is also interesting for its use of definite and indefinite articles. Discussions of "diction" in poetry, or "word choice," tend to focus initially on nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, and on the choices

that a poet might make in terms of their register. Along with prepositions, articles are easily neglected, but they have great power to orient and to disorient. Treated with sufficient detachment, they tell us a great deal about the implied reader of a text.

Although the poem treats the man as a type, it does not typify him to the extent of referring to him initially as "the black man." Straightforward expository writing will not use the definite article unless the reader is already familiar with the relevant object. The *OED*'s illustrative example clarifies the usage: "We keep a dog. We are all very fond of the dog." Crane's "Black Tambourine" does exactly this with regard to the black man, introducing him with the indefinite article in the first stanza, and returning to him with the definite in the third stanza.

One cause of disorientation for readers of poetry is the use of the definite article for entities with which we are not familiar. A well-known example comes in Eliot's "Prufrock" in the form of "the room" in which the women come and go. In "Black Tambourine," a similar problem is posed by "the interests" of the central character. We might survive this disorientation if the sentence went on to define them: for example, "the interests of a black man in a cellar / are shaped by his poverty." What Crane gives us however, in the second line, is cryptic: the interests "mark tardy judgement on the world's closed door." What sorts of interests "mark … judgment"? In order to answer this, we would need to raise further questions: Why are those judgements tardy? What is "the world's closed door"? Does the tardiness imply that the man realized too late that the door was being closed? While these questions are interesting and significant, for the present I wish to focus on Crane's use of "the." The definite article implies a reader who possesses knowledge about an entity. Most readers quickly recognize that they are not that reader; they do not possess that knowledge. One response is to assume that the poem was written for someone else. But another is to assume that there is no reader who possesses the relevant knowledge: the poem's densely worded assertions are in fact disguised questions. Just as in "At Melville's Tomb," we needed to ask in what ways bones could bequeath an embassy, so here we need to ask in what sense a man's interests can mark judgement on something.

Similar sorts of disorientation occur with personal pronouns and with demonstrative pronouns. The opening of Pound's "The Return" (1912) is a particularly clear example (Rainey 42). We are told that "they return," and are told how they return – their "tentative movements," "slow feet," their fearfulness – but we are not told who "they" are. We are kept waiting

for a sentence that might define them, but it never arrives. "The Return" is a poem of great rhythmic beauty, and the structure of its sound is compelling, but the lack of definition might be, for some readers, frustrating. It creates, in a very pure form, the typical encounter between reader and modernist poem, in which the reader becomes anxious that he or she has failed to notice a crucial detail, a crucial allusion, which might unlock its secrets. I say pure, because other modernist poems provide us with a great deal more that is recognizable and representational; but they do so in a fragmented form. "The Return" is devoid of anything recognizable from the modern world, and often archaic in diction.

The simplest form of reader-response answer to this puzzle is to say that the "subject" of the poem is our own puzzlement. That sort of answer can be absurd unless it takes into account some textual evidence, and tries to describe more accurately the shape and texture of our puzzlement: a more precise answer would be that the poem is about our being kept waiting. Note the contrast of tenses within the poem, between the present tense, uncompleted action of "they return," and the perfect tense of "these were." "They" are in the process of returning, but never quite do so; we are in the process of determining who they are, but never quite get there. The poem raises the expectation of completion, of perfection, but does not deliver.

Although the poem never explicitly defines "They," it *implies* a definition by the accumulation of verbs and epithets. Note also that it implies some sort of definition just by its grammar: "they" in this poem are always grammatical subjects, never objects; they might be tentative, they might turn back, but they do not, grammatically, allow anything to be done to them. The speaking subject in the poem never identifies itself as "I" or "we," never asserts its own presence against theirs; the speaker remains in the position of an awed spectator.

So, "they" do things. We can rephrase the poem so as to define "they" in terms of what they do: they are capable of returning; they are characterized by tentative movements; and by slow feet; their pace is troubled and they waver uncertainly. The process of rephrasing could become mechanical, but it can illuminate, especially if we think through the implied contrasting statements: if "they" return, some others do not; if they are tentative, others are more confident in their returning. To say that "they" are characterized by "slow feet" opens up the possibility of asking what has slow feet: old people, perhaps, or certain kinds of poem? This process can lead to breakthroughs, but not necessarily. We might say that the

subjects of this poem are defined by the absence of definition, and this surely leads to the possibility that they are ghostly forms.

What I have identified are modernist poems that state facts elliptically, as if the reader were already acquainted with them or the contexts which make them significant. William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow," part of his sequence *Spring and All* (1923) is an extreme instance of this tendency (Rainey 529). It is also a useful poem for thinking about our interpretative processes and our expectations of poetry. To isolate the poem from the sequence of *Spring and All* is not to remove any essential context which might explain the situation. The poem is intriguing because of the delicacy of its music and the starkness of its images: the orderliness of the music implies that there is some sort of intellectual order to the poem, some sort of meaning to the very simple proposition that it presents. But how are we to reach that meaning? If "so much depends …" were a sentence extracted from a detective novel then it would be easy enough to imagine a narrative context for it. But it is presented in isolation. Another route, often followed with British modernist poems, would be to make the wheelbarrow and the chickens symbolic of a larger concern. Taken together, we might argue, they represent agriculture, and particularly the mode of the small-scale independent farmer. We might ask whether there is a socio-political context that made such things particularly significant in 1923, or we might make the red wheelbarrow symbolic in some less historically significant way.

The trouble with that process is that there is little evidence to indicate whether the readings are right or wrong. The reading in which the objects "symbolize" the independent farmer might be more plausible if the poem had been printed in the context of a journal which debated such questions, but it was not. There is also a danger that, in an effort to bestow significance upon the text, we lose sight of its very delicacy and frailty, and its insistence on the factual. A good reading ought to begin from those qualities rather than compensate for them.

A consideration of the role of negatives in descriptive poetry provides another approach to "The Red Wheelbarrow," and provides questions which may be productively applied to a wide range of poems. As there are no negatives in Williams's poem, for a simple example one may turn to realist narrative prose. In the opening scene of *Great Expectations* (1860–1), Charles Dickens, via Pip, specifies a great deal of the texture and atmosphere of the graveyard in the marshes, as Pip begins to learn "the identity of things." We learn of the "dark flat wilderness" that was the marshes,

the "low leaden line" of the river. Magwitch springs up, and Dickens gives a detailed description of the impression he makes:

> A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; […].[1]

Set amongst a great wealth of positive tactile information, the specification of Magwitch as a "man with no hat" is anomalous. It would be equally true to say that he wasn't wearing pink knickerbockers, but Dickens does not specify those things. Although we interpret all the information we are given against our knowledge of the prevailing social conventions – we guess that it was not conventional to go around soaked in water and smothered in mud – the knowledge that Magwitch had "no hat" is more than usually dependent upon our knowledge of social conventions. The description seems odd because we no longer expect respectable people to wear hats outdoors; the meaning of hats as a social sign has changed. The description only becomes significant when placed in relation to the appropriate set of social conventions. The negatives tell us something about the character described, and perhaps something about the narrator's sense of social propriety, but they also tell us something about the implied historical reader of the text. Although the negative of "no hat" is easily interpretable, even at the present day, a negative that referred to a more obscure set of social conventions might be disorienting. Thinking about the implied reader is one way of reorienting oneself.

Ezra Pound's "Liu Ch'e," published in 1916, but probably written a few years earlier, is a description dominated by absences: the rustling of silk is "discontinued"; there is "no sound" in the courtyard; and, above all, the unnamed woman is dead.[2] Negatives in "dis-" allow the poet both to describe what used to be the case – that silk was often heard rustling – and its cessation; in consequence, the reader has less work to do to fill in the missing gaps. As well as stating some negatives directly using the "dis-" prefix and "no," the poem implies others by reference to our expectations: if we take silk to indicate luxury, and therefore to imply an upper-class courtyard, then we might expect the courtyard to be well kept; in this context the dust and the leaves are indices of its disuse. The poem implicitly states "the courtyard is not tidy"; this further implies a reader who would normally expect courtyards to be tidy. The world of rustling silk and a tidy courtyard is the world that has passed with the woman's death;

it is the inverse, as it were, of the actual world of the poem. The imagist method of the poem also allows the scurrying leaves to become something more than indices of decay. The comparison of the dead woman's motionless state to that of a leaf allows us retrospectively to interpret the other leaves as the other former occupants of the courtyard: they are tokens both of its desertion and its former liveliness.

"Liu Ch'e" bears comparison with Pound's translation of Li-Po's "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance" (Rainey 46): there are no literal negatives in the translation, but there is the same sense of negation communicated through understatement and through implication. The poem throws the reader into the midst of the scene: definite articles abound; the speaker assumes that we are familiar with the steps; we must infer the time of day from the presence of dew, and the social status of the speaker from her attire and from "the crystal curtain." Pound's note to the poem is relevant to the topic of negation, and more broadly to the modernist use of understatement and implication:

> Jewel stairs, therefore a palace. Grievance, therefore there is something to complain of. Gauze stockings, therefore a court lady, not a servant who complains. Clear autumn, therefore she has no excuse on account of weather. Also she has come early, for the dew has not merely whitened the stairs but has soaked her stockings. The poem is especially prized because she utters no direct reproach. (Rainey 46)

The note is itself an indirect reproach to poets who state emotions explicitly, those who tell rather than show, leaving the reader no room for imaginative contribution. Pound makes the eighth-century poem into a forerunner of imagist method: it is direct in its presentation of descriptive images, but indirect in its presentation of feelings and ideas. The emotional and intellectual content are implied by what is not said, and by the juxtaposition of images. In "The Jewel Stairs' Grievance," the images of the steps and the stockings become, in T. S. Eliot's phrase, "objective correlatives" for the speaker's feelings. Likewise, in "Liu Ch'e," the scurrying leaves and the single wet leaf, and the relations between them, become correlatives for the feeling of loss. Eliot's phrase has been overused, but the passage from his essay on *Hamlet* is relevant here:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain

> of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[3]

The phrase "a set of objects" should not be take to imply that the poet can describe only what is present: the rustling of silk in "Liu Ch'e" is quite definitely not present in the scene, but serves to suggest a particular emotion.

In "The Fire Sermon" section of *The Waste Land*, Eliot makes use of the doubleness of negative descriptions:

> The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
> Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
> Or other testimony of summer nights. The nymphs are departed.
> (Rainey 130)

Read by the rule which I applied to "no hat" earlier, the description implies a reader who would normally expect the river to contain such items. The irony of "testimony" in relation to such detritus also implies a reader who considers the social convention of throwing rubbish into the river to be an undesirable one. But there is a difference: Dickens's description of Magwitch's non-existent hat is so generic we do not simultaneously imagine him in one; Eliot's description of what is absent is so detailed, that, like the rustling silk, the objects become present. Had he simply written "The river bears no detritus. / The nymphs are departed" then the effect would not have been created. But rather than the generic term, he gives us specific details. The sentence piles disillusion upon disillusion: it conjures a disillusioned implied reader who expects the river to be filthy; it then disappoints those expectations by describing a river without those indices of pollution; but because it does not describe the river as pure and sparkling bright, it leaves the impression of pollution in any case.

"The Red Wheelbarrow" makes similar use of allusive understatement. The stillness of the image, its depopulation, and the detail of water, suggest that it owes something to Pound – if not specifically to his Chinese translations and imitations, then to the orientalist strand within imagism. We might approach it in the same deductive spirit as Pound's note to the "Jewel Stairs": a *red* wheelbarrow, therefore newly purchased or newly painted, therefore the possession of a proud gardener, smallholder, or farmer; a wheelbarrow, therefore a garden or smallholding not touched by mechanization; a wheelbarrow glazed with rain water, so unattended,

perhaps momentarily; white chickens, so ornamental to some extent; chickens standing beside a wheelbarrow, implying that it is day time and they are not being kept in a hen-house to protect from foxes, nor being intensively farmed.

This process is productive, but it does not penetrate to the heart of this poem's particular problem. The opening words, "so much," create a mystery for the same reasons that definite articles, undefined personal pronouns, and demonstrative pronouns create a mystery: "so" gestures towards a certain extent, but does not define it; the context for the utterance is lost (*OED* "so," part 3). Although "so" is often used as an intensifier without comparative force (*OED* "so," 14a) – e.g., "We were so pleased to receive your lovely present" – I don't think that is intended here. The pace of the poem and its precision do not encourage us to read the "so" as a colloquial intensifier: one can try to read "so much depends on a red wheelbarrow beside the white chickens" in a colloquial tone, but it is not the same as "so much depends these days on knowing the right people"; the splitting of familiar words at line breaks – "wheel / barrow" and "rain / water" – disrupts it.

The mystery of quantity created by the first two words is insufficiently answered by the objects that follow the verb: they are too homely, calm, and insignificant. Williams momentarily creates a reader who expects a great deal, one who expects dependency to relate to more substantial objects: one who expects sentences such as "so much depends on the new hydroelectric scheme," "so much depends upon the stabilization of the exchange rate," or "so much depends on the use of nitrogen-based fertilizers." What the reader finds instead is a poem that might be paraphrased as "so much depends on things which seem insignificant." The process is similar to negation: the insignificant quality of the objects functions as a kind of negation. It is not, in this case, the negation of a clearly established social convention like wearing hats, but of an expectation that exists more diffusely, and is brought momentarily into focus by the opening phrase.

Modernist poems treat their readers as if they knew a great deal. There is a well-worn argument to the effect that modernist poems were trying to exclude a mass readership, but one can also see the poems are treating the readers as people interested, intelligent, and hungry for knowledge. In very general terms, the implied reader is willing actively to imagine connections between elements that would not normally be found together, and willing to search for missing information. The implied reader is willing, for example, to think about how the word "dice" might go with

"bequeath," or how a black man in a modern-day cellar might go with Aesop the writer of fables. That general expectation can be discouraging, but it is also a sign of the openness of modernist texts to being constructed and reconstructed by the reader: they leave us a lot of imaginative space.

Notes

1 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, ed. Charlotte Mitchell (London: Penguin, 1996), 4.
2 For Pound's "Liu Ch'e," see *Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: Library of America, 2003), 286.
3 T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet" (1919), *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), 48.

6

The Sound of the Poem

In the face of a threat to its prestige, one way that poetry might try to justify itself is by emphasizing the things that are distinctively poetic. In his Vorticist manifesto, Pound articulated the idea as "the primary pigment": "It is the picture that means a hundred poems, the music that means a hundred pictures, […]" (Rainey 97). Painters in the era of the camera realized that they no longer had a monopoly on accurate visual representation: their art was better to be understood as the "arrangement of lines and colours" (Rainey 98). The primary quality of poetry is more difficult to analyze, because poetry combines the musical potential of signifiers with the referential qualities of their signifieds; moreover, the signifieds can refer to abstractions and to physical objects. Pound's definition of the primary pigment of poetry as the image (Rainey 98) is of little help. Rather, one might note that poetry distinguishes itself from fiction by drawing attention to its signifier; in fiction, the referent is more important. It does this, in particular, by means of repetition: in rhythm, in rhyme, and in alliteration, consonance, and assonance. One way for poetry to justify its existence was to emphasize the signifier, and, by using devices such as rhythm, rhyme, and alliteration, to emphasize the repetition of signifiers. But for poetry to adopt traditional patterns of rhythm and rhyme was to risk becoming formulaic, and thus another instance of mass-production. How modernist poets negotiated these difficulties will be considered in this chapter with reference to a wide range of poems; particular attention will be given to T. E. Hulme's "The Embankment" and William Carlos Williams's "To a Poor Old Woman."

A useful but densely formulated description of poetry comes in Roman Jakobson's classic essay "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics." A large part of the essay is concerned with a technical analysis of rhythm. Jakobson notes the tendency of regular rhythm in poetry to equalize all

syllable lengths. Thus, if we look in isolation at the words "end," "I," "my," "run," "softly," "song," "sweet," "Thames," and "till," each of the syllables has a different length: the "-ly" suffix of "softly" is probably the shortest, while "sweet" is the longest. But when they are placed together in the regular iambic line "Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song," the regular metre tends to reduce those differences, stretching short syllables towards the average, and compressing long ones. From this phenomenon Jakobson extracts his formulation:

> The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination.[1]

Jakobson imagines the two dimensions of language as the two axes of a graph. The axis of combination is the line in which we combine noun-phrases and verb-phrases to make sentences. The axis of selection is the dimension from which we select the elements that go to make up our utterances: thus in the phrases "Sweet Thames run softly" and "Beloved Derwent swiftly flow," the verbs "run" and "flow" are grammatically equivalent, as are the adverbs "softly" and "swiftly," though their meanings are of course different. The rhythmic regularity of poetry encourages us to "project" one axis onto the other: we think of adjacent elements as if they were equivalent. Equivalence at the level of the signifier encourages us to imagine equivalence at level of the signified. The repetition of similar feet encourages us to look for other kinds of repetition; if there are other kinds of aural repetition, such as rhyme or alliteration, these likewise signal the possibility of other repetitions. The equivalence principle of rhyme encourages us to look for similarities in the signifieds: to rhyme antonyms such as "womb" and "tomb" is to encourage the reader to think how the two enclosed spaces resemble each other, and also how they differ.

The role that sound plays in the meaning of the poem is complex. Alexander Pope urged in the eighteenth century that the sound should be the echo to the sense, but the over-zealous pursuit of this principle leads to sound being too rigidly subordinated to meaning, something Peter Barry once usefully summarized as the "Enactment Fallacy."[2] If we assume, as some school-level introductions do, that the primary purpose of poetry is to represent the physical world as vividly as possible, then sound echoing the sense is reduced to onomatopoeia. Sound becomes essentially decorative, a supplement to sense. If we concede this much, we grant primacy to prose. A key assumption in this chapter is that patterns of sound should be

allowed to develop a life of their own before we treat them as instruments of meaning. In some cases there may be no direct connection between the "sound" and the "sense" of the poem, but the organization of the aural level acts as a guarantee of organization at other levels.

How, as critics, can we make the sound of a poem significant? Assuming that the poem is willing to cooperate with the assumptions articulated above, one answer is to read the poem aloud, and to listen to the sound of the poem with as little attention to the meaning as is possible. We can never fully realize such a reading, because our knowledge of grammar affects the intonation; intonation is a form of interpretation. But it is a useful exercise, and there is some modernist support for it. In 1929, T. S. Eliot claimed that the poetry of Dante was easy to read, even if you did not fully understand medieval Italian: "genuine poetry can communicate before it is understood."[3] He reinforced this idea a few years later with his idea of the "auditory imagination," something that penetrates below conscious levels.[4]

We can also look and listen for patterns of sound. The written text allows us to look for patterns that we might not consciously remember: a distinctive cluster of alliteration for example. Those repetitions can be treated as a form of rhyme, implying equivalence between two elements that are spatially separated. "Equivalence" for these purposes means only comparability.

Interpreting rhythm requires close attention to detail, but it is important not to lose sight of the larger picture. What choices were open to a modernist poet with regard to rhythm? What were the larger implications of those choices? What mood or moods did they allow the poet to create, and what possibilities did they exclude? Looking beyond the meaning of the poem, what signals did they send out about the modernity of the poet?

In retrospect, from the 1940s, Ezra Pound wrote that "to break the pentameter" was "the first heave" in the project of modernizing poetry (Canto LXXXI, line 54; Rainey 91). The phrase might leave the impression that the only poetry being written in the late nineteenth century was written in regular blank verse. In fact the period immediately before modernism is notable for its own forms of experimentation, particularly the adoption of classical metres such as sapphics. Modernist poetry stood in an ambivalent relationship to the revival of classical measures. On the one hand, such experiments demonstrated that iambic tetrameter and pentameter were not the only possible ways of constructing a line of verse. They introduced a self-consciousness about form and about the possibility of choosing other forms. On the other hand, predetermined metres

suggested a kind of rigidity which precluded really open-ended experimentation; the composition of poems in them suggested a school exercise rather than genuine creation; if the poet undertook them as an exercise, there was a danger that poets would simply pad their lines with unnecessary epithets, just as they had done in iambic pentameter. Classical metres also used the alternation of long and short syllables as their fundamental principle, rather than the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables.

By 1900, then, one line of exploration had been tried, and largely abandoned. Around 1909, the important step forward appeared to be to break with regular metres. Ezra Pound emphasized the "musical phrase" as being more important than regular metres: "compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome" (Rainey 94). T. S. Eliot, discussing Pound's poetry in 1917, quoted a reviewer who felt that Pound seemed to be "scorning the limitations of form and metre, breaking out into any sort of expression which suits itself to his mood."[5] Eliot took the criticism as a compliment: it was in the adaptation of metre to mood that Pound excelled.

To break with the pentameter usually meant to choose "*vers libre*": the French term was in use in English from at least 1902, and its English translation from at least 1908. "Free verse" is a slippery concept: although it may seem easy enough to define what it is that poets wish to be free from – regular metres – the term in itself does not give a clue as to the rules that prevailed among writers of such verse. There were two main schools. On the one hand, there were the followers of Walt Whitman, small in number, of whom the best known is D. H. Lawrence. Lawrence's free verse line is long, and the rhythmic element of his composition derives not so much from the stressing of syllables as from figures of repetition. On the other hand we have writers of free verse whose lines appear regular when we attend not to "feet," but to the number of stressed syllables; typically their lines contain between two and six stressed syllables, with three and four stresses being the most common. T. S. Eliot's critical analysis of *vers libre* in 1917 argued that the life of verse derived from a contrast between "fixity and flux," and that good free verse worked by reminding us continually of that from which it was free.[6] One way of regarding free verse is as simply another form of stress-accentual metre, but with highly irregular patterns of repetition.

A poet in 1912 could have chosen regular metre, a Whitmanian free verse, or the form of free verse just described, with the suggestion of regular metres lurking behind it. The two other major possibilities are syllabic

verse and alliterative verse. In the first, the measure of a line is neither feet nor stressed syllables, but the number of syllables it contains. This form came into English from French poetry, in which the counting of syllables is the main system of versification, and from Japanese poetry. Discussions of the *haiku* form began to appear in English journals in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Japanese *haiku* consists of 17 syllables, divided into lines of 5, 7, and 5. Its transposition into English is problematic not only because one is moving from a language without heavy emphasis on particular syllables, but also because Japanese syllables are shorter and more regular than English.[7] But arguments about authenticity are beside the point: however warped it becomes in translation, the haiku form suggested an alternative principle for verse composition. The tendency in English was to create regular stanzas containing far more syllables than the lines of a haiku: Marianne Moore's "To a Steam Roller" has lines of 5, 12, 12, and 15 syllables, for example. Visually, such lines can look as if they might be constructed from regular feet, but attempts to impose a regular number of stresses onto them fail.

Alliterative verse, as understood in the early twentieth century, operated on the principle of counting only certain stressed syllables, those that formed an alliterative pattern. In Old English poetry, each line usually contained four stressed syllables, of which the first three alliterated. Ezra Pound's translation of the Old English poem "The Seafarer" (Rainey 39–41) breaks the rules liberally, but certain lines approximate more closely, for example: "Chill its chains are; chafing sighs / Hew my heart round and hunger begot" (lines 10–11). Gerard Manley Hopkins's late nineteenth century metrical experiments, which rejected the foot as a unit of composition, and relied instead on stressed syllables, supplemented by alliteration, appeared to many modernist writers as an important precedent for their own work. However, Hopkins was not a direct influence on early modernists; his poetry only became widely known after 1918.

Each of these metrical systems creates different expressive possibilities. The long Whitmanian line tends to push writers towards an exclamatory style, or a style marked by rhetorical forms of repetition; it tends to suggest an assertive or expressive self; it tends to focus attention as much onto the speaker as on to the subject of the poem. Alliterative systems can suggest a passionate attitude, and can call up associations of heroic endeavour; handled carelessly they can become monotonous over longer poems. Syllabic verse allows for expression that is more muted, more conversational, than either free verse forms or regular metres. If it changes tone,

it does so through diction: without the regular pulse of stressed syllables behind it, it cannot achieve the more exclamatory tones of other verse forms. There is some controversy about whether syllabic verse works at all: because spoken English is marked by stressed syllables, some critics argue that any other system is alien. One has stated that poets might as well use the number of letters in a line as a basis for its regularity: we could never hear such a measure. So is syllabic verse simply prose chopped into lines? The ease with which Moore incorporates a reviewer's prose into "To a Steam Roller" might suggest that it is, but syllabic count introduces definite constraints; in response to those constraints, the poet has to use language more self-consciously, and is forced to find phrases which might not have come spontaneously. It produces a disconcerting impression that something is not quite "natural." Moreover, even chopped-up prose presents the writer with a decision about where to sever the line, and line endings are an inalienable characteristic of poetry.

In his essay on *vers libre*, Eliot quotes T. E. Hulme's "The Embankment" as an example of a poem which might be considered to be free verse, but which could not create its effect "without the constant suggestion and the skilful evasion of iambic pentameter."[8] It is illuminating to follow Eliot's suggestion and make explicit what these suggestions and evasions might be, but it is necessary first to establish some other parameters.

Rhythm is always an interpretation. When dealing with metrically regular poems, it is convenient to distinguish the expectations established in the poem, and their actualization in any given line; to distinguish between its *metre* and the *rhythm* of each line. Thus a poem in iambic pentameter might deviate markedly in a line by having an inverted first foot, or by having an extra syllable to make an anapaest from an iamb; or, more subtly, while retaining the iambic metre, it can create effects of acceleration or deceleration through punctuation, grammar, the choice of monosyllabic or polysyllabic words. Exactly how we read those words, how far we try to assimilate them to the underlying metre, is a matter of choice. Derek Attridge has remarked how, in the context of Spenser's "Prothalamion," a poem in regular iambic pentameter, the line "Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song" carries five stresses, with "till" being accented more strongly than one might accent it in normal speech.[9] The poem's metre encourages us to impose a certain rhythm on the words. In the context of *The Waste Land*, however, where Eliot's lines are less regular, there is a temptation to stress only "Thames," "soft-," "end," and "song," and to give the line a different rhythm.

T. E. Hulme's "The Embankment" presents us with several such rhythmical choices:

> **The Embankment**
> (The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night)
>
> Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,
> In a flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.
> Now see I
> That warmth's the very stuff of poesy.
> Oh, God, make small
> The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,
> That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.[10]

In the opening line, we could choose a colloquial pronunciation of "ecstasy" as a dactyl, or we could give additional emphasis to the final syllable, so that the last four syllables are two iambs. The rhythm of the line does not compel us towards the latter, but allows for it. The line is close to being iambic pentameter, the exceptions being an inverted first foot and two trailing syllables at the end; if we were to stress the last syllable of "ecstasy," the line would be closer to iambic hexameter. However, although there is a suggestion of the pentameter, the alliteration on the unstressed syllable of "finesse" draws attention away from this system. If we took the principle of the line to be alliteration, then we might find four stresses: "fin-," "fidd-," "found," and "ecst-"; in that case, we would be less likely to pronounce the final syllable of "ecstasy."

The second line could also be spoken with five stresses, but contains fewer reminders of the iambic line: it seems best interpreted as having a stress on "flash," and then two pairs of stresses on "gold heels" and "hard pave-." There is a choice about how much emphasis to give to "gold" and "hard." In an earlier version of the poem, the last words of the line were "pavement grey," a formulation that would have regularized the rhythm at that point; the revision to "hard pavement" was a move to a less traditionally poetic rhythm. Eliot was right to note that the lines were suggesting and evading iambic pentameter, but the question remains of why.

Line 3 offers several choices: my own preference is to give it two stresses, "Now" and "I": the first is dictated by the contrast with "Once," and the stress on "I" is almost unavoidable. One might instead try to give almost equal stress to all three words, thereby giving additional emphasis to seeing: the reading would emphasize that the speaker has experienced some

sort of revelation; "seeing" here would stand in contrast to the implied action of the first line, hearing the music of fiddles, and in contrast to the literal seeing of the second line. However we take the line, its brevity marks a shift in the logic of the poem, the pivoting point between the past and the present: the rhythm points to the logic of the poem's structure, and would do so even if the explicit signal of "Once" and "Now" were not present.

The next lines are far closer to the iambic: if we choose to place a stress on the last syllable of "poesy," then line 4 is pure iambic pentameter. Given the artificial, dated quality of the word "poesy," the choice is a curious one: do we emphasize the archaism of the word by artificially stressing the final syllable, or do we opt for modernity and allow the line to trail away? It would be possible too, to make the fifth line into pure iambic pentameter, but this would require an unnatural stress on the "eat" of "eaten," and an abnormally heavy stress on "of": it is more likely that at this point we fall back into a more natural rhythm, with the emphasis on "star." The pair of stresses ("old star-") causes a pause, which gives additional emphasis to "star-eaten." The final line then reverts to iambic feet, though in this case it is a hexameter.

We are now in a position to ask why. The poem draws closest to the regular metre in lines 4 and 7, at the points when it describes warmth and comfort. It is furthest away when describing "the flash of gold heels on the hard pavement." So by suggesting and evading regular metres, the poem establishes its own system of internal contrasts. To express this correctly requires some tact: at some level, the contrast appears to correspond to the speaker's two states, rich and fallen, but to say that the "roughness" of certain lines corresponds to the "roughness" of his present condition would be a little too neat, and a little too close to the mimetic ideal in which the sound of a phrase depicts a quality of things. In any case, the roughest lines describe his former life of luxury. The point is not of the correspondence of a given metre to a given situation, but the creation of an internal contrast. The contrast keeps the poem rhythmically interesting, but also creates structure. Not everything can be discovered through a process of sight reading. Having read the last line, with its six stresses, we might be encouraged to try the first line again with six. This raises the possibility of a reading in which the hexameters wrap themselves around the core of the poem like an enfolding blanket, but such a reading, in which the form of the poem mimics its subject matter, is a version of the enactment fallacy. One might simply see the pattern as a matter of pleasing

symmetry, the creation of order at an aural level which suggests orderliness elsewhere, even when conventional connections are absent. Or one might see the final line as a smoothing out, or a subduing, of the rhythmic pattern of the first.

The movement of "The Embankment," from relatively irregular to relatively regular lines is not the only possibility. A rather more obvious, but widely distributed modernist trick is to raise an expectation of regular and traditional rhythm and then to undercut or to disrupt it. Ezra Pound produced some of the most obvious examples: "The Bath Tub," "The Lake Isle," and, rather more subtly, "The Garden." Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" does something similar in its opening lines:

> So let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table;

While much of the shock of the third line comes from the content, the rhythmical development of the lines also contributes. The opening line is most easily read as pure iambic tetrameter. The second is less certain; it offers the reader more options, particularly in the first six words, but by its final four syllables it has returned to iambic feet, and, like the end of the first line, to long vowel sounds, providing a smooth rhyme in "I" and "sky." Line three is where the lyrical flow of the poem is first punctured: the long "e" of "evening" seems to be picked up by the "e" of "etherised," but the later "e" is slightly shorter. We are given the option of regularizing the rhythm of "etherised" by stretching the third syllable, but to do so is unnatural; but if we read it naturally, as a dactyl, we end with a scurry of unstressed syllables until we reach "-pon." Moreover, the rhyme of "sky" and "I" reaches inside the word "etherised" and seems to bring the line to an end; "upon a table" sounds like an afterthought. Creating high-flown expectations only to undercut them, Eliot establishes the emotional pattern for the rest of the poem.

One of this chapter's starting points was the proposition that what distinguished poetry from prose, and what became its unique selling point in the literary marketplace, was its self-consciousness about language; repetition was one of the primary means by which poetry drew attention to the signifier. However, one might instead define poetry as verse: as a form of writing in which lines end before they reach the margin of the page; or as a form of writing in which the author rather than the typesetter chooses where the

lines end. What do modernist writers do with line endings that might justify the continued existence of verse?

Modernist poets differed about the value of rhyme, and several of them changed their theory and practice. The argument against rhyme, and particularly against fixed rhyme schemes, was that it led to filler, and that it was unsuitable to some emotions. The argument in favour was that it forced the poet to accept a degree of discipline.

When they do use them, what do modernist poets do with rhymes? There is a tendency to speak of rhymes as if they had a definite existence within the text: I would suggest that it is more productive to think of them as elements which are never fully actualized without a reader; rhyme words often present the reader with a choice: do we warp our pronunciation of the word to fulfil the rhyme, or do we assert a natural pronunciation and produce half-rhymes? In Hulme's "The Embankment," do we give full weight to the final syllables of "ecstasy" and "poesy" in order to bring them together? In Eliot's "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" (quoted in chapter 4, p. 50), do we similarly stretch "geranium" in order to rhyme it properly with "fatalistic drum"? To assert the rhyme seems particularly unnatural when, in other respects, the poets appear to be avoiding poeticisms of diction and grammar. Why are they offering rhyme choices? One very general answer might be that they are posing questions about the nature of verse and of rhyme, asking us as readers how artificial it should be. A more local answer is that half-rhymes, or difficult choices about rhymes, focus our attention on pairs of words. Hulme might be asking us, for example, what "ecstasy" has to do with "poesy"; is poetry still a valid route to transcendence? Complete rhymes should focus our attention in the same way, but it is easy to become lulled by the succession of them. Within free verse, modernists have the choice to turn rhyme on or off, to subdue it or brighten it according to the local effect.

Rhyme is not the only thing that occurs at a line ending: breaking the grammar mid-line is an effect in itself, and not one that was new with modernism. The relatively small innovation that modernists made related to where one might break the line grammatically. In "The Red Wheelbarrow," Williams breaks the line in the middle of two compound words, so that, momentarily, we think that "So much / depends / upon the red wheel," and then that "the red wheel / barrow" is glazed "with rain," not "rain water." For a second, we ask ourselves, what is "the red wheel"? For even longer, we might be asking what the difference is between being glazed with rain and glazed with rainwater. In this case, the specific

local problem does not apparently lead to larger thematic questions. Its function is rather is to keep the reader in an alert frame of mind; or, to put it another way, to remind the reader not to conclude interpreting too early.

Williams is particularly alert to the use of line endings. "To a Poor Old Woman" offers in its second paragraph a technical study in how line endings can change the meaning of a phrase.

> munching a plum on
> the street a paper bag
> of them in her hand
>
> They taste good to her
> They taste good
> to her. They taste
> good to her[11]
>
> (ll. 1–7)

We could treat lines 4–7 as enactment, as a greedy gobbling of identical pieces of fruit, one after another; the line munches away at the phrase. We could paraphrase them, that is, as "she eats three plums, rapidly." But there is much more going on. Do plums simply taste good, that is good universally, to everyone; or do they taste particularly good to a poor old woman whose only home might be the street? "They taste good to her" offers the basic proposition; "they taste good" appears to offer the narrator's confirmation: not only do they taste good to her, but they do objectively taste good. But then we turn the line and have the qualifying "to her": perhaps that poses a question – they taste good, to her, but are they actually good? Or only good because she is poor, old, and a woman? The next fragment, "They taste," tells us that they taste of something, but we are left at the end of the line wondering how they taste, and what they taste of. The turn delivers the same information, but again with different emphasis.

Eliot's claim that a good poem can communicate before it is understood overstates the case, but is a powerful claim on behalf of the musical pleasures of poetry. A more measured case would have to concede three things: first, that the patterns of sound only emerge properly when we have made a preliminary interpretation of what to emphasize; second, that what is "communicated" by sound becomes more important once we begin to understand the poem; and third, that the patterns of sound, as well as

communicating in themselves, are often signposts to what is important in the poem. The sounds in a poem communicate through establishing patterns of repetition, and through one pattern contrasting with another: a paragraph of tentative rhythms contrasting with another of assertive regularity; a pattern of subdued rhymes contrasting with a few full rhymes. In interpreting, there is a temptation to associate a given pattern with a given meaning, often in a mimetic way, but there are often more subtle suggestions going on, and what is needed is sometimes a patient ear, a willingness to enjoy the sound for its own sake and to allow meaning to emerge from it at a later date.

Notes

1 Roman Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (Harlow: Longman, 1988), 39.
2 Peter Barry, "The Enactment Fallacy," *Essays in Criticism* 30 (1980), 95–104.
3 T. S. Eliot, "Dante" (1929), *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), 206.
4 T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London: Faber, 1933), 118–19.
5 T. S. Eliot, "Ezra Pound: His Metric and His Poetry," *To Criticize the Critic* (London: Faber, 1965), 165.
6 T. S. Eliot, "Reflections on 'Vers Libre'," *Selected Prose*, 33.
7 For the argument about the non-native quality of syllabic verse, see Robert Wallace, "Meter in English," *Meter in English: A Critical Engagement*, ed. David Baker (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1996).
8 T. S. Eliot, "Reflections on 'Vers Libre'," *Selected Prose*, 33.
9 Derek Attridge, *The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982), 323.
10 T. E. Hulme, "The Embankment," *Collected Writings*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.
11 William Carlos Williams, "To a Poor Old Woman," *Collected Poems*, 2 vols, ed. A. Walton Litz and Christopher MacGowan, (New York: New Directions, 1986), 1:383.

7

Allusion and Quotation

Poetry can draw attention to its distinct qualities as a form of knowledge in several ways. One is to draw attention to its textuality by alluding to, or quoting from, other texts. Allusion allows modernist writers to reach back into literary history, and to remind the reader of the interconnection of the past and the present. It also allows the writer to indicate that he or she is acquainted with the works of his or her predecessors; it allows the writer to demonstrate that the new work was achieved by "standing on the shoulders of giants." The phrase is Isaac Newton's, and the ideal of cumulative knowledge connects the allusion to an ideal of scientific method. However, a scientist referring to the work of his or her predecessors and contemporaries would normally do so explicitly; a writer may learn from other writers without having to wear that learning on his or her sleeve.

To some scientifically minded people, allusion was a sign of the decadence of literary culture. A great many of those in the governing classes in the early twentieth century had an education in the classics; consequently, allusion to the classics was common in political discourse, particularly in the form of "tags" from Latin. The adequacy of classical education to the modern world was fiercely debated during the First World War: one of its defenders claimed that the humanities help us to see the world "with imagination." H. G. Wells, defending the scientific outlook in 1916, responded that having a humanist education meant "never hearing a skylark without raining out quotations from that poem of Shelley's, and never looking at a tripod in a chemical laboratory without rolling the eyes and murmuring 'Delphi!' "[1] One would not see the world with imagination, but would see it "*tagged*"; one would not see life steadily and see it whole, as Matthew Arnold had envisaged, but look at life "unsteadily" and "with one's head swimming with fine remembered phrases." The same criticisms could be levelled at the subtler mode, allusion. Literary critics have tended

to treat it as one of the most sophisticated aspects of literary composition, but there have been dissenting voices. The present chapter will concentrate largely on the most prominently allusive modernist poem, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

Allusion is a method that contributes to the impression that modernist texts are difficult. Allusion rouses complex feelings: when one recognizes an allusion, a feeling of belonging, of feeling that one belongs to the same cultural group as the poet; but if one feels that a poet is alluding and the allusions remain unrecognizable or unintelligible, it can lead to a sense of exclusion. The distinction between *recognition* and *comprehension* is important, because one might recognize the source of the allusion, perhaps with help from an annotated edition, but not feel comfortable with the way the poet is using it; the poet's use of the source text implies that they value and interpret it differently, and that they belong to a different cultural group. H. G. Wells was speaking not just for scientists, but for the lower middle classes. There is, in short, a cultural politics to allusion. As with other forms of modernist difficulty, it is important both to try to overcome the difficulty, but not to dissolve the memory of it completely: it may be that the difficulty constitutes part of the meaning of the text.

One of the most densely interwoven passages of *The Waste Land* provides sufficient materials to begin a discussion of the definition of allusion:

> But at my back from time to time I hear
> The sound of horns and motors, which shall bring
> Sweeney to Mrs Porter in the spring.
> O the moon shone bright on Mrs Porter
> And on her daughter
> They wash their feet in soda water.

Eliot's notes identify three sources. First, Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress":

> But at my back I alwaies hear
> Times winged Chariot hurrying near:[2]

Second, a more obscure work, John Day's *The Parliament of Bees*:

> When of the sudden, listening, you shall hear
> A noise of horns and hunting, which shall bring

> Actaeon to Diana in the spring,
> Where all shall see her naked skin; and there
> Actaeon's hounds shall their own master tear,[3]

Finally, the passage dissolves into a popular ballad from Sydney, Australia. Some critical accounts report that the ballad was sung by soldiers during the First World War: Rainey quotes one possible source, but because soldiers' ballads are not always recorded in print, especially not when they are considered obscene, the matter is not readily resolved.

On this brief account, Eliot might appear to be engaging in intertextuality, as described by Roland Barthes:

> We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.[4]

The centres of culture in *The Waste Land* are countable, but they are various: they range from contemporary culture to classical myth. But literary allusion is a very different thing from intertextuality, and the theorization of it begins from very different critical assumptions. Theorists of intertextuality are, explicitly or otherwise, concerned to deconstruct established hierarchies of text and canon, while theorists of allusion generally take those hierarchies as a given: without them, allusion could not function. Although literary allusion and quotation are examples of intertextuality, they are a special subset: the theory of intertextuality relates to all forms of writing. For example if we use the word "horns," it potentially refers to all previous uses of the word, literary and non-literary; collocations of words, such as "horns and motors," refer to all previous collocations, so that relevant intertexts would include a newspaper report about noise pollution in the contemporary city; the intertext from a newspaper is as valid as one from a well-established literary work.[5] By this account, intertextuality is as much a feature of colloquial discourse as it is of written, as much a feature of popular culture as it is of high culture. The notion of intertextuality dissolves the special status granted to "literature": literature consists of anything printed; intertextuality could also in theory include reference to oral "texts," the only problem being one of providing evidence.

Theorists of allusion are thinner on the ground than theorists of intertextuality: the concept tends to be used in critical practice, with relatively

little questioning of its underlying assumptions; what I will refer to as the "theory of allusion" is largely an inference from the practices of literary critics. The concept of allusion assumes a stable and relatively restricted canon of writers to whom a poet might allude; not Barthes's innumerable centres of culture, but a distinct tradition of literature. In Christopher Ricks's account, they are related by a metaphor of inheritance, usually grateful inheritance; Ricks has little time for Harold Bloom's idea of the anxiety of influence, or the idea that one might resent one's poetical ancestors. The concept of allusion also assumes that we can infer knowledge of an author's intentions, and use it to guide us in our interpretations. This of course runs contrary to much critical theory: both that of the New Critics, with their notion of "the intentional fallacy," and the theory and practice that began with French theory in the late 1960s, when the "death of the author" was a fundamental assumption. Critics writing about allusion do not assume that they have access to the author's complete intentions in writing a poem, but intention is inseparable from the act of alluding. In order to recognize the allusion, the reader has not simply to identify the source text – which, after all, a computer could do – but has to recognize that the author intended us to identify it. In a case such as the allusion to Marvell above, this might seem unproblematic: but the more faint the resemblance between the two texts, the harder it becomes to quote solid evidence for there being an allusion. Having a restricted canon makes it easier for allusion to function unambiguously, simply because it reduces the range of possibilities. But there is never complete consensus about the composition of the canon, and even if there were at any given moment, canons change. We are faced with the problem of determining the appropriate canon for a given writer at a given time.

The problem of faint resemblances is important, because allusion is of necessity indirect and so, potentially, indistinct. In its indirectness it has something in common with negatives and understatements in modernist poetry: it embodies the assumption that good writing should not spell everything out explicitly; that it should make imaginative demands on the reader, and should leave him or her space for imaginative speculation. Allusion, however, differs, in that in "recognizing" an allusion we are deferring to the author's intentions: we are allowed to be imaginative in thinking about *why* the author made a particular allusion at a particular point, but we are not allowed to misrecognize it.

Some allusions are relatively bold: in *The Waste Land*, for example, "Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song"; Eliot takes a whole line

from Edmund Spenser's "Prothalamion," and repeats it verbatim. If the essence of allusion is indirectness, then should this example really be classed as an allusion? Given that the words appear verbatim, ought it not be classed as a quotation? The difficulty with this definition of quotation is that it is impossible to demarcate: how many words would constitute a quotation? Certain collocations of words are very common, so the mere appearance of two words together would not prove with any certainty that the author was quoting from a particular source. According to the theory of intertextuality, all words are quotations from other texts; even a new compound word would be a quotation of its component morphemes. It is simplest to reserve "quotation" for those phrases that actually appear in quotation marks.

Do quotations allude? If Eliot's quotation from Prothalamion appeared in quotation marks it would be a bold and direct reference to Spenser's text, but it would be but a small segment of the source; *The Waste Land* glances at the full wedding poem rather than incorporating the whole of it. In that sense, it would allude. This creates a problem of terminology in that "allusion" can refer both to a string of familiar words found in a poem, and the reference implied by the string of words; quotations are "allusions" in the second sense of the word. How do the two modes differ? The etymology of "allusion" reminds us that it can be ludic, or playful. Although quotations can allude, the presence of the quotation marks removes some of the playfulness from the process: whereas in allusion, the boundaries between the poet's voice and the source can be fluid, in quotation, the boundaries are clearly marked, and the reader is never in doubt.

How faint can an allusion become before it ceases to be an allusion? Can a poet use a single word to allude? It would very much depend on the word, and also on the reader: as Virginia Woolf suggested in her essay "Craftsmanship" (1927), for a moderately educated reader of English literature, "incarnadine" will always carry some suggestion of Shakespeare's "multitudinous seas incarnadine / making the green[,] one red" (*Macbeth* II.ii.59–60). But the allusion requires both the word and a reader with the appropriate sort of education. On its own the word "perish" is insufficient to allude to the King James Version of John 3:16 ("that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"); but in H.D.'s "Mid-day," at a point where the poem is beginning to sound like a prayer, and where the desert imagery also suggests the parable of the seed falling on stony ground, then the Biblical text might be activated. But as before, it requires an appropriately versed reader to recognize the allusion.

The lack of direct verbal correspondence in an allusion may be reinforced by grammatical and other features. Take a non-modernist example, Alexander Pope's apprentice piece, "Spring," which alludes to Spenser's "Prothalamion":

> Fair Thames flow gently from thy sacred Spring.

The only word it shares with Spenser's line is the name of the river, but "fair" is not so far from "Sweet," and the verb and the adverb similarly echo Spenser's. The remaining words take us further away, but, as in Spenser's poem, the third stressed syllable, "from," is the weakest of the five, so the overall rhythmic shape of the line reinforces the allusion.

The resemblance between Pope's line and Spenser's opens the question of how pastiche differs from allusion as a mode. It is easier to define in theory than to differentiate in practice. Pastiche borrows from another writer or work at the more generalized level of style, borrowing the characteristics of texts at the level of diction, grammar, and rhythm. If a writer's work is characterized by the use of a certain kind of trope, then that might contribute: no one pastiches Raymond Chandler without attempting a tough-guy simile. For pastiche to work, the reader needs to recognize that the style is not original to the pastiching author, and needs to recognize, at least in broad terms, the kind of text being pastiched. In this regard, it is like allusion, but whereas in allusion it pays dividends then to ask how the alluding author has altered the original, either by altering the words or by altering the context, pastiche does not reward such investigations.

The terms used in discussing allusion are often slippy. The theory of intertexuality treats cross-reference as an intrinsic feature of all language: words cannot help but refer to other words, texts cannot help but include elements of other texts. The theory of allusion treats cross-reference as something deliberately manipulated by the author, drawing on a limited body of texts, usually literary. Neither theory is completely adequate, though the inadequacies of theories of allusion are disguised by their evasiveness, their unwillingness to be "theory." Intertextuality does not allow for the hierarchical nature of our interpretations, our ability to recognize that the intertextuality of some words is less significant for an interpretation than the controlled referentiality of others. Writers on allusion tend to treat the canon as a given, and tend to assume that everyone's literary competence is the same as theirs. When one recognizes – or thinks one has recognized – an allusion, it is very

difficult to silence the earlier text; it continues to speak through the alluding text. In consequence, it is difficult to return to the position of a reader who did not recognize the allusion, or, in some cases, a reader who thought that it alluded to something else entirely.

Writers on allusion tend not to discuss the readerly processes involved in recognition: if all readers are equally competent, equally literary, then the process will always be the same, and need not be examined. But the moment of recognition is a moment worth interrupting. Just as, when we read realist fiction, the moments when we recognize our similarity to narrator or character are often underwritten by ideology, so the recognition of allusions draws on underlying cultural agreements. Those agreements most immediately concern the literary canon; beyond that, they concern the values that surround the canon, about who counts as worthy and weighty enough to bear alluding to. T. S. Eliot had originally intended to give *The Waste Land* an epigraph from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, but wrote to Pound that "I doubt if Conrad is weighty enough to stand the citation."[6] Instead he used a compound of Latin and Greek. The cultural politics of allusion is the same: the writer must consider who is weighty, who is superficial; he or she must consider not only his or her personal preferences, but those of the assumed readership. In an era where cultural consensus was breaking down, allusion was a somewhat imperilled literary mode.

For the sake of argument, I have assumed that we recognized the allusions in the lines from *The Waste Land* given earlier. When we do not recognize allusions, and when there is no annotated edition or reader's guide to help, the situation becomes more complex; such situations help to clarify the process of "recognition." In some cases, we might read on obliviously: those cases are very difficult to do anything about. But we might detect the presence of others through a sudden shift in tone, or register, or rhythm; or a breakdown in the logic of the poem, because the author is assuming that we know the source text, and it supplies the missing link. The allusion to Marvell, Day, and the ballad is not the easiest one to begin with. Instead, consider these lines by Eliot:

> A rat crept softly through the vegetation
> Dragging its slimy belly on the bank
> While I was fishing in the dull canal
> On a winter evening round behind the gashouse
> Musing upon the king my brother's wreck
> And on the king my father's death before him.
>
> (Rainey 130–1)

The lines appear at first to be contemporary realism. True, "softly" picks up "Sweet Thames run softly" from a few lines earlier, and contributes to the contrast that Eliot constructs between Spenser's world and his own, but it is more an internal echo than an allusion. The surprise, the break in logic, comes when we find the persona of these lines to be musing upon "the king my brother's wreck." We would not ordinarily expect the brother of a king to be fishing alone in an urban location. We might speculate that he is some form of exile, perhaps from the Russian revolution, and so try to repair the fracture in that way. It is necessary to continue with that process, and to understand the contemporaneity of the lines, but we might also wonder whether a text from another era has been introduced. Even if the reference to kingship were not there, we would notice the clash of grammar and diction: "round behind the gashouse" is more colloquial than what has come before; in the next line, "the king my brother's wreck," we find a grammatical construction unfamiliar in modern English.

If we detect a disruption of the textual surface, there is a factual question to be answered – is there a source text? – and an interpretative question about what the poet is doing with the source. One way of looking for source texts is simply to commit the lines to memory, to continue reading widely, and to wait for as long as it takes. To someone who read and responded to *The Waste Land* before reading *The Tempest*, and who knows Eliot's poem better than Shakespeare's play, seeing the play performed is a strange experience, as it occasionally opens windows onto something more familiar and luminous. We could, of course, use various databases and search tools, but Eliot's world did not contain such things. It may be that we are not supposed to understand the poem instantaneously; that it is supposed to be memorable but semi-comprehensible; that it sows seeds that sprout only when disturbed many years later.

If we were to use an internet search engine, we would be relying on the presence on the internet of the relevant source texts: the limitations of the method are in part the limitations of the internet canon. If we choose the whole line from "musing" to "wreck," we will find only references to *The Waste Land*; if we select the more distinctively archaic portion, "the king my brother's wreck," we will be led to many more, some of them quoting Eliot, most of them quoting Shakespeare: "Weeping again the king my brother's wrack." But we cannot be completely certain that some intermediary had not already combined Shakespeare's phrase with the word "musing." I do not know of any such text, but in "recognizing" the source, it is important to retain scepticism about our own judgements. Though the

range of texts on the internet is vast, it is still limited, and its limitations are similar to those of the traditional limited canon.

Finding a source is not quite the same as identifying an allusion. Reading Eliot's *Ash Wednesday*, we might feel there is something unusual about the lines "Because I do not hope to know again / The infirm glory of the positive hour."[7] Certainly "infirm glory" and "the positive hour" are both phrases that might delay the reader, if only in trying to digest them. We might wonder if their indigestibility was because the author assumed they had been predigested for us, being part of the literary canon. Once we have eliminated the noise generated by texts that allude to Eliot's poem, we might notice a line from Virginia Woolf's novel *Night and Day* (1919). Mrs Hilbery is the daughter of a great Victorian poet, dedicated to perpetuating his memory. Though in the past she had known "all the beautiful women and distinguished men of her time," at the present they are "either dead or secluded in their infirm glory,"[8] and so she invites her own relations to her house, and laments the decline that has come since the Victorian era.

Certainly we have a match, and as Eliot knew Woolf, there is no problem with the obscurity of the text, even if it is one of the least known of Woolf's novels. But does it make sense for Eliot to be alluding to *Night and Day* at this point in his poem? Certainly the theme about the relation of living writers to the dead is a characteristic one for Eliot, though more characteristic of *The Waste Land* than of *Ash Wednesday*. But while for Woolf "infirm glory" is virtually identical to being dead, Eliot combines it with "the positive hour." Given that the poem concerns the renunciation of hope, is he saying that the positive hour was a delusion, itself little better than death, or the silent retirement of an elderly writer? A reading might be constructed on this basis, but two other possibilities are that Eliot invented the phrase quite independently of Woolf, and that Eliot unconsciously recalled the phrase, but not its context, and that any attempt to introduce Woolf's text as a source simply muddies the waters. Recognizing an allusion as an allusion, not just a verbal coincidence, requires that we make some sort of sense of it. There are few limits to human interpretative ingenuity, but before expending time on a given pairing, it is worth considering that to borrow is not always to allude.

Having identified the source, we need to ask what the allusion adds to the poem, what it allows the poet to do that could not have otherwise been achieved. Part of the imagist method in modernist poetry is to place side by side two disparate images, scenes, or ideas, and to leave the reader to ponder their similarities and differences. For example, in Hart Crane's

"Black Tambourine," the black man in the cellar is set alongside the freed slave Aesop. Allusion allows for similar juxtapositions, but they are implicit and simultaneous, existing only in the reader's head. Having recognized similarity, we need to consider difference. What difference does it make that Eliot's speaker hears the sound of horns and motors only "from time to time," and not "always"? Should that be taken to imply that at other moments he hears "time's winged chariot"? Or do we take the deletion of the chariot to be complete? Either way, Eliot implies, as often in *The Waste Land*, that the glorious world of the past has been replaced by a noisy, grimy, and morally corrupt modern world. The replacement of Day's "horns and hunting" with "horns and motors" does the same. What are we to make of Day's Actaeon and Diana being replaced by Sweeney and Mrs Porter? Are we to assume that Sweeney too will undergo a metamorphosis, and that he too will be hunted to death for breaching a taboo? If Sweeney is about to catch syphilis at Mrs Porter's brothel, then he too will be destroyed by a nemesis, though not by hounds. Or, if the modern world is degraded, are we to assume that the poetic justice that rules in Ovid's world no longer prevails?

Allusion, then, allows the poet to cram more words into the available space, by including the words of the source text as a sort of background murmur, or a musical counterpoint to the words on the page. There is an economy to the method: the atmosphere of a work or a scene may be invoked with the slightest of gestures. An allusion to Dante's *Inferno* economically implies that modern London is a kind of hell; an allusion to *The Tempest* can be used to invoke a narrative of finding oneself in an alien land; an allusion to Marvell implies all other *carpe diem* poems. Such density and economy are needed because a plainer, simpler language would not be rich enough to deal with the complexity of the modern world: Eliot argued along these lines when he insisted, in "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), that the modern poet "must be *difficult*." To expand on what he said there, one might note the increasing internationalization of economic activity and of communications networks. A political theorist remarked in 1912 that the owners of an English country house did not depend on the produce of the surrounding fields for their income, as they might have done in medieval times, but on "on Argentine railways or Alaskan gold, or land increments in New York City."[9] Space itself had grown complex. Allusion reproduces that density and complexity.

Though modernity forces allusion upon the poet, this does not imply that allusion can deal equally well with all aspects of the modern world.

Certain kinds of effect emerge more readily than others. As we have just seen, it allows the poet to compare the present and the past. The words which Eliot used of Joyce's "mythical method" in "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" (1923) might also be applied to allusion: it allows the poet to manipulate "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity." That parallel need not imply a fixed value judgement on the relative merits of the two eras. Eliot's allusions often imply degradation, but others might imply parity. When, in the first section of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," Pound uses allusion to compare his protagonist to Odysseus, there is no immediate implication that his struggles with a philistine culture are any less than those of Homer's hero.

Christopher Ricks has argued that allusion often works most effectively when the poet is dealing with questions of inheritance: it is inherently appropriate to such questions. One might reconsider Eliot's lines about the fisherman in this light: if the king, the speaker's brother, has been shipwrecked, he might be dead; is the speaker contemplating his own inheritance? And, if so, is the speaker in some sense Eliot, contemplating his own poetic inheritance from his poetic fathers and brothers? If the lines are self-referential in this way, is Eliot also implying that he as a modern poet feels both alien and isolated in England, or in the world of modern poetry?

Allusion depends on a canon to work, but may also bring about subtle changes in the canon. If the allusion proves effective in certain ways, it can have a mutually reinforcing effect: some of the power of the new work is reinvested in the old one. The way this works can be complex: does Eliot's vision of the Thames not full of detritus really make Spenser's "Prothalamion" more powerful by contrast? Is it possible to read "Prothalamion" without thinking of cigarette ends and other rubbish? At first sight, Eliot might seem to have vandalized Spenser's poem for his own ends. But it might also be possible that we appreciate Spenser's tranquil scene all the more for the knowledge of its being threatened.

By reinforcing the canon, allusion can be a poetically conservative gesture. Eliot speaks of the canon in terms of "monuments," but allusion can make it more of an old boys' club, in which the quoting and the quoted mutually reinforce their cultural influence while excluding others. Allusion can also strike the reader in this way, implying that the poem was written for others who received a different education. Those feelings of exclusion are as valuable as the moments when we recognize an allusion: they tell us something about the poem's implied reader; that in turns tells us something about the audience for poetry, and the conditions of its reception.

We need not assume that any real readers ever reached the range of competence implied in the implied reader: the combination of sources may be so peculiar as to be unique to the author. Of course, although a poem's range of reference can cause resentment, if we have responded to the poem in some other way – if we are intrigued by it in some way – then the range of reference can also function as a reading list, and be an invitation to a programme of self-education.

In their choice of sources, alluding poets can alter the make-up of the canon. If an author's allusions draw disproportionately on a given historical period, or a given group of writers, it is worth asking why. Similarly, if some writers appear to be excluded, it is worth asking why they were deemed unsuitable or uninteresting. The Romantics are largely absent from Eliot's sources. The reshaping of the canon implied by Eliot's poem largely matches that which was done more explicitly in his critical essays. If we think of allusion in Ricks's family metaphors of inheritance, expressing one's indebtedness to some forebears necessarily means excluding some other branches of the family.

Allusion is a time-honoured practice in poetry. Indeed, because of the way that oral-formulaic poets work, it may have been more strongly rooted in oral poetry than in written. Nevertheless, the cultural conditions surrounding it changed in the era of modernist poetry. In a period characterized by an explosion of printed media, both of new works and reprinted classics, the clarity of allusion was endangered: it was increasingly easy for any given reader to select his or her own personal canon, and so the agreements that underwrote the method were weakened. It is probable that late nineteenth-century reprints of Elizabethan and Jacobean texts provided the material basis for Eliot's realignment of the literary canon, though we cannot always be sure of which editions he was using. (*The Parliament of Bees* has been so infrequently reprinted that a reader might have to consult Vizetelly's 1888 reprint, quite probably the same edition used by Eliot.) Eliot manages a balancing act, referring to writers not previously cited, while providing notes to keep the canon limited, to prevent his readers from ranging too far afield. The notes to *The Waste Land* seem to illuminate the text, but they also place blinkers on the reader.

The density and economy of allusion were suited to the conditions of modernity, because of the effects of simultaneity that they allowed the poet to create: different scenes can be superimposed in the one line; like cubist painters, modernist poets can present the same thing from different

angles. Many modernists were concerned with the relation of the past and present: allusion is particularly capable of dramatizing the presence of the past. The density of allusion, the difficult in decoding it instantly, means that it prevents us from consuming the modernist poem instantaneously: it is one of many devices of roughening that differentiate the modernist poem from other consumable commodities in the marketplace.

H. G. Wells objected to classical "tags" on the grounds that past literature interposed itself between the self and reality: no one could see a tripod or a skylark for what it really was. However, many thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have argued that Wells's epistemology was simplistic. Allusion and quotation both have the potential to bring into question the authenticity of the perceiving subject and the speaking voice. Allusion reminds us that the innermost self might not be authentic, but rather, authored by others. Allusion allows the modernist writer to dramatize the uncertainty of knowledge in modernity, the sense that modernity is characterized by "many gods and many voices," not in complete harmony with each other. It does not predetermine the issue: the author can attempt to subordinate those voices to an authoritative narratorial voice, or can allow them free play. Modernism can at times be postmodern: the idea that modernism was always concerned with the unity of the text is a narrow view.

Allusion was a long-established means of composition. The unspoken agreements on which it was based were endangered by modernity, but it was also peculiarly adapted to articulate the characteristic complexity of the modern world.

Notes

1 H. G. Wells, "The Case against the Classical Languages," *Natural Science and the Classical System in Education: Essays New and Old*, ed. E. Ray Lankester (London: Heinemann, 1918), 188.

2 Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921), 74.

3 John Day, *The Parliament of Bees*, reprinted in *Nero and Other Plays*, ed. Herbert P. Horne, Havelock Ellis, Arthur Symons, and A. Wilson Verity (London: Vizetelly, 1888), 226.

4 Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge, (Harlow: Longman, 1988), 170.

5 See for example, "The Demon Motor," a leading article in *The Times* for August 8, 1911.
6 Eliot's letter to Pound about *The Waste Land*'s epigraph is dated January 24, 1922, *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, rev. edn., ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber, 2009), vol. 1, 625.
7 Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays*, 89.
8 Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* (London: Duckworth, 1919), 31.
9 J. W. Graham, *Evolution and Empire* (London: Headley Bros., 1912), 194.

8

The Language of Modernist Poetry: Diction and Dialogue

Ever since Wordsworth renounced the poetic diction of his eighteenth-century predecessors in favour of "a selection of language really used by men," the status of poetic language in the modern world has been vexed.[1] Differentiating their diction from that of everyday prose allowed poets to mark their separation from the modern world, and that distance enabled a rendering strange of the modern world; yet the same act of differentiation risked separating the poet from modernity, thereby offering more justification for the argument that poetry did not matter.

Though for convenience we might refer to "*the* language" of the modern world, many critics have noted the multiplication of specialized discourses, corresponding to the specialization of approaches to the world, whether intellectual or practical. Such discourses were commonly dismissed by literary writers as jargon: it is common enough to find "jargon" combined with the epithets "ungracious" or "ugly," but unheard of to find anyone speaking of "beautiful jargon"; indeed, in many contexts the word "ugly" was taken as read; "jargon" is a pejorative term. But despite this widespread literary prejudice, some modern poets espoused a poetry that sought to broaden its range of reference. In "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), T. S. Eliot argued that the modern poet must become "more and more comprehensive," uniting areas of experience that the "ordinary man" would leave disconnected. In 1933 one critic, writing of the poetry of Paul Valéry, wrote of the "strange hybrid vocabulary" of psychologists, and the impossibility of using it in poetry:

> most of the words it contains would have much the same effect on the texture of a poem as the addition of a serviceable patch of mackintosh on the texture of a butterfly's wings.[2]

This drew a scornful response from the modernist Hugh MacDiarmid:

> This, of course, is just a variant of the old insistence on a "poetic diction" and a parallel to the old and persistent notion that certain kinds of subject matter are inappropriate to poetry or less appropriate than other sorts. […] the use of the phrase "hybrid vocabulary" begs the question. All vocabularies are hopelessly hybrid; only that of the man-in-the street is so in a different direction than that of any scientific specialist. It is time that poets abandoned the anti-intellectualist pretence that the jargon of average mentality is preferable to the latter; or that some special virtue attaches to restricting our linguistic medium to a miserable fraction of our expressive resources. […] A concerted effort to extend the general vocabulary and make it more adequate to the enormous range and multitudinous intensive specializations of contemporary knowledge is long overdue […].[3]

The revolution proposed by MacDiarmid had in fact already begun in preceding decades. Unlike Wordsworth's purging of artificial diction, this revolution sought to expand the vocabulary of poetry, and to deny that there is a single, unified "language really used by men." Rather, there are multiple languages layered upon each other, intermingling and overlapping. We cannot easily speak of "men" with the universalizing humanism of Wordsworth: society is stratified in multiple dimensions. However desirable human unity might be, there are real linguistic barriers to it.

Extreme but fascinating instances of MacDiarmid's revolution appear in several of his contemporaneous poems in the volume *Stony Limits and Other Poems* (1934): "In the Caledonian Forest," "Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum," and the opening of "On a Raised Beach":

> All is lithogenesis – or lochia,
> Carpolite fruit of the forbidden tree,
> Stones blacker than any in Caaba,
> Cream-coloured caen-stone, chatoyant pieces,
> Celadon and corbeau, bistre and beige,
> Glaucous, hoar, enfouldered, cyathiform,
> Making mere faculae of the sun and moon
> I study you glout and gloss, but have
> No cadrans to adjust you with, and turn again
> From optik to haptik and like a blind man run
> My fingers over you, arris by arris, burr by burr,
> Slickensides, truité, rugas, foveoles,

> Bringing my aesthesis in vain to bear,
> An angle-titch to all your corrugations and coigns,
> Hatched foraminous cavo-rilievo of the world,
> Deictic, fiducial stones.[4]

MacDiarmid introduces terms from mineralogy, obstetrics, and mineralogy again; then a literary quotation from *Paradise Lost*; we are taken to the Middle East, and then, in further mineralogical terms, back to Europe, but to Caen, in France, and to several French-derived terms. "Glaucous" is chiefly used in natural history, but "enfouldered" is literary, specifically from Edmund Spenser. "Cyathiform" is chiefly botanical, while "faculae" is from astronomy. In many cases, of course, the words belong to more than one domain. In the last line quoted "deictic" comes from logic, but is also used in grammar; "fiducial" begins in theology, but is also used in surveying and in astronomy to refer to a line or point that can be trusted as fixed.

The opening lines of "On a Raised Beach" might be allowed to stand for one kind of modernist poetry, a kind that is obviously and even ostentatiously wide-ranging in its vocabulary; there are, of course, other kinds which take a very different attitude to the linguistic medium. The effects of "On a Raised Beach" are more concentrated than those of other poems of its kind, but in, for example, T. S. Eliot's poetry, we find unexpectedly obscure diction from time to time, and, more relevantly, we find in *The Waste Land* a rich variety of discourses, each pointing in the direction of different view of the world; we find a similar blend of the literary and the non-literary. It is possible to paraphrase such language, but to do so, as the New Critics recognized long ago, is to lose the verbal specificity that makes the poem distinctive. It is also possible to label the text as linguistically diverse, but such a label does not exhaust the questions; in particular, it fails to differentiate different extents and kinds of diversity.

Thinking about Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia can sharpen our powers of discrimination. Bakhtin argues that there is no single language. At any historical moment, each age group has its own language, and each age group is itself internally differentiated according to "social level, academic institution (the language of the cadet, the high school student, the trade school student are all different languages) and other stratifying factors" (Bakhtin 290). Moreover

> at any given moment, languages of various epochs and periods of socio-ideological life cohabit with one another. Even languages of the day exist: one

> could say that today's and yesterday's socio-ideological and political "day" do not, in a certain sense, share the same language; every day represents another socio-ideological semantic "state of affairs," another vocabulary, another accentual system, with its own slogans, its own ways of assigning blame and praise. (Bakhtin 291)

Bakhtin terms this plurality of languages *heteroglossia*. Bakhtin developed the concept as a way of illuminating the novel, and the principal weakness of his essay "Discourse in the Novel" is that he polemically contrasts the novel with poetry. To Bakhtin, poetry is antagonistic to heteroglossia.

> Poetic style is by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse.
>
> Any way whatever of alluding to alien languages, to the possibility of another vocabulary, another semantics, other syntactic forms and so forth, to the possibility of other linguistic points of view, is equally foreign to poetic style. (Bakhtin 285)

In consequence, poetry cannot understand the "historicity" or the socially determined character of language. What Bakhtin refers to as the "suspension" of poetry he elsewhere refers to as the sealing off of poetry from "the influence of extraliterary social dialects" (Bakhtin 287). For Bakhtin, poetry exists in its own hermetically sealed world.

Bakhtin accepts that sometimes poetry will include language beyond conventionally poetic discourse, and that it will sometimes breach decorum and treat unpoetic subjects; but he argues that in such instances, a hierarchy of discourses keeps the unpoetic in its place: "Even when speaking of alien things, the poet speaks in his own language. To shed light on an alien world, he never resorts to an alien language, even though it might in fact be more adequate to that world" (Bakhtin 287). Moreover, he later argues that poetic rhythm has a levelling effect: if there were any danger of heteroglossia breaking through, rhythm tends to mute it (Bakhtin 298). Against poetry, Bakhtin contrasts the heteroglossic qualities of the novel. The nub of his argument about the novel has nothing to do with dialect speakers in novels: indeed the hierarchy of discourse in the novel can keep them in their place, subordinated to the narrative voice. But in his analysis of Dickens's narrative voice, among others, he finds different social and ideological dialects breaking through the narrative voicing, questioning its unity.

It should be clear, if only from the passage from "On a Raised Beach," that Bakhtin's idea of poetry is not universally true. Much modernist

poetry, indeed, displays exactly the qualities of heteroglossia that Bakhtin finds in the novel. Moreover, the different languages are placed in confrontation to each other: in Bakhtin's terms, dialogism. In, for example, "On a Raised Beach," the discourse of theology seen in the allusion to the forbidden fruit and in one meaning of "fiducial" is set against the discourse of several sciences.

One way of reading the dialogism of the poem is to conclude that MacDiarmid is a thorough-going relativist, and that he allows no single discourse to achieve a monopoly on truth. However, such versions of Bakhtin have been criticized for blunting the political edge of his writing. Some critics, noted Ken Hirschkop, make dialogism

> a friendly and polite discussion in which a difference of opinion is acknowledged as unresolvable but is nonetheless reconciled to the extent that each speaker "takes into account" the opinions of the other. […] this is a far cry from that condition of fierce social struggle outlined by Bakhtin in "Discourse in the Novel," in which the dialogical forces of language actively contest the social and political centralization of their culture.[5]

Bakhtin was writing a coded dissidence within a totalitarian political system: his theory is Marxist, but anti-Stalinist. How may we adapt his ideas to a seemingly liberal society in which a wide range of discourses are accepted? As Hirschkop suggests, some critics simply take dialogism as a description of the ideal form of liberal society. But power still operates in such a society, and certain discourses have great normative power. There is a danger that the terms "heteroglossia" and "dialogism" simply become descriptive stylistic labels for all modern poems, and that they lose any analytical leverage on the poem itself; this would be ironic, given the strength of Bakhtin's polemic against mere "stylistic" analysis. How can we restore their analytic strength? First, we need to realize that the blend of discourses in each poem will be distinctive and different. There are many different ways of being heteroglossic. We need patiently to think about the background of each word. We need to recognize that to speak of the background of a word is not to relate it to a singular and determinate origin: even a single word can be dialogic, as was "fiducial," for example. And we need to develop our sensitivity to language, so that it applies in cases far subtler than MacDiarmid's. Second, we need to realize that the "background" of each word, and of the poem in its totality, is determined socially and historically. If we treat the concept of "heteroglossia" as a mere stylistic description, we reaffirm the hermetic isolation of the poem from its social context.

So, for a poem like MacDiarmid's, we need first to consider where his strange vocabulary has come from: we have noted theological, scientific, and literary discourse; later in the poem we find contemporary political discourse.[6] Second, we need to consider carefully the relative positions of these discourses in MacDiarmid's society. We also need to be careful about received wisdom: in this case, the received wisdom that religious faith had been shattered by Darwin, Nietzsche, Freud or other late nineteenth-century thinkers. Certainly religious faith appeared to have declined, and theological discourse had suffered a decline in authority as a result. However, we might wish to differentiate the authority of the Church as an institution, and the authority of theological discourse, and suggest that the latter still had some residual force. Moreover, we might wish to note, among literary circles, a certain resurgence of Christianity, especially in its more intellectual forms: T. S. Eliot's conversion, and his Christian poetry and prose are a particularly significant marker. And finally, if we take "On a Raised Beach" to be a meditation on ultimate things, we might note that, even if theological discourse had little bearing on everyday life, when it came to such questions, it still carried great authority; there was no other fully developed discourse in which to conduct such conversations. So, if one grants that context as true, then the scientific materialist discourse at the opening of "On a Raised Beach" looks far more oppositional: the theological discourse, and the conventionally literary discourse of *Paradise Lost*, are there to identify the grounds of the opposition. It will also be clear from the foregoing discussion that the context is by no means straightforward to determine. Indeed, it is entirely reasonable to argue that a single work will take on different qualities in different contexts, and there is much evidence from reception studies to bear this out. In the case of "On a Raised Beach," one might take into account its publication history: it first appears in the volume *Stony Limits and Other Poems*, published by Gollancz in May 1934. Gollancz was the premier socialist publisher in Britain, so, if one accepts that a socialist readership might be more favourably inclined to science and materialism than to theology, the poem now looks rather different: it might appear to be attempting to recuperate theological discourse for a Marxist-materialist readership.

How might Bakhtin's ideas work in relation to other poems? It might seem to work most readily with poems like *The Waste Land* which contain a variety of different voices, each speaking from a distinctive social or ideological perspective. Once again, it is not enough to say that the poem is

heteroglossic or dialogic: this is little more than a truism. The theory becomes most informative when one of the poem's discourses comes into sharp conflict with another. A reconsideration of the "horns and motors" passage of *The Waste Land* (lines 196–201) brings the issues into focus. As noted in the previous chapter, allusion increases the range of discourses that come into play: as well as the actual words on the page, there are, for the sufficiently informed reader, the words of the source texts as well. However, arguably the presence of the source texts merely accentuates a relation that would exist in any case.

The phrase "from time to time" stands in contrast to the "always" of Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress": the poem establishes a contrast between the mundane and colloquial quality of "from time to time," and the hyperbolic perspectives of Marvell's poem, which invokes "deserts of vast eternity." The dialogue, at its simplest level, is between two ideas of time, the one mundane, the other sublime.

The phrase "horns and motors" stands in contrast to one source text, in which the speaker hears, or claims to hear, "Time's winged chariot," and another source text in which another speaker hears the noise of horns and hunting. Again, the sublime and the abstract, Time's winged chariot, is placed in dialogue with the mundane and the particular, urban traffic. One might also note that the word "horns" in itself becomes dialogic. In so far as it is still coloured by Day's *Parliament of Bees*, then it suggests a feudal world of hunting horns; although the allusion is to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it suggests the world of medieval romance, of forests and adventure. When we find it in conjunction with "motors," it suggests the world of modernity, of traffic, and of the confrontation of traffic moving at different speeds – it suggests a world of modernity characterized not simply by acceleration, but by uneven development, the machine age coming into conflict with the pedestrian and the horse. In the same way, one might also note the different senses of "hear" in Eliot's poem and in those of his sources: whereas Eliot's speaker literally hears the horns and motors, in Marvell's poem, to hear Time's winged chariot is an act of imagination.

One of Bakhtin's more elusive concepts is "the internal dialogism of the word" (Bakhtin 279). Although his account of it is somewhat obscure, it is relevant to the dialogism we saw in "horns" above, and it can help bring otherwise hermetic poems into dialogue. There are two aspects to the concept. One aspect is that "the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object" (Bakhtin 279). If we take

the "object" to be an abstraction such as "manliness," then it is easy to see how the "object" is always already populated with other people's ideas of what it is to be manly. If we take the object to be a concrete object such as a stone or a horse, it is harder to understand what the "alien word" is, and how it can be "in" the object. Bakhtin might mean that there will always be conflicting ideas about the essence of stoniness or of horseyness; or he might mean the "alien word" to be the sign that would truly describe the object with a completeness that ordinary human language cannot achieve; an imaginary plenitude which ordinary language can never attain.

The concept of the internal dialogism of the word becomes more straightforward when Bakhtin asserts that:

> every word is directed towards an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates.
>
> The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already-spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. (Bakhtin 280)

Critics have understood that in the analysis of persuasive speech, we need to understand the grounds against which the utterance was made, the field of the already-spoken and the about-to-be-spoken, but they have tended to assume that descriptive or expressive language does not take the audience into consideration. Bakhtin argues to the contrary:

> The linguistic significance of a given utterance is understood against the background of language, while its actual meaning is understood against the background of other concrete utterances on the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view, and value judgments […] (Bakhtin 281)

I have already suggested as much in relation to "On a Raised Beach." The poem is not simply *expressing* the poet's ideas about man and the universe, but is *making an intervention* in a conversation where there have been many other opinions expressed, some Christian, for example, and some atheist.

We could work with *The Waste Land* in a similar way. It is worth noting that we can apply the basic idea to the whole poem, or to its constituent parts. If we take "A Game of Chess" in isolation, we might take its theme as being love, as seen from the perspectives of the upper, middle, and

lower classes. Clearly enough there are different voices in "A Game of Chess," and we can treat them as being in dialogue with each other; but Eliot is also in dialogue with other commentators on love. How can we determine which other writers are the significant others in this dialogue? How can we prevent such choices from being arbitrary? We can begin with the field of texts in the poem itself. The presence of "That Shakespearian Rag" suggests that the poem is in dialogue with the popular-song view of marriage. The rhetorical question that Lil's friend asks, "What you get married for if you don't want children?," introduces the Christian doctrine of procreative marriage. If we wish to push beyond the immediate reference points offered by the text, then we might contrast the more exultant idea of love offered by Lawrence in *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*.

What happens with *The Waste Land* as a whole? If we take it to be a poem about the city, then we need to place it alongside other texts on the same theme. Its view of the city as haunted by the dead and by echoes of the past contrasts sharply with a progressivist view of the city as a place that overwrites the past. If we take "the city" to be merely one instance of the larger theme of "modernity" in the poem, then we might find a slightly different dialogue taking place, though the dialogue between an optimistic progressive view of time and the poem's more pessimistic and cyclical view would still be significant. If we take the poem's theme to be post-war Europe, the terms of the debate would change once again. We could be more specifically historical: one might contrast the poem's view of post-war Europe as a waste land with the British government's war-time propaganda about "homes fit for heroes." As we saw with "On a Raised Beach," the process is by no means straightforward: many modernist poems are evasive about their themes. Moreover, the longer and richer the poem, the more thematically plural it is likely to be; a thematically plural poem engages in multiple debates simultaneously.

This conception of dialogism becomes most useful with the more hermetic form of modernist poem, the form closest to Bakhtin's idea of poetic discourse. *The Waste Land* contains enough references to modern life that it is relatively easy to place into dialogue with its contemporary surroundings. Although "On a Raised Beach," set on a remote island, might seem more abstracted from contemporary history, its text quotes from and borrows from a range of contemporary writers. But what might we do with H.D.'s "Oread" (1914) (Rainey 442), for example:

> Whirl up, sea –
> Whirl your pointed pines,

Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir.

The classical frame suggested by the title tends to hold the modern world at bay. So too does the very limited vocabulary of the poem: there are no terms here that immediately appear to be under contestation, nothing that seems to speak immediately of modernity.

One way of proceeding might be to admit frankly that poems such as this one are hermetic; to say that what they signify above all else is the autonomy of poetry from practical concerns; they signify the separation of poetry from signification. This is not to say that they escape dialogism: rather, the dialogue is raised up to the level of form. They enter into a dialogue with those forms that, on the contrary, assert the possibility of art engaging with, or at least obliquely addressing, practical concerns. They gain their meaning as artefacts from such a contrast. Moreover, making this general interpretation does not mean that we are excused from engaging with them in detail; but when we come to read, the task becomes one of understanding how the poem works to exclude the modern; identifying what discourses it suppresses; asking as much what is not in the poem as what is there.

From here we might pass seamlessly to the other way of proceeding, which would be, once again, to make a thematic reduction of the poem. "Oread" hinges on a contrast between the forest and the sea, and it dramatizes the difficulty of knowing something unfamiliar except through the categories of one's own familiar discourse. The oread, a mountain nymph, can understand the sea only in terms of the mountain pines. Seen this way, the poem enters into dialogue with a range of other texts. First, we might see it as a poem in the family of sea-shore poems, poems in that dramatize the encounter between a finite consciousness and the infinite or unknown. Second, it is intervening in debates about the nature of consciousness. Some texts in this debate are also poems. Rupert Brooke's "Heaven" (written in 1913, though published in 1915, after "Oread") makes an analogous contribution, but in a contrasting comic mode: it presents a fish's idea of theology. If we accept it as relevant, then the dialogue is one about the appropriate poetic mode for such debates. However, "Oread" makes a more significant dialogue with those poems, including imagist poems, that imply an optimism about the ability of poetic discourse to capture experience. "Oread" could be seen as

an intervention in the debate about the meaning of imagism; it could be read as a reflexive poem. However, it is also an intervention in a much larger debate concerning the nature of knowledge, and about the nature of the self: if we are all trapped within our national language, then the possibility of communication between nations seems significantly diminished; if we are all trapped within our idiolects, then solipsism prevails.

Dialogism is not just a useful label for those modernist poems that "do the police in different voices." It is an invitation to listen to those different voices, and to try to understand the nature of their relations. It is also an invitation to listen to the voices outside the text, and to try to understand its relation to the social and ideological conflicts of its time. The intertextuality of a text connects it to its social and political context.

Notes

1 William Wordsworth, preface (1802) to the *Lyrical Ballads*, *Romanticism*, 2nd edn., ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 357.
2 Theodora Bosanquet, *Paul Valéry* (London: Hogarth Press, 1933).
3 Hugh MacDiarmid, "Problems of Poetry Today" (1933), *The Raucle Tongue*, ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray, and Alan Riach, 3 vols. (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), 2:483–9.
4 Hugh MacDiarmid, "On a Raised Beach," *Complete Poems*, ed. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, 2 vols (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993), 1:422–3.
5 Ken Hirschkop, "A Response to the Forum on Mikhail Bakhtin," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1985), 673.
6 For contemporary quotations in "On a Raised Beach," see Michael H. Whitworth, "Three Prose Sources for Hugh MacDiarmid's 'On a Raised Beach,'" *Notes and Queries* 54 (2007), 175–7.

9

Literal and Metaphorical Language

Metaphor has long been seen as a defining feature of poetry, but definitions of this sort have a disabling effect in a culture that values literal statements of fact. In the mid-twentieth century, the New Criticism reasserted the importance of metaphor to poetry. The New Critics were especially concerned to differentiate poetry from science, the latter being symptomatic of a modernity that they distrusted. Scientific language was literal and direct, while poetic language was figurative, paradoxical, and indirect. The view, which drew support from I. A. Richards's distinction between denotative and connotative language, was to prove influential. However, even though the New Critics were amongst the most enthusiastic supporters of modernist poetry, particularly that of T. S. Eliot, their schematic contrast does not do justice to the ambivalent attitudes that modernist poets held towards figurative language, nor to the complex mixtures of literal and metaphorical that characterize their poems. The opening lines of Eliot's "Prufrock" provide a compressed example; this chapter will also consider T. E. Hulme's "Autumn" and part II of H.D.'s "Garden," and will return to Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" and Pound's "In a Station of the Metro."

The problem with metaphor was that, according to a widely prevalent view, it was merely a decoration applied to a literal statement; the problem with literal language was that it was too closely associated with mimetic transcriptions of reality. T. S. Eliot was writing in opposition to the first view when he wrote, in 1918, that "Metaphor is not something applied externally for the adornment of style, it is the life of style, of language. [...] we are dependent upon metaphor for even the abstractest thinking."[1] Quoting Shakespeare's phrase "in her strong toil of grace" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, V.ii), Eliot remarked that "[A]s in most good metaphor, you can hardly say where the metaphorical and the literal meet." Discussing

poetic symbols, Ezra Pound similarly advocated an approach where the literal and the symbolic could not be distinguished: the "proper and perfect" symbol was "the natural object"; writers should use symbols in such a way that "their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that *a* sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk."[2] Pound implies that the readers who recognize the symbol as a symbol will obtain more than "*a* sense," the literal sense, but that their interpretation will not be radically different from that of readers who do not recognize the symbol.

While such writing might superficially resemble literal description, many modernist poets were suspicious of the mimetic faculty. The imagist principle of "direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective," had been misinterpreted by many poets and critics as endorsing writing about "things" in the sense of material objects. The introduction to the 1916 anthology *Some Imagist Poets* sought to correct the misunderstanding, noting that imagism was not merely "the presentation of pictures."[3] The introduction reminds the reader that the "thing" may be subjective, and that objective things need not be static. However, by 1916 some poets felt that imagism had drifted too far to be rescued, and the brief-lived Vorticist movement sought to clarify the basis of truly creative art. Pound asserted that "Vorticism means that one is interested in the creative faculty as opposed to the mimetic. We believe that it is harder to make than to copy."[4] His remarks were true for modernist art more widely. To copy was to become mechanical: a photograph could copy the visual world, but only a painter could reshape it into an artistic form.

To create was to originate a work that was unique. In verbal arts, from this uniqueness follows the principle that the work cannot be paraphrased. Every word has been carefully chosen to fulfil a certain purpose, and to alter even one word is to change the work into another. This view later became enshrined in the New Critical idea of "the heresy of paraphrase," but it was already implicit in the imagist principle of using no word that does not contribute to the presentation. To change a word is to change the meaning; if a word could be altered without altering the meaning, it would suggest that the word contributed nothing to the poem.

Definitions of metaphor often illustrate it with the substitution of one noun for another: for example, "A camel is a ship of the desert." While such metaphors certainly occur in modernist poetry, they are the most readily paraphrased and so the most readily dismissed as decorative. Ezra Pound's

"Portrait d'une Femme" (1912) uses an extended metaphor building on the phrase "Your mind and you are our Sargasso Sea" (Rainey 41). The verb "to be" separates the subject ("Your mind and you") and the complement ("our Sargasso Sea"), and the weakness of this form lies in the fact that "to be" grants the subject an independent existence which the metaphor can never fully counteract. Stronger metaphors – that is to say, metaphors less easily paraphrased – combine the grammatical subject with a verb from a different domain. Christine Brooke-Rose gives the example "the meadows laugh" which in context might mean "the meadows are full of flowers," but which could have other meanings according to context, and which moreover economically embodies assumptions about nature and about the desirability of flowers which are not so readily paraphrased.[5] The opening lines of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" include complex mixtures of metaphors and similes:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table.

It is valuable to think through our expectations word by word. In this case, it is particularly valuable to stop the poem at "evening," and to ask what kind of verbs "the evening" might take, given that the sentence is governed by "when." We might say "When the evening *is just beginning*"; it is allowable to speak of evenings being extended in time, so we might say "when the evening *has dragged on too long*." But to speak of an evening being "spread out" is to make it more substantial than is normal, and is to make its extension a matter of extension in space. Moreover, the evening is "spread out *against the sky*." We need to ask what might more normally be "spread out" in this manner. A sunset might be "spread out," but the idiomatic choice of preposition would be "across," not "against." We need to ask what sorts of thing might normally be spread out "against" another thing. Is the evening to be imagined as resting or leaning "against" the sky? To say "spread out *against*" is to imply that the two things come into close contact, but are not completely mingled; the oppositional sense of "against" implies that there is ultimately a separation of the two.

The simile in the third line answers these questions, but also complicates matters further. It closes off several interpretations we might have made: we might have felt that "the evening" was a metonymy for "the sunset," but the etherized patient makes this less plausible, because it is hard to

understand how a sunset can be rendered temporarily inanimate. The simile implies that the evening was, like the patient, animate and perhaps about to undergo surgery, and that it has now been rendered inert and passive. We might be tempted to paraphrase as "When the evening is coming to a close," or "When the evening is becoming less animated," but such translations fail to acknowledge the surgical implications of "etherised."

There is a similar combination of metaphor and simile in the opening lines of T. E. Hulme's "Autumn" (1909):

> A touch of cold in the Autumn night –
> I walked abroad,
> And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
> Like a red-faced farmer.
>
> (ll. 1–4)

We could stop at "moon" and ask what sorts of verb we might expect to follow. It seems unlikely that many readers would anticipate "lean": the class of objects that can lean must normally be vertical in relation to a level surface; a sphere cannot lean, and even if it could, an orbiting object does not have any level surface against which its deviation from vertical could be measured. But when we continue to the fourth line, the simile follows, and apparently makes sense of the metaphor: we infer that the moon was red, like a red-faced farmer, and was low in the sky, and so could be imagined leaning over the hedge. However, what follows in the concluding lines of the poem further confuses the separation of literal and figurative language:

> I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
> And round about were the wistful stars
> With white faces like town children.
>
> (ll. 5–7)

What sort of person would stop to talk to the moon, however strong its resemblance to a red-faced farmer? We might conclude that the poem is a dramatic monologue spoken by a lunatic, in this sense returning "lunatic" to its etymological roots; however, by the fourth line we have become aware of the games that the poem plays with the literal and the figurative, and to solve the problem this way would be to break its rules. We might also solve the problem by deciding that the poem has inverted the literal and figurative: that, in other words, it describes the experience of seeing

a red-faced and moon-faced farmer leaning over a hedge, but chooses to describe the experience obliquely. Such as reading would redeem the fifth line as literal statement, but would jeopardize the first four lines. As another course of action we might decide that "speak" and "nodded" are not meant literally, but denote some form of communing with nature. That none of these choices is entirely satisfactory is the point: "Autumn" folds the literal and the figurative into each other so that the relative positions of each becomes indeterminate.

The second part of H.D.'s "Garden" (1915) (Rainey 443) is also rich with metaphor. Heat, a quality of the atmosphere, is understood in terms of a solid object which might be opened and cut to pieces. The idea is novel but adapts a more familiar one: hot air, especially humid hot air, seems "thick," and so solid. From the fourth line onwards H.D. glosses the opening image with the less surprising one. The idea that the heat "blunts / the points of pears" is vivid, but it might seem at first to be a different and less significant order of thinking: metaphor here might seem to be performing the role of hyperbole. We know that there is no heat so strong that it prevents fruit from falling. Whether extreme heat might cause fruit to be deformed is a question for horticulturalists. Sometimes when assessing metaphors, one needs to pursue historical questions about what the writer believed to be the literal truth at the time. If the idea should turn out to be merely fanciful, as was the idea about the fruit not falling, then we might fairly conclude that the poem's inaugurating metaphor has become exhausted.

However, if we feel that the observations about the heat and the fruit cannot literally be true, we might be led to ask whether the whole description is a metaphor for something else. Such suspicions might have arisen in the first paragraph: heat cannot literally be "cut apart." The recognition that the poem is literally untrue might lead us not to treat the statements as hyperbole about a real garden, but to ask whether the garden and its fruit are non-literal. If that is the case, then the verbs provide the only clue about the poem's meaning: something cannot fall to the ground, something cannot complete its natural life cycle, because of some external factor. The fruit is a metaphor for the something, while the external factor is figured by the oppressive heat.

The final paragraph returns to the opening metaphor of the heat as a solid. H.D. now renders the metaphor of cutting with the more specific verb "plough." The verb suggests that H.D. wishes to anticipate the next agricultural cycle of ploughing, sowing, growing, and reaping. While at

one level the poem might simply describe an oppressively hot day, its figurative language suggests that it is about fertility or creativity more generally: that it might be a reflexive poem about conditions that make creativity impossible; the poet cannot shed fruit, cannot complete a poem, and calls for the wind to plough the land and begin the process over again. Or, if we feel that this interpretation focuses too narrowly on poetic creativity, we might suggest that the poem concerns a more generally oppressive state of affairs in which the normal processes of life are stifled and prevented from progressing in their usual manner.

Metaphor in this poem goes somewhere beyond understanding one thing in terms of another. Certainly it starts by figuring atmosphere in terms of solidity, but the hyperbolic quality of the metaphors suggest that the poem is more than a vivid description of a hot day; the physical atmosphere is itself a metaphor for something else.

"Autumn" and "Garden" are both richly metaphorical, but what distinguishes them from richly metaphorical poems of earlier periods is their unwillingness to allow us to separate their literal and their metaphorical levels; the two are intermeshed in ways that pose interpretative problems. One might approach the question from the other side, and ask how to interpret poems that are apparently purely literal. Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" (Rainey 529) might appear at first glance to consist of purely literal statements, but there is at least one respect in which it might be taken as metaphorical. To say that the wheelbarrow is "glazed" with rainwater is to import a term from one domain and to apply it to another: "glazed," I would suggest, comes either from pottery or from painting; it is hard to imagine a sense in which the wheelbarrow has been equipped with windows. The interpretations that might be placed upon this metaphor are various, but depend on why we think that Williams would wish to treat the wheelbarrow as if it were a piece of pottery or a painting. It is already a man-made object, but "glazed" suggests that it has been given a protective coating, albeit temporarily, one that marks it out as a work of art. Why might "so much" depend on this transfigured wheelbarrow? The point might concern the transfiguring potential of poetry: so much depends on the fact that an ordinary object can be transformed into one with a distinctive aura. However, given our knowledge that the rainwater will evaporate, the metaphor might simultaneously be making another point: so much depends on the fragile and temporary nature of the transformation. The one word, "glazed," raises a wide range of possibilities.

In 1936, the critic and theorist I. A. Richards introduced two descriptive terms which are still often used in discussions of metaphor: the tenor and the vehicle; the tenor is the main subject, while the vehicle is the thing to which it is compared.[6] In the case of an utterance like "Your mind is our Sargasso sea," the woman's mind is the tenor, while the vehicle is the Sargasso sea. In the case of the wheelbarrow "glazed" with water, the watery coating of the wheelbarrow is the tenor, while the verb implies a vehicle which is either a potter's glaze or a painter's. Metaphors which rely upon unexpected verbs can be more difficult to clarify, and are, by the same token, often richer and more interesting. In the second line of "Prufrock," "the evening" is the tenor, but the vehicle is anything that might plausibly be "spread out" against something else.

Exactly how the two elements relate to each other has been widely disputed by theorists of metaphor, but there is a more fundamental difficulty: the binary division frequently privileges the literal term, the tenor; the vehicle is merely a means to an end. To understand the binary in this way risks perpetuating the idea that metaphor is merely decorative, and this in turn risks perpetuating a view of literary knowledge as merely decorative, when contrasted with the literal knowledge of science. As T. S. Eliot implied with his remark about the dependency of thought upon metaphor, some modernists had far greater respect for it. The most important metaphors are concerned not with expression, but with cognition: they help us conceptualize the world differently. However, metaphors cannot easily achieve such ends if one term is privileged as being the literal truth. One of the ways that modernists sought to escape from the weakness of the binary was through parataxis: the placing of one element side by side with another without any implied hierarchy. To illuminate this aspect of modernist poetic structure, it is necessary to return to Ezra Pound's ideas about poetic language.

In his "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" (1912), Pound had warned poets to "Go in fear of abstractions" (Rainey 95); the instruction implies that the evidence of the senses is more trustworthy than abstractions, and it encourages literal descriptive language. He expanded upon this idea in 1913, writing in praise of what he called the "prose tradition" in poetry: "It presents. It does not comment. It is irrefutable because it does not present a personal predilection for any particular fraction of the truth. It is as communicative as Nature. It is as uncommunicative as Nature. [...] It washes its hands of theories."[7]

However, a complete outlawing of "abstractions" or "theories" would place too extreme a limitation on poetry. The problem confronting Pound

was how modernist poetry could address abstract issues without succumbing to the loss of precision and immediacy threatened by abstractions. His reading and editing of Ernest Fenollosa's "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" (Rainey 99–112) gave him a fuller philosophy of language, and he developed his ideas in his *ABC of Reading* (1934). In the *ABC*, he presents Europe as hopelessly committed to habits of abstraction.

> In Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simplest things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region, that is a region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction.
>
> Thus if you ask him what red is, he says it is a "colour."
>
> If you ask him what a colour is, he tells you it is a vibration or a refraction of light, or a division of the spectrum.[8]

Pound contrasts such mental habits with what he called "the method of science." In this argument, science is not the domain of specialized language and abstractions, but of statements rooted in the evidence of the senses. Moreover, Pound associates the method of science with Fenollosa's idea of ideogrammic writing. His paradigm case is the formation of the ideogram for "the East" from the ideograms for "sun" and "tree": presenting all three ideograms in a column, he demonstrates that the ideogram for "the East" consists of the ideogram for "sun" "tangled in the tree's branches, as at sunrise." Although "the East" is in many respects an abstract notion, Pound goes on to ask how the Chinese refer to "something more complicated" or to "a general idea." How, for example, does the Chinese thinker define red, without actually using red pigment?

> He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | ROSE | CHERRY |
> | IRON RUST | FLAMINGO |
>
> That, you see, is very much the kind of thing a biologist does (in a very much more complicated way) when he gets together a few hundred or thousand slides, and picks out what is necessary for his general statement. Something that fits the case, that applies in all of the cases.
>
> The Chinese "word" or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS.[9]

In the *ABC of Reading*, Pound introduces the idea as part of his proposed system of how to read: the student of literature should put specimens side by side and compare and contrast, just as a scientist would do when viewing two slides side by side under a microscope. However, the idea also appears to have informed the structure of his poetry. One of his best-known imagist poems offers a concise illustration:

> **In a Station of the Metro**
> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.

There is no grammatical connection to suggest that the image of the faces and the image of the petals stand in a metaphorical relation to each other. But the placing of one image alongside the other is itself an invitation, or even an imperative, to think of the first in terms of the second, and vice versa. What do these two "slides" have in common, and how are they different? At the simplest level, white or pink petals resemble European faces, and vice versa. Beyond this we might note the implications of mortality and decay. I take "on" the bough to mean that the petals have fallen from the twigs of the tree and have come to rest on a larger branch. The weather is wet, so they will decay. The same is true of the humans, and while "apparition" could mean simply the fact of the faces appearing, it also suggests that the humans are not quite real, that they are "apparitions" in the sense of ghosts. There is no verb in either phrase, so the poem freezes time. Yet it is also – and we shall return to this topic in the chapter on temporality – a poem marked by a knowledge of time's passage and of organic decay.

In such a juxtaposition, neither side of the comparison is marked as being more real than the other: if the juxtaposition produces the metaphor "faces are petals," it simultaneously produces the metaphor "petals are faces." We are to understand both the faces and the petals as literally existing in the world of the poem; there is no hierarchy. The poem provides the raw materials for the construction of a metaphor, but leaves its final shaping to the reader. In this particular instance, the paratactic relation of the two sentences also discourages us from reading the poem anthropocentrically: the petals are no more symbols of the human faces than the faces are symbols of the petals. Given that lyric poetry has very often used nature to speak of human concerns, the discovery of a method whereby nature can be allowed a degree of independence was a significant one.

Although the New Critics warned that paraphrase was a "heresy," it has its uses when reading the dense and sometimes multi-layered metaphors of modernist poetry. But its primary value comes at the point when figurative language cannot be paraphrased, or where the paraphrase becomes so clumsy or lengthy that it only serves to highlight the merits of the original text. At their best, the metaphors of modernist poems create a space in which the reader can reconceptualize the relations of once familiar objects, ideas, moods, or emotions. At times, as the instances from "Prufrock" and "Autumn" suggest, the "vehicle" takes on a life of its own, and the metaphor challenges our understanding of the relations of the literal and the figurative.

Notes

1 T. S. Eliot, "Studies in Contemporary Criticism," *The Egoist* 5 (October 1918), 114.
2 Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect" (1918), *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), 9.
3 The Introduction to *Some Imagist Poets* is reprinted in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
4 Ezra Pound, "Affirmations, II: Vorticism," *New Age* 16 no. 11 (Jan. 14, 1915), 277.
5 Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Grammar of Metaphor* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1958), 208.
6 I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1936).
7 Ezra Pound, "The Approach to Paris [V]," *New Age* 13 no. 23 (Oct. 14, 1913), 662.
8 Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934; New York: New Directions, 1960), 19.
9 Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 22.

10

Mythology, Mythography, and Mythopoesis

While critics are agreed that many modernist poems stand in a significant relationship to mythologies, the articulation of that relationship is far from easy. Critics tend to use spatial metaphors in this connection: they speak of myths being *in* a poem, or standing *behind* it, or *supporting* it; or, if they believe the mythic material to be superfluous, as coming *between* the poet and the reader. Although "myth" provides a convenient abbreviation for "mythology," it creates a potential for confusion with two related terms: "mythography," the study of mythologies, and "mythopoesis," the creation of new mythologies. In considering these questions, the present chapter will focus particularly on Yeats's "The Valley of the Black Pig."

One of the most debated examples among modernists was James Joyce's use of the *Odyssey* in *Ulysses*. For Ezra Pound, myth was a scaffolding: useful for the construction of the text, but not an integral part of it. For Pound, Joyce was essentially a naturalist writer. T. S. Eliot argued to the contrary that myth was of greater importance, but it is harder to extract a simple spatial metaphor from his account of *Ulysses*:

> In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. […] It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history. […] Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method.[1]

Eliot is describing *The Waste Land* as much as he is describing *Ulysses*; he does not acknowledge the comedy of *Ulysses*; and, more specifically, he does not acknowledge the extent to which Ulysses shows the heroic aspects of the *Odyssey* to be inadequate to the modern world. Joyce is far more

interested in Odysseus the trickster than Odysseus the hero. *Ulysses* is a mock heroic work which uses legend not to mock the present day, or not only that, but also to mock the heroic ideal. For Eliot, myth would appear to be a mould into which one may pour the fragmented elements of the modern world; or, to use an image which we shall reconsider in chapter 12, myth is a magnetic field which brings shape to the chaotic fragments of iron. For Joyce, however, neither contemporaneity nor antiquity provide a privileged perspective.

It has also been suggested that, in the essay on *Ulysses*, Eliot does not clarify the extent of myth's capabilities: is it, asks Michael Bell, "merely a technical method enabling the artist to *express* the futility and anarchy, or is it a principle of meaning that actually *opposes* it?"[2] Is the story of Odysseus selected arbitrarily as a means of gaining a perspective on the modern world, or is it selected because it contains values to which Joyce subscribes, and which offer a normative perspective on modernity? Of course it should also be noted that the *Odyssey*, though it is a classical text, might better be described as a legend or an epic than as a myth. It certainly shares certain elements with mythic texts, such as the descent into the underworld, but those elements do not transform the whole narrative into a mythic one. This raises the question of whether any narrative is *inherently* mythic: might it be that myth is really a way of using texts. Myth then would not be "in" the text, but would be something that we bring to it as an interpretative community.

The dominance of *Ulysses* and of *The Waste Land* in discussions of modernism and myth is a problem, because they establish parameters that do not necessarily apply to shorter poems. *Ulysses* is particularly problematic, because, even though Eliot insisted that it was not "a novel," it is clearly a narrative work. A more general account of myth might be obtainable by considering a poem which establishes connections both to contemporary history and to established mythologies, W. B. Yeats's "The Valley of the Black Pig" (first published April 1896):

> The dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown spears
> Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
> And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
> Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
> We who still labour by the cromlech on the shore,
> The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in dew,
> Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you,
> Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.[3]

Some mythological poems provide fairly obvious clues to the relevant mythology in their titles: for example, Yeats's "Leda and the Swan," or H.D.'s "Eurydice." For most readers the background to "The Valley of the Black Pig" is more obscure, or would have been in 1896 to readers not versed in Irish folklore; I shall return to these details shortly. The larger question about our interpretative process is what we are doing if we read these poems "mythically." To pursue that question historically, it is valuable to establish what modernists themselves understood by "myth" and related terms.

The present-day semantics of the term were current in the late nineteenth century, and provide a broad overview: a myth is both a narrative that provides a profound insight into the nature of things, and a narrative that should be distrusted as an unscientific falsehood; we trust myths and we expose them. How we think about "myth" is inseparable from how we think about Enlightenment: the Enlightenment sought to free men and women from the myths of religion, but, if we accept something like Adorno and Horkheimer's thesis, Enlightenment rationality itself began to enslave people. Versions of this thesis were in circulation long before Adorno and Horkheimer published the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).

Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) contains much valuable discussion. Much of Nietzsche's book is written in opposition to the Socratic spirit, that is, the spirit of rational enquiry; it is, then, anti-Enlightenment, or at the very least, sceptical about the one-sidedness of Enlightenment rationality. He suggests that the way we respond to the portrayal of miracles on the stage indicates whether we are Socratic in spirit, or, in his sense, aesthetic. Myth is "a concentrated image of the world," and, because it is "an abbreviation for phenomena," it cannot do without miracles. But the Socratic spirit, the critical-historical spirit, can only accept miracles in a sceptical and scholarly spirit. For Nietzsche, this is a cultural disaster:

> without myth all culture loses its healthy and natural creative power: only a horizon surrounded by myths can unify an entire cultural movement. […] The images of myth must be the daemonic guardians, omnipresent and unnoticed, which protect the growth of the young mind, and guide man's interpretation of his life and struggles. The state itself has no unwritten laws more powerful than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connection with religion and its growth out of mythical representations.[4]

Notice that although myth is essential to the vitality of culture, myth itself is unnoticed and is comparable to "unwritten laws": myth is perhaps something we are unconscious of, or at least only fleetingly conscious of.

Nietzsche traces the decline of Greek tragedy to the "dissociation" of the two driving forces behind art, the Apolline and the Dionysian:

> The decline of Greek tragedy seems necessarily to have been the result of a curious dissociation of the two primal artistic drives, a process that went hand in hand with a degeneration and transformation of the character of the Greek people. This compels us to reflect seriously on the necessity and closeness of the fundamental interconnections between art and people, myth and morality, tragedy and state. The decline of tragedy was also the decline of myth. Until that point the Greeks felt an involuntary need to connect all their experiences directly to their myths, understanding them solely by means of that connection. This meant that the immediate present appeared to them *sub specie aeterni* [viewed in relation to eternity] and, in a certain sense, timeless. The state and art, however, both immersed themselves in that flood of timelessness, finding a haven there from the burden and voracity of the moment. And, like a human being, a people has value only in so far as it can give its experience the stamp of eternity, for in this way it becomes desecularized, and reveals its unconscious inner conviction of the relativity of time and the true, metaphysical meaning of life.

Myth is important not just for art, but for the relation of perception to cognition, and for the whole of society. The problem of modernity is that historical thinking has destroyed mythical thinking. Nietzsche continues:

> The opposite occurs when a people begins to understand itself historically and to shatter the mythical bulwarks that surround it. This generally goes hand in hand with a resolute process of secularization, a break with the unconscious metaphysics of its former existence, and all the ethical consequences which follow from that.

For Nietzsche, then myth is contrasted with history: but whereas history is a mode of understanding, myth is better characterized as a precondition of understanding. Myth is contrasted with rational knowledge, but some of Nietzsche's remarks suggest that they are not alternatives; but rather that myth provides the grounds or horizon for rational thought.

Nietzsche was influential, but we should not assume that all modernists subscribed to his views. However, for other writers, even those committed to the employment of myth, it can be harder to determine where they

stood. W. B. Yeats never uses the word "myth" in his poetry, and he uses related words such as "mythological" and "mythologies" very rarely. In "A Song" we find one such:

> I made my song a coat
> Covered with embroideries
> Out of old mythologies
> From heel to throat;
> But the fools caught it,
> Wore it in the world's eyes
> As though they'd wrought it.
> Song, let them take it,
> For there's more enterprise
> In walking naked.
> (Rainey 302)

If we take the first line to mean that he made a coat *for* his song (rather than making a coat *of* his song), then the poem at first suggests that mythologies are unnecessary surface decorations; the final line appears to endorse that position. One might object that the idea of nakedness, of a plain language without embellishments, is just as much a mythology as the idea of excessively figurative language. More importantly, the middle lines of the poem suggest that mythology is particularly sensitive to conditions of reception: "fools" can appropriate it. Moreover, the objection is not simply to their having appropriated it as their own, but perhaps to their having worn it "in the world's eyes": the line could imply that mythologies should be exposed only to an elite of competent readers.

Yeats's notes to his poems provide more insight into his ideas. In a note to "The Valley of the Black Pig," he related the image of warfare to various mythical struggles of light and dark, warmth and cold, fruitfulness and sterility: "Once a symbolism has possessed the imagination of large numbers of men, it becomes, as I believe, an embodiment of disembodied powers, and repeats itself in dreams and visions, age after age."[5] If this were so, of course, it ought to be difficult for the fools to misread it. What that might mean is that there are different kinds of mythology, those that are readily misappropriated, and those that are so deep rooted that they are universally understood. Later, in "The Second Coming," Yeats speaks of the "spiritus mundi" as the universal store of images. Although Yeats rarely speaks of "mythologies," when he uses terms such as "dreams" and "images," they very often imply systems akin to mythology.

Modernist approaches to mythology were influenced by late nineteenth century developments in mythography. J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890, was immensely influential on modernist writers and thinkers. Eliot's reference to it in the notes to *The Waste Land* is well known; Yeats's account of "The Valley of the Black Pig" also makes reference to it. It was important for the vast range of beliefs and mythologies that it gathered together, but also because of Frazer's method: his way of reading myths was available to literary readers, and literary writers could incorporate mythological material in the expectation that their readership would interpret them appropriately.

Frazer gathered together accounts of primitive religions from around the world, and noted their similarities to each other, and, more tentatively, their similarities to Christianity. Frazer's method was comparative, and it was also universalist: he was interested in similarities rather than differences, and assumed that there is a single pattern underlying all human culture. Frazer was also closely associated with the group of classicists known as the Cambridge ritualists: he believed that all mythologies existed in a vital relationship to rituals. The idea is similar to Nietzsche's belief that there are "fundamental interconnections between art and people, myth and morality, tragedy and state." Art is not merely aesthetic, but serves a social function. Finally, Frazer was progressivist, in that he believed that magic had been replaced by religion which had in turn been replaced by science. However, as the distinction between magic and religion is not altogether certain, the distinction between religion and science might appear not absolutely stable: his method of finding analogies across space encourages us to find analogies through time, and these collapse the ideal of gradual enlightenment. Moreover, Frazer is fascinated by the vestigial survival of old rituals in folk-customs: the complete myth-and-ritual is to be glimpsed in fragments everywhere. In his prose, Frazer often sounds like a Victorian classic realist, relating the individual to a typical figure. Take the following sentences:

> in the handsome Hippolytus, beloved of Artemis, cut off in his youthful prime, we have one of those mortal lovers of a goddess who appear so often in ancient religion, and of whom Adonis is the most familiar type.
>
> In the story of the tragic death of the youthful Hippolytus we may discern an analogy with similar tales of other fair but mortal youths who paid with their lives for the brief rapture of the love of an immortal goddess.[6]

But although the prose suggests realist typologizing, the larger process of connecting tentative analogies is closer to the process of modernist reading: we are presented with suggestive fragments, and must work to discern the underlying pattern. As I suggested earlier, it may be that myth is not exactly present *in* the poem, but *alongside* it; or better still, myth is not a thing at all, but a way of reading. Modernist poetry needs to be considered not only in the context of mythology, but also that of mythography.

To these two terms, we need to add "Mythopoesis," the creation of a myth or myths. The term derived from Greek roots, but – according to the current *OED* – came into English only in 1882, the year of James Joyce's birth, and a few years before the births of Pound and Eliot. The related adjective "mythopoeic" was also a Victorian invention. The Victorians needed these words because of the growth of anthropology. The first recorded use of "mythopoesis" is in an anthropological work, Keery's *Outline of Primitive Belief* (1882): anthropology led late Victorian thinkers to recognize that myths were not inevitable or natural, but were human constructs. The noun "construct" in this sense is also a late Victorian invention, dating from 1890. It was recognized that myths were created within human societies to serve human needs. Although some believed that myth-making was uniquely an attribute of primitive societies, and while others believed that the Greeks, for example, were unusually fertile in their mythopoeic abilities, the recognition that myths had been constructed opened up new modes of analysis, and moreover raised the possibility that new myths were still in the process of construction.

The recognition in the 1880s and 1890s that science was also a construct further complicated the relation between myth and science. We might begin with the fundamental contrast between science as something factually true, and myth as factually untrue. To that we might add the complementary contrast of myth as serving deeper imaginative needs that science fails to satisfy. But the idea that both science and myths are constructs further complicates the picture: it opens the speculation that perhaps what we believe to be scientifically true might one day look like mythology. At the same time, it opens the speculation that what now looks like mythology was once treated much as we now treat science, and believed in with the same depth of conviction. This peculiar position creates an interest in myth that was very different from Nietzsche's. Whereas Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* took myth to be a more profound truth than Socratic rationality,

to other readers the interest of myth was precisely its double quality of being simultaneously true and not true. Michael Bell puts it like this:

> Since archaic myth was foundational, holistic and inarguable, yet was from a later, scientific viewpoint clearly not "objectively" true, it eventually provided the basis of a compelling analogy for what it might mean to inhabit as conviction a world view which is also known to be ultimately relative.[7]

The idea of that a society has a "world view" or a "world picture" is also a mid-nineteenth century one. Bell observes that if a society completely believes in a myth, it does not see it as a "world picture"; rather, it considers it to be inseparable from the world.

Any poem that invokes myth potentially presents us with a choice of how we interpret it: do we treat the poem as genuinely subscribing to the myth, or do we treat it as offering the myth for sceptical consideration? Of course, when we are dealing with short lyric poems, then the myth may make itself known to us only in fragments in several related poems. Although it is easy enough to invoke myth when a poem uses the names of pre-established mythological figures, there is a far more difficult interpretative choice when we suspect that the poem might be mythopoeic, but when we cannot be sure.

If we came to "The Valley of the Black Pig" knowing nothing of the mythology behind it, we might take the title as a clue and try to discover what this valley signified in 1896, and this information alone might lead us to recognize that the poem is rooted in folklore mythology. Even the singularity of "the black pig" suggests that the pig is no common agricultural creature, but one with peculiar associations. So even the title gives some hint that we should read mythologically. The opening phrase suggests that the supernatural is relevant to the poem. To say that dreams "gather" suggests that they come from beyond the human mind; in modern English we normally speak of having dreams, but these dreams are the sort that will possess the subject. The parallelism of "dews drop" and "dreams gather" suggests that the dreams are analogous to dews, coming into being by a process of condensation; what was in the atmosphere but imperceptible has acquired a definite outline. Dreams are not necessarily mythologies, but the externality of the dreams suggests that they are collective. Yeats's note about a symbolism that has "possessed the imagination of large numbers of men" is implicit in this phrase.

The speaker has a revelation of battle, clearly pre-modern in that it involves spears. That the spears and the armies remain "unknown" even when they make themselves available to the eyes and ears of the perceiver further suggests that the poem is about a kind of knowledge which hovers at the edge of consciousness. The ambiguity of "dream-awakened eyes" further raises this question about the status of the knowledge presented here: have the speaker's eyes been awakened *from* a dream, or awakened *by* a dream? If we take the "dream" to be a metaphor, has the speaker been awakened *from* rational knowledge, and taken into a more profound knowledge that has the quality of a dream? The poem participates in the ambiguities that surround mythology as a form of knowledge.

The first four lines revolved around a singular first-person subject, even if the vision he experienced seemed to be available to the community. The last four lines modulate to a plural first-person. Why is this collective speaker characterized as "still" labouring on the shore? The reference to the cromlech suggests that they have been labouring there since the prehistoric structure was built; it suggests continuity between the prehistoric past and the political present. However, if we take the moment when the day is drowned in dew to mean simply "evening," then "still" might signify that they are still working when others have gone home; that they are forced by necessity or their employers to work long hours. That reading is complicated by the association of dew with dreams: in that light, they are still working, still maintaining a non-visionary consciousness, even at a point in history when collective symbols have reached saturation point.

The "we" of the poem bows down to "you," a master of cosmic entities who would appear to be some sort of deity: if we had not noticed hints in earlier lines, then the final line forces us to assess the poem in terms of mythology. However, the invocation of the divine does not imply the rejection of the earthly: the poem is also about the intersection of secular human history and the mythological level: "We […] being weary of the world's empires […] bow down to you." The phrase implies that were they not weary imperial subjects they might not worship the master of the still stars. The phrase opens up a window on the world of the labourers by the shore: although the poem offers the reader a mesmerizing dream-vision, it suggests that such dream-visions are produced from material conditions. In this regard, although the poem's opening lines offer a chilling revelatory rhetoric that appears to believe fully in the supernatural, its conclusion offers a more sceptical and disenchanted perspective.

Yeats's various notes to the poem also point in more than one direction. One note explains the basic myth:

> The Irish peasantry have for generations comforted themselves, in their misfortunes, with visions of a great battle, to be fought in a mysterious valley called, "The Valley of the Black Pig," and to break at last the power of their enemies.[8]

In this reading it is very much a political or politicized myth. Yeats's prose account of it suggests that it exists in a compensatory relation to the hardships of peasant life. However, another of Yeats's notes reads it in terms of James Frazer's universalist interpretations.

> If one reads Rhys' *Celtic Heathendom* by the light of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, and puts together what one finds there about the boar that killed Diarmuid, and other old Celtic boars and sows, one sees that the Battle is mythological, and that the Pig it is named from must be a type of cold and winter doing battle with the summer, or of death battling with life.[9]

This comes at the end of a note that begins by acknowledging the political aspect of the myth: the Frazerian reading seems to suppress the politicized versions of it, or suggest that they are less important than the underlying eternal battle of summer and winter, life and death. Nietzsche had argued that "a people has value only in so far as it can give its experience the stamp of eternity," and that it could do this by subscribing to myth. The latter of the two notes quoted seems to endorse this view: the struggle of the Irish peasantry is a form of the eternal struggle of life and death. However, in endorsing the Nietzschean view, Yeats suppresses a more historicizing reading which the poem itself allows: that myths are created and revived in particular historical and material conditions. A peasantry comforts itself with myths.

"The Valley of the Black Pig" may not be as obviously mythological as "Eurydice" or "Leda and the Swan," but the clues are easily found. Even if we do not know whether to read it as mythological or meta-mythological, we know that there are established narratives underlying it. But what to do with poems that are even more tentatively mythological? By Nietzsche's definition, myth is something unnoticed, unwritten, and unknown, the horizon of rational activity, so its presence in the poems is necessarily shadowy.

We might try to define myth as something that lies between texts, that connects them together, and which brings them additional power. It can

connect established narratives with the poet's new work, or, if the poet is a myth-maker, it can connect different poems in his oeuvre. So in Yeats's "The Second Coming," "Bethlehem" connects the poem with Christian myth. Much less easily, "the widening gyre" connects it with Yeats's theory of historical cycles: we can re-read "The Second Coming" in the light of the later poem "The Gyres," but more importantly, we can re-read it in the light of Yeats's prose work *A Vision* in which he expounded his theory.

However, Yeats's work is not typical, in that most poets do not outline their private mythologies as explicitly as Yeats did in *A Vision*. Moreover, the effects wrought by Yeats's mythologies do no always inhere in words as obvious as "gyres." Consider the general apocalyptic atmosphere of "The Second Coming" and its final lines:

> The darkness drops again; but now I know
> That twenty centuries of stony sleep
> Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
> And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
> Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?[10]

Then consider the poem which follows it in *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, "A Prayer for my Daughter," which begins thus:

> Once more the storm is howling, and half hid
> Under this cradle-hood and coverlid
> My child sleeps on.

Most explicitly, the rocking cradle of the first poem is carried over into the cradle of Yeats's daughter, although there is also a modulation from the symbolic to the literal. The air of menace at the conclusion of "The Second Coming," the rough beast, is carried over into the next poem, and reinterpreted as "storm"; the storm is said to have been "bred" on the Atlantic, a phrase that recalls the earlier poem's concern with generation. The phrase "the ceremony of innocence" is echoed in the later poem's reference to "the murderous innocence of the sea." There are numerous other connections, and not all of them depend on specific verbal echoes.

Of course, many lyric poets create subtle and not-so-subtle echoes between poems: for example, Auden's early poems are often described as being set in "Auden country." To take an example from Yeats's *Responsibilities*: the reference to "Paudeen's pence" in "To a Wealthy

Man" is picked up by the "greasy till" of the following poem ("September 1913"), and both in turn are echoed by "old Paudeen in his shop" a little later in the collection ("Paudeen"). But does lexical coherence constitute a mythology? The references to Paudeen, set alongside references to heroic figures like Duke Ercole ("To a Wealthy Man"), certainly set down a scale of values within the volume. One might argue, however, that if myths are narratives, then a scale of values falls short of the ideal: it is not, in itself, a myth; of course, it might draw upon a myth, or inform a myth. So the narrative element of the rough beast slouching to be born is a mythology; the echo of the cradle in the cradle-hood is not, in itself, but it connects to one because it implies birth.

Mythologies can be deployed in poems in many different ways, and, moreover, they are open to being interpreted against the grain. Poems can subscribe to mythologies, presenting present-day actions as if they were repetitions of an eternal cycle. However, in re-presenting mythologies, they can also create a critical distance between the reader and the mythology; in consequence, the reader can rehistoricize the myth, asking whose interests it served and what role it had in the modern era. T. S. Eliot's idea that the modern world was chaotic, and that classical ideas were necessarily more orderly is not the only way of analyzing the situation.

Notes

1 T. S. Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order and Myth" (1923), *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber, 1975), 177–8.
2 Michael Bell's *Literature, Modernism and Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) is an important general source for this chapter; Bell's quoted remarks about Eliot and *Ulysses* come from p. 122.
3 W. B. Yeats, "The Valley of the Black Pig," *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989), 100.
4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, tr. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner (London: Penguin, 1993), 109, and 111.
5 Yeats's prose notes are from *Yeats's Poems*, 516–17.
6 J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, ed. Robert Fraser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17, 19.
7 Michael Bell, *Literature, Modernism and Myth*, 12.
8 *Yeats's Poems*, 516.
9 *Yeats's Poems*, 753.
10 *Yeats's Poems*, 295.

11

Who is Speaking?

One way of uniting the technical topics discussed in the foregoing six chapters is to ask "Who is Speaking?"; following from this question is that of who is being addressed. If the poem appears to disorientate, might that give a clue to the expectations of the poet or speaker? If the rhythms or rhymes of the poem change, do these indicate a change of voice, or at least a change of mood within a single speaker? If the poem alludes to other texts, or pastiches other styles, does this allow other voices into the texture of the work? If the poem alludes to mythologies, to what extent does the reader need to be already initiated into them in order to understand the poem? Through a discussion of Hart Crane's "My Grandmother's Love Letters," William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All*, XXV, and W. B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium," this chapter aims to bring together some of these diverse elements.

Of the three poems "My Grandmother's Love Letters" (1920) is the most conventional: Crane's language is less dense than in "Black Tambourine" or "At Melville's Tomb," and the speaking voice appears unified. In answer to the question "Who is Speaking?," the answer "Hart Crane" does not seem entirely unreasonable. However, there are subtle modulations of voice within the poem that reward further attention. The first four lines run thus:

> There are no stars to-night
> But those of memory.
> Yet how much room for memory there is
> In the loose girdle of soft rain.
>
> (Rainey 812)

While the negative of the opening line is not particularly disorienting, it nevertheless establishes several parameters for the poem. At a purely

realist level, it establishes a scene: there are no stars because it is cloudy and, as we soon discover, raining. We might ask why we would have expected stars, and what they might have been useful for. Given that the poem concerns a journey – literally across the space of a loft, and metaphorically across the cultural space that separates the speaker from his grandmother – stars as a means of navigation become important. That there are no stars suggests that the poem might concern the difficulty of finding one's bearings. Additionally, if we think that the grandmother is dead, stars might also suggest the classical idea of the stellification of the dead.

That there are stars "of memory" available signals that the poem will have an explicit figurative dimension. Although the core of the poem describes literally the task of recovering the grandmother's love letters, the early figurative reference makes us aware of the metaphorical dimensions of the later literal statements.

The poem alludes subtly to other texts, but does not depend on the reader recognizing the allusion: to this extent, my suggestions may seem superfluous. The "soft rain" of the fourth line in particular suggests the "small rain" of an anonymous sixteenth-century English lyric:

> O Western Wind, when wilt thou blow
> That the small rain down can rain?
> Christ, that my love were in my arms,
> And I in my bed again.[1]

While "soft rain" by itself might not be enough to make the connection, the erotic connotations of the "loose girdle" further suggest the earlier poem. But while the sixteenth-century poet was waiting hopefully for the spring, for Crane's speaker it has come, at least metaphorically.

The rhythm of the poem communicates a great deal, through, to adopt T. S. Eliot's description of T. E. Hulme's "The Embankment," a constant "suggestion" and "evasion" of iambic metres. If one accepts that the poem's basic theme is the distance that separates us from the dead, and the difficulty of understanding people over historical distances, then its drifting in and out of regular metre is appropriate: the distance between regular and irregular metre creates an auditory equivalent for the distance in time.

Although titles are not always considered in analyses of rhythm, and not always read aloud by poetry readers, the dactyl of "grandmother's" and the potentially dactylic "love letters" establish a pattern that will become important in the poem. The first actual line of the poem allows itself to be

read as three iambs. Although we could substitute a more colloquial reading in which "no stars" becomes a spondee, the assonance of "are" and "star," along with an ingrained expectation of iambic feet, probably pushes most readers towards the former. The second line offers some other choices: do we read "memory" as three syllables, or more colloquially as a disyllabic "mem'ry"? There is much to be said for the first reading: it gives the second line the same number of syllables as the first line, and moreover "grandmother" sets a pattern for "love letter" and then for "memory." Regardless of how we treat "memory," it is notable that, against the dominant texture of iambs, the poem is threaded through with dactylic words, some of them preceded by an unstressed syllable: "memory"; "(E)lizabeth"; "liable"; "(in)visible"; "grandmother"; "pitying." This rhythmic motif holds the poem together, and draws our attention to phrases that are widely separated. We might want to ask whether there is anything significant about the words that are marked in this way; whether, like rhyme, the connections are significant. But there does not have to be: it is sufficient for such patterning to bring unity to the poem; the musical coherence of the poem acts as a guarantee of coherence of meaning.

Much of the poem's manipulation of sound works to create an atmosphere of tentative movement and contemplative silence; although atmosphere is not everything, the evocation of mood is important. The suggestion and avoidance of rhyme builds the atmosphere. There are full rhymes – "hair" and "air" (lines 14–15), "hand" and "understand" (lines 23–4) – but they are relatively few in number. More important are the recurring fricatives at the end of lines: "enough"; "moth(er)"; "(Eliza) beth"; "soft"; "(my)self"; "enough"; "roof"; "laugh(ter)." To these we might add similar sounds within lines: "love" in the title, and "soft" (rain). The "ch" sounds of "much," "birch," and "such" also contribute. We could read these sounds as enactment, if we believed that fricatives sound like gentle rain on a roof, but "My Grandmother's Love Letters" is only indirectly a poem about rain. We could say that this chain of sounds, like the trisyllables, is there only to create structure. We could also think about the way that both the trisyllables and the very muted rhymes murmur in the background of the poem, almost inaudibly: they suggest the respects in which the grandmother's voice has been lost almost beyond recovery.

Rhythmic variation also works subtly to make meaning in the poem. Though the opening line establishes an iambic pattern, many lines deviate from it, or would feel clumsy if it were imposed upon them: for example,

by placing a great emphasis on the last syllable of "liable," we could make "And liable to melt as snow" a regularly iambic line, but most readers probably give "-ble" very little emphasis. The third paragraph is still more tentative, with the line "It is all hung by an invisible white hair" and the one that follows offering many alternatives for emphasis. It is notable that, before line 16, Crane does not use "I," though the speaker's presence has been signalled by "my." The avoidance of "I" may account for the oddly impersonal construction of line 13, "Steps must be gentle," rather than "I must step gently." Once the "I" has been explicitly introduced, when the speaker questions himself in lines 17–22, a far more regular rhythm emerges. Although the poem is ostensibly a lyric spoken by a single voice, the rhythmic variation differentiates two voices, one a semi-conscious internal monologue, the other a more explicit and conscious voice, posing questions to itself. A similar variation brings the poem to a conclusion: while the full rhyme of "hand" and "understand" (lines 23–4) appears to promise a confident concluding couplet, what the poem delivers is more tentative, a subtle chiming of "roof" and "laugh(ter)." The rain and the soft rhyme that signifies it offer an ironic comment on the worthy and boldly stated intentions of the speaker. The theme implied at the opening of the poem, the contrast between having clear navigational markers and making a less certain exploration on a starless night, is carried through into the contrast of sounds. At times the poem offers the reader clear navigation points in the form of rhythm and rhyme, but at other times removes them.

Spring and All, XXV, "Somebody dies every four minutes," is concerned with mortality, with the modern world of commodified leisure, with the different languages we use to engage with the world, and with the value of poetry in the face of mortality and modernity. It is a poem of many different voices, not strictly demarcated from each other, but overlapping in ambiguous ways: the question of who is speaking is of supreme importance.

Whether we begin with the sound of the poem, or the points where it is most disorienting, or even with the more difficult questions of the presence of metaphor and myth, the most striking lines are these:

THE HORSES black
&
PRANCED white

(Rainey 534)

If we begin by listening to the sound of the poem, in the hope that it might guide us, these lines present an obvious problem. If we hold rigidly to the lineation, we must utter something like "the horses (black &) pranced (white)." While it seems that "black & white" must apply to horses, the lineation does not allow for "the horses – black & white – pranced." The arrangement suggests that we must imagine two voices at this point, one saying "the horses pranced," the other "black & white." The practical difficulty created by the lines serves to emphasize the horses, and to emphasize – if we had not already noticed – that this is a poem of many voices. The definite article might also leave us asking whether we are supposed to be familiar with the horses already; I will return to that question shortly.

The many-voiced quality of the poem is signalled early by the rhythms. Though the poem is metrically irregular, it is possible to establish a pattern of units containing two stresses interspersed with units containing three stresses. The first line is ambiguous but is best read as containing two groups of two stresses, with stresses falling naturally on "some," "dies," "ev-," and "min-." (Alternatively, one might stretch "four" into a disyllable, and thereby make space for three stresses in the second group: "ev-," "fou-," and "min-.") The second line contains two stresses, on "New" and "State." The next four lines alternate between three stresses and two. There is therefore a continuity between these lines and the opening pair, but the rhythm also becomes less regular.

The isolated seventh line, "What the hell do you know about it?," presents more options for the reader. Although the phrase "what the hell" suggests that the line should be rendered emphatically, and although most readers would probably place the greatest emphasis on "hell" and "you" (echoing the "you" in lines three and four), one might also continue the dactylic rhythm established by "somebody," and emphasize "hell" and "know": "HELL-do-you KNOW-ab-out." Alternatively one might slow the pace of the poem at this point by giving equal emphasis to "what," "hell," "know," and "-bout." Certainly the isolation of the line suggests that it should be voiced differently from lines 3–6; however, such a reading would transform the line from a rhetorical question into one more genuinely enquiring. Whatever option is taken, the opening seven lines suggest a subtle variety of voices, from the blunt, but coldly factual announcement of the opening two lines, to the vituperative language of lines 3–6, and then to the question of line seven.

In the remainder of the poem, the range of voices becomes more explicit and pronounced. The "Careful Crossing Campaign" is a pastiche

or quotation of public information. The question to "Carl" is more sympathetic in tone than the earlier addresses to "you," and therefore raises the question of whether the two are addressed to the same person. "Outings in New York City" could be taken from an advertisement; from line 19 onwards, we are apparently presented with the text of an advertisement by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company, sometimes paraphrased (as the casually dismissive "etc." suggests), but at other times verbatim. Moreover, with "rippling brooks," a phrase that might have adequately served a Romantic poet, the transit company has incorporated once "poetic" language into advertiser's cliché. The borders between one area of discourse and another are often unclear: it is difficult to tell whether the opening lines are in the speaker's own voice, or are a fact quoted from a newspaper. Similarly, we cannot tell whether the imperative to "Go to the Great Parks" is directed by the speaker to Carl, or by the transit company to the general public; we cannot tell whether, or to what extent, the speaker can be said to endorse the transit company's exhortation. In any case, it might be unwise to speak of "a speaker": there are several voices, and some of the text reproduces a fundamentally *written* language. The poem hints that it might be typeset in a variety of styles appropriate to the variety of texts which it collages together. By the end of the poem, the "speaker" appears to have been overpowered by the transit company, its name forming an ironic signature in the final line. We have travelled from the seemingly objective discourse of medical statistics to the seemingly illusory discourse of advertising.

The sounds of the poem offer guidance to matters of importance, with the poem's divergent uses of alliteration being particularly interesting. The unsubtle alliterations of "Careful Crossing Campaign" suggest that a conventional poetic device has been appropriated for the discourse of public information and advertising. This tends to be confirmed by the later "bathing, boating," and "green grass." While this abuse of alliteration might suggest that it has become bankrupt as a poetic device, the poem also makes significant use of it when "THE HORSES [...] PRANCED" echoes the pronounced sibilants of "Cross Crossings Cautiously." The connection thus forged has a larger thematic importance: the cautiousness with which the citizens are encouraged to walk is contrasted with the careless movement of the horses. This parallel partially answers the question of who "the" horses are: they are the equine counterparts of the pedestrians implied by lines ten and eleven. More importantly, just as Pound's juxtapositions of images create the materials for a metaphor, so these lines

create a comparison and a contrast: the cautious crossers are compared and contrasted to the prancing horses. Should we live our lives more like the prancing horses? And if we do, does that necessarily mean we should follow the suggestions of the Company?

As well as being in dialogue with each other, the voices of the poem are in dialogue with implied external voices. One external voice proclaims the transcendent and eternal value of poetry, to which the voice in the poem replies "to hell with you." One external voice proclaims that it is worthwhile remaining indoors, sweating over one's work, while the voice in the poem replies in the language of the advertisements, asserting that one should take an excursion to Pelham Bay. The hardest part of the dialogue to decipher comes in the lines "What's the use of sweating over / *this* sort of thing, Carl; *here* / it is all set up –" (my emphasis). Even if Carl could be identified, the terms "this" and "here" are shifters, words whose referents can be understood only in their physical context. "This" might refer to Carl's literary work, especially if we accept Rainey's identification of him with Carl Van Doren: we should imagine the speaker addressing Carl at his desk. However, "this" might refer back to what has already been said: the speaker might be asking why, when an excursion is possible, one should sweat over the facts of mortality (taking "this" to refer to lines 1–2); or why one should sweat over the quarrel between poetry and mortality (taking "this" to refer to lines 1–7); or why one should sweat over the difference between the cautious pedestrians and the prancing horses. While it is necessary to look for the alternatives, the difficulty of deciding between them may not be a weakness in the poem, but part of its point: so far as the transit company is concerned, "this" is any activity which might be abandoned for the charms of Pelham Bay.

In pondering the reference to "the horses," we might wonder whether they are supposed to be familiar from another literary work, or from mythology. We might invoke Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which the soul is compared to "a winged charioteer and his team." While the gods have a good team of horses, the charioteer of human souls drives a pair of horses, one of which "is fine and good and of noble stock," the other of which is "the opposite in every way." Though Plato does not distinguish the horses by colour, the contrasting appearance of Williams's horses suggests the duality of human nature. For Plato, the unpredictable nature of the human chariot team means that, unlike the gods, humans are unable to ride their souls into the purest realms of reality; what glimpses they achieve are

impaired by the unruly nature of their horses. I offer this reading as a provocation, because Williams is not normally seen as a poet who draws on mythology, and because his poems rarely offer materials for such readings. The reading is broadly compatible with the reading sketched above, because the poem concerns the possibility of rising above the mundane into a more perfect world. However, if the poem does invoke mythology, it may be doing so for purposes that are anti-mythopoeic. It does not wish the reader to imagine Pelham Bay as a glimpse of the Platonic realm of absolute knowledge; rather, it wishes to expose the respects in which the Company wish to mythologize the experiences available; it participates in the process of secularization which Nietzsche contrasted to myth.

Like *Spring and All*, XXV, "Sailing to Byzantium" (written 1926) is concerned with responses to mortality; unlike Williams's poem, Yeats's is strongly mythopoeic. The first line of the poem creates temporary obscurities and raises questions which drive the rest of the poem.

> That is no country for old men. The young
> In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
> – Those dying generations – at their song,
> The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
> Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long
> Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
> (Rainey 309)

"*That* is no country for old men": where is the speaker pointing? Given that the title provides a place name, some readers new to the poem may have entertained the idea that "that" points to Byzantium. As the first stanza unfolds, it becomes clear that "that" points to the place of flesh, fish, and fowl; in the second stanza it becomes clear that the speaker is travelling to Byzantium to escape it. Critics have tended to identify the flesh, fish, and fowl, and particularly the "salmon-falls," with Ireland, but the lack of a specific place name means that the place is not an historical Ireland, but simply a place of mortality. By the end of the second stanza, we may feel we have disambiguated the opening line, but it is valuable to hold on to the misinterpretation, and to ask whether Byzantium really is a place for old men? The speaker's desire to be gathered into "the artifice of eternity" suggests that Byzantium is a place for old men only in so far as they wish to be transformed into something other.

That the poem has metaphorical and mythological dimensions is signalled by the title: the name "Byzantium" was an archaic way of referring

to the city refounded by Constantine in AD 328 as "Constantinople." The speaker's voyage will be a journey in time as well as space. It is questionable whether any reader could fully understand the poem's mythology without reference to Yeats's prose remarks about Byzantium, such as those from *A Vision* (1937 edition) reproduced by Rainey; that Yeats included a brief note to the poem when it was collected in *The Tower* (see Rainey 341) indicates his awareness of its potential obscurity. Nevertheless, it is valuable to ask what we can glean from a reading of the poem in relation to Yeats's other works.

The poem's principal verbal difficulty, the imperative verb "pern" (line 19), points us towards a central mythological image for Yeats, the spiral. We have an advantage over Yeats's first readers, in that the *OED* has added an entry for Yeats's unusual verb. Yeats had derived the verb from a dialect noun, "pirn" or "pern," meaning "a bobbin." (The *OED* also records a separate verb, "perne," which derives from the name of Andrew Perne (?1518–89), the head of a Cambridge college, who was notorious for changing his religious allegiances. It is curious that this verb is not entirely incompatible with Yeats's "pern," in that Andrew Perne was, so to speak, turning or rotating; it seems possible that those who took Perne's name as a synonym for "turning" were exploiting its similarity to the dialect word. However, to entertain the idea that Yeats wishes the sages to change their opinions insincerely would be to introduce a verbal instability into the poem.) By the third stanza, readers of the poem may have recognized that it refers outwards to earlier works by the same author: the collocation of "coat" and "sing" in the second stanza echoes "A Coat" (1914). The phrase "perne in a gyre" likewise recalls "Demon and Beast" from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), in which the speaker recalls that he had long "perned in the gyre / Between my hatred and desire," before winning a temporary reprieve from the demon and the beast that have plagued him; later in the same poem, a white gull is also seen "gyring down" and "perning." The very rarity of the word draws attention to it, and forces the reader to seek out other examples Doing so, we become aware of the importance of perns, gyres, and bobbins in Yeats's work.

The next poem in *Michael Robartes*, "The Second Coming," presents the image of the falcon flying in "widening gyre." Unlike the first readers of "Sailing to Byzantium," we are also able to refer to later poems which, in effect, gloss it: in "Byzantium" (Rainey 344–5), we may note "Hades'

bobbin bound in mummy-cloth"; in *New Poems* (1938) we have the poem "The Gyres," and, in "The Spirit Medium," a reference to the newly dead who come into the speaker's soul, and to "those begotten or unbegotten / Perning in a band": "begotten" recalls the sixth line of "Sailing to Byzantium," while "perning" recalls its most obscure verb. Bringing some of this to bear on "Sailing to Byzantium," it becomes clear that while perning in a gyre can be an ordinary activity (as it is for the gull), it very often involves movement from the past to the present, and from the eternal to the mortal. The sages travel from a divine or immortal realm, the holy fire, to become "singing-masters" to the mortal speaker; he hopes that they will return him to the divine realm by transforming him into an eternal form. While we could not infer the entire infrastructure of Yeats's system of gyres from his poetic texts alone, careful attention to the key words allows us to recognize that there is a mythology underlying the poem, and allows us to identify its key concerns.

Unlike the two poems considered previously in this chapter, "Sailing to Byzantium" employs a regular rhyming stanza (with the rhyme scheme ABABABCC) and an iambic pentameter line, and so we are more able to ask clearly defined questions about the points where it deviates from its own norms. As the use of rhyme and regular metre was the norm for Yeats, the poem does not stand out from others in *The Tower* or in his wider oeuvre; it would be wrong to place too much importance on the decision. Nevertheless, one might reasonably ask how such decisions interact with the theme of a poem which is itself concerned with "artifice" and, in the form of the golden bird, with poetry. At the simplest level, the artifice of the form embodies the artifice which Yeats believes will bring immortality. It is also worth asking how far Yeats forces us to recognize the artificiality of the stanza form. One of the potentials of this rhyme scheme – to anticipate a point to be explored further in chapter 13 – is that the final couplet can be epigrammatic, like the final rhyming couplet of a Shakespearean sonnet. To achieve the closure of a perfect rhyming couplet, the final syllable of the last word must be given sufficient stress. Although in the A and B rhymes a looseness can be tolerated, allowing Yeats to make consonant rhymes of "seas" and "dies," "dress" and "(magnifi-)cence," "soul" and "animal," in the final couplets such discords would become more prominent. In order to rhyme "intellect" fully with "neglect," we must place an unnaturally strong emphasis on its third syllable; similarly, in an exact parallel with Eliot's "geranium"/"drum" rhyme, to rhyme "Byzantium" with "come," we must emphasize the fourth

syllable. Of course we may choose not to stress these final syllables, and thereby choose natural speech over the artifice of epigram; but in forcing us to make that choice, the poem is making us consider one of its larger themes, that of the contrast between mortal nature and immortal artifice.

Note

1 There are many amended texts of "Western Wind": I have taken mine from Charles Frey's "Interpreting 'Western Wind,'" *ELH* 43 (1976), 259–78.

Part III

Form, Structure, and Evaluation

12

Form

Poetry demands close attention to verbal detail, but how those verbal details signify depends on larger structures. As well as attending to close reading, it is necessary to consider the form or genre of the poem. Both terms, but particularly "genre," were problematic ones for modernist writers. By the late nineteenth century, "genre" was already beginning to carry pejorative overtones in compound phrases such as "genre painting," and by the early twentieth century in compounds such as "genre music" and "genre fiction." To be involved in genre writing is to be involved in mass production. While the modernist disdain for mass production does not necessarily imply contempt for "the masses," it certainly suggests dissatisfaction with "mass culture." Standing in contrast to "generic" production is the ideal of the individuality of the work. To remain true to the originating aesthetic impulse, or perhaps just to avoid the charge of being involved in mass production, modernist writers sought to experiment and to innovate with each new work. Such concerns were, it is true, more prominent among modernist novelists than poets: to be a novelist was to be closer to popular forms. But similar concerns touched poets as well: a concern not to write the kinds of poetry that – it seemed to them – had become almost automatic in the pre-war years.

A concern for innovation and individuality need not imply contempt for genre: it is possible both to write with reference to genre rules and to innovate; a work can belong to a genre and be individual. It is not possible to innovate absolutely, and no modernist expected to. One would have to invent an entirely new language, and one would lose all possible readers. But when modernist writers expressed their relation to works that had come before, it was more typically in terms of their relation to tradition than to genre. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot imagines the poet being immersed in "the mind of Europe" (Rainey 153): the good writer

will root his or her works in what has gone before, but without regard for distinctions of genre.

There are certainly exceptions to the generalization about modernists avoiding fixed forms: Pound wrote a well-known sestina, and his description of the form as "like a thin sheet of flame folding and infolding upon itself" conveys his fascination.[1] Eliot reported Pound as having offered qualified support for another form: "when one has the proper material for a sonnet, one should use the sonnet form; but [...] it happens very rarely to any poet to find himself in possession of just the block of stuff which can perfectly be modelled into the sonnet."[2] Pound's support also indicates another reason why modernists avoided genre: form should follow the distinctive and individual mood or idea that the poet wished to record. In terms analogous with modernist design, form should follow function; inherited forms and superfluous decorations were outlawed.

In preferring the term "form," modernists were ignoring well-established senses concerning behaviour in which the word often implied insincerity in the observation of rules. As Tennyson asked in *In Memoriam*: "For who would keep an ancient form / Thro' which the spirit breathes no more?" Nevertheless, "form" it was. The reasons for this preference were many. A primary reason was that many definitions of "form" stand in contrast to "matter," as in subject matter; "genre" does not depend for its meaning on such a contrast. Everything is made of matter or atoms, but a group of atoms become a "thing" only when they acquire a definite form or shape. In the philosophical tradition deriving from Plato, it is possible to imagine things in the natural world as coming into being in many different places and times, and being composed of different particles of matter, but always conforming to the same essential shape or form. In this view, forms are permanent, always being available to shape the chaos of matter. Things are temporary unions of matter and form. After Darwin, the situation becomes more complex, because natural species are constantly changing, and so there are no permanent forms.

In artistic works, "matter" consists not of atoms, but of the fundamental units that can be shaped or reshaped. In literature and music, "form" came to mean the arrangement and order in which units were presented. "Order" is important, because time is fundamental to the realization of musical and literary effects, while it is secondary to the appreciation of sculpture or painting. "Order," then, consists at least in part of *sequence*. Consider how these concepts of form relate to a traditional fixed form like the Petrarchan sonnet. At the most tangible level, it has 14 lines, divided

into octave and sestet, and the octave and the sestet must come in that sequence. We can signal the division visually, leaving a blank line, but fundamentally the division is signalled aurally, by the rhyme scheme. If we see the *lines* as matter, one might say that the rhymes give *form* to what would otherwise be shapeless, making it into the *thing* known as a sonnet.

A description of the tangible signifiers of form is, unfortunately, also a superficial account of it. To press any further we need to reactivate the idea of form as social convention. Reader-response theories of genre see it as a set of conventions or expectations, and what is true of genre is also true of form. As we begin reading a text, details of style, vocabulary, or narrative situation signal the genre we might expect it to be in. The material condition of a text – for example, the paper, typography, and binding – sends out important messages even before we have begun reading. If we know the rules of the genre, they dictate how we interpret: put starkly, the same sentence or narrative situation in different genres would mean different things. Having signalled the genre, the writer is able to break certain generic rules, to defy our expectations in relation to style. The breaking of rules is one way of making meaning, though the writer needs to have some tact in knowing how far he or she can break them before becoming meaningless to a given audience.

For the sonnet, before we have even begun to read, the single boldest marker is probably the shape of the poem on the page. The most prominent expectation is that the division into octave and sestet will correspond to some significant change in thought or emotion. In some cases the division is explicitly marked in terms of logic with "If" in the octave, "then" in the sestet; an assertion in the octave, followed by "but" in the sestet; or it is marked in terms of time, with "Once" in the octave, "now" in the sestet; in other cases it might be marked by verbal tense, or emerge only as we interpret. A more malleable set of expectations is the kind of thought and emotion that can be accommodated as the matter of the sonnet. Although it might touch on public events, it has predominantly been used to express personal feelings; in this regard, it is a sub-category of lyric poetry. Another set of malleable and historically changeable expectations concerns the levels of diction appropriate to a sonnet. In all these regards, the Petrarchan sonnet form brings form to matter. It does so both in relation to lines of verse – it provides a rhyme scheme – and, more profoundly, in relation to emotions and ideas, to which it brings a form of division and contrast. As a social convention it signals what to expect: someone reading a sonnet aloud can approach the sestet in the expectation that a change of

tone might be required. Moreover, the sonnet prescribes a style and order for expressing certain kinds of emotion.

How far is it possible to extend these conceptions of form to include the kinds of poem that modernist poets wrote? Is it possible to identify features in modernist poems which will allow us to group poems together according to their likeness? Is it possible to do so while acknowledging the protean nature of form in modernist work?

What did the modernists say about form? Before modernism, as early as the 1860s, literary critics were articulating concepts of form which had no immediate reference to style and order, or to details of rhyme or metre. In 1889 James Russell Lowell, having entertained the idea that form was the "soul" of a work, offered the following definition: "Form [...] is the artistic sense of decorum controlling the coordination of parts and ensuring their harmonious subservience to a common end."[3] Lowell, it should be noted, was sceptical about the primacy often granted to form, and argued that many great works achieved their effects in spite of their formal chaos. Nevertheless, although he may have been less than fully committed to his definition, it is valuably suggestive. In my definition of the sonnet form, patterns of rhyme controlled the coordination of parts, but Lowell's definition is far more abstract: the agent of control is one step further removed from the technical details of the poem. Lowell's definition allows more flexibility to the poet, and allows the critic to extend the notion of form to include *ad hoc* forms. But it also creates uncertainty for the critic: we are more likely to agree over whether a poem rhymes ABBA, than we are over what counts as decorum, whether a sense of decorum was operative in a given poem, and whether it has succeeded in bringing harmony to the poem.

Consider Ezra Pound's definition of form from January 1915:

> Energy, or emotion, expresses itself in form. Energy, whose primary manifestation is in pure form, [–] i.e., form as distinct from likeness or association [–] can only be expressed in painting or sculpture. [...] Energy expressing itself in pure sound, i.e., sound as distinct from articulate speech, can only be expressed in music. When an energy or emotion "presents an image," this may find adequate expression in words. It is very probably a waste of energy to express it in any more tangible medium. The verbal expression of the image may be reinforced by a suitable or cognate rhythm-form and by timbre-form. By rhythm-form or timbre-form I do not mean something which must of necessity have a "repeat" in it. It is certain that a too obvious "repeat" may be detrimental.[4]

Pound was writing this as the leader of the Vorticist movement. The vortex or whirlpool represented something which had a definite form without being static. The vortex reconciled the interests of the futurists in the dynamism of modernity with a more traditional demand for form. Pound drew some of his ideas from Allen Upward's *The New Word* (1907). Upward built a great deal on the discovery that the atom consisted of positive and negative electrical charges held in tension: in other words, the atom gained its strength and its solidity from energy expressing itself as form. The same could be said to be true of larger and more complex dynamic forms: he cryptically refers to a waterspout as being a brief-lived tree. If the energy in such forms falls above or below a certain level, they become becalmed or chaotic; but at the right level they are symmetrical and dynamic.

The pre-eminence that Pound granted to form meant that the basis of beauty in poetry could be reconceived:

> An organisation of forms expresses a confluence of forces. These forces may be the "love of God," the "life-force," emotions, passions, what you will. For example: if you clap a strong magnet beneath a plateful of iron filings, the energies of the magnet will proceed to organise form. It is only by applying a particular and suitable force that you can bring order and vitality and thence beauty into a plate of iron filings, which are otherwise as "ugly" as anything under heaven.[5]

To many modernists this image emblematized the way that chaotic fragments could be unified in a pattern while retaining their individuality as fragments; it emblematized the coexistence of beauty and ugliness. The image is also haunted by ideas of the crowd, of mass persuasion, and of the application of force in mass society: if we compare it to James Russell Lowell's definition, we find that decorum has been replaced by force. Whereas decorum depends upon tacit agreements within a community, force may be asserted by any one individual.

The image of the magnet and iron filings is very suggestive of the way that, for example, myth might be used to organize fragments drawn from a wide variety of literary sources, or presented in a wide variety of literary styles, giving them some sort of underlying shape. One can similarly imagine the vortex sucking in heterogeneous materials but temporarily uniting them into a shape. The images that modernist writers use to describe their experiments in form, and to justify them to their contemporaries, are

fascinating in their own right, but the images and metaphors they use are often a long way removed from the details of their poetic practice.

One problem with the traditional language of form is that its insistence upon temporality, upon order expressed as sequence, clashed with the modernist insistence upon immediate revelation. In his imagist manifesto, Pound defined the image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time"; the instantaneous presentation "gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art" (Rainey 95). This evasion of the temporality of literary art is one reason why modernists were so willing to view their poems as sculptures and their production of the poems as a kind of carving. Note that Pound, in his reported remarks about the sonnet, speaks of subject matter as a "block of stuff": the implication is that the poet treats the block like stone to be carved; the block may have a natural grain or texture which makes certain forms more suitable than others. The modernist sculptors' ideal of "truth to the materials" is relevant here: one should not attempt to carve a block of wood into a form that would be better suited to marble; one should not attempt to conceal the natural texture of the materials.[6] Sculpture should attempt not to impose form on its materials, but to liberate a form from within the uncarved block of wood or stone. For the poet, if there is a sonnet within the emotional experience, he or she should liberate the sonnet. But in the modern world, experience is rarely as orderly as sonnet-experience.

The modernist attempt to do the impossible, to make texts into atemporal experiences, was later encapsulated by Joseph Frank in the concept of "spatial form."[7] Frank's article largely concentrates on fiction, and on the convergence of fiction and poetry in the modernist movement,but his ideas are relevant to the reading of poetry. Frank argues that modern poetry asks its readers to "suspend the process of individual reference temporarily until the entire pattern of internal reference can be apprehended as a unity." If we read the modern poem correctly, we assent to this suspension. How would this work with one of the shortest of modernist poems, Pound's "In a Station of the Metro"?

In a Station of the Metro
The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.
(Rainey 43)

If we follow Frank's guidance, we should not concern ourselves with questions about what "a station" refers to, nor who "these faces" are, nor where the petals are. Rather, we should concentrate on "internal reference": the visual similarity of petals on a black background to white faces in the crowd; the aural patterning of assonance and alliteration. Only then do we apprehend the poem as a whole, and it is the whole that should signify, not the sum of its parts. Longer poems, like prose narratives, require us to connect small details across much longer distances. To give a very simple example from *The Waste Land*, we should connect the person fishing by the canal in line 189 with the person "fishing, with the arid plain behind" him in line 424. The meaning they have taken together is more important than any reference they might have individually.

Spatial form in poetry is created not only through traditional methods of rhyme and repetition, but also, as we have seen in "In a Station of the Metro," through repetitions of images. Some other names for the same thing are Ezra Pound's term "ideogrammic method," and the term "image rhyme." Pound spoke of ideogrammic method chiefly in connection with teaching literary readers how to read appreciatively: the teacher should present specimens or exhibits side by side and allow the student to learn from direct experience. However, he employed the same method in his poems both short and long. In 1929 W. B. Yeats described what Pound intended to be the form of *The Cantos*: "There will be no plot, no chronicle of events, no logic of discourse, but two themes, the Descent into Hades from Homer, a Metamorphosis from Ovid, and, mixed with these, medieval or modern historical characters" (Rainey 370–1). Pound himself had already outlined something similar in a letter to his father in 1927.[8] The poem would have a structure of repetitions:

> A.A. Live man goes down to world of Dead.
> C.B. The "repeat in history."
> B.C. The "magic moment" or moment of metamorphosis, burst thru from quotidien [sic] into "divine permanent world." Gods, etc.

It appears that Pound did not sustain this scheme much beyond 1929, and the degree of its importance to the earlier Cantos has been disputed.[9] However, it has been shown that in Canto 26, the fall of Constantinople to the Turkish army in 1453 is set alongside its second fall to Turkish forces in 1922.[10] Form is not to be equated with narrative sequence, but with a controlled pattern of juxtaposed ideas.

No other poets used Pound's system of repeats in history. While it is helpful to discover the principle of order behind a single poem, unique forms do not allow us to make comparisons between poems; as readers, we will not come to the poem with expectations about its form. That understanding comes only if we ask a question about the poet's larger aims: it is relevant to glance back at James Russell Lowell's definition of form ensuring "the harmonious subservience" of the parts of a poem to "a common end." If that definition is to work for much of modernism, we have to go beyond conventional ideas of harmony, because the combinations of materials in modernist works very often appear to be discordant: it is only on further reflection that we may recognize the underlying unity. We also have to be flexible in defining the "common end" of any given poem. We might define the intention of *The Cantos* as being to persuade us that financial institutions stifle creativity, but that intention is peculiar to Pound. A more productive definition would begin with Pound's definition of the epic as "a poem including history."[11] How can one integrate the materials of history – particularly documentary materials – into a poem? A poet in an earlier era might have chosen narrative, but Pound wishes to demonstrate that the same processes have occurred repeatedly in different times and places. He needs therefore to juxtapose events that cannot be connected by narrative. The purpose of Pound's form is to integrate historical events into a poem. Other writers with similar epic ambitions, and a similar interest in the documentation of history, have devised different forms. We can bring these poems together not by looking at their shared form – they don't have one – but by looking at the technical problem they share. The forms they adopt are diverse solutions to the problem.

In the essay "Arnold Dolmetsch" (1918), Pound himself suggested that the first myths were invented to solve a practical problem of communicating an unprecedented experience. "The first myths arose when a man walked sheer into 'nonsense,' that is to say, when some very vivid and undeniable adventure befell him, and he told someone else who called him a liar."[12] When this man realized that "no-one could understand what he meant when he said that he 'turned into a tree' he made a myth [...] an impersonal or objective story woven out of his own emotion, as the nearest equation that he was capable of putting into words." Pound's "equation" anticipates Eliot's idea in his essay on *Hamlet* that the "objective correlative" provides the "formula" for an emotion.[13] Many modernist experiments in form attempt to find a shape for previously unarticulated emotions.

Even a traditional form such as the sonnet can be seen as the solution of a technical problem. The poet wishes to present personal feeling briefly; he or she requires some constraints that will temper and shape the feeling; the feeling involves a contrast or a logical argument with a turn in it. Many poetic forms might be devised to answer this problem, but, if the block of stuff is sonnet-shaped, then the ready-made solution is the Petrarchan sonnet. When we compare writers of Petrarchan sonnets, we are not only comparing the writers of 14-line poems divided into 8 and 6, but, more fundamentally, we are comparing poets who wish to shape a certain kind of experience into poetry.

Pound's ideogrammic method of shaping experience is closely related to allusion, the difference being that with allusion the two texts are not side by side but, figuratively speaking, one behind the other. The pattern that emerges from the way that the poem negotiates its relationships with its source texts brings form. If the poem consistently uses its source texts to draw attention to a contrast between the glories of the past and the degradation of the present, then it rapidly establishes a pattern of expectations much as a poem in rhyming couplets or *terza rima* establishes them. Of course, if the poem were to use its sources as programmatically as this – if it were to make the contrast as starkly and invariably as this suggests – it would be as dull and predictable as a rhyming poem that used very few rhyme sounds and which end-stopped every line. Nevertheless, it would have created a kind of form.

The Waste Land makes use of such contrasts. Although Eliot's poem rests on a despairing degenerationist view of the world, he uses his allusions in many other ways; even when they primarily support the contrast between past and present, there are often other ideas intersecting with them. To pursue the analogy with rhyme: the rhyme word might also interlock with other words in the surrounding lines through relationships of assonance and alliteration, and the use of such devices might relieve the monotony.

Mythology in *The Waste Land* creates another kind of patterning. Although superficially the poem appears fragmented, its title, much of its vocabulary, and many of its most striking lines and images point towards a common core: fertility myths. The opening lines announce its concern with death and growth; the exchange with "Stetson" concerning the corpse buried in his garden ought to alert us that the poem invokes rituals not commonly observed in modern civilizations. For the purposes of the present argument, we must overlook the details of how the text relates to

the myth. Rather, we need to ask how the correspondences resemble "form" as traditionally understood. If we understand form as something that transforms matter into a thing, then Eliot's description of Joyce's *Ulysses* is the relevant starting point. Although Eliot misrepresents Joyce's text in some regards, he provides a good description of his own, as one that manipulates "a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity." As *Ulysses* was widely seen as an obscene text, Eliot was responding to the accusation that Joyce was writing formless and self-indulgent pornography. Like many of its earlier critics, he exaggerates its orderliness and forgets to mention its humour.

If we seek to understand "form" as something that interacts with the reader's expectations, the form produced by "the mythical method" is more complicated, but not inexplicable. Just as, on seeing a sonnet on the page, we make a first guess at it being a sonnet, and look, perhaps, whether the rhyme scheme confirms our guess, at some point in reading *The Waste Land* we make a guess that it is concerned with growth and fertility, dryness and infertility, and we direct our attention more sharply to the relevant details. There are some big differences. Whereas anyone who has been taught the basic form of a sonnet could immediately decide, even before reading a poem properly, whether it rhymed in a sonnet-like manner, the first-time reader of *The Waste Land* will have to read a great deal of it before its relation to myth becomes clear; the reader may even have read it several times. Moreover, much more depends on the reader's knowledge and the reader's interpretative activity. If we do not possess the right anthropological and literary knowledge, the mythic aspect will not come into focus. And we need to use that knowledge actively to an extent that would not be the case with villanelles, sonnets, and sestinas. An extensive knowledge of sonnets will certainly sharpen our appreciation when we encounter a new example, but the knowledge needed for recognition is minimal. To recognize mythical form, we need to have accumulated a large body of knowledge, and we need to re-read the poem repeatedly before that knowledge bears fruit.

The mythical method may be accommodated within Lowell's definition of form, as a "sense of decorum" coordinating the parts and "ensuring their harmonious subservience to a common end." Indeed, if we did not recognize the mythical structure of *The Waste Land*, then many parts would seem mysterious or superfluous: it is only when the concealed narrative comes into focus that they seem harmonious. Indeed, the mythical method seems closer to Lowell's definition than, say, the rhyme scheme of

a sonnet. If we were to rewrite a sonnet so as to remove the rhymes, the contrast between octave and sestet would in many cases be signalled by other elements. The subservience of the parts to the common end would survive the rewriting; whereas *The Waste Land* loses far more if we fail to recognize the mythical aspects.

While, to clarify the interpretative process, it is useful to imagine a well-educated reader encountering *The Waste Land* without any prior knowledge of it or of modernist literature, and independently deducing that it is shaped by the mythical method, historically speaking such an approach is improbable: it is hard to believe that many readers have come to the text without some awareness of what to expect. Even on its first publication, before the advent of reader's guides, annotated editions, and a mass of criticism, it was an object of discussion amongst its readers. No doubt some of them spread the word that the title and much else related to the anthropology of Sir James Frazer and Jessie Weston. All readers are part of, in Stanley Fish's words, "interpretive communities," and one might argue that it is the interpretive community, not the individual reader, that brings form to the poem.

The modernists set a high value on form, and works which they considered "formless," "shapeless," or "baggy" they dismissed as not being art. But they were suspicious of form as a straitjacket, as something that would prevent them from expressing their true visions, or prevent them from depicting the actual chaotic nature of the modern world. If we are to understand their form, then we need to go beyond definitions of form that work for conventional rhyming poems. Older definitions of form are useful starting places for new models: for example, we can stretch the analogy of rhyme to cover ideogrammic and mythic method. But to go further we may need to consider other kinds of unity. When we encounter seemingly unique forms, we may need to ask what underlying problems they were intended to solve.

Notes

1 Ezra Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London: J. M. Dent, 1910), 18.
2 T. S. Eliot, *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry* (1917), reprinted in *To Criticize the Critic* (London: Faber, 1978), 167.
3 James Russell Lowell, *Latest Literary Essays and Addresses* (London: Macmillan, 1891), 144.

4 Pound, "Affirmations: As for Imagisme," *The New Age* 16 (Jan. 28, 1915), reprinted in *Selected Prose,* ed. William Cookson (London: Faber, 1965), 344–7.
5 Ezra Pound, "Affirmations: Vorticism," *The New Age* 16 (Jan. 14, 1915), 277–8.
6 The idea of "truth to materials" was associated with the direct carving movement in sculpture: for a history, see Judith Zilczer, "The Theory of Direct Carving in Modern Sculpture," *Oxford Art Journal*, 4, no. 2 (Nov. 1981), 44–9.
7 Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature," *The Widening Gyre* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1963).
8 Ezra Pound, letter to Homer L. Pound, Apr. 11, 1927, *The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber, 1950), 210.
9 The importance of the structure of repetitions to the *Cantos* has been questioned by Ron Bush in *The Genesis of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 7–9, though Bush concedes its relevance to Cantos 17–30.
10 David Roessel, "The 'Repeat in History': Canto XXVI and Greece's Asia Minor Disaster," *Twentieth Century Literature*, 34 (1988), 180–90.
11 Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (1934; New York: New Directions, 1960), 46.
12 Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), 431.
13 T. S. Eliot, "Hamlet" (1919), *Selected Prose*, 48.

13

Subjects and Objects in Modernist Lyric

The lyric was a mode of writing which modernists regarded with great suspicion, but which exerted a strong force over their poetry. They needed to wrestle with the form to prove their modernity. Before asking how modernist poets tried to break away from the assumptions of the form, we need to define the form in general terms. To define lyric is to touch on much larger questions about the purpose of poetry from the Romantic era to the present day. It is also a difficult task: definitions have been historically fluid. Like the novel, lyric has been open to developments and to cross-pollination from other forms. One might argue that there is no such thing; that it is simply a critical construct. Or, in a variant of this argument, one might argue that what really exists is the practice of *interpreting* lyrically. Nevertheless, we can still ask what kind of a construct it is, and we can ask what modernists thought it was; or if we see it as a process of reading, we can ask how modernist poems sought to enable or complicate this process. In doing so, the present chapter will begin with W. B. Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" and T. S. Eliot's "La Figlia che piange," before turning to a number of poems by Ezra Pound: "The Lake Isle," "Ione, Dead the Long Year," "Alba," and "The Encounter."

An historical definition would note that in classical times a lyric was a poem that to be sung with accompaniment from a lyre. It thus stood in a major contrast to poems that were to be recited or to be spoken. While the detail about the musical instrument tells us very little, the contrast between song and speech is a valuable one. It informs contrasts between the lyric as spontaneous effusion and other forms of poetry which are supposedly more considered or meditative. It informs the idea that the lyric comes from the heart, while other forms of poetry come from the head. It also informs the derived adjective and adverb: if we speak of a work being

lyrical, or of someone writing lyrically, it implies a smoothness of sound which would facilitate song.

Three other characteristics commonly cited by way of definition are that the lyric is written in the first person; that it is written in the present tense; and that it is brief. As it is a relative quality, the last criterion is of little practical value.

The other two qualities are not necessarily universal. A poem might completely avoid the use of first-person pronouns, and be ostensibly purely descriptive, and yet through its use of verbal tenses, of adverbs of time and place, and through its use of emotive or figurative language, it might embody a distinctive subject position. This idea draws on Émile Benveniste's distinction between the subject of the *enoncé*, the "I" or "we" that appears in the sentence, and the subject of the *énonciation*, the subject-position that is embodied in the discourse.[1] When John Donne begins "A Nocturnal Upon S. Lucy's Day" with " 'Tis the year's midnight, and it is the day's," he implies a speaker for whom this statement is true, even though he does not use a first-person pronoun until the ninth line. To say "now" or "then," "here" or "there," "these" or "those" is to imply a first person speaker; to use the perfect tense is to imply a present moment in relation to which the narrated events are past.

Similarly, the rule that the lyric must be written in the present tense is not universally honoured: there are lyrics written in the past tense. Wordsworth's influential definition of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity" allows for a lyrical poetry in which events occur in the past tense, and in which the recollecting of those events implies an emotion felt in the present. However, regardless of the tense, we might say that lyric is not dominantly a narrative mode; a lyric might incorporate brief narratives, but they are subordinated to the first person's reflections.

Given that the formal definitions concerning tense and person are not adequate, we might attempt to define lyric by what it sets out to achieve. The aesthetics of Romanticism are highly relevant here. In the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment had established the modern scientific and philosophical view of the universe. The modern universe is divided into perceiving subjects and perceived objects; as humans, of course, we are both subjects and objects. The response of Romanticism has been described by David Walker as follows:

> The naturalization of the universe, and the consciousness of man's ontological separation from it, helped to provoke the familiar Romantic appeal to the

> organic faculty of imagination. Through the power of imaginative vision, man could hope to bridge the gap between subject and object, to restore a vital, significant relationship between the self and nature, and to rediscover meaning in a fragmented universe. In an act of sympathetic intuition, the imagination could identify itself with its object, and in that moment of direct perception could effect a bond between the self and the external world.[2]

The poem at the very least records those moments of imaginative reunification, and at best enacts them and recreates them for the reader. In Romantic poetry when objects in the world become symbolic, they connect to a spirit of nature that unifies both subjects and objects. While this function is not restricted to short lyric poems, the lyric, because of its focus on the perceiving subject, is particularly well adapted to the representation of brief moments of imaginative perception. The present tense is a useful though not essential vehicle for conveying moments which, in a sense, stand outside of time.

This description of lyric supports another formalist approach to lyric in which *apostrophe* is its defining feature. Explicitly or implicitly, the lyric first person addresses a voiceless second person; an "I-you" relationship is established. In the love lyric of the early modern period, this is very often a male first person addressing a female second person, and in the pronouns of the day, the relationship is "I-thou."

However, the "you" need not be a person: it is possible to address insentient objects. In Romantic poetry and after, those objects are most commonly part of nature. Jonathan Culler takes William Blake's "O rose thou art sick" as a paradigm case.[3] Apostrophe is such a common feature of poetry that it takes a few moments to recover what a peculiar speech act it can be: why tell a rose that it is sick? At one level Blake's phrase may be paraphrased as "The rose is sick," and we might take the modulation into apostrophe simply to signify the passion of the speaker. But apostrophe is also personification by another route: by addressing the inanimate object, the speaker implies that it is animate. One way of explaining the oddity of such a speech act is to suggest that the object is merely a metonymy for a larger divine or quasi-divine power: for example, that in addressing the rose, Blake's speaker is really addressing Nature. But, as Culler remarks, this argument loses some of the strangeness of apostrophe. Apostrophe attempts to conjure presence where there is none, and, in terms of the division between subject and object, attempts to repair the schism by bringing objects to life. Addressing the object implies that the subject and

object are commensurable. Although nothing happens in a lyric poem, in the sense that lyric is not a narrative mode, the poem itself attempts to make something happen, insofar as it attempts to bring objects to life. As Culler puts it, "Nothing need happen [...] because the poem itself is to be the happening."

Culler also notes the interesting category of apostrophes addressed to aspects of the speaker's self – for example, T. S. Eliot in *East Coker*, "I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope" – or other poems where the speaker addresses his or her heart or mind. If we take apostrophe to imply that the addressed thing is external to the speaker, then such apostrophes perform a double action, first expelling the relevant part of the self, and then speaking to it in a way that implies continuity between the speaking self and the expelled component of it.

If we follow Culler's definition, the lyric is not simply a first-person utterance, but a first-person utterance addressed to some sort of second person within the world of the poem. However, like the earlier definitions, the definition of lyric as apostrophic does not exclude other kinds of speech act. A lyric can include passages that, for example, describe the external world without directly addressing it. We might try to understand description and apostrophe as two polar opposites between which the lyric moves. However, we might feel that apostrophe is the more characteristic element, and thereby treat description as the neutral background from which the more significant moments of apostrophe emerge. Or to put it slightly differently, apostrophe is the lyrical norm, while description is a deviation from that norm. To describe apostrophe as the norm does not mean that it has to predominate in any simple statistical sense; rather, that the most significant moments in a lyric are apostrophic moments.

Similarly, Culler notes that although the lyric is characteristically timeless, existing in the present tense of apostrophe, this does not preclude narrative temporality. Indeed, some of the most interesting lyrics juxtapose narrative temporality, such as that in which someone has died or been lost, with the present tense of utterance in which the subject calls out to them or to their memory.

One reason why it is difficult to define lyric is that it is both a set of technical resources and a spirit, a way of doing things. The former are more readily definable – it is easy enough to point to the present tense, or to apostrophe – but by themselves they do not make a lyric poem. Robert Browning noted at the beginning of his collection of dramatic lyrics, *Bells and Pomegranates* (1842), that though the poems were "for the most part

Lyric in expression," they were "always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine."[4] They are lyric in expression because they are first person, and very often addressed to an unseen auditor; but dramatic in principle because to read them by the rules of lyric and to identify the poems with their author would be an error. We might remark that, conversely, the New Criticism insisted that all poems should be read as if they were dramatic monologues. While this approach avoids the intentional fallacy and reductive biographical reading, it also has the potential to misunderstand the principle by which some poems are written.

If we accept lyric as a principle, certain kinds of descriptive poem can be treated as apostrophic in spirit without actually using apostrophe. For example, W. B. Yeats's "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," the first stanza of which will suffice:

> I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
> And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
> Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honey-bee,
> And live alone in the bee-loud glade.[5]

The second stanza goes on to describe the peacefulness of Innisfree, while the third stanza contrasts its peacefulness with the speaker's present urban environment. At no point does Yeats address Innisfree or any other entity. Nevertheless, if we are willing to extend apostrophe beyond being a merely grammatical category, we can understand the poem as an apostrophe to the lake isle. If apostrophe signifies desire, and distance between the subject and the object, then this poem is apostrophic: there is a distance between the "pavements grey" and the peaceful isle, and the poem seeks to overcome that distance by bringing the isle to consciousness. The "now" of the poem's moment of utterance exists in tension with the narrative temporality of the future in which Yeats will build the cabin and plant a vegetable garden.

The advent of dramatic monologue causes a significant adjustment in the definition of lyric. As the dramatic monologue came to occupy the space for the statement of inauthentic statements, so the expectation grew that lyrics must embody only authentic personal utterance. As Herbert Tucker has observed, "The symbolist and imagist schools wanted to read in their French and English antecedents an expurgated lyric that never was on

page or lip. It was, rather, a generic back-formation, a textual constituent they isolated from the dramatic monologue and related nineteenth-century forms."[6] In other words, there is no such thing as a purely lyrical poem, although in the late nineteenth century there arose the belief that there might be. There is, however, a quality called lyricism which can, in Browning's terms, be either a form of expression, or the governing principle of a poem.

The modernist response to lyric often appears hostile. If we understand lyric as the expression of personal feeling, then some of the most influential modernist statements about poetry mark a reaction against it. In "A Lecture on Modern Poetry" (1908), T. E. Hulme commented on the current decadent state of poetry: "Imitative poetry springs up like weeds, and women whimper and whine of you and I alas, and roses, roses all the way. It becomes the expression of sentimentality rather than of virile thought."[7] Hulme's misogyny here brings out the gendering of the lyric as a feminine form, because it is expressive, personal, and occasional, in contrast to the epic, a more masculine form, which is narrative, public, and permanent. The "I-you" relationship of the lyric is particularly objectionable to him. In proposing a new kind of poetry, Hulme also reacts against the musicality of lyric: "This new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. [...] It builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured to influence him physically by the hypnotic effect of rhythm." The prevalence of sculpture metaphors in imagist poetics suggests that the imagists wished for poetry to escape the temporality that is a necessary condition of writing. In Hulme's case, this escape from temporality becomes an escape from musicality, and hence, in one sense of the word, lyricism. But if we agree with Culler that the lyric poem also seeks to escape temporality, to exist in a frozen moment of utterance, then it might be that the imagist poem has more in common with the lyric than its creators were willing to concede.

If we take lyric to be personal and expressive, then T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" has a significant bearing upon it: poetry, Eliot argued, was "not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality" (Rainey 156). Eliot's objection, like Hulme's, is to the expressiveness of lyric poetry.

The reasons why modernist poets turned against lyricism are various, and before we examine them, it must be noted that the reaction was not

universal: some modernists such as Wallace Stevens and Hart Crane are widely considered to have been lyrical in spirit. However, for all modernists, there were several problems. If we take the first person quality of the modernist poem to be central, then a modern awareness of both the complexity and the impotence of the self come to bear on lyricism. If the self is multiple, affected from beneath by unconscious desires and from outside by the pressure of social convention, then the unified expressive speaker of traditional lyric looks antiquated. Modernists may also have been dissatisfied by the way that the worldview of the speaker dominates the traditional lyric utterance: by contrast, the ironies of the dramatic monologue suggest a relativity of knowledge; the speaker is typically shown to have an incomplete understanding of things. If we take solipsism to be a dominant characteristic of modernism, and apostrophe to be the most significant characteristic of lyric, then we might find an incompatibility: if self and other can never truly know each other, if we are all trapped inside the prison of consciousness, then there is little point in calling out to each other. Of course, it could be argued that apostrophe as a poetic technique has potential to indicate the pathos of solipsism, so this explanation is not completely convincing. If we see apostrophe as aiming to animate insentient objects, then the increasingly sharp modern awareness that the universe really is composed of lifeless matter may account for a rejection of the lyric. More generally, we might note that for modernist writers, culture, rather than nature, is the source of value, so addressing nature is not a worthwhile activity.

T. S. Eliot's "La Figlia che piange" (1916) (Rainey 117–18) suggests that some modernists felt the need to repudiate lyric not only in their essays, but in their poems themselves. The poem begins in classic lyric mode: a first-person addressing a silent subject, in this case with imperatives, ordering her to stand, to lean, to weave, to clasp, to fling, and to turn. Rhyme and the long vowels suggest strong connections to song, making it lyrical in another sense. However, even within the opening seven lines, we might guess that not everything is right. There is a visual quality to the scene, perhaps pictorial, but perhaps also theatrical. These seem like the words of a theatre director. While it is not unusual for a speaker to tell the lyric addressee what to do, it is surprising that he tells her how to respond – with "pained surprise," and then with "fugitive resentment." Moreover, the long vowels which bring a lyrical quality to the poem are abruptly interrupted by the phrase "fugitive resentment." The implied petulance of the woman flinging the flowers to the ground further breaches

lyric decorum. In this light, the repetition in the seventh line of the imperative to "weave the sunlight in your hair" seems more like an attempt to reassert control than simple song-like refrain.

What the first seven lines hint at, the remainder of the poem makes quite explicit

> So I would have had him leave
> So I would have had him stand and grieve.
> So he would have left
> As the mind leaves the body torn and bruised,
> As the mind deserts the body it has used.

"Leave" and "grieve" maintain a lyrical rhyming relation to the poem's first paragraph, but "so I would have" shifts the poem into a different mode. So too does the introduction of an unexpected male character, presumably the person uttering the opening imperatives. She turned away, we later learn, but there is nothing to suggest that her turning away had the theatrical quality that the speaker had hoped for.

The poem's first seven lines are revealed to be a quotation of lyricism rather than the real thing. The authenticity and immediacy that are characteristic of the lyric are here placed in a frame. The frame is explicit about the coercive quality of lyric apostrophe: the direct address is an assertion of the will over the mute or inanimate addressee. In this light, we can reconsider the lyric repetition of "weave the sunlight in your hair." In a conventional lyric, a refrain might appear to be the sign of contentment. If we consider the refrain as a "chorus," it is the point where the larger community joins in with the individual lyric singer. Here, though, the repetition of the imperative signifies uncertainty on the part of the speaker: it seems more like an anxious assertion of the will.

"La Figlia che piange" critiques conventional lyric apostrophe, but, in the frame of the poem, the first-person speaker lives on. Moreover, it seems likely that the speaker of the opening scene, the "him" of the eighth line, is not entirely separate from the speaker of the rest of the poem. The final paragraph of the poem mixes the perfect tense of narration with the present tense of the narrator's continuing speculations: "I wonder how they should have been together!" The blurring of "I" and "him" means that we can read this as "I wonder how *we* should have been together." Although there is no direct apostrophe to "them," the poem might figuratively be considered as an apostrophe, just as Yeats's

"Lake Isle" is an apostrophe to a place far distant from the present-tense speaker, even though it never directly addresses Innisfree. We could treat "La Figlia" as an apostrophe to the earlier scene in general, or we could treat it as an apostrophe more specifically to the earlier self who failed to seize the moment. If we accept that, in addressing a person or thing, we are making it symbolize something, then we can ask what the earlier scene symbolizes: does it, in its pictorial or theatrical quality, symbolize the way that art presents idealized forms that are unattainable? In other words, the poem as a whole speaks to the painting, trying to bring it to life. If we treat the poem as an address to the earlier self, asking why he did not act differently, it leads in a similar direction: the earlier self could not have been decisive in the way depicted, because such decisiveness is a theatrical ideal. The later speaker has realized that such a scene consists of artificial gestures and poses.

Like Eliot, but less subtly, Ezra Pound burlesqued the lyric form. The title of his "The Lake Isle," first published September 1916, nods towards Yeats's well-known poem about Innisfree, and raises the expectation of a similar scenario. However, Pound rapidly disappoints our expectations:

> O God, O Venus, O Mercury, patron of thieves,
> Give me in due time, I beseech you, a little tobacco-shop.
> With the little bright boxes
> piled up neatly upon the shelves.[8]

Pound's poem comments not only on Yeats's, but by extension on the Romantic opposition of the city and the countryside, and the romantic valorization of nature. Pound describes the casual bohemian sociability of a shop where "the whores" might drop in "for a word or two in passing." As the final lines reveal, Pound is not wishing to escape the grey pavements, but to escape the writer's life. For Pound the important contrast is not the Yeatsian one of city and countryside, but of brain work versus mindless work. Moreover the poem contrasts the isolation of writing with the sociability of shopkeeping. It is ironic about the status of professions: if we take a "profession" to be employment which demands formal qualifications and which comes with high social standing, as in "the professions," then shopkeeping is certainly not one. Perhaps the poem contrasts professional life with a less formalized way of life. But one might ask whether writing can really be called a profession, so it also opens up the question of the status of the poet. Although Pound "The Lake Isle" critiques

the assumptions of Yeats's poem, Pound's larger point about lyric also turns back on himself. An invocation to God, Venus, and Mercury can yield only a tobacco shop: Pound implies that the power of the lyric voice has become diminished, as has the social status of the poet.

Pound's "Ione, Dead the Long Year" (1914) gives a more subtle example of a lyric critiquing lyric tropes.

> Empty are the ways,
> Empty are the ways of this land
> And the flowers
> Bend over with heavy heads.
> They bend in vain.
> Empty are the ways of this land
> Where Ione
> Walked once, and now does not walk
> But seems like a person just gone.

The poem uses personification without apostrophe: the flowers bend their heads, as if in mourning. In a conventional lyric, the idea is a form of pathetic fallacy: man and nature are united in mourning for the dead woman; subject and object are reunited. Pound follows up with "They bend in vain." We might take this as an extension of the basic pathetic fallacy: that is, the speaker believes that the flowers mourn the dead woman, but the futility of their mourning becomes the register of the completeness of the loss; even if the whole of nature were united in mourning her, her death could not be reversed. Such an extravagant gesture would not have been out of place in earlier poetry. But this line is more ambiguous and undecidable. Rhythmically it is monosyllabic and iambic, and contrasts with the more subtle and complex rhythms of the previous lines. The bluntness of rhythm suggests scepticism about the personification: even if the flowers bend, it is a natural process unconnected to human mortality. Such an indeterminate point in the poem suggests that lyric is not always a formal convention, but a convention of reading: we can read this line in both enchanted and disenchanted ways.

In some respects, imagism appears to react against the subjectivity of the lyric poem. The best-known imagist poem, "In a Station of the Metro," excludes any use of first-person pronouns. And even when first-person pronouns appear, they are relatively uninvolved in the scene. In Pound's brief imagist poem, "Alba" (1913), the first person figures only in "She lay beside me"; the presence of this self is almost negligible. The speaking subject of "The Encounter" (1913) is similarly detached: in her "Her eyes

explored me," he is, grammatically speaking, the object of the verb. Though in "I arose to go" he becomes the agent of an action, the phrase is not the main clause of the sentence: the real interest lies in the description of the woman's delicate fingers. Neither poem uses the conventional present tense of lyric. Moreover, although both poems are about sexual desire, the first-person pronouns are passive and undesiring: in the first, the "me" simply lies there; in the second, the speaker is first "explored," and then leaves; if, as we assume, he shakes her hand, this is left implicit.

However, if we extend the scope of apostrophe to include poems that do not include formal apostrophe, then perhaps some connection survives with conventional lyricism. Notice that "In a Station of the Metro" locates a speaker within the scene when it speaks of "*these* faces." The past tense of "Alba" and "The Encounter" locates the speaker temporally in relation to the image, and the past tense signifies loss. The speaker is no longer lying beside the woman: the title "Alba" recalls the sub-genre of "aubade," a lyric announcing the dawn, with conventional associations of parting and loss. In spite of the promise of "The Encounter," the speaker apparently left alone, and his only physical contact with the woman was apparently a handshake: it is a poem about a lost opportunity. But, if we allow an extended definition of apostrophe, "Alba" addresses the woman and attempts to summon her back if only in memory. So too does "The Encounter."

We might extend this analysis to the verbless noun-phrases of "In a Station of the Metro." If we were to replace "the apparition" with "O, apparition," and "Petals" with "O, petals," the poem would certainly seem more dated in its rhetoric; but the force of the utterances would be little changed. The similarity of the faces in the crowd to the petals on the bough has often been noted; the poem as it exists already hints at a personification of the petals, as well as conversely implying that the faces are as delicate and transitory as the petals. If we take the aim of lyric poetry as being to reunite subject and object, then "In a Station of the Metro" goes part way there, uniting the human with the natural world; the explicit apostrophe of conventional lyric is merely suppressed, rather than being completely removed.

Notes

1 For a summary of Émile Benveniste on the "subject of the *énonciation*" and "the subject of the *enoncé*," see Tzvetan Todorov, "Language and Literature," in *The Structuralist Controversy*, ed. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 125–33.

2 David Walker, *The Transparent Lyric: Reading and Meaning in the Poetry of Stevens and Williams* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 5.
3 Jonathan Culler, "Apostrophe," *Diacritics* 7, no. 4 (1977), 59–69; this chapter also draws on Culler's "Reading Lyric," *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985), 98–106, and on David Lindley's *Lyric* (London: Methuen, 1985).
4 Robert Browning's note to *Bells and Pomegranates* is taken from *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, vol. 3, ed. Ian Jack and Rowena Fowler (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 178.
5 W. B. Yeats, "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989), 74.
6 Herbert Tucker, "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric," *Lyric Poetry: Beyond New Criticism*, ed. Chaviva Hosek and Patricia Parker (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 239.
7 T. E. Hulme, "A Lecture on Modern Poetry," *Collected Writings*, ed. K. Csengeri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 51, 56.
8 For the texts of Pound's "The Lake Isle," "Ione, Dead the Long Year," "Alba," and "The Encounter," see *Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: Library of America, 2003), 294, 290, 287, 288.

14

Temporality and Modernist Lyric

Unlike arrangements of rhymes or the use of apostrophe, the shaping of time is not usually considered one of the parameters of poetic form. However, modernist writers were notably conscious of time, of long durations set against instantaneous revelations, and this chapter will explore how a poem's shaping of time becomes one of its formal properties. Just as a more conventional poem imposes rhyme or metre on language, so the modernist poem imposes strict limitations of representation onto experience. Just as a more conventional poem plays with the language of form by using unexpected rhythms or rhymes, so too might a modernist poem stretch our expectations about time. Yeats's "The Cold Heaven" and "Leda and the Swan" provide the first two examples, followed by Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow."

The importance of time was recognized by modernist poets themselves. Although they may have had different ideas about narrative poetry, several modernist poets argued that the ideal lyric occurred in an instant: it did not have a temporal dimension. Of course such an ideal can never be realized – even the shortest poem takes time to read – but the skilled poet could create the illusion that the poem occupied only a moment, and a willing reader could attempt to hold the entire poem in his or her head as if the reading had been instantaneous. An early statement of this idea occurs in Yeats's "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1899), where poetic rhythm is the technique that creates the illusion.

> The purpose of rhythm, it has always seemed to me, is to prolong the moment of contemplation, the moment when we are both asleep and awake, which is the one moment of creation, by hushing us with an alluring monotony, while it holds us waking by variety, to keep us in that state of perhaps real trance, in which the mind liberated from the pressure of the will is unfolded in symbols.

> If certain sensitive persons listen persistently to the ticking of a watch, or gaze persistently on the monotonous flashing of a light, they fall into the hypnotic trance; and rhythm is but the ticking of a watch made softer, that one must needs listen, and various, that one may not be swept beyond memory or grow weary of listening; while the patterns of the artists are but the monotonous flash woven to take the eyes in a subtler enchantment.[1]

While later poets found other justifications for rhythm, and other means of making the poem into an instantaneous revelation, Yeats shares with them the idea that the poem escapes time. Notice that for Yeats, the escape from time is equivalent to the escape from the "pressure of the will": the anti-rationalism of modernism enters into its anti-temporality.

Ezra Pound insisted that the image took the modernist poet out of time. As noted in the discussion of form earlier, Pound argued that the image itself occupied only an "instant of time," and offered an appearance of liberation from "time limits and space limits" (Rainey 95). For Pound, it is enough to present the image: there need not be a rhythmic hypnotic effect.

How can a poet make us believe that the poem concerns a mere instant, when the words must unfold one after another? One answer is to avoid verbs altogether and to present noun-phrases alone, as Pound does in "In a Station of the Metro." However, such a form of poetry was limiting, and only the shortest imagist lyrics entirely avoided finite verbs. Another, very simple route, is to signal the instantaneousness of the moment with an adverb: "suddenly" is a particularly important one. Yeats associates suddenness with visions and revelations, as in "The Valley of the Black Pig," where spears "suddenly hurtle," and "The Cold Heaven" (first published 1912), which begins with the adverb:

> Suddenly I saw the cold and rook-delighting heaven
> That seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice,
> And thereupon every imagination and heart were driven
> So wild that every casual thought of that and this
> Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of season
> With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long ago; […][2]

In conventional narratives, "suddenly" usually occurs in the context of more mundane sequences of action: "I was doing such and such when suddenly …" In "The Valley of the Black Pig" Yeats establishes this ordinary temporality with the slow actions of the dew falling and the dreams gathering. The later poem denies us the mundane context and launches us

directly into the moment of revelation; it only retrospectively indicates that the mundane consisted of "casual thought[s] of that and this." It would appear that the mundane context was our own idle thoughts before we began to read the poem. The relation of syntax to the lines moves the poem forward: "driven" in line 3 demands either an adverb or preposition and so we have to move on to the next line. We might mistakenly anticipate that imagination and heart were driven "out" or driven "away"; "so wild" pushes the sentence forward further: *how* wild, we need to know. The next phrase, "every casual thought of that and this" reaches the end of the line without a verb, and so we must push forwards again to "vanished." The adverbial phrase "so wild" and the verb "vanished" each recapitulate the initial shock of "suddenly."

"Leda and the Swan" (written 1923, published 1924) begins with a verbless noun-phrase:

> A sudden blow: the great wings beating still
> Above the staggering girl, her thighs caressed
> By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill,
> He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
> (Rainey 325)

After the "sudden blow," Yeats gives us a string of disconnected noun phrases which tend to fragment both the swan and Leda as subjects: they are merely a confusion of wing, thighs, webs, and nape; it is only in the fourth line that we reach the grammatical subject ("He") and the finite verb ("holds"). In this case, as in "The Valley of the Black Pig," the poem is cast in the present tense, so as further to insist that no time has elapsed between the events and the time of writing and of reading.

Although it is valuable to consider the techniques by which modernist poems create the illusion of being instantaneous, to do so risks credulously accepting the modernist estimation of the poem's instantaneity. To obtain more critical purchase on the poem, we need to consider time scales other than the ones most explicitly invoked.

Some poems explicitly include elements of narrative. In "Leda and the Swan," Yeats goes on to survey the consequences of Zeus's rape of Leda. Yeats expects his reader to know that Leda gave birth to Helen of Troy:

> A shudder in the loins engenders there
> The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
> And Agamemnon dead.
> (Rainey 326)

Yeats depicts the consequences through highly compressed metonymies: the wall, roof, and tower are sufficient to depict Troy, and "Agamemnon dead" is sufficient to recall what happened when the Greeks returned from the siege. Once we unpick these references, however, we recognize that the poem includes a much longer timescale, that of narrative.

Other poems are rather more reticent, and here it may be helpful to make an analogy with painting. A painting presents itself to the viewer instantaneously, and although some recent research has examined the temporal aspect of looking at a picture, tracking the way that viewers' eyes move back and forth across the canvas, it is nevertheless reasonable to assert that a painting is instantaneously present. Many genres of representational painting present the viewer with a scene which itself could have been apprehended in an instant. (The obvious exceptions are medieval narrative paintings, and paintings that try to capture the movement of an object; Italian Futurist paintings are an instance of the latter.) A very good example would be the still life, especially those presenting flowers or fruits alongside earthenware vessels or other more durable objects. Each object has a shelf life inscribed within it, and one purpose of the still life is to act as a *memento mori*; some do so more explicitly than others. So although a still life isn't a narrative painting in any conventional sense – not a narrative painting such as the Pre-Raphaelites painted, for example – its force derives from our sense of what will happen to the objects on display. *Hollyhocks and Other Flowers in a Vase* (1702–20), by Jan Van Huysum (1682–1749), in the National Gallery, London, depicts its vase on a slightly damaged stone shelf; a snail, proverbially slow-moving, crawls across the shelf. (The picture embodies a more subtle temporal dimension, in that the flowers depicted bloom at different times of the year, but this need not detain us.) Several of David Ligare's contemporary still lives, such as *Still Life with Figs and Peaches* (2006), depict perishable items on a stone plinth, with a low shadow cast by the setting sun, and a glimpse of the ocean beyond: the image implies the movement of the sun (or of the earth), and the temporal scale of a single day, while the seawater suggests the temporal scales of waves and of tides.

Read in the context of still lives, William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" (Rainey 529) appears to borrow one element directly from the pictorial form. In still lives, leaves and petals are often speckled with water, to create the illusion of time having been arrested, and the wheel barrow "glazed with rain / water" suggests the same; set against that stillness are the chickens. We might take a guess as to whether the chickens or

the wheelbarrow will survive longest. As I have already noted, in "The Valley of the Black Pig," the timescales of nature and mind, in which events occur "slowly," are contrasted with those of the revelation; in "The Cold Heaven," the sudden vision is contrasted with everyday life in which one can talk casually of that and this. The two contrasts are not identical. Whereas in "The Valley of the Black Pig," the slow formation of the dew and of dreams appears to lead to the precipitation of the vision, in "The Cold Heaven," the two time scales are mutually exclusive, incompatible ways of viewing the world. In "The Red Wheelbarrow" there is no explicit long time scale. If, as I tentatively suggested in chapter 5, the scene depicted represents an endangered or old-fashioned form of small-scale agriculture, then we might recognize the timescale over which small-holdings were being replaced by corporate agriculture, but such a perspective is hinted at so tentatively as to be scarcely present.

A poem makes a distinctive shape in time. This suggestion owes something to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, but Bakhtin's concept was direction specifically towards narrative works; I wish to suggest that even non-narrative poems have a chronotope. Bakhtin's term "chronotope" means literally "time-space," and, in his words, it concerns the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 84). The chronotope, for Bakhtin, is fundamental to the definition of genre and of generic distinctions (Bakhtin 85). For example, the ancient Greek romance has a distinctive chronotope. Its plots are usually framed by a love story, in which a boy and girl of marriageable age meet, but before they can marry, circumstances serve to separate them. In the main body of the narrative they seek to overcome the obstacles to their love, and in the end they are reunited. Bakhtin notes that none of the events changes their love for each other. In another kind of novel, a much later kind of European romantic novel, their various trials might have served to strengthen or deepen their love for each other. But in ancient Greek romance, the lovers appear not to have aged at all. Moreover, the time in which their story occurs has not connection to any real historical time. The time sequences "are neither historical, quotidian, biographical, nor even biological and maturational" (Bakhtin 91). Although within any given adventure episode, time and space might play an important part – a hero might have to arrive at the right place at the right time in order to rescue someone – across the narrative as a whole, they make no difference. As Bakhtin puts it: "The adventure chronotope is thus characterized by a *technical, abstract connection*

between space and time, by the *reversibility* of moments in a temporal sequence, and by their *interchangeability* in space" (Bakhtin 100). Against this we might contrast, for example, the nineteenth-century bildungsroman, in which each event in the protagonist's narrative contributes to the development of his consciousness: time is cumulative. Similarly, where the protagonist is – whether he is in the country or the city, at home, at university, or at work – is significant.

The idea could be extended to non-narrative poems. I shall begin with broad contrasts before moving to more complex configurations. The idea of an instantaneous revelation was not new to modernism, and we might compare Wordsworth's "Daffodils" to some of the poems considered earlier.

> I wandered lonely as a cloud
> That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
> When all at once I saw a crowd,
> A host of dancing daffodils;
> Along the lake, beneath the trees,
> Ten thousand dancing in the breeze.
>
> […]
> I gazed and gazed but little thought
> What wealth the show to me had brought –
>
> For oft when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude,
> And then my heart with pleasure fills,
> And dances with the daffodils.[3]

Like some of the poems seen earlier, especially "The Cold Heaven," Wordsworth's poem contrasts an everyday state of mind with a moment of revelation: the daffodils are seen "all at once." However, this instant of revelation, in the perfect tense, is placed in contrast with the poet's subsequent personal history, the generalized lying on the couch in a vacant or pensive mood. That is, while in Yeats's poem the revelation is the centre of attention, in Wordsworth's poem it gains its full value and meaning only in retrospect. The contrast is a common one in Romantic poetry and after: the past and present are contrasted; the past provides spiritual nourishment in the present. Acts of memory and sometimes of imaginative reconstruction form a bridge between the present and the past. Notice

that the contrast of times is also overlaid with a contrast of places: the distant past is outdoors, the more recent event is indoors. Elsewhere in Wordsworth's poetry the contrast of indoors and outdoors is also one of the city and the country.

The Russian formalist distinction of *fabula* and *syuzhet* is useful as a way of mapping the complexities of chronotope. *Fabula* is the raw chronological account of events – if we believe that such an account can ever be produced – while *syuzhet* consists of the same events shaped into a literary narrative form. At its most radical, the *syuzhet* might reverse the sequence of events, beginning, let us say, with the wedding, and only working back gradually to the moment when the two lovers met. More subtly, the narratorial language might mark certain events as having happened unexpectedly and others as predictably; some events might be narrated in great physical detail while other might be narrated more abstractly; chapter divisions might punctuate events in different ways.

The *fabula* for "Daffodils" is relatively straightforward: at some point in the distant past, the poet wanders, and the poet then sees daffodils, but fails to recognize their full significance; much later, the poet reclines on his couch (as he habitually does), and remembers the daffodils; he then understands the wealth they have brought him. The *syuzhet* follows this broad chronological sequence, but we learn only in retrospect that the poet did not fully recognize the significance of the revelation when he saw it. This broad contrast of the present and the past is central to a great deal of post-Romantic poetry: it provides the underlying structure for nostalgic poetry.

On the face of it, imagist poetry devoted to the instantaneous might seem to have no chronotope. "In a Station of the Metro" might seem to be devoted solely to the here and now, but it is possible to tease out a chronotope. In this case, the Metro is, by definition, Parisian, so it occupies a space that exists outside the space of the English-language poem. Though in 1913 underground urban railways were not a novelty, the Paris Metro was nevertheless relatively new, only thirteen years old, and a sign therefore of a new urban modernity. It invokes, therefore, the timescale of modernization, an historical process. Contrasting with this long historical timescale, as in some still lives, we have the perishable petals, and the mortality of the faces; "apparition" suggests death and ghostliness. The petals on the wet black bough – cherry or apple blossoms – connect the poem to a particular time of year, but they are more ambiguous in terms of space: they might signify an urban ornamental tree, or the countryside; moreover, given the ubiquitousness of petals in received versions of oriental poetry and

painting, they also signify a space that is not European at all. So, although the poem might seem to signify a here and now, it signifies a very specific now, the now of urban modernity, which exists on an implied continuum of European time; and it includes two spaces, one specific and the other gestured at allusively and generically, the Parisian and the oriental.

In some poems, attention to the chronotope could begin with something as immediate the grammatical tense. Take "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," which begins with imperatives ("Let us go then"), then moves to a present tense (the women "come and go"); it then adopts the preterite – the yellow fog (or yellow smoke) "licked," "lingered," and "curled" – and then moves on to the future tense: "there will be time." The poem reaches about restlessly in time. The women coming and going are apparently indifferent to Prufrock's imperative; so too are the movements of the fog. Prufrock would like to bring everything to a stop, to roll the universe into a ball, but he cannot. That problem is repeated for the reader: it is not clear whether the coming and going of the women occurred before or after the licking and lingering of the fog. While we might assume that events in the preterite occurred earlier than events in the present tense, the sequence suggests otherwise; moreover, there are no adverbs to place events relative to one another. The poem fragments space, and emphasizes the fragmentation through its shifts of tense. The room which the women occupy is particularly baffling: it is never located relative to Prufrock's space.

Mythological and allusive poems acquire additional temporal depths, once the allusions have been recognized. Take "The Valley of the Black Pig." Given that "spears" are archaic weapons, it is implied that the battle is rooted in the past, even if it might recur at the present day. Yeats identified the black pig with a mythological type of winter, and saw the battle as one between the forces of winter and summer, barrenness and fruitfulness. So the poem has behind it an idea of cyclical time, but it also implies the eruption of this myth into contemporary time: Yeats's note to the poem (quoted in the chapter on myth) mentioned that the Irish peasantry believed that a great battle, to be fought in the Valley of the Black Pig, would break the power of their enemies. The labouring of the peasants in the poem suggests a time cycle of a day, and lives that are measured in days, but their weariness is not simply the weariness of physical labour, but weariness of empires. In an Irish context, that meant particularly a weariness of the British Empire; the juxtaposition of sundown ("the day sinks") and "empires" suggests the

Empire on which the sun never sets. Weariness of Empires suggests a longer historical duration. To understand the chronotope of this poem we could start by trying to arrange a series of events in a sequence, but some of them – events in Irish mythology, for example – cannot be arranged in a simple sequence. Understanding a mythically alluding poem is not simply a matter of arranging a series of events in a sequence, but rather of recognizing the various timescales and kinds of time that it juxtaposes. One is a historical sequence, which might include the history of English settlement and political domination in Ireland. The generalized reference to "empires" invokes the historical sequence of the rise and fall of all empires. Other timescales in the poem consist of different kinds of mythological sequence: both the universal myths of the battle of winter and summer, and the more localized myths of Irish heroes. By invoking such timescales, the poem acquires a chronotope that is distinctively modernist.

We might similarly unravel an allusive poem by drawing up a timeline; by recording the dates of the source texts in chronological order, we produce a *fabula* to the poem's *syuzhet*; to produce the chronotope we would also need to map the geographical sources of the allusions. In such a three-dimensional mapping, Yeats's Irish sources would lead to his map looking very different from Ezra Pound's; early in his career, Pound's would be speckled with references to medieval Provence, while later on his attention turns to China. T. S. Eliot wrote of "the historical sense" that it compelled a writer to write with a feeling that "the literature of Europe from Homer" was present (Rainey 152–3). In practice Eliot's tradition is selective, and by trying to unravel the sources and to present them as the *fabula* to the poem's *syuzhet*, we can see what he leaves out.

There are two main reasons why modernists play with time scales. The first is to do with agency. Yeats's remark about "the mind liberated from the pressure of the will" offers a clue. For Yeats, the liberation is simply a matter of creative agency – true creativity is detached from the will – but it points to something deeper: modernists doubted the power of the individual will to make an impact on the world. In this connection, Prufrock's powerlessness is the key. The world has grown too complex and too large for the individual to have any leverage on it. The kind of sequential time in which an action causes a reaction seems to them to be an over-simplification. Our lives are affected by events that unfold over much longer periods of time: geological and evolutionary events, but also slow historical processes such as the rise and fall of empires. The challenge to poetry has

been summarized in relation to late twentieth-century poetry by N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge:

> Poetry has not often found a way of representing events beyond the scale of direct, individual perception – events too large and slow to be observed, such as geological processes of formation and dissolution, or too small and quick, such as the movements of molecules or the immediate reactions of nerve-cells.[4]

A poetry centred on the personal observations of a coherent first-person tends to be limited to the depiction of things that exist at a similar scale to the observer. The impersonality of modernist poetry liberated it to include other kinds of object, and to suggest time scales beyond the personal. Modernist innovations were not absolutely unprecedented in this regard: the fact that seventeenth-century still-lives provide a useful analogy implies otherwise. Nevertheless, modernist poetry's experiments with temporality began to introduce events that were inaccessible to other modes.

The second reason is a concern with liberal ideologies of progress. Many modernists were sceptical of the idea that the new is necessarily better than the old. The freezing of time, the disruption of linear sequence, and the return of mythological events all serve to complicate the linear time within which progress must occur. Here we touch on what can be the most reactionary aspect of modernist thinking: scepticism about progress can be simply a fear of growing legal and political rights for the mass of the population. However, one might also see it as a concern with an idea of progress that had seemingly displaced art and artists; and also a scepticism about the gradual diminution of the scope of progress: a world where the "new" was not a matter of new rights or freedoms, but of new commodities and new distractions.

Notes

1 W. B. Yeats, "The Symbolism of Poetry," *Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), 159.
2 Yeats, "The Cold Heaven," *Yeats's Poems*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1989), 227.
3 William Wordsworth, "Daffodils," *Romanticism*, 2nd edn., ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell 1998), 383.
4 N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much: The Poetry of J. H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 5.

15

The Dramatic Monologue

To deal with something as fluid as modernist poetic form, we need to move beyond definitions of form that can deal only with rhythm and rhyme schemes. In chapter 12, two possibilities presented themselves. The first arose from James Russell Lowell's definition of form as "the artistic sense of decorum controlling the coordination of parts and ensuring their harmonious subservience to a common end." The definition by reference to specific verbal features has been replaced by a reference to a "sense of decorum," one that allows more room for interpretation, but which may make consensus harder to reach. The critic must infer what the "common end" of the parts might be; and if "form" is to be a feature common to several poems, the critic must define it precisely enough for it to be meaningful, and yet broadly enough for it to accommodate diverse poems.

This leads to my second tentative definition of form: the common end is the solution of a problem that the poet faces. The sonnet, for example, provides a pre-formulated means of expressing lyric emotions with, usually, some sense of conclusiveness; the mythical method provides a means of expressing a modernity which is shadowed by eternal recurrence.

The modernists found the dramatic monologue a valuable resource, though it is questionable whether the best modernist poems were dramatic monologues, and questionable whether their achievements in the form were as important as those of their Victorian predecessors. This chapter will focus on Ezra Pound's "La Fraisne" and "Sestine: Altaforte" and T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and "Gerontion." However, to contextualize the modernist dramatic monologue, it is necessary first to consider the history and the characteristics of the form.

Alan Sinfield has suggested that the dramatic monologue is rooted in the classical rhetorical exercise of *prosopopoeia*, in which the speaker gives a speech in character.[1] Quintilian recommended as a training in rhetoric

that the student attempt three things: the complaint, the epistle, and the humorous colloquial monologue. The complaint was originally an expression of grief or disappointment, concerning love, or death, or both. It dated back to Greek pastoral poetry of the third century BC. From the Renaissance onwards complaints were often set in the pastoral mode: for example, a shepherd lamenting the loss of his love. The complaint anticipates the narrative framework that we find in the fully developed dramatic monologue, but unlike the later form, it does not imply the presence of an auditor. Sinfield also notes that complaints came in two distinct forms, the empathetic and the pedagogic. Robert Langbaum influentially argued that in the fully developed dramatic monologue, both elements exist simultaneously, and the reader is divided between sympathizing and judging.[2]

In the epistle, a classical instance of which is Ovid's *Heroides*, the central character is again separated from a lover, but in this case he or she addresses the absent lover in a letter. The epistle contributes to the fully developed dramatic monologue the importance of an auditor. In its classical form the colloquial monologue, like the complaint, featured shepherds, but, by contrast with the shepherds of pastoral, they spoke a more comical and colloquial language. From this form the dramatic monologue drew the idea of deploying the demotic, with the crucial difference that classical ideas of propriety were set aside: it was no longer considered necessarily comical to deploy everyday speech. The colloquiality of the monologue also licenses a rhythmical irregularity: although monologues can be smoothly lyrical, where this suits their mood, it need not be so.

One significant shift during the Victorian era was the means by which the dramatic monologue identified itself as such. The titles of classical complaints tended to emphasize the form, and this sort of title began to vanish in the early nineteenth century: Wordsworth used it in "The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman" (*Lyrical Ballads* [1798]); Yeats's "The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner" (1890) self-consciously revives this form of title. Dramatic monologues tended not to identify themselves as such in the title (with a few exceptions such as Tennyson's "Despair: A Dramatic Monologue" [1881]); rather, they identified the character in the title or subtitle: for example, Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi," or the subtitle of "My Last Duchess," "Ferrara," which refers to the Duke of Ferrara. Whereas classical complaints had identified typical characters, Browning's dramatic monologues, in giving the characters names, emphasized their individuality. The typical character was not banished altogether

however: Tennyson, for example, wrote two monologues in the voice of a "Northern Farmer." Tennyson also tended to favour classical figures, such as Ulysses or Tithonus. We might note that there was a tension between the realist and the typifying, and that, moreover, even Browning's "realistic" figures can often be read as embodying a particular abstracted character trait.

The Victorian dramatic monologue provided a ready-made solution to several problems that vexed modernist poets. First, it allows for the impersonality that Eliot demanded in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" and elsewhere. In the dramatic monologue, the poet is not to be identified with the speaker. At the same time, however, it sustained an identification of the poem with speech and with an idea of psychological depth: the poem was something more than play with a verbal medium. Only for a later generation of modernists – notably Louis Zukofsky in "Poem Beginning 'The' " – does the verbal medium become detached from speech and the quotation-poem become a valid form. Secondly, as Isobel Armstrong has argued, building on Robert Langbaum, the dramatic monologue dramatized the relativity of knowledge. We see the speaker both from inside and from outside; what appears to be the absolute truth from the speaking subject's point of view turns out to be only a relative truth when seen from outside.[3] These two advantages of the form combine in Alan Sinfield's insight that the dramatic monologue frees the poet from making his or her own experience stand for that of the typical humanist subject: what, Sinfield asks, "could be more hampering for a writer than to feel that he must express 'what God sees' or be 'the voice of the human race'?"[4] In the conventional lyric, "Whenever the poet says 'I' the reader expects a personal truth which is also a truth about humanity." In the first instance, the dramatic monologue records the truth about an individual. It does not foreswear truths about humanity, but they are embodied in the form of the poem, in the combination of speaker, auditor, and situation, not in the words themselves.

If the dramatic monologue solved some problems for modernists, its Victorian form also presented some new problems. Most straightforwardly, it was too easy for a representation of colloquial speech to rely on Robert Browning's verbal and rhythmical mannerisms. In about 1923, T. S. Eliot, commenting on Herbert Read's poem "John Donne Declines a Benefice," remarked that Read had not fully digested Browning's influence, while conceding that the Victorian poet was a valuable model.[5] Beyond this, there were more fundamental problems. For the moment, I shall consider

only the problem of identity. Many modernists recognized that the self was by no means unified, formed as it was by pressures from outside and from within the psyche. Though the Victorian dramatic monologue often shows the self performing under external pressure, it arguably still embodies a humanist idea of the authentic self. One might also ask whether the moral world of the Victorian dramatic monologue was suited to modern ideas. Although Browning's dramatic monologues sometimes ask their readers to view the world temporarily from the perspective of a villain, ultimately they leave the notion of villainy untouched. In a modern world in which Nietzsche had suggested that the distinction of good and evil was an arbitrary one, to build a poem around the idea of villainy seemed simplistic. Furthermore, the modernists differed from the Victorians with regard to the role of the reader. Although the Victorian dramatic monologue asks a great deal more of its readers than conventional lyrical poems, it ultimately allows of closure: if we can place the speaker, auditor, and situation, then the poem need not trouble us any more. Moreover, Browning's insistence on historical particularity too easily allows us to separate the speakers from ourselves in time and space.

Ezra Pound had been drawn to the dramatic monologue early in his career. His 1909 collection of poems was titled *Personae*, and this was the title he used for his 1926 collected poems, and for subsequent editions. The personae of the 1909 collection are drawn from Pound's reading of medieval literature, particularly the Provençal Troubador literature. In *A Lume Spento* (1908), we find "La Fraisne," which comes with a generic identification of the scene, "The Ash Wood of Malvern." In it Pound speaks in the voice of a man who was once "a gaunt, grave councilor," but who has turned his back on his old life, and fallen in love with a tree within the ash wood. In this poem, as T. S. Eliot later noted, Pound's "attitude" and "vocabulary" resemble those of Yeats.[6]

> And I? I have put aside all folly and all grief.
> I wrapped my tears in an ellum leaf
> And left them under a stone
> And now men call me mad because I have thrown
> All follow from me, putting it aside
> To leave the old barren ways of men […]

Although the diction does not assert its colloquiality, the rhythms take greater risks than was conventional in pre-war poetry:

> Once when I was among the young men … .
> And they said I was quite strong, among the young men.
> Once there was a woman … .
> … . but I forget … . She was … .
> … . I hope she will not come again.[7]

A note in the original book publication relates the poem to the Provençal legend of Miraut de Garzelas, but the removal of the name generalizes the character into an old man who has discovered a new happiness in madness, a figure more mythical than the original.[8] Like the speakers of the classical complaint, the character speaks from a position of loss, having lost both his reason and, in the more distant past, the woman he loved. As in the classical complaint, and unlike Browning's characteristic dramatic monologues, there is no auditor present: it is a soliloquy. And although there is a very general narrative context, there is no very specific stimulus to the monologue: the speaker is justifying himself against those men who call him mad, but events have not reached any particular crisis.

In considering "La Fraisne," and others like it, one might invoke Glennis Byron's explanation of the special appeal of the dramatic monologue to women writers in the early nineteenth century: that it allowed them to occupy subject positions that would have been denied them a women writers of poems in the lyrical mode. In Pound's case, less laudably, it might be argued that the dramatic monologue allowed access to a vocabulary that would otherwise have been deemed archaic.

Ezra Pound's "Sestina: Altaforte" (first published June 1909) was celebrated in its time; one might query, however, whether its fame owed anything much to its virtues as a dramatic monologue. A prefatory note indicates that the speaker is the troubador poet Bertrans de Born, and that Altaforte is his castle. Again, the opening attempts to summon the colloquiality and directness of Browning:

> Damn it all! all this our South stinks peace.
> You whoreson dog, Papiols, come! Let's to music!
> I have no life save when the swords clash.
> But ah! when I see the standards gold, vair, purple, opposing
> And the broad fields beneath them turn crimson,
> Then howl I my heart nigh mad with rejoicing.[9]

The poem continues through all the repetitions necessary to a sestina. The poem summoned a register of invective unseen since Jacobean drama,

and this quality was brought out in Pound's spirited renditions of it. However, the situation is much more generalized than that of Browning's dramatic monologues: Bertrans despises the peacefulness of his times, but there is no specific incident prompting his outpourings. Similarly, although at times he addresses Papiols, the speech does not leave much scope for interjection, and so Papiols is little more than a name and a profession.

One might again ask what subject positions the dramatic monologue allows the poet to inhabit in this case. The bellicosity of "Sestina: Altaforte" is inseparable from a casual misogyny: the man "who fears war" is fit only "to rot in womanish peace." One might conclude that the dramatic monologue appeals because it allows the poet to voice sentiments that could not otherwise be approved in his social circles. The tone of the poem has much in common with parts of the Italian Futurist manifesto published earlier in 1909: Marinetti wrote that "We intend to glorify war – the only hygiene of the world – militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of emancipators, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and contempt for woman" (Rainey 4). However, one might also ask whether the poem also allows us to condemn the speaker's attitudes. It is particularly interesting to ask whether the sestina form brings any contribution. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland have rightly characterized Bertrans's voice as being one of "blustering, loud-mouthed anger," and have suggested that it stands in "powerful, poignant counterpoint" to the regular repetitions of the sestina form.[10] The sestina form can create a feeling of stasis: its line-end repetitions create an expectation of rhyme (repetition with difference), but only ever yield the same six words (repetition of the same). Such a form creates a disconcerting context for Bertrans's calls to action: it suggests that peace is stronger than belligerence, that the music of poetry is more powerful than the music of battle. Whether Pound subscribed to this point of view is another matter.

T. S. Eliot's adaptations of the dramatic monologue form are particularly important. While the form was important for Pound and H.D., their early experiments with it lack the richness and complexity of the best Victorian examples. While Eliot abandons some features of the Victorian model, he makes many innovations.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" resembles the form in many respects, beginning with its naming the protagonist. However, once again we cannot be sure whether there is really an auditor. Critics have disagreed

on this point. Robert Langbaum wrote in 1958 that Prufrock "is clearly speaking for his own benefit," but added that "he does not, like the soliloquist, address himself; he addresses his other self – the 'you' of the first line […]. Prufrock's other self figures as the auditor who watches Prufrock's performance at the tea party and to whom Prufrock tells what he learns through the performance about his life."[11] However, Eliot had responded to an enquiry by Kristian Smidt saying that, although his memory was imperfect, "I am prepared to assert that the 'you' in THE LOVE SONG is merely some friend or companion, presumably of the male sex, whom the speaker is at that moment addressing."[12] For William Harmon in 1976, the crucial detail was the epigraph: in Dante's *Inferno*, Guido da Montefeltro speaks to Dante only because he cannot believe that Dante will ever return to the world; Harmon takes Prufrock to be similarly reticent. Harmon noted that Eliot's assertion about the "friend or companion" was so surrounded with qualifications that no reader should accept it on trust, and claimed that it was "improbable" that Prufrock had anyone "to talk to so freely and candidly: the only person he could talk to *senza tema d'infamia* is himself or some aspect of himself."[13]

One might argue that the uncertainty about the auditor is part of the point, and that Eliot, by qualifying his comments to Smidt, intended to preserve some of the uncertainty. In the context of a "love song," one might expect the "you" to be female, and Eliot's suggestion that the auditor is "of the male sex" complicates those expectations. In the opening paragraph, the remark "do not ask, 'What is it?' " (line 11) suggests that there is an external auditor whose interjection has been anticipated, but his or her presence is hard to detect thereafter. Towards the end of the poem "No! I am not Prince Hamlet" (line 111) might be taken to suggest that the auditor has spoken: compare the "Nay, we'll go / Together down, sir" of Browning's "My Last Duchess," which responds to an action rather than words. Yet although we could imagine Prufrock's companion remarking that he resembles Hamlet in his indecisiveness, by this point there have been so many rhetorical questions that appear to be uttered in soliloquy, that the companion has faded; and moreover, the exclamatory tone is far removed from that with which Prufrock invited his companion to make their visit. The blank verse rhythm brings a stiffness and formality to the speech, and we might take this to differentiate these lines from the purely internal musings of the previous lines. However, we might equally well take them to be a further development of Prufrock's fantasy life, one in

which his denial that he is Prince Hamlet in fact signifies its opposite: he is dignifying his indecisiveness by reference to Shakespeare.

What does the uncertainty about the auditor's status bring to the poem? It is easy enough to see, by contrast with Browning, what it might take away: the scene is not dramatic; it is less immediately obvious what is at stake in the speech. However, the advantage of the uncertainty is that it embodies a new notion of the self, one that is socially constructed. Victorian dramatic monologues had hinted at this, insofar as their characters' speeches are always persuasive speech rather than authentically expressive; they imply that the self is always a performance, and that the performance might vary according to the audience. But the uncertainty in Eliot's poem suggests that Prufrock has internalized those external figures and their demands.

Above all, Prufrock has internalized the demand that a man should be a man of action. In asking whether, "after tea and cakes and ices" he would have "the strength to force the moment to a crisis" (lines 79–80), he is reflecting one of the external measures of manliness. His later question about whether it would have been worth while "To have squeezed the universe into a ball" carries an allusion to Andrew Marvell's "To his Coy Mistress," and strength is again the subtext: says Marvell's speaker, "Let us roll all our Strength, and all / Our sweetness, up into one Ball."[14] There is also an echo of Arthur Symons's remark about the French poet Jules Laforgue: "In Laforgue, sentiment is squeezed out of the world before one begins to play at ball with it."[15] Again, the subtext is of a strong, unsentimental manhood. Recognizing that he does not have the strength to force the moment to a crisis, Prufrock measures himself against another kind of manliness, that of the mature thinker, but concludes that in spite of his having wept, and fasted, and having grown slightly bald, he is "no prophet." Again, while there is no external voice explicitly demanding of him whether he is a prophet, the denial registers a cultural pressure to conform to certain identities; Prufrock conducts a dialogue with an internalized voice.

The title of Eliot's "Gerontion" (1920) suggests that it concerns a character less individualized than Prufrock. Although Prufrock can be placed easily enough as a character type, the indecisive man, Gerontion's name places him as the "little old man." However, before the poem properly begins, the epigraph complicates matters, by suggesting that the character has neither youth nor age, but has somehow gone beyond both. In the opening lines of the poem proper, the implications of negatives are important as the positive statements.

> Here I am, an old man in a dry month,
> Being read to by a boy, waiting for rain.
> I was either at the hot gates
> Nor fought in the warm rain
> Nor knee deep in the salt marsh, heaving a cutlass,
> Bitten by flies, fought.
> (ll. 1–6) (Rainey 121)

The opening line establishes a here and now for the speaker, but it does not establish it in precise historical terms. If there is an auditor, his or her identity is not at all clear; the boy can presumably hear Gerontion, and the fact that Gerontion speaks of him suggests that the poem is an internal monologue. Contradicting this, in line 55 a "you" does emerge: "I would meet you upon this honestly." While we might try to interpret this "you" as another aspect of Gerontion's self, the interpretation is much harder to sustain in this poem than in "Prufrock"; the "you" is so much more obviously a former lover.

Like Prufrock, Gerontion goes on to deny a heroic identity, and the form of his denial takes the poem further away from the conventional dramatic monologue. He denies both having fought at the Battle of Thermopylae (the "hot gates") in 480 BC, and, in denying that he wielded a cutlass, seemingly denies having been a Renaissance adventurer (the word "cutlass" itself dates from the late sixteenth century). Whereas Prufrock's denials that he was either a prophet or Hamlet could be taken as referring to types, Gerontion's refer to specific historic periods. Even while Gerontion denies these identities, he implies the possibility of existing out of time, as the epigraph had hinted. This might imply metempsychosis, the idea that a soul transmigrates from body to body. However, as Eliot was not drawn to the occult, it would be more appropriate to relate it to the "historical sense," which, as described in "Tradition and the Individual Talent": "involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence"; it is "a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together" (Rainey 152–3). What remains uncertain, in this post-war poem, is whether Gerontion's denial of involvement in these earlier battles implies that he is a veteran of more recent ones, for example, the Somme; or whether he is denying any kind of military involvement. His later reminder that "Neither fear nor courage saves us" and that heroism fathers "unnatural vices" (lines 45–6) suggest a complete denial of military associations.

In any case, Gerontion does not have the historic specificity of Browning's Duke, his Fra Lippo Lippi, or his Andrea del Sarto. Although he is therefore closer to Tennyson's mythological figures (Tithonus or Oenone, for example), the idea of eternal recurrence implies a different theory of myth: Tennyson's figures were safely locked in their mythic past, but Gerontion inhabits an identifiably contemporary Europe.

Does Gerontion's speech belong to a dramatic situation? Its identity as an interior monologue would suggest not: Gerontion is not engaged in trying to persuade an external auditor of a particular case. However, there is an urgency about the fifth paragraph (lines 34–48) which suggests that there might be a narrative context for the monologue, albeit an obscure one. Moreover, the early denial of military activity also smacks of self justification: the situation resembles those in Browning's monologues such as "Fra Lippo Lippi," where the speaker stands accused of some wrongdoing, or anticipates such an accusation. In this light, Gerontion's opening sentence implies that he is *merely* an old man, harmlessly going about his business, and indeed doing nothing more active than waiting; the presence of the boy implies that he is blind, which might also support his claim of innocence. "You've got the wrong man," he appears to be saying. The references to "a dry month" and "waiting for rain" are seemingly less relevant to Gerontion's excuse, but can be assimilated. If we come back to the poem after reading *The Waste Land*, they suggest a dimension of fertility rituals and rejuvenation; it is hard not to identify Gerontion with the later poem's Fisher King, and the landscape of "Gerontion" with the "arid plain" of *The Waste Land* (line 424). If the mythic dimensions are allowed, they imply an alibi of impotence. A further instance of Gerontion's denial of responsibility comes in his claim that "the jew" is the owner of the house.[16] If the wrongdoing of which Gerontion stands accused is the war, then his willingness to point to "the jew" suggests that he is trying to shift the blame. Given that the house, with its tenants of many nationalities, appears to represent Europe, the responsibility for the ownership leads to a much larger contemporary question, responsibility for the state of the continent.

Many critics have been concerned that Eliot shared his character's anti-Semitism, and there is much evidence that he shared a low level of racial prejudice with many of his Anglo-Saxon contemporaries. However, the poem shows some signs of self-awareness on this issue, though it expresses them with the obliquity typical of modernist poetry. No sooner has one encountered the "jew" apparently being treated as a scapegoat than one encounters the goat, apparently cast out into a barren field.

If Gerontion's denials might provide a key to reading the poem, then we also need to explain the following:

> In depraved May, dogwood and chestnut, flowering Judas
> To be eaten, to be divided, to be drunk
> Among whispers; by Mr Silvero
> With caressing hands, at Limoges
> Who walked all night in the next room;
>
> By Hakagawa, bowing among the Titians;
> By Madame de Tornquist, in the dark room
> Shifting the candles; Fräulein von Kulp
> Who turned in the hall, one hand on the door.
> Vacant shuttles
> Weave the wind. I have no ghosts,
> An old man in a draughty house
> Under windy knob.
>
> (ll. 21–33)

Why should Gerontion deny that he has ghosts? If he does not, we might want to ask who does. Mr Silvero, Hakagawa, Madame de Tornquist, and Fräulein von Kulp are participants in what Jewel Spears Brooker has described as a "corrupt eucharist ceremony," and the concomitant of Gerontion's denial is that this shifty congregation are haunted.[17] The whispers and the shifting of candles might suggest that some sort of séance has taken place, though this is far from certain. Like the earlier "jew," these characters are united in not being Anglo-Saxon: three are continental Europeans, while Hakagawa is presumably Japanese. Of course, when we reach the end of the poem, with its identification of the "Tenants of the house" with Gerontion's own thoughts, the attempt at differentiation becomes retrospectively more complex. (As Brooker says, invoking Joseph Frank's idea of spatial form, "Gerontion" "cannot be read; it can only be re-read.") In a poem so concerned with exculpation, it should not be altogether surprising if someone called "von Kulp" is a part of the speaker's mind.

In the next paragraph, Gerontion's tone becomes more explicitly argumentative. "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?" (line 34). One critic, seemingly forgetting that the poem might be a dramatic monologue, characterized the tone as "hortatory," and commented that Gerontion "urges us to an effort of will."[18] The assumption here is that Gerontion is addressing someone outside himself, but, as in "The Love

Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," we must consider whether he is merely urging another aspect of himself.

It is significant that Gerontion invokes "forgiveness" at this point: it makes clearer than ever that the possibility of judgement is in the air. From this point of view, "Gerontion" shares the quality of doubleness with the Victorian dramatic monologue: it encourages both sympathy and judgement; we see the character both subjectively and objectively. But whereas the crimes of Browning's Duke are clear enough, as are the all-too human qualities of Fra Lippo Lippi, the nature of Gerontion's misdoing is not clarified. By the end of the poem Gerontion's claim for forgiveness is based not on scapegoating any particular group, but on blaming history: history "deceives" and misguides "us," "us" seemingly referring to the whole of humankind. In the following paragraph, the implicit accusation becomes more personal: "I that was near your heart was removed therefrom." Gerontion attempts to exculpate himself from accusations of having abandoned someone; he furthermore attempts to counter accusations of having become passionless: "I have lost my passion: why should I need to keep it / Since what is kept must be adulterated?" (lines 58–9).

If form provides a sense of decorum, then the dramatic monologue form allows diverse elements to coexist in service of a common end. The question is, whether that common end is truly modern. In some cases, particularly Pound's medievalizing poems, it can appear that the dramatic monologue licenses archaisms that allow the poet to escape his own modern situation. In this case, decorum preserves an outmoded speech; the "common end" of the poem is potentially little more than escapism. Yet in other cases – The "Game of Chess" section of *The Waste Land* is the prime example – the dramatic monologue licenses the use of diction that would otherwise have been deemed unpoetic. It has the potential both to open poetry up to modernity and to seal it off.

If we see form as solving a problem for the poet, then the dramatic monologue reconciles the need for poetry to relate to voice and to speech while at the same time separating it from the voice and identity of the poet. It solves, in other words, the problem of impersonality.

One of the recurrent problems we have seen in the modernist examples of the form is the question of whether there is really an external auditor. Judged by the standards of Browning's best dramatic monologues, these poems might seem to be lacking: they fail to exploit the form's potential to its maximum, because it is at its best when we are reading the words both for what they tell us about the speaker and for what they tell us about

the auditor. A simple response to this criticism might be that modernist dramatic monologues are playing off our expectation of there being an auditor in order to emphasize a modern feeling of isolation; however, this answer both excuses some weak poems too easily, while underplaying the complexity of some others. A significant number of modernist monologues are undramatic, and lack the complexity and tension of their Victorian predecessors. On the other hand, as we saw in "Prufrock" and "Gerontion," the uncertainty about the auditor allows the poet to articulate more complex ideas of self than were possible in the Victorian form.

Similar considerations apply to the question of the dramatic situation. If the best Victorian dramatic monologues create a tension between sympathy and judgement, it might be conceded that in the least successful modernist ones, we neither sympathize with the character nor know the basis on which we might judge them. But in the best modernist examples, the characters attempt self-justification without our ever being quite certain what accusations have been laid against them. Such scenarios have the potential to be confusing, certainly, but they are more appropriate to a world in which moral distinctions have become fuzzy edged. As I suggested earlier, one might attribute this to thinkers like Nietzsche: if the distinction of good and evil has been deconstructed, then there is no place for old-fashioned villainy. But it might also be associated with a nagging and distinctly modern sense of original sin. Although we might identify Gerontion's offence with the Great War, because this accusation is never explicitly stated, the sense of guilt remains more resonant. If some modernist dramatic monologues fail to reach a point of closure, it might be because no speaker can ever quite articulate the scale of the offence, or find a justification for it.

Notes

1 Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen, 1977), 42–52.
2 Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (1957; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
3 Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993).
4 Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue*, 58.
5 Eliot's remarks about Herbert Read's dramatic monologue are in an undated (c.1923) letter to Read, *Letters of T.S. Eliot*, ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber, 2009), 2: 138.

6 T. S. Eliot, *Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry* (1917), reprinted in *To Criticize the Critic* (London: Faber, 1978), 167.
7 Ezra Pound, "La Fraisne," *Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: Library of America, 2003), 23.
8 Pound's note on the poem appeared in *A Lume Spento* (1908); see Peter Brooker, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber, 1979), 54.
9 Ezra Pound, "Sestina: Altaforte," *Poems and Translations*, 105–6.
10 *The Making of a Poem: A Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms*, ed. Mark Strand and Eavan Boland (New York: Norton, 2000), 42.
11 Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (1957; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 190.
12 Eliot, quoted by Kristian Smidt, *Poetry and Belief in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), 85.
13 William Harmon, "T. S. Eliot's Raids on the Inarticulate," *PMLA* 91 (1976), 458.
14 Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1921), 74.
15 Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899; London: Constable, 1908), 109.
16 On the lower-case "j," see Anthony Julius, *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 41, 43; Anthony Julius, "A Response to Ronald Schuchard," *Modernism / Modernity*, 10 no.1 (Jan. 2003), 46; Craig Raine, *T. S. Eliot* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 156–7.
17 Jewel Spears Brooker, "The Structure of Eliot's 'Gerontion,'" *ELH* 46 (1979), 329, 322.
18 Harvey Gross, "*Gerontion* and the Meaning of History," *PMLA* 73 (1958), 300–1.

16

Modernism, Epic, and the Long Poem

Brevity, economy, and intensity were keywords for much of modernist poetry. However, many modernist poets also wrote long poems. This chapter will outline their justifications for their doing so, and will suggest contexts within which we can read longer modernist works.

The idea that brevity is the essence of poetry was not new to the modernists. In the mid nineteenth century, Edgar Allan Poe had begun "The Poetic Principle" (posthumously published in 1850) by announcing that "a long poem does not exist," and that the very term was a contradiction in terms. Canonical epic poems such as *The Iliad* or *Paradise Lost* were to be viewed as poetical only if seen as series of lyrical poems. While Poe conceded that there were equal and opposite dangers, and that through excessive brevity the poem might be reduced to the epigram, the main force of his argument was directed against the long poem.

In making the argument, Poe also touched on one of the perennial reasons why poets felt it necessary to write a long poem. The long poem was seen by some as the sign that the poet was capable of "sustained effort." Poe rightly argued that sustained effort did not in itself guarantee aesthetic accomplishment, but many poets and critics believed that the composition of a long poem was a test that any poet who aspired to be a major poet should undertake. There are implications of manliness in the idea of "sustained effort": the idea implies that the lyric, for all its attractiveness, is a form that can be equally well managed by the immature or the unmanly. Some contemporary critical accounts of major poets treat their early lyrical work as a training ground for the long poem. (See for example Mackail's account of Virgil in *Latin Literature* (1895), which Pound had read).[1] Despite the gendered assumptions below the surface of this idea, or perhaps because they wished to disprove those assumptions, women poets such as H.D. were also drawn to the long poem.

But if there were egotistical reasons for writing a long poem – because it might secure the poet's place in the canon – there were also impersonal reasons. If the place of poetry in the modern world was threatened, then the long poem stood a better chance than other forms of justifying poetry. If the problem for poetry was its inability to deal with the full breadth of the modern world, then only the long poem stood a chance of accommodating modern experience, and of being assessed as a form of knowledge rather than a form of entertainment or a record of fleeting sensations and feelings.

The long poem had space to raise large questions about man's place in the universe, or man's place in modern society; it could raise such questions directly, or attempt to imply them through narrative or other formal means. To undertake direct discussion meant that the long poem might appear to break the common modernist injunction against poetry as the expression of personality. But that injunction, at least in Eliot's formulation of it, was against the expression of emotion, and not the expression of ideas. Additionally, modernist writers may have been wary of falling into the sage-like role occupied by some Victorian poets.

Modernist long poems raise more individual problems than can be discussed in a chapter of this length: the nature of their ambition makes it so. The present chapter will attempt to outline and contextualize the idea of the long poem, and to indicate the range of choices that were available to a modernist poet.

Before anything else, there was a choice between writing a long poem – where "long" might mean anything longer than two pages – and writing a long poem that was self-consciously in the tradition of epic. Works such as Wallace Stevens's "Le Monocle de Mon Oncle" (1918) or Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1920), are long poems, but in no sense epics. In 1919, T. S. Eliot conceived *The Waste Land* as a "long poem";[2] Pound was to call it "the longest poem in the English langwidge [sic]."[3] Though the two share some considerations, the epic brought its own distinct set of expectations.

In both cases, as Poe's polemic suggests, there was a question about the unity of the long poem: was it to be understood as a sequence of lyrics, or at least of lyrical moments, or as a continuous sequence, united by a narrative or an abstract argument? A parallel debate had surrounded the works of Homer since F. A. Wolf's provocative *Prolegomena* (1795). The problem arises in part because the long poem requires some variety. T. S. Eliot insisted, contrary to Poe, that a long poem was characterized by "a variety

of moods," and that "some parts may be deliberately planned to be less 'poetic' than others: these passages may show no lustre when extracted, but may be intended to elicit, by contrast, the significance of other parts, and to unite them into a whole more significant than any of the parts."[4] However, the more various the moods, the harder it is to perceive the unity of the poem. The situation is more vividly represented by the two textual states of Hugh MacDiarmid's long poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926), which on first publication was printed as a continuous sequence, but which in his *Collected Poems* (1962) was divided into separate lyrics, each with its own title. MacDiarmid's own description of the poem as a "gallimaufry" emphasizes its heterogeneity, but does not necessarily imply rigid subdivisions within it. It is worth noting the presence or absence of section numbers in relation to this: the presence of such numbers more strongly implies a linear sequence, whereas their absence suggests the poem be considered as a suite of poems, supplied with an order which is significant, but not overpoweringly so. (*The Waste Land* on its first appearance in *The Criterion* and *The Dial* did not have section numbers, but all subsequent texts did.) The implication of the question of unity is that we might read poems in different ways on different occasions, one time reading for the lyrical "high points," and on other occasions looking for the non-lyrical or "unpoetic" material, and asking how it serves to elicit significance.

If the long poem is to be an epic, then the epic tradition creates expectations about the kind of narrative that the poem will embody, and the kind of form that it will take. Most early twentieth century accounts of epic took as their starting point the classical examples of Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*; the latter was commonly taken as having codified the form. However, they also attempted to accommodate, to varying extents, other early narrative poetry which was epic in the sense of being long, or concerned with heroic actions, or both. John Clark's *A History of Epic Poetry* (1900) took in the Finnish *Kalevala* and Indian epic narratives alongside the classical precedents; Lascelles Abercrombie's *The Epic* (1914) took into consideration the *Nibelungenlied*, *Beowulf*, and Icelandic and Scandinavian poems.[5] Critics also varied in the extent to which they were willing to accommodate poems such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* (a work of great importance for modernist poets), Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. One broad definition is that the epic is a narrative in which a hero attempts to find his home. Such a definition begins with Odysseus's long voyage home in the *Odyssey*, and readily encompasses

the *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas travels from Troy to found a new city, Rome. (A subordinate expectation roused by both poems is that the journey is a sea voyage.) In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante begins by being literally lost within the wood, but more importantly, has spiritually lost his way; the narrative, which ends with a vision of God, is a homecoming in a deeper sense. Milton, in justifying the ways of God to man, effects a similar reconciliation, though return is not part of *Paradise Lost*'s narrative pattern. The idea of homecoming is harder to apply to Wordsworth's epic autobiography, but insofar as *The Prelude* was intended to establish the poet's credentials to write a long philosophical poem, it narrates a coming home to his true – though unfulfilled – vocation. A variant on this argument, beginning with the *Aeneid*, is the idea of epic as a narrative of the nation, and especially of its foundation. Around 1909, Ezra Pound spoke of the epic as being "the speech of a nation thru the mouth of one man."[6] The nineteenth century had seen a great many British examples, and the form persisted into the early twentieth century, in works such as the decidedly non-modernist *Drake: An English Epic* (1906–8), by Alfred Noyes, and the linguistically idiosyncratic *The Dawn in Britain* (1906) by Charles M. Doughty.

The form that the narrative should take once again raised the question of unity. The great classical epics have an episodic quality which is more typical of romance: the various obstacles that Odysseus encounters do not need to occur in any particular order. While the *Aeneid* obeys a stricter necessary sequence, there is still an episodic quality to the first half of the poem. Because the early epics began as oral compositions, developing and bringing together already-familiar materials, their authors could assume that the audience was familiar with many of the stories, and could tell them more or less economically, according to need. In such a situation, the distinction between telling a story and alluding to a story is relatively slight: every telling is also an allusive retelling. In 1914, Abercrombie distinguished between epic material and the epic itself: every poet had a tradition of epic "matter" and epic style on which to draw, but they were a "mass of confused splendours" which needed to be shaped into poetry. However, in the oral tradition, the shape of the story was already familiar. In 1941, in his "Epic and Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin remarked upon the indifference of epic to beginnings and endings: unlike the novel, it does not need to reach a point of closure, nor does it need to begin at a significant moment. Bakhtin refers to the epic past as the "absolute past": it is "walled off" from any subsequent historical time, and its events are completed and unchangeable

(Bakhtin 15). The novel, on the other hand, has a temporal continuity with present-day time, even in the case of novels that are set in the past. The epic's indifference to novelistic ideas of time is underwritten by the audience's familiarity with the epic materials; the reader of the *Aeneid*, for example, is assumed to be familiar with the story of the Trojan Wars. Paradoxically, because epic events are already known to be completed, the writer of epic is less concerned with narrative closure; such closure is already a given. Modernist attitudes to narrative form have some resemblances to epic narrative, certainly in the modernist indifference to conventional narrative closure; modernist narratives try to capture the open-endedness of events, the idea that life is a continual becoming. However, more fundamentally, the dominant modernist attitude to narrative time is very different from that of epic: the open-endedness of modernist narratives opens them to historical time; modernist narrative events are not located in the absolute past of epic. Nevertheless, the relative indifference of epic to narrative sequence and proportion may have liberated modernist narrative form from the conventions of nineteenth-century realism.

In his first version of the *Cantos*, Ezra Pound addresses Robert Browning about the possible of using Browning's *Sordello* as a model. What he admires is the flexibility of Browning's poem, a "rag-bag" in which Pound could "dump [his] catch, shiny and silvery / As fresh sardines flapping and slipping on the marginal cobbles."[7] In particular, he notes Browning's relaxed attitude to historical accuracy and to anachronism: characters are clad "In robes that are half Roman, half like the Knave of Hearts"; in one scene, Sordello sits beside a font which is "some two centuries outside the picture – / And no matter." "Ghosts move about me patched with histories": once a character has achieved the archetypal quality that warrants his or her inclusion in an epic narrative, the poet may be allowed some chronological latitude.

For poets choosing to write in the tradition of the epic, there were strong precedents regarding style and narrative units. The epic tradition included rhetorical features such as heightened diction and the use of the epic simile, and larger-scale units such as the invocation of the muse; the catalogue of ships or heroes; the descent into hell; and supernatural interventions by the gods. While for some critics, such features are important or even essential, for others they are means to an end, and may be omitted if the end can be attained by other means. The interventions of the gods might be improbable to the modern mind, but they indicated that the epic narrative went beyond, as Abercrombie put it, "the reach of common knowledge."

Pound's *Cantos* begin with an account of a descent into the underworld:

> And then went down to the ship,
> Set keel to breakers, forth on the godly sea, and
> We set up mast and sail on that swart ship,
> Bore sheep aboard her, and our bodies also
> Heavy with weeping, and winds from sternward
> Bore us out onward with bellying canvas,
> Circe's this craft, the trim-coifed goddess.
> (Rainey 62)

In beginning with one of the most common epic narrative units, Pound unambiguously signals his epic intention. This might be seen as a conservative gesture, given that some of his contemporaries felt such moments not strictly necessary, but as there are few other familiar points of reference in the poem, such an unambiguously epic moment is necessary. Stylistically the passage is rendered in an alliterative verse reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon poetry, or at least of Pound's own translation of the Anglo-Saxon poem "The Seafarer" (Rainey 39–41). The style of both is marked by frequent inversions of colloquial word order: "My feet were by frost benumbed" (not "benumbed by frost"); "Poured we libations." The most significant stylistic difference is that whereas Pound's "Seafarer" frequently employs archaic diction and word forms – "oft," "liveth," "bide," "nathless" – the narratorial voice of Canto I is purged of such elements. Pound's purpose in adopting the Anglo-Saxon alliterative style becomes clearer once we recognize that most of Canto I derives from book XI of Homer's *Odyssey*, and that it is translated not directly from Homer, but from Andreas Divus's 1538 Latin version. In other words, a poem from (perhaps) the ninth century BC, mediated by a Latin text from the sixteenth century AD, is translated in the style of an English poem of the tenth century, as imitated in the early twentieth. The style indicates that history has seen many heroic and epic styles; and that the epic tradition has passed through many hands before reaching the present moment.

It is also worth considering the catalogue, as Pound has several such lists, and other groupings of names which at least gesture towards the convention. In Canto LXXIV, he invokes recently dead contemporary writers: "Fordie that wrote of giants / and William who dreamed of nobility / and Jim the comedian singing […]." It is worth asking whether such a list necessarily bestows heroic status upon those named, or whether it merely proposes that they might be worthy of it. Bakhtin's distinction

between epic time and novelistic time is relevant here: Ford Madox Ford, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce were near-contemporaries of the author, and of many of this Canto's readership. Just as we can identify with the protagonist of a novel, we can identify with these writers; there is historical continuity between us and them. Though the epic style does something to interpose a distance, it is not the absolute distance that Bakhtin identified. And Pound's use of familiar forms of their names reminds us of the ordinariness of these writers.

Finally, it is worth returning to the intellectual ambitions of the long poem, and specifically of the epic. While some long poems were explicitly philosophical – the greatest example being Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* ("On the Nature of Things") – the epic's intellectual ambitions were implicit. It was not purely a narrative form: the narrative had a higher significance. In Abercrombie's account, the epic poet used the epic poem to symbolize the "unconscious metaphysic of his age." By the Renaissance, the epic poem had acquired what Northrop Frye refers to as "an encyclopaedic quality," "distilling the essence of all the religious, philosophical, political, even scientific learning of its time."[8] Though the *Divine Comedy* is categorized by Frye as purely encyclopaedic, Dante's example was clearly important to modernists; in 1920 Eliot noted Dante's "encyclopaedic" knowledge and his talent for organization.[9] However, it may be that some modernists wished to go beyond the rational organization implied by the encyclopaedia. Writing in 1932, Herbert Read quoted a letter by John Keats in which he had envisaged the long poem as "a little Region to wander in" where the readers "may pick and choose, and in which the images are so numerous that many are forgotten and found new in a second Reading" (Keats, to Benjamin Bailey, 8 October 1817).[10] Understood in these terms, the long poem demands a different kind of readerly attention from the lyric. Moreover, if it requires multiple readings, it is possible that it can never be conclusively interpreted, and in this respect it will have a richness that exceeds that of the encyclopaedia; it will embody the richness of the world of perceptions, rather than the richness of the world of organized knowledge.

For those writers who did not gesture towards the epic, there were other significant models for the longer poem. As noted earlier, many long poems are explicitly sequences of lyrics, and, as Eliot suggested, some parts may be less obviously "poetic" than others. In such poems, there is often a hierarchy of lyrical intensity, with a brief lyrical section providing a point of greatest intensity, but also of furthest distance from rational discourse;

the other, more discursive parts maybe understood as building up to the moment of lyrical intensity, establishing the poem's vocabulary and images so that they may be used economically at the crucial moment. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, for example, have quite clearly defined lyrical sections, and clearly defined discursive sections, and although we might wish to subdivide the latter into colloquial, didactic, and deliberative (as Hugh Kenner did in *The Invisible Poet* [1959]), and although at times Eliot moves seamlessly from one to the other, the basic distinction between lyrical and nonlyrical is still highly significant. One way of reading such poems is to identify the moments of greatest lyrical intensity, and to ask how the more discursive passages serve them; but as such an approach grants a higher significance to the lyrical, it is valuable also to invert the hierarchy, and to ask what the lyrical passages contribute to the argument. In the context of a long poem, we may ask whether lyric offers moments of visionary experience that will not submit to rational analysis, or moments of experience which the rest of the poem tries to digest.

The combination of description and meditation had also reached a distinctive form in the work of the Romantic poets, in poems such as Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," or Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," a form which M. H. Abrams later termed the "greater romantic lyric." Abrams summarized the form's features thus:

> They present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem.[11]

As we have seen in other chapters, several of the fundamental assumptions of this form were questionable to a modernist frame of mind: Is the unified speaking voice, the determinate speaker, a true reflection of the nature of mind? Is nature, implied by the outdoor setting, necessarily a guarantor of value? Can the perceiving subject ever really know the scene that he or she perceives? However, in spite of these difficulties, the form was resonant

for some modernist writers. Yeats's "A Prayer for my Daughter" is very closely related to "Frost at Midnight," while the poems comprising his sequence "Meditations in Time of Civil War" (Rainey 314–19) begin in particular places and scenes. Wallace Stevens's longer meditative poems usually take place in a distinctive landscape, but Stevens does not engage in landscape painting, preferring to imply the setting through refracted fragments. The title of "The Idea of Order at Key West" (Rainey 614–15) suggests an idea located in a landscape, and the poem includes a woman singing by the Florida coast on a summer evening, but the poem does not begin with a clearly described scene, nor does it locate the scene in relation to the speaker's life; the speaker is meditating from the opening lines.

Some of the difficulties confronting the would-be modernist writer of a long poem are common to all such large-scale and long-term literary endeavours, but others are more particular to the modernist moment. First, there was the question of whether an imagist poetic that began with economic statements of similitude could sustain a longer poem. In 1914 Pound noted that he was often asked whether there could be "a long imagiste or vorticist poem," but he did not dwell at length on the difficulties, noting only that the Japanese, "who evolved the hokku," had also invented the Noh play. He suggested that "the whole play may consist of one image," a definition which suggests that the "image" is not simply something which can be apprehended visually in one instant, but is a name for the non-paraphraseable content of the work; in the next sentence, he suggests that the play is "gathered about one image," which suggests a more every day definition of the term.

Assuming that the technical difficulties can be overcome, a larger issue arises. As Eliot put it, somewhat cryptically, "the question of the possibility of writing a long poem is not simply that of the strength and staying power of the individual poet, but may have to do with the conditions of the age in which he finds himself."[12] Are there narratives available to the poet with the potential to be transformed into narratives of a universal significance? Or if the narratives fall short of a universal significance, then, might they take the form of a national epic, and have significance for the entire nation? The writers of early epics could rely on certain stories being known by their entire audience, but for the modern writer the problem arises of finding a narrative which is sufficiently well known, while at the same time being suitable vehicles for important ideas.

A second problem is whether there is sufficient intellectual consensus to transform a story into something significant. If belief systems have become

fragmented, if the "grand narratives" are in dispute, then the story may fail to achieve an unambiguous significance; the poet may have to employ a narratorial voice to interpret the significance of events, much as George Eliot did in the novel, and such narratorial interventions impede the narrative. The problem of the "conditions of the age" also arises for the writer of the long meditative poem.

For the aspiring epic poet, the problem arises particularly acutely in relation to heroism. For some commentators, heroism was the essence of epic; the epic harked back to the heroic age of a nation, an age of assertive individualism. Pound in his 1909 letter about epic asserted that the form needed "a Hero, mythical or historical." But the problem arises of whether modernity allows scope for heroic actions; indeed, modernity might be defined as a cultural state which prevents heroism, either approvingly, because heroism is essentially barbaric and unenlightened, or regretfully, because modernity is effete and degenerate.

For Pound in 1910, the problem of intellectual consensus manifested itself as a contrast between the spirit of satire and the spirit of epic: "An epic cannot be written against the grain of its time: the prophet or the satirist may hold himself aloof from his time, or run counter to it, but the writer of epos must voice the general heart."[13] The nation cannot speak through the mouth of one man if the nation does not speak and think with one voice. The version of Canto I published in *Poetry* in June 1917 touches explicitly on this problem, as part of its dialogue with Robert Browning.

> You had one whole man?
> And I have many fragments, less worth? Less worth?
> Ah, had you quite my age, quite such a beastly and cantankerous age?
> You had some basis, had some set belief.

Pound, lacking a "basis" for his epic, is more tentative. The "set belief" is not just the individual poet's firmness of belief, but the firmness of a belief which he or she can share with the "age." The next line, "Am I let preach? Has it a place in music?" suggests that the absence of a "set belief" necessitates that the poet take on a more didactic role; and that for Pound there was potentially a contradiction between didactic and lyrical poetry, between preaching and music.

The explicit problem for Pound in "Three Cantos" is where to begin? "How shall we start hence, how begin the progress," he asks in the *Poetry* version. Of course, by addressing Browning, Pound has already begun, and

the beginning is a modern and non-supernatural version of the traditional address to the muses. But beyond the exordium, he needs to decide whether to begin in Renaissance Italy, in ancient Egypt, or in Confucian China. And beyond the matter of chronological beginnings, he needs to identify his intellectual starting point. The problem of consensus becomes particularly prominent when Pound wonders what status to accord to "the spirits." The idea is easily dismissed as "supernatural," something inconsistent with modern enlightened thought, but it is essential to the coherence of the *Cantos*. In the "Three Cantos" Pound speaks of a place "full of spirits," but makes clear that they are not "*lemures*" (spectres of the night), "but ancient living, / Wood-white, smooth as the inner-bark, and firm of aspect." They are not "all a-gleam with colour," but "coloured like the lake and olive leaves, / GLAUKOPOS, clothed like the poppies, wearing golden greaves, / Light on the air. Are they Etruscan gods? / The air is solid sunlight, *apricus*." The frequent interrogatives and the attempt to define "spirits" and "gods" with a degree of precision are the signs of Pound's uncertainty about finding consensus. But it is necessary for him to establish the reality of gods, and to establish a vocabulary associated with them: a vocabulary of light, of glittering, of crystal, of leaves, and of unworldly suspension (floating, drifting, and so on.). This vocabulary will thread in and out of the poem, counterpointing its worldly concerns with glimpses of paradise and of the gods.

We may read modernist long poems for the ways they take the rules of their forebears, whether of the epic or the greater romantic lyric, and adapt them to modern circumstances. We may ask to what extent they continue to use the technical devices of shorter poems, such as the juxtaposition of images, and to what extent they are forced to adopt more traditional elements in order to bring coherence to the poem. And at the same time, in recognizing that modernist long poems placed a greater than usual strain on the intellectual consensus of the era, we may examine them for the ways that they attempt to negotiate with existing structures of thought, and for the ways in which they attempt to build new ways of seeing the world.

Notes

1 Ezra Pound, *Selected Letters of Ezra Pound*, ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber, 1950), 87.

2 T. S. Eliot, letter to his mother postmarked December 18, 1919, *Letters of T. S. Eliot*, rev. edn., ed. Valerie Eliot and Hugh Haughton (London: Faber, 2009), vol. 1, 424.

3 Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), 169.
4 T. S. Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry" (1948), *To Criticize the Critic* (1965; London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 34.
5 Lascelles Abercrombie, *The Epic* (London: Martin Secker, 1914), 16.
6 Ezra Pound, quoted by A. David Moody, *Ezra Pound: Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 122.
7 The chapter quotes from two different early versions of the early Cantos: 'Three Cantos from a Poem of Some Length,' as collected in *Lustra*, and reprinted in *Poems and Translations*, ed. Richard Sieburth (New York: Library of America, 2003); and the version published in *Poetry* (Chicago), June 1917, 115. Quotations from Cantos not included in Rainey's *Modernism* are taken from *The Cantos* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987).
8 Northrop Frye, *Five Essays on Milton's Epics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 3.
9 T. S. Eliot, "Dante as a 'Spiritual Leader,'" *Athenaeum*, no. 4692 (Apr. 2, 1920), 441–2.
10 Herbert Read, "The Long Poem," *The Modern Scot*, 2 (Jan. 1932), 301–11.
11 M. H. Abrams, "Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric," *The Correspondent Breeze* (New York: Norton, 1984), 76–7.
12 Eliot, "From Poe to Valéry," 34.
13 Pound, *The Spirit of Romance* (London: J. M. Dent, 1910), 228.

17

Modernist Endings

How a poem ends tells us a great deal about the poet's relation to his or her audience. Moreover, it tells us about something significant about his or her idea of poetic form, and this in turn can tell us something about the poet's understanding of what poetry is, and its relation to the world and to other forms of knowledge. There are two details of modernity that are important here, and they relate to knowledge and time. First, the universe is too vast and complex ever to be knowable by a single human subject. Though science often appears confident about its ability eventually to know the universe, from the perspective of poetry either that confidence is misplaced, or what is true for scientific knowledge does not pertain to that which is humanly knowable. The second aspect of modernity is also a further cause of the unknowability of the universe: it is in a constant state of flux; static pictures of the universe cannot capture its dynamic aspect. A problem for modernists was how to make a poem stop, without implying that it had achieved cognitive closure on fundamentally open-ended problems. In more narrowly aesthetic terms, modernists had divided loyalties: on the one hand, they continued to subscribe to an aesthetics of "the work," in which the poem creates its own enclosed and ordered world, while on the other they were very often sympathetic to philosophies which suggested the real world was an open-ended process which could never be fully known.

Modernist poetry often acts as a critique of other earlier forms of poetry, and of contemporaneous poetry that took an unquestioning relation to the poetic tradition. The questions of how twenty-first century readers expect a poem to end, and how the modernists' peers expected it to end, are not so very far apart: to the extent that modernism did not sever the non-modernist tradition, our contemporary expectations for poetry have something in common with those of the early twentieth century. That is,

many readers have a residual expectation that the end of the poem will deliver some sort of concluding statement, or at least a definitive concluding image. While this chapter will concentrate on modernist poems – Hulme's "The Embankment" and "Autumn," Pound's "The Lake Isle," and Yeats's "The Second Coming" – it will also make reference to the form of the Shakespearean sonnet, and to a non-modernist poem, Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est."

There is a practical problem of defining the "end" of a poem, if we mean a distinctive portion of the text: do we mean the last sentence, or the last line, or the last word? Timothy Bahti argues that we need to ask not simply how a poem ends, but how the poem gets to its end.[1] Of course, it can sometimes occur that what we find near the end is not the conclusion we expected; or that the conclusion occurs at some point before the last line. In this light it is worth reconsidering T. E. Hulme's "The Embankment." Although the poem embodies the imagist ideal of compression, it is relatively conservative in its conclusion. At the purely aural level, "sky" and "lie" provide a rhyme with which to conclude the poem, and, as noted in chapter 6, although the opening line of the poem suggests the principles of alliterative verse, by the final line the rhythmic principle appears to be iambic. However, to ask how the poem reaches its end, we need to consider the shape of the whole work. The opening words of each sentence establish a structure: "Once … Now … Oh." The poem is structured around a simple contrast of past and present, followed by an invocation by which the speaker seeks to restore himself to his past condition, or at least to ameliorate it. It has, in other words, many of the coordinates of a classic lyric: the present expression is motivated by the disjunction between the past and present, and seeks to overcome that disjunction. What is different from earlier lyrics is the compression of the phrase "the old star-eaten blanket of the sky." The phrase raises, first, the question of how the sky could be like a blanket, then of how far we are supposed to take the comparison of moth holes to stars, and then of how we are supposed to take the speaker's invocation. So if there is something modern about the ending of "The Embankment," it is that the imagery leaves questions unresolved after the verse has formally concluded.

Whereas "The Embankment" rises up to a point of invocation, Pound's "The Lake Isle" begins with one, invoking God, Venus, and Mercury, and then returns to it, calling upon them to "lend" the speaker a tobacco shop. The sound of the final lines calls for attention: Pound goes from a measured and oratorical rhythm to a prosier rhythm; the hint is given by the

phrase "this damn'd profession of writing." While one can perform the final lines in different ways, emphasizing or making subtle the change of tone, the change itself is hard to deny. Rhythmically, then, the poem is a staged refusal of the lyric or oratorical voice. By beginning in a high mode and ending low, Pound expresses the limitations of lyric poetry.

The poem reaches its end through repetition: the first paragraph has already prepared us for the bathos of the second. Once already Pound has invoked the gods to give him an inappropriately low object. Once already, the rhythms of the poem have trailed away from the opening invocation to something more colloquial: "popping in for a word or two in passing." The first paragraph raises a question: is it possible for lyric poetry to accommodate both the high and the low in the same space? That is, can we both invoke the gods and speak of commonplace actions such as tidying one's hair?

When we come to the second paragraph, and the repeated invocation, we know what to expect. Indeed, part of the humour of the poem comes from the ways that Pound goes beyond the bathos of the first paragraph: he now asks the gods merely to "lend" him a tobacco shop. Moreover, to refer to "this damn'd profession of writing," and so, by implication, to refer to the act of writing the poem, creates a lurch of perspective which reveals the poet at his desk engaged in the production of the poem itself.

The poem also reaches its conclusion by presenting chains of equivalences which raise questions about similarity and difference: not all the items in the list seem to belong there. The principle of equivalence begins in the first line, as does the pattern of diminishment: note that Mercury is presented here not as the messenger god, but as the patron of thieves. Even if we thought that he might have equivalent status to Venus, the epithet suggests otherwise. The description of the tobacco shop employs relatively uncomplicated equivalences: "And the … and the … And the" to describe the various tobaccos. That the weighing scales and then the whores become part of the same sequence is, however, more complicated: are the tools of the trade and the whores not different from the tobaccos?

In consequence, when "The Lake Isle" reaches its end, we expect equivalence. We might say that part of the poem's purpose is to ask whether there is any real difference between running a tobacconist's shop and being a poet. And beyond that, as a secondary equivalence, it asks whether anyone in the poet's life takes the role that the passing whores take in the tobacconist's. If we conclude that no one does, then not only does the poem alert

us to the unsociable nature of the poet's life, but it hints that the poet is both tobacconist and prostitute. These equivalences raise the question of whether we are looking at a contrast, between the prostitutes selling their bodies and the poet selling his brains, or at a similarity in which both are selling their souls. What happens at the end of the poem happens because of the structures that it has established up to that point.

Non-modernist expectations about endings still exercise a powerful influence. The concluding lines to Wilfred Owen's widely anthologized "Dulce et Decorum Est" provide a paradigmatic example. Having begun in a past-tense, descriptive mode, and having briefly described the persistence of the dead man in Owen's dreams, the poem turns to address the reader directly. If you, the reader, could see the dead man:

> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
> To children ardent for some desperate glory,
> The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
> Pro patria mori.[2]

Powerful though it is, the poem reaches its conclusion by a well-worn route: it describes a personal experience with particular attention to sensory detail, and it then moves to generalize in some way; the poem modulates to a higher register. Both experience and generalization are contained within a plausible speaking voice: we experience the change of register as modulation, rather than as a fracture in the text.

In this case, the concluding idea is also particularly crisply expressed, and this raises the larger question of the relation of lyric to epigram. One can see Owen's poem as deriving from a longer tradition of which the Shakespearean sonnet is a key progenitor. The rhyming couplet in the final two lines of the Shakespearean sonnet creates a form which must necessarily move to some kind of closure, to some kind of sharpened observation. Barbara Herrnstein Smith sees the epigram as contrasting in emotional attitude to the lyric:

> To "dispel" (to undo the spell) or to dismiss is the epigrammatist's characteristic gesture. In love or hate, praise or blame, he is saying something so that he will not have to say it again. He writes a poem not when he is moved, but when he ceases to be. He records the moment of mastery – not the emotion, but the attitude that conquered it.[3]

"Saying something so that he will not have to say it again" precisely sums up Wilfred Owen's attitude in "Dulce et Decorum Est." Modernist

poets also produced satirical poems and expressed their satire epigrammatically, but the kind of cognitive closure that is implied by the epigram is problematic. If the situation described is limited in scope, then "mastery" of it need not imply that the poet believes he has mastered knowledge in any larger sense. But if the poem describes the world more generally, then the epigrammatic ending may imply an unwarranted confidence about the knowability of the world.

The ending of Hart Crane's "My Grandmother's Love Letters" finds another way of using the epigram. The last four lines are preceded by the passage in which the poet asks himself "Are your fingers long enough to play / Old keys that are but echoes." The passage asserts a regular rhythm in contrast to the more tentative rhythms that came before. The last four lines then return to less regular rhythms, but they also make use of the rhyming couplet:

> Yet I would lead my grandmother by the hand
> Through much of what she would not understand;
> And so I stumble. And the rain continues on the roof
> With such a sound of gently pitying laughter.
>
> (Rainey 812)

There is a very soft half-rhyme in the final pair of lines ("roof"/"laugh-") but it is not assertive: if the strong rhyme of "hand" and "understand" suggests a speaker confident in his ability to understand his grandmother and her world, the next rhyme suggests an altogether more cautious attitude. Crane has, in other words, taken the poetic language of the epigram, but used it in an unexpected way.

The endings of poems can be considered in the larger context of what modernist poets believed about endings in general. The conclusion of Eliot's "The Hollow Men" (1925) suggests that the world might end "Not with a bang but a whimper." Eliot raises the question of closure in the history of the world, and beyond it, the universe. If there will be an ending, if there can be an ending, will it be definitive, or the apologetic "whimper"? The nineteenth century had seen a diversification of the grand narratives available to writers. Christian theology gives history a pattern of fall and redemption: there will be an ending, or at least a radically new beginning. Individual lives need to take this pattern into account. Revolutionary philosophies, particularly Marxism, also assume there will be a significant transformation, and that history has some sort of shape.

Scientific theories emphasized long-term narratives such as evolution or the gradual dissipation of the sun's energy. Anthropological investigations revealed a significant contrast to these linear and directional theories, drawing attention to societies whose view of history was essentially cyclical. The commonest form was the cycle of the seasons. However, European philosophers also developed theories of history in which there were longer term cycles. History might appear to move to a point of closure every thousand years, but at that point a new cycle would begin again. The theory advanced by Yeats in *A Vision* is the best known. Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* embodies a cyclical philosophy of history, and confronts the inevitable problem of placing such a philosophy in writing: how can the linearity of writing, at the level of the sentence and of the book, embody circularity? More generally, how can a text stop, and yet be true to a world in which processes continue?

This is a problem confronted by D. H. Lawrence in "Poetry of the Present" (1919). Lawrence begins by saying that most poetry is "either the voice of the far future," or the "voice of the past":

> The poetry of the beginning and the poetry of the end must have that exquisite finality, perfection which belongs to all that is far off. It is in the realm of all that is perfect. It is of the nature of all that is complete and consummate. This completeness, this consummateness, the finality and the perfection are conveyed in exquisite form: the perfect symmetry, the rhythm which returns upon itself like a dance where the hands link and loosen and link for the supreme moment of the end.[4]

Lawrence argues that there is another kind of poetry, the poetry of "the immediate present": "Life, the ever-present, knows no finality, no finished crystallization. The perfect rose is only a running flame, emerging and flowing off, and never in any sense at rest, static, finished."[5] Such poetry is exemplified by Walt Whitman. Characterizing it more generally, Lawrence writes thus: "It is never finished. There is no rhythm which returns upon itself, no serpent of eternity with its tail in its own mouth. There is no static perfection, none of that finality which we find so satisfying because we are so frightened."[6] What this implies is that our ideas about poetic form are tied up with our philosophy of time and our attitude towards the flux of nature. Lawrence appears to subscribe to something like Wilhelm Worringer's theory of aesthetics: if we are frightened of the seeming arbitrariness of nature, then we seek refuge by creating semi-abstract representations of human bodies and of other organic matter. (The theory became

well known to English-language modernists through T. E. Hulme's "Modern Art and its Philosophy," though Lawrence appears to have reached the same conclusions independently of Hulme.) However, while Worringer and Hulme promoted the art of abstraction and of clear form, Lawrence continues to make a case for forms of poetry that are not afraid of the flux; of course, to speak of "forms" of poetry in this instance might be somewhat misleading.

One could of course turn to Lawrence's own poems with this idea in mind, particularly the later works. One might categorize the works of various American modernists as "the poetry of the immediate present": in the poetry of William Carlos Williams particularly, and also Marianne Moore, there is an immediacy which is uninterested in the past or the future. The justification of the poem has little to do with the way it moves towards its conclusion.

How the poem reaches its end is determined in part by how it begins. As noted in the chapter on temporality, many modernist poems began with a sudden or startling revelation. Elsewhere, the moment of revelation is embedded more subtly, in a change of rhythm or a change of imagery. Hulme's "Autumn" may be reconsidered in this light:

> A touch of cold in the Autumn night –
> I walked abroad,
> And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
> Like a red-faced farmer.
> I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
> And round about were the wistful stars
> With white faces like town children.

In this case the "suddenness" occurs with the fourth line: all the previous lines have begun with iambs, but in this case we either emphasize "like," and create a line of trochees, or we place the first emphasis on "red-," and create an anapaest. Either way, the rhythm is disrupted. Moreover the surprise of the image, the surprise of comparing high to low, suggests a sudden revelation. Even though he is using the perfect tense, Hulme manages to bring the moment into the present tense: the verbless opening phrase helps, as does the fact that most of the verbs concern motion: I walked, I did not stop, [I] nodded. Moreover, he never makes any contrast between the present moment of reflection and the past moment of experience. One can rewrite the poem in the present tense and it is very little altered.

However, the poem also presents two other time scales. Its title places the poem within a time scale of the seasons, and the opening reference to

a touch of cold suggests that the first hints of winter are on their way. The other time scale is far more subtly suggested, and it comes into play in the closing lines. The concluding image of the stars like white-faced town-children repeats the basic anti-romantic gesture of the image of the moon/farmer: rather than ennobling the low by comparing it to the high, Hulme brings the symbol of transcendence back down to earth. But he also introduces another spatial contrast into the poem, that of the country and the city. Inscribed with that contrast is a social history of migration from the country to the city. That the town children are white faced, unlike the farmer, suggests that they are anaemic and unhealthy, and so there is yet another narrative introduced into the poem, that of degeneration. For a reader in Edwardian Britain, the poem would not only have disturbed certainties about high and low, but would have opened up other questions, about the health of the nation or of the race. So although the poem appears to embody an instant revelation, and although it is very brief, it opens up other time frames, and leaves new questions in the mind. While the simile of the white-faced children echoes and answers the simile of the red-faced farmer, in doing so it opens up new possibilities.

Yeats's "The Second Coming" (Rainey 308–9) explicitly concerns the possibility that the world is coming to an end. One way of asking how the poem reaches its end is to ask what questions the opening poses, and how the ending answers them. Or, if we feel that the opening does not pose questions as such, we might ask what parameters it establishes, and how the ending complies with them, or breaks them.

The present participles of "turning" and "widening" give the poem a dynamism and immediacy from the outset that suggests suddenness, while not stating it so explicitly as the other poems quoted. But although the poem deals in sudden revelation, the title and its Christian framework suggests a much longer period of time. The concluding reference to Bethlehem invokes this timescale once again. We might treat the opening eight lines and the title as posing the question of how the present social-political situation relates to the grand narrative of fall and redemption. An optimistic Christian might expect that the "last days," nation rising against nation (Matthew 24:7), would herald the coming of Christ and some sort of resolution to history. But the conclusion suggests that what will come will be at best a false Christ or a false prophet (Matthew 24:11); and indeed the slouching towards Bethlehem suggests that there will not even be a resolution, but a replaying of the Christian narrative with a rough beast as its main protagonist.

This typological reading is reinforced by the imagery: we might take the opening image as posing the question of what will happen to the falcon. Will something cause it to come back to the falconer? The poem does not mention the falcon again, but the image of dispersal and of a widening spiral with which the poem begins is answered by an image of return, and a sort of homecoming. The falcon has been transformed into, or replaced by, the rough beast.

To emphasize the symmetry of opening and conclusion might suggest that the poem is more confident of its knowledge than is really the case. Set within this symmetry is the strange way the final sentence, which seems to begin so confidently, transforms itself into a question in the final line: "what" looks at first like a relative pronoun, not an interrogative. And, as remarked earlier, the neatness of the closure is immediately disrupted by the next poem in the volume *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, "A Prayer for my Daughter." Yeats returns to the image of the cradle, and suggests thereby that the cycle of history continues.

A full account of the endings of modernist poems requires reference to all of their technical devices and a sense of the poem's form and structure. The rhythm and the rhyme of the closing lines can give important clues as to the tone of the ending: as to whether it seems to be offering something definitive and epigrammatic, or something tentative. The endings of poems also raise larger questions about modernist ideas of time and history. And they raise questions about the role of the reader. In many cases, the poem comes to a conclusion, but much is left unresolved, and the process of interpretation continues long after.

Notes

1 Timothy Bahti, *Ends of the Lyric* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
2 Wilfred Owen, *The Poems of Wilfred Owen*, ed. Jon Stallworthy (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), 117.
3 Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 208.
4 D. H. Lawrence, "Poetry of the Present," *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Michael Herbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75.
5 "Poetry of the Present," 76.
6 "Poetry of the Present," 78.

18

Value and Evaluation

It may seem enough to consider the meaning and the technique of a modernist poem, and how it related to its literary and historical context; to ask about its value may seem unnecessary. If one divides critical activity into hermeneutics and poetics, between saying *what* a poem means and *how* it produces meaning, one leaves no space for evaluation.[1] Value fell off the critical agenda many decades ago. Yet these questions matter because, in their unguarded moments, few readers would deny that they prefer some poems to others. Contemporary criticism provides the vocabulary to articulate shades of meaning and subtleties of technique, but does little to help us articulate our reasons for preferring one poem to another. This chapter does not aim to provide an objective system for distinguishing good poems from bad, any more than earlier chapters aimed to state what poems meant; rather, it aims to clarify some processes used in reflecting on value, and to highlight their strengths and weaknesses.

Although critics continued to discuss value into the mid-twentieth century, the beginning of its disappearance as a valid topic could be traced back to the late nineteenth century. Quantitative knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge, began to be more highly valued than qualitative knowledge. All literary criticism looks unscientific, but discussions of value are particularly bad. Categories of value became seemingly arbitrary. In the 1930s and 1940s, the philosophers of the logical positivist school argued that value judgements are not real statements about the world but are merely "emotive expressions of personal sentiment" that neither reflect nor produce genuine knowledge.[2] The journal *The Calendar of Modern Letters* in the 1920s was unafraid to make value judgements, particularly in its "Scrutinies" section, and it influenced Leavis's journal *Scrutiny* (1932–53). But by 1957 the literary critic Northrop Frye was prepared to assert that statements about value were "chit-chat" or "leisure-class gossip."[3]

The social context of literary criticism, and particularly the opening of universities to people from an increasingly broad range of social backgrounds, is relevant. People of the same social background and the same relation to ideologies of class and gender can discuss value with each other more easily than with those from different social backgrounds. That is not to say that people from the same social background agree about value – the history of book reviewing makes clear that they do not – but it was easier to have a meaningful conversation about it. As the university population grew more diverse, it became more difficult to find the grounds for such conversations. In later periods, discussions of value were also stifled by a fear of elitism, precisely because the confident statements about it made by earlier generations so obviously reflected their privileged social position: note Frye's class-conscious and dismissive remarks about "leisure-class gossip." But to prohibit discussions of value is to run the risk of accepting by default the existing valuations and the existing canons.

The seemingly simple question "Is this modernist poem good?" is overcomplicated. It asks both "is this a good poem?" and "is this a good modernist poem?" The answers might diverge. Moreover, the scope of the modernist canon is open to debate: indeed, some of the most exciting developments within modernist criticism in the last 15 to 20 years have been due to a recognition of the plurality of modernisms and a rediscovery of neglected modernists. So in answering the two questions, we might find ourselves having both to justify our description and our evaluation. We might appear to be bending our definitions of "modernism" to allow our poem to seem good.

One of the most interesting critical accounts of value notes that value is relative to use and therefore to our definition: there is "an interactive relationship between the *classification* of an entity and the functions it is expected or desired to perform."[4] If we were art critics, then we would probably classify Henry Moore's *Reclining Figure* (1969–70) as a work of modern sculpture, and value it accordingly. If we were scrap metal dealers, we would value it as a piece of bronze weighing 2,100 kg. This is not simply a discrepancy in financial value, though when Moore's sculpture was stolen in December 2005, the discrepancy between its financial value as a work of art and its value as scrap was widely noted. The value we place on an object may depend on how we define ourselves; what we mean by "value" may depend on our identity.

The questions about whether a poem is good, and whether it is a good *modernist* poem are related, but not the same. Only if we expected all

poems to perform the same functions as modernist poems should we expect the two to converge. We need to find an approach which asks both how well a poem performs the functions we expect of a poem, and how well it performs the function of a modernist poem, and which then finds some way of relating the two. The question of definition would be a problem for poems from any literary movement, be it romanticism or neoclassicism, but it is particularly acute in the case of modernism because of the movement's insistence on innovation. It is difficult to categorize modernist poems; it is difficult to allocate them to predetermined genres or forms. It would be foolish to expect a short imagist poem to perform the same functions as a modernist epic; it might be a mistake even to expect two imagist poems to perform the same function. To the extent that modernist works evade the categorizations of the marketplace, they make aesthetic valuation more difficult, because their writers seem determined to remake the rules with each fresh work. Indeed, they throw into question the discourse of functionality.

However, though difficult, the situation is not impossible. We must not expect the wrong things from a concept of value. So many evaluative activities employ a one-dimensional scale – most prominently, financial evaluation, but also such things as league tables – that we neglect the possibility of creating multi-dimensional evaluative spaces. Smith identifies two misleading models that have overshadowed and stifled evaluation. On the one hand the humanist idea that literary works contain universal truth has meant that would-be evaluators have been reluctant to acknowledge the "mutability and diversity" of literary value. On the other hand the pseudo-scientific quest for "objectivity" has inhibited the investigation of that mutability. We need an idea of value that will enable us to acknowledge – to take an obvious case – that a good lyric makes a poor epic, and vice versa. To give a more complex example, we need an evaluative space that recognizes that the strengths inherent in the openness of modernist form, its ability to pose questions, are necessarily weaknesses if we expect a poem to deliver a clear and unambiguous message.

Smith's remarks about definition illuminate a particular problem for literary critics, which is to maintain a healthy relationship between the institution of criticism and the institution of evaluative judgement. One critic quoted by Smith wrote that "Milton is a more rewarding and suggestive poet *to work with*" (my emphasis) than his largely neglected contemporary Blackmore.[5] In other words, if the poem is expected to perform the function of being the object of literary criticism, then we may well value it

differently from a poem that we might simply enjoy being acquainted with. All critical readers have criteria for what makes a good critical essay on poetry: indeed, both students and professional critics are probably more conscious of those criteria than of criteria for good poems; and of course, the criteria for a good essay are more narrowly drawn. The criteria might include attention to verbal detail; attention to the verse *as verse*; awareness of the literary and historical context; the ability to recognize unexpected connections between one text and another. The likelihood is that these criteria will make us gravitate towards some kinds of poems and to avoid others. Undateable poems, for example, frustrate attempts to contextualize. Poems written during a clearly marked moment of historical crisis seem "valuable" – for example, poems from the First World War – while those written during a period where the issues are not so clearly defined are harder to work with. I keep "valuable" in quotation marks, because the clarity bestowed by context may lead to interpretative reductiveness.

A problem arises if we prefer poems which do not offer themselves as subjects for good critical essays. A kind of double-consciousness comes to prevail, in which the critic is expected to evaluate poems as if their usefulness to the literary critic were not an issue; as if we were all amateurs answering only to a shared set of values. If that becomes the case to too great an extent, then the institution of criticism will need to change: we will need to develop a new critical language in which to discuss our preferred poets; we will need to argue in defence of essays which appear not to carry out the expected functions of essays. While such considerations can seem peripheral to the real activity of literary criticism, if the creation of a new critical language allows us to speak about what feels important, then it is imperative. The institution of criticism needs to be flexible enough to respond to those changes: if it fails to develop, it can only begin to seem like an antiquated ritual that fails to reward us individually or collectively.

One reason that evaluative criticism disappeared was the recognition of the relativity of value judgements to ideology and power. Evaluative criticism has mutated into the study of historical taste and of the forces which shaped the modernist canon. This looks like dodging the question: an account of the criteria for literary value in 1932 is not an adequate answer to a question about value at the present moment. However, reading historical criticism can help to clarify what we value now, and can provide a training in extracting general propositions about value from local judgements.

The unenviable task of writing the first published review of *The Waste Land* fell to J. W. N. Sullivan, better known as a writer of popular science; it appeared, anonymously, as part of a review of the first issue of *The Criterion*. Having described the "Plan of a Novel" by Dostoevsky as consisting of unsystematic "flashes," Sullivan turns to discuss Eliot's poem:

> Mr Eliot's poem is also a collection of flashes, but there is no effect of heterogeneity, since all these flashes are relevant to the same thing and together give what seems to be a complete expression of the poet's vision of modern life. We have here range, depth, and beautiful expression. What more is necessary to a great poem? This vision is singularly complex and in all its labyrinths utterly sincere. It is the mystery of life that it shows two faces, and we know of no other modern poet who can more adequately and movingly reveal to us the inextricable tangle of the sordid and the beautiful that make up life.[6]

Sullivan makes an explicit remark about his criteria: a great poem will be characterized by range, depth, and beautiful expression. Of course it remains for us to decide what "range," "depth," and beauty might look like in any given poem. But Sullivan makes many more definitions by implication. "Flashes" may or may not be a good thing, depending on whether they relate to a unifying centre. "Heterogeneity" is a bad thing. A good poem should give a complete expression of a poet's "vision"; I take it that "of modern life" is contingent. It is of additional value that Eliot's vision is "complex" and "sincere"; Sullivan may also imply that complexity and sincerity do not always accompany each other, and that Eliot's ability to combine them in his vision is an additional mark of value. It is, finally, a mark of value that the poet can deliver mixed qualities such as the combination of the sordid and the beautiful that appear in Eliot's work.

One approach to reaching our own judgements while remaining consistent is to make a checklist. However, the beneficiality of such an approach varies greatly according to the content of the checklist and the way in which we employ it. We might produce a checklist of common features of modernist works, both their subject matter and their formal and stylistic qualities, and ask whether the poem in question conforms to them. In *Modernism* (2007), I gave a checklist of 12 characteristics, the first four of which are:

1 It depicts modern life.
2 It is difficult: it incorporates a wide range of reference, and there is an absence of linking material.

3 It contrasts an orderly past with a chaotic present.
4 It sees art as transcending the chaos and pain of the present.[7]

We might ask, of any given poem, whether it depicts modern life, and we might devise subtler versions of the question: whether it depicts the most topical and visible manifestations of modernity, or whether the modernity it depicts is less immediately tangible. However, a poem might conform to all the stylistic and formal requirements and yet not feel like a modernist poem; indeed, at a more fundamental level, it might fail as a poem. A variant on this approach would be to emphasize the formal productiveness of modernism: rather than asking what formal and stylistic devices the poem uses, we might ask how far it *innovates* formally and stylistically. In approaching a poem this way, we might look for innovative versions of techniques already on the checklist, and for styles and techniques not anticipated. Such an approach is necessarily historical, in so far as the techniques that were innovative in 1910 had become well known and widely copied by 1930, and it needs to attend to what counted as modern within the particular poet's literary milieu.

However, styles can be adopted without having any real and vital relation to the more fundamental issues at stake, and so such an approach might still fail to reach the heart of the question. If we define *modernism* as a response to the problems posed by *modernity*, then we would need to consider how the poem engages with the modern world. It need not necessarily make direct statements about the modern world; rather its stylistic and formal aspects need to engage with modernity. For example, if the poem is fundamentally lyrical, does it find a way of avoiding and acknowledging the problems that lyric encounters in the modern world, or does it fall back on apostrophe and expressive utterances issuing from a unified subject? If the verse rhythms vary freely from line to line, is there any rationale for the variation, or have modern freedoms been adopted as an empty stylistic gesture?

A variant on this approach would be to qualify our historicism, and ask whether and how the poem addresses *our own* modernity. To ask this question is not to adopt the humanist assumption that poems address eternal and universal human values; rather, it is to assume that there is a continuity between modernism and the present day, and that subsequent literary movements have not turned modernism into a museum piece. The concerns of modernism about, for example, the role of art in the modern world and about the complexity of the modern world, were sufficiently deep-rooted

that they are still relevant today. If we consider the *The Waste Land* still to be an important poem, we can accept that what made it so important to its first readers is not what makes it important to us today. It seems likely that, immediately after the First World War, a poem so marked by the presence of death spoke with an immediacy which it has now lost. It also seems likely that its willingness to depict a recognizably modern world – one that included gasworks and a landlord calling time in a pub – made it, to those who were prepared to make the leap, an important step forward. At the present moment, neither detail seems so important, and details such as a gashouse and a gramophone seem distinctly antiquated. But in spite of that the poem's collage technique and its questioning of the coherence of a single voice might still seem relevant in a world where sampling and pasting are common practices, where communication technologies allow us readily to connect diverse spaces, and where plurality of personal identity is more readily accepted.

However, whether we assess the poem by reference to a checklist of modernist characteristics, or a checklist of aspects of modernity, if we take the checklist to be rigid and infallible, we risk making clumsy and counter-intuitive judgements. To assess a work against a fixed checklist is to make a "criterion-referenced judgement." Such judgements are commonplace in selection procedures – for example, in making shortlists of job applicants – because the checklist makes (or appears to make) the terms of reference public and explicit. Their weakness is they cannot articulate complex interdependent relationships; nor in most cases do they even articulate how far a deficiency in one criterion can be compensated by excellence in another.

A more flexible approach is to begin with the seemingly naive and simplistic question of whether the poem is good in itself, but to be prepared to make as much effort in the definition of "good" as one makes in understanding the poem, and to accept that valuation is a process that might never fully achieve closure. "Good" does not always equate with enjoyable: a poem might be demanding, unpleasant, or disturbing, but might be those things in order to address important issues. Because the quality of modernist poems is not always identical with readability, we might need to remain aware of the poem being a modernist poem; we might need to invoke some generic arguments as to why we need to persevere with the poem in spite of immediate difficulty. But to invoke those generic arguments about modernism as a means of viewing the poem sympathetically is not the same as valuing it narrowly as a modernist poem.

Our sense of value emerges relative to several points of reference. It is relative to ourselves, and our ideas about what is good or desirable in

larger terms.[8] We exist within interpretative communities, which set down norms for literary interpretation, and also within other communities, which may not be readily reconcilable with the interpretative ones: for example, at one time politically aware readers could not readily reconcile their political awareness with a literary interpretative community which insisted on the apolitical nature of great literature; in more recent years the literary interpretative community has become more willing to recognize the political dimension of literature.[9] Our sense of the value of any given poem may be refined by comparison with other poems that attempt to do the same things, and by comparison with other poems that seem valuable in the same way. Finally, our sense of value emerges relative to the evaluations of other readers: it is often easiest to reach an evaluation when confronted with a reader who takes a radically different view.

If we consider our own responses to many poems, we should be able to set down some sort of list of what we find valuable. On the basis of his review of *The Waste Land*, J. W. N. Sullivan believed that a good poem should have "range, depth, and beautiful expression," that it should express a "vision," and that it should be "complex" and "sincere." We might re-read our own formal and informal writings about poems and undertake a similar analysis: a sentence beginning "One of the most surprising moments in X's poem" suggests that "surprise" might be a valuable facet of poetic value; a remark about inconsistency of tone puts both "tone" and "consistency" onto the critical agenda. By isolating such statements, we can ask further questions of them, and reach a more abstract and coherent idea of what we consider valuable. Why, we might ask ourselves, is "surprise" important? What are the limits to surprise in a poem? Was surprise valued as highly by the poet's contemporaries? Has surprise been known by another name in the past, and what difference has the change of name made? Might another reader designate the features that we find surprising by another, less favourable name – unpredictability or arbitrariness, for example? How would I defend my designation?

We might also ask how any one criterion interacts with the others, something that criterion-based assessments very rarely allow for. Might a preference for "consistency" at times come into conflict with the receptive attitude towards "surprise"? Might surprise be a valuable feature only of certain kinds of poem, only if certain other criteria are fulfilled, or only at a certain point in the sequence of the poem?

The process of evaluation leads in several different directions simultaneously. We reach more subtle and accurate judgements about the poem at

hand, but we also reach a more subtle understanding of our own sense of values, and of the values held by other critics and readers, in our own time and in the past.

Value comes into play when we choose which texts to write about, and in remarks which are ostensibly descriptive and value-neutral. What I have tried to argue is that we need to approach valuation in a systematic way, but that we need to adopt an appropriate kind of system. A system of checklists is not sufficient to the task of understanding value in all its complexity, and may even lead to some very misleading evaluations, ones that conform neither to instincts nor reason. The main value of a checklist is as the basis for an imaginary dialogue with oneself: if the checklist demands quality X, but one discovers a good poem which does not exhibit it, then one may need to revise the checklist.

A one-dimensional ranking or league table is unlikely to be adequate to any complex object that can fulfil many different functions: this is true even for domestic appliances, so it is bound to be for items with less readily definable uses. An investigation of the value of a poem is bound to be reflexive. If we agree with Smith that there is an interaction between classification and valuation, then we need to determine what kind of thing we think the poem is, or what functions we wish it to fulfil, before we can even begin to decide.

There is much to dislike about modernist poetry. Early critics objected to its obscurity and its fragmentation. More recent critics have objected to the conservatism, racism, and misogyny of some modernist poets. These cannot be overlooked, and I am not suggesting that we should defend all modernist poems from all criticisms as if by reflex. But there is a danger that the language of political and ethical judgement is becoming the only available language of evaluation, and if that were to be the case, we would be weakened in our ability to discriminate as readers. By developing a language of valuation that can deal with all aspects of the poem, we can build arguments to defend our own choices, and to reshape the modernist canon.

Notes

1 Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

2 This chapter is particularly indebted to Barbara Herrnstein Smith's "Contingencies of Value," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983), 1–35: the quotation about the logical positivists comes from p. 3.

3 Frye, quoted by Smith, "Contingencies of Value," 5.
4 Smith, "Contingencies of Value," 13.
5 Northrop Frye, quoted by Smith, "Contingencies of Value," 8.
6 J. W. N. Sullivan's review of *The Waste Land* appeared anonymously in the *Times Literary Supplement,* no.1084 (Oct. 26, 1922), 690, and is reprinted in *T. S. Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Michael Grant (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 134–5. I have identified the authorship using the online resource *TLS Centennial Archive* (Primary Source Media).
7 This checklist summarizes one in Michael H. Whitworth, ed., *Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 11–12.
8 The idea that an investigation of aesthetic value might involve an inquiry into good more generally is derived from J. H. Prynne's "Tips on Practical Criticism" (2004), at www.cai.cam.ac.uk/students/study/english/tips/praccrit.pdf (accessed Oct. 2009.)
9 The idea of "interpretative communities" derives from Stanley Fish's "Interpreting the *Variorum*," *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (Harlow: Longman, 1988), 325–9.

Glossary

anapaest: in poetry, a rhythmic unit of three syllables with the stress on the third.

dactyl: in poetry, a rhythmic unit of three syllables with the stress on the first.

dialogism: a term deriving from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, referring to the respects in which linguistic signs are in dialogue with other signs embodying contradictory meanings.

***énonciation*, subject of the**: a term from structuralist linguistics, referring to the grammatical subject embodied in a sentence, even a sentence which is apparently impersonal; it contrasts to the "subject of the *enoncé*," which is the subject embodied in pronouns such as "I" and "you." A seemingly impersonal statement such as "The dog bit the man" embodies a subject of the *énonciation* because of its use of the past tense, which can only be understood relative to the present moment of the implied speaker; a statement such as "He sits over there" embodies one in the gestural term "there," which can only be understood relative to the physical position of the speaker. A statement such as "I sat over there" embodies both a subject of the *enoncé* ("I") and a subject of the *énonciation* (in the past tense and in "there").

fabula: a term in Russian Formalist criticism of narrative, understood in contrast to *syuzhet*: the *fabula* of a narrative refers to the chronological sequence of events; the *syuzhet* refers to the sequence and the manner in which the narrative presents them.

Futurism: a movement in the arts and in literature, originating in Italy in 1909 under the leadership of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti.

heteroglossia: a term deriving from the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, describing the stratification of a language into distinct dialects on the basis of social class, profession, age, and other factors.

iamb: in poetry, a rhythmic unit of two syllables with the stress on the second.

imagism: a movement in poetry (sometimes given the French spelling, "imagisme"), beginning in 1912.

metonymy: figurative language in which a part is taken for the whole.

sapphics: a classical metre derived from the poetry of Sappho (c.600 BC)

syuzhet: see "fabula."

trochee: in poetry, a rhythmic unit of two syllables with the stress on the first.

Vorticism: a short-lived movement in painting, sculpture, and literature, initiated in 1914 by Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and others; the journal *BLAST* (2 issues, 1914 and 1915) was its most prominent literary product.

Further Reading

General

For overviews of modernist poetry and poetics, and their relation to a broader range of twentieth-century poetry, see Neil Corcoran, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), and Neil Roberts, ed., *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); for a collection of essays specifically focused on modernism, see Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). For accounts of the specifically American aspects for modernist poets, particularly Stevens, Williams, and Crane, see Richard Gray, *American Poetry of the Twentieth Century* (Harlow: Longman, 1990), chs. 1 and 2, and Albert Gelpi's *A Coherent Splendor: The American Poetic Renaissance, 1910–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), which focuses particularly on the relations of modernist poetry and Romanticism.

Particularly valuable, as examples of close-readings which remain aware of the larger social context, are David Trotter's *The Making of the Reader: Language and Subjectivity in Modern American, English and Irish poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1984), though it does not focus exclusively on modernism; and Stan Smith's *The Origins of Modernism: Eliot, Pound, Yeats and the Rhetorics of Renewal* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994). Edward Larrissy's *Reading Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) is valuable for its introductory discussion of objectivity and figuration, as well as its specific discussions of Pound, Eliot, and Williams. Though it is concerned exclusively with Pound's *Cantos*, the dialogue form of D. S. Carne-Ross's "The Music of a Lost Dynasty: Pound in the Classroom," in *Instaurations: Essays In and Out of Literature, Pindar to Pound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 193–217, brings questions of process into focus.

Chapter 1

For an overview of the many varieties of modernism, Peter Nicholls's *Modernisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995) is recommended; for an overview of the intellectual contexts underlying the movement, see the essays in David Bradshaw, ed., *A Concise Companion to Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003). For an account of different theories of modernism see the essays collected in Michael H. Whitworth, ed., *Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). David Punter's *Modernity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) starts from a different perspective, though in consequence it does not restrict itself to modernism, taking in responses to modernity in other periods.

Discussions of the "culture industry" begin with the work of Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. For overviews, see Ross Wilson, *Theodor Adorno* (London: Routledge, 2007), and David Ferris, *The Cambridge Introduction to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). For primary texts see Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, tr. John Cumming (London: Verso, 1979), and also the shorter collection of Adorno's essays, *The Culture Industry*, ed. J. M Bernstein (London: Routledge, 2001); for Benjamin, see "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Modernism*, ed. Rainey, 1095–1113, or *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970).

On the distinctiveness of literary language, and the paradoxes involved, see Derek Attridge's *Peculiar Language* (London: Methuen, 1988); on the question of literature possessing a distinctive knowledge, see Michael Wood, *Literature and the Taste of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Chapters 2–4

Reflexive readings of modernist poetry are greatly assisted by a knowledge of the prose essays, reviews, and manifestos of modernist poets. T. E. Hulme's "A Lecture on Modernist Poetry" and "Romanticism and Classicism" are both valuable, and reprinted in *Collected Writings*, ed. Karen Csengeri (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994); though not directly concerned with poetry, Hulme's "Modern Art and its Philosophy," in the same collection, is also valuable. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (in *Modernism*, ed. Rainey) and "The Metaphysical Poets"

(in *Selected Prose*, ed. Frank Kermode [London: Faber, 1975]), are seminal; Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" and Ernest Fenollosa's "Chinese Written Character" are also of immense importance. For an overview of the work of T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound, and further suggestions for reading in this area, see Rebecca Beasley's *Theorists of Modernist Poetry* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007).

For two influential discussions of the city in literature, see Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973), and his "Metropolitan Perceptions and the Emergence of Modernism," in Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, ed. Tony Pinkney (London: Verso, 1989), 37–48. Generally speaking, critical writing on the city and modernist literature has tended to concentrate on fiction. However, there are exceptions in Robert Crawford's *The Savage and the City in the Work of T. S. Eliot* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), and Richard Lehan's *The City in Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), ch. 8 of which gives an account of *The Waste Land*.

For a brief introduction to Bergson, see Mary Ann Gillies, "Bergsonism: 'Time Out of Mind,'" *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 95–115. For a wider overview of ideas of mind, see Judith Ryan's *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Chapter 5

For historical examples of objections to modernist poetry, the reader should refer to the Critical Heritage volumes, listed in the further reading for chapter 18, and John Sparrow's *Sense and Poetry* (London: Constable, 1934). Hart Crane's own account of "At Melville's Tomb" is given in his letter to Harriet Monroe, *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), 165–9. Monroe's queries about the poem, which prompted the letter, appear in *Poetry* (Chicago), 29 no.1 (Oct. 1926), 35.

Chapter 6

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an introduction to theories of prosody. For the beginner, Derek Attridge and Thomas Cooper's *Meter and Meaning: An Introduction to Rhythm in Poetry* (London: Routledge,

2003) is highly recommended. Attridge's *Poetic Rhythm: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) gives a fuller introduction.

For an overview of modernist prosody, see Daniel Albright's "Modernist Poetic Form," *Cambridge Companion to Twentieth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Neil Corcoran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 24–41. Though it deals with later twentieth-century poets, John Osborne's "Black Mountain and Projective Verse," *A Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry*, ed. Neil Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 168–82, provides a useful way of thinking about line endings.

William Carlos Williams has been the subject of many stimulating and informative prosodical studies: Stephen Cushman's *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) ("To a Poor Old Woman" is considered on pp. 22–5); Patrick Moore, "Cubist Prosody: William Carlos Williams and the Conventions of Verse Lineation," *Philological Quarterly* 65 (1986), 515–36; Rosemary L. Gates, "Forging an American Poetry from Speech Rhythms: Williams after Whitman," *Poetics Today* 8, (1987), 503–27.

As well as pursuing a specialized thesis, Michael Golston's *Rhythm and Race in Modernist Poetry and Science* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) surveys Pound's and Yeats's ideas about rhythm, though it lacks detailed analyses of the poems.

For T. S. Eliot's prosody, see Rosemary L. Gates, "T. S. Eliot's Prosody and the Free Verse Tradition," *Poetics Today* 11, (1990), 547–78. Barry S. Edwards's " 'The Subtler Music': Ezra Pound's Prosody," *Paideuma* 27 (1998), 31–53, surveys the range of Pound's verbal music, without engaging in technical analysis. The first chapter of Chris Jones's *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) discusses Pound's use of alliterative metre in his translation of "The Seafarer."

Chapter 7

For influential accounts of allusion, see Christopher Ricks, "Tennyson Inheriting the Earth," *Studies in Tennyson*, ed. Hallam Tennyson (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), 66–104, and *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Also valuable is Eleanor Cook's "Introduction" to a special issue of *University of Toronto Quarterly* 61 (1992), 289–96. For strictly formalist approaches, see Ziva Ben-Porat,

"The Poetics of Literary Allusion," *PTL: A Journal for Descriptive Poetics and Theory of Literature* 1 (1976), 105–28, and Göran Hermerén, "Allusions and Intentions," *Intention and Interpretation*, ed. Gary Iseminger (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 203–20.

T. S. Eliot's own views on influence are gathered in an appendix to *Inventions of the March Hare*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber, 1996), 485–514. Accounts of Eliot and allusion include Leonard Unger, "Intertextual Eliot," *Southern Review*, ns 21 (1985), 1094–109, and A. Walton Litz, "The Allusive Poet: Eliot and His Sources," *Yale Review* 78, no. 2 (1988–9), 254–64. My own "'Sweet Thames' and *The Waste Land*'s Allusions," *Essays in Criticism* 48 (1998), 35–58, asks how a broadened canon might complicate recognition. For a discussion of *The Waste Land*'s notes, see Jo Ellen Green Kaiser's 'Disciplining *The Waste Land*, or How to Lead Critics into Temptation,' *Twentieth Century Literature* 44 (1998), 82–99.

The practice of quotation and its effects on the texture of a poem are considered by Leonard Diepeveen, *Changing Voices: The Modern Quoting Poem* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), with particular consideration of Moore, Eliot, and Pound; chapter 6 of Cristanne Miller's *Marianne Moore: Questions of Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995) is particularly concerned with Moore's use of quotation.

Chapter 8

David Rosen's *Power, Plain English, and the Rise of Modern Poetry* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006) considers the relation of modern poetry to what has variously been called the "low register," "plain English," and "the plain style"; it includes specific discussions of Yeats, Eliot, and Auden. Chapters 12 and 13 of Emerson R. Marks's *Taming the Chaos: English Poetic Diction Theory Since the Renaissance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998) examine the range of views about poetic language among conservatives and modernists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though it has little to say directly about modernist poetry, Derek Attridge's *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988) exposes the paradoxes inherent in attempts to define poetic diction, and is relevant to this chapter and to the problem of literal and figurative language tackled in chapter 9.

Though the Bakhtinian aspects of the chapter were prompted primarily by critics on contemporary poetry – especially N. H. Reeve and Richard

Kerridge's *Nearly Too Much: The Poetry of J. H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), and Ian Gregson's *Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996) – there have been several important works on modernist poetry and Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia. The first discussion of *The Waste Land* in Bakhtinian terms came in a 1938 article by Nicholas Bachtin, Mikhail's brother, who discussed George Seferis's Greek translation of the poem: "English Poetry in Greek: Notes on a Comparative Study of Poetic Idioms," reprinted in *Poetics Today* 6 (1985), 333–56. However, the article was long neglected. The revival followed the publication of the *The Dialogic Imagination* in 1981. Two articles by Max Nänny, "Ezra Pound and the Menippean Tradition," *Paideuma* 11 (1982), 395–405, and "*The Waste Land*: A Menippean Satire?" *English Studies* 66 (1985), 526–35, locate *The Cantos* and Eliot's poem within a literary tradition, but do not obtain any analytical leverage from Bakhtin. Calvin Bedient's *He Do the Police in Different Voices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), invokes a curiously depoliticized Bakhtin in its reading of *The Waste Land*. The outstanding Bakhtinian essay in relation to Eliot is Tony Pinkney's "*The Waste Land*, Dialogism and Poetic Discourse," *The Waste Land*, ed. Tony Davies and Nigel Wood (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994), 104–34. Brian G. Caraher's "Reading Pound with Bakhtin: Sculpting the Social Languages of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley's 'Mere Surface,'" *MLQ* 49 (1988), 38–64, maintains a circumspect attitude to the applicability of Bakhtin's ideas.

Of the essays on modern poetry in *Dialogism and Lyric Self-Fashioning*, ed. Jacob Blevins (Selinsgrove: University of Susquehanna University Press, 2008), Amittai F. Aviram and Richard Hartnett's essay on Wallace Stevens, "'The Man with the Blue Guitar': Dialogism in Lyric Poetry" (204–20) is particularly interesting. Stacy Burton's "Paradoxical Relations: Bakhtin and Modernism," *MLQ* 61 (2000) 519–43, provides an overview of Bakhtin's relation to modernism, and critics' use of Bakhtin.

Chapter 9

Marjorie Perloff's "Pound / Stevens: Whose Era?" *New Literary History* 13 (1982), 485–514, distinguishes two kinds of modernism, for which the distinction of literal and figurative language is significant. Patricia Rae, in "Bloody Battle-Flags and Cloudy Days: The Experience of Metaphor in Pound and Stevens," *Wallace Stevens Journal* 26 (2002), 143–59, challenges

Perloff's account of Pound as a poet uninterested in the associations of words, and questions other aspects of Perloff's Pound/Stevens distinction. Herbert Schneidau's "Wisdom Past Metaphor: Another View of Pound, Fenollosa, and Objective Verse," *Paideuma* 5 (1976), 15–29, engages more directly with Pound's poetry.

Suzanne Juhasz's *Metaphor and the Poetry of Williams, Pound and Stevens* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1974) considers the legacy of imagist poetics in the poetry of all three poets, and how metaphor works in their longer poems. Robert Rehder's *Stevens, Williams, Crane and the Motive for Metaphor* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) considers the poets' ideas about metaphor as well as their use of metaphor in their poems. For a discussion of metaphor in Williams, see Barry Ahearn's *William Carlos Williams and Alterity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), ch. 5. For Crane, see John T. Irwin, "Naming Names: Hart Crane's Logic of Metaphor," *Southern Review* 11 (1975), 284–99.

Chapter 10

Michael Bell's *Literature, Modernism and Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) provides an excellent overview of ideas of myth in relation to modernism. Laurence Coupe's *Myth* (New Critical Idiom) (London: Routledge, 1997) takes its cue from Eliot's essay on *Ulysses*, but is wider ranging.

Chapter 12

There are many excellent studies of *genre*, mostly beginning with early modern literature, but the concept of *form* has proved more elusive. For a history of the literary concept in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Angela Leighton's *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Chapter 13

For an overview David Lindley's *Lyric* (Critical Idiom) (London: Methuen, 1985) is recommended, as is a recent work, Scott Brewster's *Lyric* (New Critical Idiom) (London: Routledge, 2009). Jonathan

Culler's "Apostrophe," *Diacritics* 7, no. 4 (1977), 59–69, is concise and illuminating, as is his "Reading Lyric," *Yale French Studies* 69 (1985), 98–106.

Chapter 14

There is little critical literature pertaining directly to the approach taken in this chapter, but there are several important works pertaining to literary and modernist ideas of time. Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) considers the idea of an ending across a wide time frame; the "fictions" considered are not only novels, but the fictions by which we live. Stephen Kern's *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) considers ideas of time in circulation in the modernist period.

Chapter 15

Excellent overviews are provided by Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (Critical Idiom) (London: Methuen, 1977), and Glennis Byron, *Dramatic Monologue* (New Critical Idiom) (London: Routledge, 2003). It is illuminating to compare the most important nineteenth-century examples with modernist texts: Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "Andrea Del Sarto"; Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Mariana," "Ulysses," "Tithonus." Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957) has been influential on criticism of the Victorian dramatic monologue; his idea of the double poem is taken up by Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

Antony Easthope's "'The Waste Land' as Dramatic Monologue," *English Studies* 64 (1983), 330–44, considers the poem in relation to the form, by way of asking the larger question of whether Eliot presents private prejudices as universal truths. Margaret Dickie's "Wallace Stevens and the Inverted Dramatic Monologue," *Wallace Stevens Journal* 16 (1992), 22–36, considers the quoted female speakers in poems by Stevens such as "Sunday Morning."

Chapter 16

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Poetic Principle" (1850), an important foundation for much later discussion, is reprinted in Poe, *Essays and Reviews* (New York: Library of America, 1984), 71–94. M. H. Abrams's 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric' (1965), in *The Correspondent Breeze* (New York: Norton, 1984), 76–108, outlines a significant forerunner of one kind of long modernist poem. M. L. Rosenthal and Sally M. Gall in *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) follow Poe's argument about the dominance of lyric; Vincent B. Sherry's "Current Critical Models of the Long Poem and David Jones's *The Anathemata*" *ELH* 52 (1985), 239–55, which argues against Rosenthal and Gall, provides a critical overview, relevant to readers of poems other than Jones's. Margaret Dickie's *On the Modernist Long Poem* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1986) prefers the term "long poem" to "sequence" or "epic," and examines the form of *The Waste Land* and *The Cantos*, Crane's *The Bridge*, and Williams's *Paterson*, and the poets' compositional processes.

Paul Merchant's *The Epic* (Critical Idiom) (London: Methuen, 1971) provides a clear overview. Mikhail Bakhtin's "Epic and Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) theorizes the form, though with a bias towards novelistic form. Michael André Bernstein's *The Tale of the Tribe: Ezra Pound and the Modern Verse Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) considers *The Cantos*, Williams's *Paterson*, and Charles Olson's *Maximus Poems*. Daniel Gabriel's *Hart Crane and the Modernist Epic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) focuses on *The Bridge*, and on the relation of lyric and epic in Crane's work.

Chapter 17

The two most important works are those cited in the notes: Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), and Timothy Bahti's *Ends of the Lyric* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996). Smith's book covers English-language poetry from the Renaissance onwards. Particularly rele-

vant to modernist poetry are her discussions of the relation of free verse to closure (pp. 84–95), and her section on closure and "anti-closure" in modern poetry (pp. 234–60), which takes in poems by Stevens, Yeats, Eliot, and Williams, among others. Bahti's book covers a similar time span, with Wallace Stevens being its main English-language poet of the twentieth century. An earlier version of Bahti's account of Stevens also appears in "End and Ending: On the Lyric Technique of Some Wallace Stevens Poems," *MLN* 105 (1990), 1046–62.

Chapter 18

J. H. Prynne's "Tips on Practical Criticism" (particularly paragraphs 25–8) gives a fuller account of the approach taken at the end of this chapter. It is available online at www.cai.cam.ac.uk/students/study/english/tips/praccrit.pdf (accessed Oct. 2009). Another crucial source is Barbara Herrnstein Smith's "Contingencies of Value," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983), 1–35.

Historical criteria for value may be investigated using materials gathered in Routledge's Critical Heritage volumes: *T. S. Eliot*, ed. Michael Grant (1982); *Ezra Pound*, ed. Eric Homberger (1972); *Wallace Stevens*, ed. Charles Doyle (1985); *William Carlos Williams*, ed. Charles Doyle (1980); and *W. B. Yeats*, ed. A. N. Jeffares (1977). This being a largely androcentric series, there are no volumes for Mina Loy, H.D., or Marianne Moore; nor is Hart Crane represented. The later Critical Assessments series includes *W. B. Yeats*, ed. David Pierce (Mountfield: Helm Information, 2000), while the *American Critical Archives* series includes *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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